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**On the Principles and Presuppositions of Atheism and  
Agnosticism in Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche**

**by**

**Matthew Alun Ray**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
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### *Declaration*

I would like to acknowledge that this thesis is all my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

I would also like to acknowledge that parts of my first chapter on Nietzsche were recently published in the Icelandic journal of philosophy, *Hugur: Tímarit Um Heimspeki* (1998-1999) under the title: 'Tilraun um styrk: Trúin í túlkunarsálarfræði Nietzsches' pp. 50-65 ['An Experiment in Strength: An Outline of Nietzsche's Religious Metapsychology', in *Mind: A Journal of Philosophy* (1998-1999) pp. 50-65].

Also, I used the quote from Freud's *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* to make a similar point about atheism and psychoanalysis in my M. A. thesis, *On the Principles and Presuppositions of Atheism and Agnosticism in Modern Continental Philosophy*, Warwick University, 1996, although I have rewritten the surrounding paragraphs for this thesis.

Finally, I should like to remark that some of my observations, located in the introduction, upon a book by Gordon E. Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God*, also found a home in a book review by me published in the journal *Philosophical Books* (forthcoming).

### *Abstract*

This thesis will be asking questions about the underlying structure of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's thoughts on atheism and agnosticism. It will begin with the work of the mature Kant, explaining how his epistemology, as articulated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, treated the question of the sense experience of God and then how his theory of biblical hermeneutics treated the question of divine revelation through scripture, before examining Kant's moral proof of God, finding it not to be successful.

I next move to a consideration of the atheistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's chief argument against God will be seen to be an argument from exclusion, although significant difficulties will be seen to beset Schopenhauer's endeavour. He will also be seen to shape a moral philosophy which he then turns against God. This argument will be examined in some detail and it too, despite appearances, will be seen to be essentially metaphysical. Since Schopenhauer's moral philosophy is intrinsically metaphysical in this way, his moral objection to God has to be construed as relying upon the prior introduction of an element of his atheistic metaphysics and to that extent is to be considered an expression of, rather than an argument for, atheism.

Nietzsche elaborates a metapsychological and physiological analysis of the type of person inclined towards believing in the claims of the monotheistic tradition, demonstrating how theism is connected with the yearning for escape and for the moralisation of the socially unaccountable. After investigating the Nietzschean approach to religion and atheism, I will however, conclude that Nietzsche only achieves some of his aims; and further, that those of his aims which are achieved themselves rely on certain specific empirical assumptions which are in any case problematic.

## ***ABBREVIATIONS***

### **A. Works by Kant**

CJ *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951)

CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T. K. Abbott (New York: Prometheus, 1996)

CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973)

LPT *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. A. Wood (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1978)

P *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that can Qualify as a Science*, trans. P. Carus (Chicago: Open Court, 1994)

Rel *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Green and H. H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960)

### **B. Works by Schopenhauer**

BM *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965)

FW *On the Freedom of the Will*, trans. K. Kolenda (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985)

FFR *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Open Court, 1995)



PP I *Parerga and Paralipomena*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) vol. 1

PP II *Parerga and Paralipomena*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) vol. 2

WN *On the Will in Nature*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Berg, 1992)

W I *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) vol. 1

W II *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols. , trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) vol. 2

### **C. Works by Nietzsche**

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990)

BT *The Birth of Tragedy/The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. F. Golffing (New York: Anchor, 1957)

D *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: University Press, 1985)

EH *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

GS *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974)

GM *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. C. Diethe (Cambridge: University Press, 1994)

HATH *Human, All too Human*, trans. M. Faber and S. Lehman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994)

TI / AC *Twilight of the Idols The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

UM *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: University Press, 1991)

WP *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968)

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

All citations to the writings on this and the previous pages will appear in the main text. All references are to page numbers except where preceded by a hash (#), which indicates a section number. As is customary, references to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* give the pagination of both the first (A) and the second (B) editions.

## **1. Introduction**

*Man shows remarkable powers of mind and reason in the satisfaction of his aims, even though they may be unnecessary, or even dangerous and harmful; and those powers are evidence of the blessings he enjoys in his natural powers which enable him to discover, to learn, and to practice those arts. Think of the wonderful inventions of clothing and building, the astounding achievements of human industry! Think of man's progress in agriculture and navigation; of the variety, in conception and accomplishment, man has shown in pottery, in sculpture, in painting; the marvels in theatrical spectacles [...] Finally, the wit shown by philosophers and heretics in defending their very errors and falsehoods is something which beggars imagination! It must be remembered that we are now speaking of the natural abilities of the human mind, the chief ornament of this mortal life*

*St. Augustine, City of God*

*Thus the lord indulges his slaves and even enjoys their insolence*

*Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*



### ***I Historical Background and Scope of the Present Study***

Generations of humanists, historical materialists, psychoanalysts, feminists and (more recently) sociobiologists have all seemingly immeasurably cheapened the concerns of religion in modern times. Inspired, it appears, to free us from the supposed constraints of dogma, their results have more often than not never really engaged with religious concerns themselves, only their political or social effects; liberating us to enter a politically charged world only to discover it now framed within an existentially incomprehensible universe. It is certainly arguable that, in the terms of the history of modern philosophy, the birth of this tendency has been most obviously observable in the influence – though not necessarily the substance – of Immanuel Kant's thought.

Kant's construal of the relationship between humanity and divinity is more complex and less assured than that to be found in the work of most of those of his major modern predecessors concerned with the same kind of questions in philosophy. Take René Descartes, for instance: although he at least seemed to break with the medieval scholastic tradition in the *Meditations* when he consciously detached philosophy from theological postulates and from a scriptural base (preferring instead the autonomy of reason as authenticated by methodological doubt), the theistic conclusion of the initially sceptical *Meditations* reached by means of an ontological argument for God and also a very specific kind of causal argument, turned out not only to be a venerable ontological conclusion largely in keeping with the previous scholastic framework but also an epistemological guarantee of truth; a divine guarantee that made God

central to philosophy and left the atheist – at least on one particular construal of Descartes’ escape from doubt – knowing little or nothing<sup>1</sup>. Or, take the subsequent example of George Berkeley. Berkeley, whilst denying that anything material exists independently of our perception, nevertheless defused any overtly solipsistic or sceptical implications by arguing that the ideas that we perceive must be caused by a spirit capable of producing far more vivid and coherent ideas than we as humans are able to produce in our dreams, imaginings and reveries: the infinite spirit, God<sup>2</sup>. The culmination of Berkeley’s philosophic

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<sup>1</sup> R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 59: ‘If we did not know that all that is in us which is real and true comes from a perfect and infinite being, we would have no reason which would assure us that, however clear and distinct our ideas might be, they had the perfection of being true’. This position seems to involve a certain methodological circularity however: it is from the premise that whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true (such as the *cogito*) that God’s existence is eventually derived – but it is then the nature of this very existence (i.e. the fact that God is no deceiver) that then vouchsafes our reliance on clear and distinct ideas. Some Cartesian commentators still attracted to this foundationalist project have accordingly sought to present clear and distinct ideas as self-validating – which would leave the atheist at least knowing something.

<sup>2</sup> G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in *Works* (London: Dove, 1890), 163-4. Moreover, Berkeley also argued that, since objects exist only when perceived, ‘As sure therefore, as the sensible world exists, so sure is there an infinite omnipresent Spirit who contains and supports it’, *ibid.* 160; see also 183-4. In other words, since sensible ideas – which, according to Berkeley, constitute the physical world as such – have, or so he seems to suppose, a continued existence even in the absence of their perception by human minds, there must be another mind to perceive them and therefore God must exist. In point of fact, however, I should mention that some recent Berkeley scholars have questioned whether Berkeley did actually subscribe to such an

vision might thus be said to be a picture of us as spirits in a divinely ordered intersubjective perceptual network. It can be seen that Kant moved way beyond both Descartes and Berkeley by arguing that there could be absolutely no theological backing for epistemology (since God was himself unknowable<sup>3</sup>) or for ontology (since God was also theoretically unprovable)<sup>4</sup>. In this advance beyond what Kant – long before Feuerbach and Heidegger – called ‘onto-theology’ is laid the immediate roots of an overall project of marginalising the role of monotheistic religion within epistemology, metaphysics and philosophical ethics that then took a dramatic turn in the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and the classical philologist turned ethical philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Of course, Kantian religious thought did not give birth to just one subsequent tradition: Kant’s philosophical legacy is diverse as it is profound. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche’s singular development of Kantian thought seems to me to be notable among post-Kantian philosophies for its self-conscious antagonism toward the Semitic monotheistic religions from the very outset.

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argument; cf. D. Berman, *George Berkeley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 47-48. Nevertheless, it is in this manner that Berkeley is customarily interpreted.

<sup>3</sup> One of the consequences of which is that in the ‘Refutation of Idealism’ section, which is partly directed against the *problematic* idealism of Descartes, which holds that there is only one empirical assertion that is indubitably certain, namely, that ‘I am’ [CPR B274], Descartes’ own appeal to God as a route away from solipsism is simply ignored by Kant.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, choosing the sceptical thought of David Hume instead of, or alongside, that of Descartes and Berkeley would deform this picture of modern philosophy considerably but the controversial issue of how uncompromising – or, if you prefer, of how enlightened – Hume’s scepticism in relation to religion was cannot be adequately entered into here.



Other immediately post-Kantian thinkers, such as G. W. F. Hegel and F. W. J. Schelling, for example, were overtly concerned to square their philosophy with the revelations of the Christian religion (albeit with questionable success). And phenomenology, whether in its Husserlian or Heideggerean variety, effectively presents no sophistication of the fundamentally agnostic Kantian response to the question of God. This, of course, was only to be expected: a return to the basic experience of the world can be of no help in determining answers to questions of a determinately other-worldly nature. Much the same agnosticism can be found both in recent Anglo-American analytic philosophy and in the very different movement that flourished at around the same time on the continent, existentialism; especially since this latter movement's emphasis on the absolute freedom of human choice gave it the requisite conceptual tools for a relapse into the (Kierkegaardian) fideism from whence it was, in any case, partly derived. Similarly, so-called 'ordinary language philosophy' as practised by J. L. Austin and the mature Wittgenstein can be seen to leave atheism without any effective conceptual tools with which to attack religion. Those heavily influenced by the work of the later Wittgenstein, for example, often argue that religious discourse, like all (non-philosophic) discourse, belongs to a form of life that is effectively uncriticisable and needs to be understood only 'from the inside', as it were. According to some authors, this Wittgensteinian standpoint renders atheism an impossible position to hold, since the atheist can only be regarded as someone who has failed to understand the way certain concepts are used within a given form of life (i.e. within a certain religion)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> R. Trigg, *Rationality and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 31. I do not, however, wish to

It would be asinine however, to deny that there are significant post-Kantian atheists outside of phenomenology, existentialism, ordinary language and analytic philosophy, the most influential probably being Ludwig Feuerbach, Max Stirner and Karl Marx in an important neo-Hegelian tradition of rigorously atheistic thinking. But even though Feuerbach, Stirner and Marx seem to me to be important modern atheistic thinkers that I have disfavoured – but not entirely neglected (see, in particular, chapter six) – in my study of post-Kantian atheistic philosophy, in mitigation of this shortcoming it may fairly be said, firstly, that these specific thinkers seemed to have been mediated through the philosophy of Hegel rather than directly belonging to the immediately post-Kantian generation and so do not illustrate so clearly the important atheistic possibilities intrinsic to Kantianism itself; and secondly, that Feuerbach's attempt to discredit Christian theism whilst remaining true to its moral involvements and Stirner's immoralising response to Feuerbach's (and indeed to the whole of European modernity's) attachment to ethics and to the value of truth in itself without God are in any case strikingly, if only partially, paralleled in the atheisms of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, respectively. It is a Stirner-Nietzsche parallelism that seems most open to elaboration (and only partly because Schopenhauer's pessimism is profoundly alien to the tone and substance of Feuerbach's writings). In particular, one would be able to point out that Stirner's attacks on the ideal of truth for its own sake, his attacks on an unquestioning attachment to the morals of one's own age, and his endorsement of an assertive – and even criminal – individualism all find strong parallels in Nietzsche's thought (and I

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suggest that Trigg espouses the view here under discussion.

shall be taking up the threads of this in my second chapter on Nietzsche). Further mitigation might also be thought to be provided by the fact that fairly recent books on the history of modern philosophical atheism such as P. Masterton's *Atheism and Alienation* and, by G. E. Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God*, cover pretty much this neo-Hegelian ground that I have disregarded<sup>6</sup>. According to the argument of *Atheism and Alienation*, modern philosophical atheism stems from the character of modern philosophy itself as initiated by Descartes, wherein a pervasive attention to subjectivity (and to the autonomy of reason) replaces the former interest in divinely formed being. Masterton follows the course of philosophical atheism from Descartes through Kant to Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx and beyond. Michalson's thesis, on the other hand, begins not with the *cogito* argument but rather with Kant and argues that since Kant's theistic commitment is, within the context of the critical philosophy, basically subordinated to human autonomy, then its natural legacy is to be found in the atheistic work of Feuerbach rather than in the liberal tradition of modern Protestant theology. Whilst being both scholarly and provocative, the argument of both books however, by either, as in the first case, only cursorily mentioning Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as forerunners to existentialism or, as in the second instance, by failing to even mention the Schopenhauerian fork of the Kantian legacy in what is presented as an explicit attempt to 'build historical perspective', omit what seems to me to be the most markedly atheistic response to Kantian thought to be found in the nineteenth century post-Kantian generation: that of Schopenhauer

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<sup>6</sup> G. E. Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); P. Masterton, *Atheism and Alienation: A Study of the Philosophical Sources of Contemporary Atheism* (Dublin and London: Gill & Macmillan, 1971).



and, at one remove, Nietzsche. It is this omission that the present study intends to cover.

It is, then, Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's works that will provide the focus of interpretation in the present study of atheism in modern philosophy, sometimes supplemented by apposite references to the doctrines of those other philosophers that Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have adopted, or are attacking, or have influenced in some illuminating way. Most important amongst these philosophers are Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Descartes, Berkeley, Austin, Heidegger and MacIntyre.

## ***II Structure of the Present Study***

In the following chapters, we will therefore be asking specific philosophical questions about the underlying structure of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's thoughts on atheism and agnosticism; thoughts that, as the review above suggested, represent one of the most concerted attacks upon monotheistic religion in the whole of modern philosophy, and by monotheistic religion I really mean to refer mainly to the Christian tradition so, unless express indications are given to the contrary, all references to religion in this study should therefore be understood to refer to Christianity. (I should perhaps also remark here that I was at times tempted to introduce the writings of certain *theologians* into certain key points of this study: Karl Barth in the section on Kant on scripture, for example, but that would have turned this into a very different study.) By means of anticipation, I should state that I will find Kant's tentative and quasi-existential moral theology largely unsupported; Schopenhauer's metaphysical and ethical



atheism flawed in several areas, and Nietzsche's peculiarly naturalistic attack upon Christianity only very partially successful. I will, in other words, find the question of God's existence characteristically unresolved even in this aggressively atheistic fork of post-Kantian philosophy. Nevertheless, this irresolution is itself still instructive as it helps focus our attention on the fact that atheism should not be taken on trust any more than should theism. Also, it arguably shows that the specific nature of these modern approaches to or attacks on religion are – for reasons that I do not go into here and which in any case seem ambiguous – primarily ethical. Topically speaking, therefore, this study will often concentrate on the concerns of moral philosophy, except in the opening sections of my Kant chapter and in much of my first chapter on Schopenhauer, which will have to take into account some epistemological and metaphysical considerations.

The exact route I intend to take is simply to begin with the work of the mature Kant, explaining how his innovative epistemology in the *Critique of Pure Reason* treated the question of the sense experience of God and how his exceptionally moral theory of biblical hermeneutics – as articulated in his late text *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* – treated the question of divine revelation through scripture, before examining Kant's so-called moral proof of God. We begin with Kant because, although not himself strictly an atheist, he nonetheless argued for a restrictive epistemological approach to the question of God, which obviously has important implications for thought on questions of religion and faith. Moreover, his historical importance for Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's work is beyond question. This is especially true for Schopenhauer: it is clear that he regarded Kant as his most important forebear and, with the

exception of Plato (and arguably Berkeley), the only philosopher to make a positive contribution to Schopenhauer's own philosophy. In a sense, Kant thus belongs to the pre-history, or to the backdrop, of that branch of philosophical atheism in which I am interested. Nevertheless, examining this backdrop will prove to be indispensable.

After investigating Kant's moral theology, I next move to a consideration of the atheistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. Sketching the unusual presentation of his atheism and the possible explanations for this, I then illuminate the methods by which Schopenhauer excludes God from his ontological picture. Fundamentally, Schopenhauer's initial argument against God will be seen to be an argument from exclusion. Schopenhauer accepted transcendental idealism – to the extent that Schopenhauer's atheistic project may be said to be prosecuted, as it were, from within a Kantian parenthesis – and then protested firstly that Kant's opposition to the objectivity of space and time should have lead him to deny any ability to separate creator and creation, and secondly that Kant's misidentification of the subject with the thinking mind alone forced him to neglect a way to determine the world of the thing in itself in a way fundamentally incompatible with the Christian faith. Considerable difficulties will be seen to beset Schopenhauer's endeavour however, and I will articulate certain of the main ones. Schopenhauer's metaphysical thought will not emerge wholly unscathed and we will have to conclude that – irrespective of its possible philosophic success in other areas – it is unable to substantiate his strong atheistic claims. In my second chapter on Schopenhauer, he will also be seen to construct an intentionally unKantian moral philosophy – a moral philosophy which in several respects harks back to the methodology of some pre-

Kantian British empiricists in ethics – which he then turns against God. This moral philosophy will be examined in some detail and will be seen to be essentially metaphysical, both on exegetical grounds and because without a metaphysical element it would succumb to deep theoretical problems concerning ethical disagreement amongst moral agents. Since Schopenhauer's moral philosophy is intrinsically metaphysical in this way, his moral objection to God has to be construed as relying, I shall argue, upon the prior introduction of an element of his atheistic metaphysics and to that extent is an expression of, rather than argument for, atheism. We close our discussion of Schopenhauer's atheism by briefly answering the question of how far Schopenhauer's emphasis on redemption from this world, which forms a highly important part of his philosophical system as a whole, allowed him to re-engage with the supposedly discredited religious tradition. This part of my study, which aims to introduce the Nietzschean notion of the 'ascetic ideal' in one of the precise locations where Nietzsche first discovered it, will be primarily elucidatory and we shall discover that this area of the Schopenhauerian philosophy shares a core commitment with the Christian religion, a commitment that is critically, and at times perhaps even obsessively, considered at great length in the later writings of Nietzsche.

Today, many critical responses to and philosophical receptions of Nietzsche's thought exist and new work on Nietzsche is constantly emerging, from both the Anglo-American and the Continental schools of philosophy. I have taken advantage of this congenial atmosphere to devote two chapters to a writer I see as one of the foremost atheists of the European literary and philosophical tradition. In my detailed and sustained reading of Nietzsche's violently poetic and aggressively polemical attack upon theistic religion what will prove to be of



surprising importance will be his proto-Austinian theory of language; a theory which Nietzsche uses to expose certain of the deleterious effects of religious speech in what I shall take to be one his key texts on religion, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In this and other texts, Nietzsche also elaborates a metapsychological and even physiological analysis of the type of person inclined towards believing in the monotheistic tradition, famously demonstrating how theism is, in his eyes, deeply connected with the yearning for escape and for the moralisation of the socially unaccountable. This kind of analysis will be the subject of my first chapter on Nietzsche. But Nietzsche also analyses types of atheism in his writing, strongly suggesting that some of the pathological motives which lay behind theism were also to be found in atheism. This peculiarly Nietzschean typology of atheism, along with a consideration of Nietzsche's speculative remarks about secularisation, will be the subject of my second and final chapter on that author. I will conclude that Nietzsche only achieves some of his aims and further that those of his aims that are achieved themselves rely on empirical assumptions which are in any case controversial. Essentially, then, the three central claims of the present study can provisionally be said to be; first, that at a certain moment of the history of post-Kantian philosophy it seemed as though the question of the existence of God was definitely resolved; second, that it is demonstrably no longer possible to agree with this estimate; and third, that the question of a personal religious faith is in principle consequently just as pressing now as it was in pre-modern times, even if today that question has largely been forgotten.

## ***2. God in the Philosophy of Kant: 'The supplement of our own Impotence'***

### ***I Introduction***

I propose in this first chapter to examine the way in which Immanuel Kant sets up the conditions for what seemed to be his great spiritual wish: not a tolerated – because disguised – atheism but rather a truly rational faith in God consistent with the tenets of his critical system. Examining Kant's philosophy of religion in this way will both illuminate its own intrinsic tensions and problems, and bring to light the manner in which it allowed Schopenhauer to argue for his specifically post-Kantian variety of atheism, an atheism which in turn massively influenced the philosophy of Nietzsche. The present chapter will be structured as follows. First, I will do a little scene setting by means of a brief, and therefore necessarily selective, look at the general argument of Kant's major work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I will then study Kant's own construal of God as existing wholly outside of space and time and his subsequent 'falsificationist' approach to the study of religious scripture. Since Kant's metaphysical construal of God appears to challenge – replace, even – the Judaeo-Christian concept of a personal and historical God as revealed through the Bible, I will be maintaining that we therefore have some license to consider Kant a 'deist' (in a sense that I shall specify). In the final section of this chapter I will then turn to examine Kant's elaborate 'moral argument' for the existence of God. This proof is without any doubt the locus of Kant's attempt to construct a positive philosophy of religion within the constraints of his 'critical' system but it will not prove to be ultimately convincing and I will develop two possible ways in which it might be seen to fail (one such way will draw upon some pertinent aspects of the moral

philosophy of Alisdair MacIntyre). Given the ultimate inadequacy of Kant's positive attempt to rationally justify the positing of God within the critical system, I will be suggesting in conclusion that it would be sensible of us to suspect Kant's deism and accept Kant's own occasional admissions that his philosophy allowed rather than compelled a theistic commitment.

## *II Cartesian Beginnings*

Before embarking upon my main line of critical argument, I would first like to say a few words to place Kant's claims regarding the question of religious faith within the framework of the overall argument of his first *Critique* and also to briefly look at a few interesting and relevant problems commonly associated with that argument, some such characterisation being a prerequisite for understanding Kant's unique approach to religious concerns. Now, Kant's project can be roughly characterised as a close attention to our absolutely (as it is supposed) invariant perceptual and conceptual faculties and their implications for the study of metaphysics. Kant thus might be said to position himself much in accordance with the main thrust of specifically modern philosophy from René Descartes onwards by beginning his enquiry with and from the individual epistemological subject and its knowledge. Yet one problem that notoriously arises even at this early point in Kant's attempt to establish philosophy on such a subjective footing is that, although Kant does not wholly overlook the philosophic problem of other minds, he nonetheless – unlike predecessors such as Descartes and Berkeley – has disturbingly little to say on this particular aspect of alterity. In truth, to establish our knowledge of other subjects, pretty much all



Kant has to say is that ‘If I wish to represent to myself a thinking being, I must put myself in his place, and thus substitute, as it were, my own subject for the object I am seeking to consider (which does not occur in any other kind of investigation)’ [CPR A 353-354]. Which, of course, far from solving the sceptical problem of other minds, serves only to highlight it. I emphasise this problem at the outset because far from being a non-issue it might in fact be thought to impinge upon a consequential *theological* problematic within the Kantian philosophy.

What I mean by this somewhat grandiose claim is simply that to such typically modern philosophical endeavours as Kant’s, which are anchored so centrally to epistemological subjectivity, there belongs, at least in principle, a suspicion (which haunts modern phenomenology and is arguably confirmed in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*) that the subject himself, the beginning of all philosophical enquiry, might in fact be a rather special kind of spiritual being; after all, although an essentially privileged one, God is nevertheless presumably also a subject. In other words, broadly Cartesian philosophies such as Kant’s that start off from the subject, if they do not successfully defuse scepticisms concerning an intersubjective world, might be left with the extravagant idea that the subject posits everything, including himself (the philosophy of Fichte has sometimes been taken to offer a case in point here<sup>7</sup>). I am not for one moment suggesting that any would now actually believe this to be true. My claim is only that this is a possible theoretical impasse – one that could be seized upon by the sceptic, for example. And, in this connection, it is noteworthy that the thought

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<sup>7</sup> Although with what justice I cannot say.



that the self apparently indicated by self awareness or the *cogito* might itself be God is, in fact, briefly entertained by Descartes in what is conceivably the most famous anti-sceptical text in the history of western philosophy, the *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

The first of Descartes' six *Meditations* famously inaugurated the modern concern with epistemology by calling into doubt all our beliefs. It specifically relied on an argument from illusion, the suspicion that we might be continually dreaming and the even more radical idea that an evil demon might be deceiving us to thereby render all our beliefs *collectively* suspicious. In the second *Meditation*, Descartes then discovers a single and now well-known truth – or perhaps re-discovers an Augustinian truth – on the basis of which he will rebuild his knowledge: namely, that his own existence is indubitable: *cogito ergo sum* (I justifiably leave aside the modern issue of whether this *cogito* argument was an inference or performance; a judgement either way on my part here would have to remain peremptory, controversial and clearly out of place). In the third *Meditation*, Descartes then investigates other of his ideas and finds that one in particular, the idea of God, could not have been generated by himself, since it is the idea of infinity and he is a finite creature. This, coupled with the rather more basic *a-priori* assumption that ideas must have adequate causes, leads Descartes to suppose that the idea of God has to be innate and implanted in us by the creator Himself, thereby saving the Cartesian project from the apotheosis of the self. To the modern reader however, Descartes' argument might seem to be flawed in either of two ways: either in its assumption that our idea of infinity is not just the concept of our own powers with their limitations and imperfections removed or by its basic assumption about causality being jeopardised by later

worries raised by David Hume. Yet it was neither proto-Humean worries concerning causality nor equally empiricist concerns over the idea of infinity that most troubled Descartes in the *Meditations*. Rather, he was most immediately concerned with the unlikely possibility that the idea of an infinite God might be generated by his own self if that self *is* God. This potential problem however, is recognised and raised by Descartes only to be quickly dispatched with what must surely be still considered to be a knock-down argument: namely, by pointing out that the subjectivity found by the *cogito* argument has not always known itself to be God and so it therefore demonstrably does not possess omniscience as one of its attributes and so it cannot, after all, be God. Descartes writes:

Perhaps also I am something more than I imagine myself to be and all the perfections I attribute to the nature of a God are in some way potentially in me [...] Still, all these excellences do not belong to or approach in any way the idea I have of a Divinity, in whom nothing is to be found only potentially but all actually existent. And is it not even an infallible argument of the existence of imperfection in my knowledge that it grows little by little and increases by degrees?<sup>8</sup>

At this point it might be thought to be still open to the particularly obstinate sceptic to desperately suggest that Descartes may be wrong in thinking doubt an imperfection. But this last objection is evidently invalid for if Descartes is wrong in thinking doubt to be an imperfection then he is still, *qua* maker of mistakes, an imperfect being<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, 125-126.

<sup>9</sup> B. Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1985), 145.

Kant too, although he sophisticates self-knowledge by distinguishing between the phenomenal self as an object of inner sense and the existence indicated by apperception (which is nevertheless decisively not a substance, as it was in Descartes) also entertains the thought that the self revealed by self-awareness might be God in his *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*:

When I think I am conscious that my ego thinks in me, and not in some other thing [...] I exist for myself and am not the predicate of any other thing [...] Either I must be God himself or God is a substance different from me. [LPT 75]

Kant's answer to this potential puzzle, explicitly in the *Lectures* and implicitly in the first *Critique*, is essentially the Cartesian one that God does not think in the manner that we do but it is coupled with the important Kantian qualification that the knowledge that pertains to the divine mind is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different: 'All his knowledge must be intuition, and not thought, which always involves limitations' [CPR B 71]. When Kant suggests that God does not think what he means is that God's knowledge is not conceptual, rather it is 'intellectual intuition' which creates rather than perceives objects. As this point may also be put, since human knowledge is always partly discursive, the recognition of God's extra-discursive omniscience allows Kant to remain as untroubled as Descartes by the solipsistic argument to the effect that our subjectivity must be identified with God (and I suppose it also true to say that the *Refutation of Idealism* section and the first *Analogy of Experience* of the first *Critique* arguably disprove the idealism of objects – although not of subjects – in the external world, further suggesting we are not responsible for everything



around us). But the idea of extra-discursive omniscience however, might be thought to lead to a problem of its own.

The problem is this: the fact that, according to Kant, divine ‘intellectual intuition’ creates rather than discerns objects seems to have a serious implication for another of Kant’s own doctrines, that of the purported spontaneity of our own human understanding, as it seems to render the reconciliation of our understanding’s spontaneity with God’s productive omniscience problematic. The source for my concerns here is a series of remarks by H. E. Allison in his *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, a book otherwise not centrally concerned with Kantian religious thought. Allison maintains that ‘The difficulty stems from the productive, archetypal nature of intellectual intuition. In conceiving of myself as known by such a mind, I would be constrained to regard the spontaneity of my own thought as the product of something else. This is [...] a contradiction’<sup>10</sup>. Allison does not draw any specific conclusion from this contradiction but I suspect he means to suggest that we might do well to regard the place for a supreme Being in Kantian thought with a measure of scepticism, if not downright cynicism. Yet there is a viable alternative: we might do just as well to concede Allison’s point about the conflict between, on the one hand, omniscience construed as intellectual intuition and, on the other hand, our understanding’s spontaneity but then rise above that very conflict by construing divine omniscience as something other than intellectual intuition. Furthermore, I do not think that we should feel compelled by Allison or anyone else to state

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<sup>10</sup> H. E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 289-290.

what exactly this ‘other omniscience’ need be. Admitting our ignorance of what God is seems to me to be neither untrue to the measured scepticism of Kant’s own writing nor untrue to the Biblical criticism of idolatry. It also has the secondary advantage of granting God the power to represent to himself objects not present without actually making them present.

Returning to the main line of argument in the first *Critique*, Kant thus embarks upon the process of circumscribing the structure and function of the *human* intellectual and sensible capacities. In the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, which opens the main text of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that all our experience is not simply passively received from the external world as on the empiricist model of perception but is rather subjectively organised, partly by what he calls two *a priori* forms of sensible intuition, which are space and time. Space and time according to Kant are therefore not derived from experience and do not in fact exist outside our actual or possible experience but rather are the sensible ways in which we experience our world. Kant had two arguments to demonstrate that space and time are not derived from the external world and a further two to show that they are intuitions rather than concepts. I would now like to mention the arguments in summary fashion (concentrating on the arguments concerned with space: the corresponding ones for time are parallel formulations), as a grasp of their structure would seem to be a pre-requisite for an understanding of the nature, and the implications, of Kant’s concept of God, as should be clear from what follows.

In the first place, Kant argues that space and time are given to us prior to sensory experience because any spatial relations we perceive presuppose space as a whole. What is presumably being meant here is that we cannot derive the

notion of a unified spatial field from noticing space relations between particulars or from noticing spatial properties of particulars because any spatial characteristics that we might derive from an object already presuppose such a unified spatial field, *such a field also being presupposed by the distinction between objects and the distinction between objects and our own self* in the first place. Our knowledge of space must therefore be *a priori*, in other words, absolutely independent of experience. This however, was not Kant's only argument for the *a-priority* of space and time. A second argument Kant used to this effect – a particular argument that Schopenhauer considered to be the knock-down one [W II 33, PP II 44] – is to emphasise the fact that we cannot represent to ourselves the absence of space although we can think what Locke called 'pure space', i.e. space empty of objects [A 23-24=B 38-9]. The fact that we can represent to ourselves space empty of objects but not objects devoid of space is taken by Kant to suggest that space is an ineliminable part of perception in a way that objects are not. Nevertheless, despite Schopenhauer's appreciation, various criticisms of Kant's position and arguments could of course be brought to bear on the discussion at this point. In opposition to the first argument, for example, one could claim, with S. Gardner, that whilst it does show that the outer world cannot be represented except as spatial and so space cannot be derived from the experience of an external world, it nevertheless leaves open at least the possibility that spatiality and the outer world are intuited *contemporaneously*<sup>11</sup>. And in response to the second argument, P. Guyer has pointed out that if even if space was an empirical representation it could conceivably become so

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<sup>11</sup> S. Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge: 1999), 83.



entrenched that it could not be imagined away, even if any particular object could<sup>12</sup>. Yet I am not going to labour any such criticism of the structure of transcendental idealism itself in this study. Rather, I want to provisionally accept the framework of transcendental idealism – in both its Kantian and subsequently its Schopenhauerian form – so as to examine the implications this idealism may have for arguments concerned with theism and atheism.

Returning, then, to the argument of the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, Kant further believed not only that space and time are *a-priori* but also that they are intuitions and not concepts. His first argument to show that space is an intuition (*Anschauung*; broadly meaning something looked at) and not a concept is that it is a unified individual thing: all particular spaces are just parts of space as a whole (in the sense that if we wanted to draw a certain figure, we must also already have the space in which to draw it). So all talk of diverse spaces really refers to parts of the same space. Particular spaces are therefore not instances of a distinct concept but rather parts of a unitary whole which must be something immediately sensed (the hidden premise here being that we perceive individual things but conceive universals). The second argument to show that space and time are intuitions is by common consent more difficult to discern but, at least according to Allison's reconstruction of the argument, suggests that space is divided by introducing limitations or boundaries and can have an infinite amount of parts, which is how an intuition is divided; whereas concepts are divided intensionally into other concepts within it as component parts, which are not

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<sup>12</sup> P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 347.



infinitely divisible<sup>13</sup>. Space therefore, Kant again concludes, must be thought to be an intuition – i.e. something picturable – rather than a concept. It may also be pointed out that Kant also has an argument from geometry and an argument from ‘incongruent counterparts’ to show that space is an *a-priori* intuition but examining even the outlines of these extra arguments would, it seems to me, take us much too far afield at this point (the latter does not even appear in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and, in any case, can prove nothing with regard to the status of time).

The primary conclusion of these four arguments – and it will be with this conclusion and the implications that follow from it that I shall often be concerned with in parts of this study – is groundbreaking: space and time are taken by Kant to exist only in a subjective or even anthropological sense: ‘We deny to time all claim to absolute reality; that is to say we deny that it belongs to things [...] independently of any reference to the form of our sensible intuition’ [CPR A 35-36=B 52; the same claim is made for space at: A 46=B 63]. Yet it should be pointed out that commentators have often made the objection that even if Kant has succeeded in establishing space and time as forms of our intuition this does not exclude them from a simultaneous objectivity (this is sometimes known as the ‘neglected’ or ‘missing alternative’ argument). S. Körner, for instance, maintains that ‘It is always logically possible that what we see under the form of space and time is so ordered independently of our perception’<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 93.

<sup>14</sup> S. Körner, *Kant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 37-38. Relatedly, Körner has repeatedly pointed out that all transcendental arguments fail to be uniqueness proofs, i.e. that they leave open the possibility that another set of conditions could allow the experience in question to occur.

Adherents of this view would presumably want Kant to recant his strict ontological claims about the non-spatio-temporality of the noumenal world, which they would see as an unjustified move, and perhaps submit instead to a kind of Husserlian transcendental *epoché*, refraining from comment on the spatio-temporal character of the world as it exists in itself. Kant himself however, allowed space for what Paul Guyer has called ‘a theological argument against the ultimate reality of space and time’<sup>15</sup>. What this argument consists of is the charge that the conception of space and time as objective forms of objects is incompatible with natural theology in as much as God Himself would therefore have to be spatio-temporal in this account, which is obviously absurd [CPR B 71-72]. However, as Guyer rightly points out, the objective view of space and time is not incompatible with natural theology so long as we suppose only that space and time are genuine properties of some but not all things in themselves. In the light of this admittedly elementary distinction, Kant’s theological argument against objective spatiality and temporality and therefore against Körner’s objection must be seen to fail (and it might also be seen to be disabled, as S. Gardner points out, by the contentiousness of its implicit premise that the concept of God is coherent<sup>16</sup>). On the other hand, to Körner’s objection it may be more successfully retorted that whilst it may be true without specific reference to the Kantian philosophy, Körner’s point cannot be considered to be by itself decisive against Kant himself since, in his *Antinomies of Pure Reason*, Kant had attempted to show that irreconcilable contradictions result from taking

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<sup>15</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, 352.

<sup>16</sup> Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, 103.

space and time to be objective aspects of reality and so, taken as a whole, the *Critique of Pure Reason* does exclude space and time from being transcendently real, at least if one considers the antinomies section to be successful.

His case for the transcendental ideality of space and time being made, Kant goes on to argue – in the *Transcendental Analytic* – that experience is further structured by twelve *a priori* logical categories (and these are probably the most difficult pages of the entire *Critique*). The categories seem to have been found in the so-called ‘Metaphysical Deduction’ by an analysis of all the kinds of judgements that there are according to Aristotelian logic. The categories are then collectively justified in the ‘Transcendental Deduction’ by an extremely tortuous and obscure argument, the spirit of which is that the use of these categories is intrinsic to the temporally extended nature of experience as such (and whilst commentators such as Strawson argue that the deduction seeks to overcome external world scepticism here, others including myself take it that the deduction assumes that our experience is of objects and leaves the task of overcoming scepticism until later in the *Critique*). This seems to be because when we perceive an object Kant thinks we actually also judge it to be an object, judging being a conceptual operation that is temporally extended. Grasping objects *as objects* is taken to be an active affair of the mind in this way because any given array of sensations has to be apprehended as – i.e. judged to be – an object in a way that experience itself is impotent to carry out. And grasping objects is taken to be conceptual because judgement is nothing other than the employment of concepts. And given that conceptually judging objects takes place over time, it requires an abiding self to synthesise (it could not, in other words, be different



selves who brought elements  $a + b$  together into *one* complex representation, it must be one unitary self-consciousness, which Kant unfamiliarly terms the ‘transcendental unity of apperception’). Thus it is our perception of the synthesised manifold itself that allows us to be sure of an abiding self. As this point may also be put, objectivity (a synthesised manifold that we perceive) and subjectivity (the abiding self that synthesises in perception) cannot be presented without each other.

This necessity of the structure of both perceiving and thinking that is built into human experience from the outset means that we possess the advantage of being able to perform what Kant calls synthetic *a-priori* judgements, by which he means judgements that are about the world we experience rather than merely about the meanings of the concepts involved (synthetic) but that are nevertheless possible independently of experience (*a-priori*). A paradigm case of such judgements is the metaphysical claim that ‘every event has a cause’. Such a judgement of universal causality cannot be rationally derived from or justified by experience – as has been evident at least since Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature* – but Kant claims that we can nevertheless know it holds true of all possible experience because causality is one of the twelve categories found in the ‘Metaphysical Deduction’ (and in the *Second Analogy* a deeper and more specific justification of causality as supporting our notion of an objective time-series is offered, thereby arguably making good any suspected argumentative deficit in the ‘Metaphysical Deduction’). Our synthetic *a-priori* judgements were therefore only possible independently of experience because they told us about the way our mind regulated nature – through its forms of intuition and its categories – rather than about nature as it might be thought to be in itself. Human

thought could consequently not represent reality as a whole. Kant nevertheless believed that we should not subscribe to empirical idealism of the Berkeleian sort, and proved this by sophisticating Locke's inadequate and hesitant theoretical position regarding material substance by the addition of a rather complicated argument (which surfaces both in the *First Analogy* and in the *Refutation of Idealism* and which I will not rehearse here) concerning the awareness of ourselves as extended in time requiring the existence of enduring entities in the external world. These enduring entities were themselves, when considered outside of space and time, unknowable and Kant referred to this unknowable realm beyond representational experience as the intelligible world and these unknowable entities (or entity) as the *Noumena* (or *Noumenon*). Kant also thought that our reason, in spite of being forever divorced from this intelligible world, could not but attempt to reach that unknowable reality, and the totalising aberrations or illusions of reason, by means of which the mind dogmatically posits God (and a soul and a world) were to be regarded as natural and unavoidable. For Kant, the idea of God is therefore neither innate, as it was, for example, in Descartes' third *Meditation*, nor is it empirically formed, as empiricists such as Locke and Hume thought, by enlarging the ideas of our own nature with the idea of infinity and removing our imperfections. Typically, Kant creates an ingenious compromise between rationalism and empiricism here: the Kantian idea of God is an idea that though not innate is nonetheless inevitably created. This tendency toward forming an idea of God, given that it is natural to all humans thus means that monotheism is a trend, Kant notes in his first *Critique*, to be found transculturally and transhistorically located: 'In all peoples, there shine amongst the most benighted polytheism some gleams of monotheism



to which they have been led, not by reflection and profound speculation but simply by the natural bent of the common understanding' [CPR A 590=B 618 see also LPT 73, CPrR 168]<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, much like the psychopathological complexes outlined by Freudian psychoanalysis, the three sophistications of reason that Kant postulated and explored do not cease to function even when

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<sup>17</sup> This natural dialectic is seen by Kant to take on one of two forms: the idea of a first cause and that of an *Ens Realissimum*. Leaving to one side any attempt to describe these illusions in their specificity (a good account can be found in A. W. Wood's *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) pp.25-79), the very notion of an idea of God arriving naturally in the human mind is in any case open to various kinds of criticism. One such line of argument is historically associated with Schopenhauer: a philosopher who, as we shall see, explicitly tried to sophisticate Kant's position but did so only by replacing much of its philosophical methodology. In the Schopenhauerian interpretation of Kantianism, the notion of intrinsic illusions is one of the few Kantian notions that is wholly abandoned: 'The objectionable element to be found in the *Kantian* doctrine [...] - this element, I say, makes it appear as if our intellect was intentionally designed to lead us into error' [W II 286]. Schopenhauer's disapproval is launched from the evolutionary premise that our minds would not systematically lead us into error because they are themselves products of the organism's need. Yet in the first place we could mention that it is not immediately obvious whether the illusions *are* disadvantageous errors and so it might be counter-objected at this stage that illusions could be construed as just side-effects of cognitive evolution and are not themselves disadvantageous. Relatedly, we might also counter-object that this epistemological objection ignores the (Nietzschean) possibility that reality is so utterly repellent that we falsify it in order to function well within it. But even if Schopenhauer's naturalised epistemological objection does not therefore conclusively invalidate the notion of Kantian ideas, John Locke suggested with some justice in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Everyman, 1991), Book I, Ch. IV, Sect. 8 that some civilisations are wholly free from what Kant regarded as a product of an inevitable tendency of reason, a point of Locke's that Schopenhauer would reproduce exactly [W I 484, see also W I 486].



they are detected and have their invalidity clearly revealed to the subject of the aberrant thought process [CPR A 339=B 397; A 297=B 353].

Next in the first *Critique*, Kant included a *Transcendental Dialectic* to counteract such natural ‘illusions’. This study will mention but will not spend much time assessing either the general merits of the *Dialectic* or the particular merits of Kant’s refutation of speculative theology. Of course, in a monograph length study focussing solely on Kant’s philosophy of religion it would be proper to dwell at some length on these attacks, particularly on Kant’s objections to the ontological argument, as many readers may well feel this to be one of the most familiar and arguably most influential aspects of the Kantian approach to religion. I have not elected to follow this route however, partly because it has been discussed elsewhere by others but also because there is substantially more, I feel, to Kant’s philosophy of religion than this aspect of transcendental idealism’s criticism of rationalism. Yet I would now like to provide an overview of Kant’s attacks as they are presented in the *Transcendental Dialectic* (Book II, chapter III, sections three to six).

Kant considers all proofs of God to be instances of one of three types [CPR A 590=B 618]. The first type is the ontological proof, which argues *a-priori* that the concept of God analytically entails his existence (after the manner of one of the arguments of Descartes in the *Meditations*). The point being made here is that ‘God’ in its normal meaning means, amongst other things, an all powerful, all knowing and existent creator. Thus the claim that God exists is guaranteed by the fact that the meaning of the term God includes existence in its definition. This is taken to fail by Kant because it assumes that existence is a characteristic which could function as a genuine predicate of a concept, whilst Kant – *contra*

ordinary language – famously disputes this (though whether he is right to do so is not an issue that can not be studied in detail here). The second argument is the cosmological, which argues that contingent things must have been caused to exist by something else which, if also contingent, must in its turn have been caused, and so on until we reach a necessary being. This second proof failed according to Kant because it extended the concept of cause outside of the world of our possible experience and further failed to identify the concept of cause with an all powerful and all good God (at least without surreptitiously reintroducing the ontological argument). The third argument is the physico-theological proof: in essence, the argument from design. Put rather crudely, it argues that this world shows order in an analogous way to a watch and since a watch has a purposive creator we may presume the same to hold for the world. This proof from apparent purposiveness in nature, Kant argues, is only licensed to posit an architect and not a creator of the world (and he might have added, as Hume's biting *Dialogues on Natural Religion* actually did, that for all we know that architect might now have expired). To postulate a creator *ex nihilo* it would have to fall back on the cosmological proof, which itself relied upon the ontological (unlike Hume's, Kant's counter-argument is therefore powerless against someone who wants only to prove a superhuman architect and not an all powerful creator – but Kant quite implausibly thinks that no-one would be interested in such reduced aims<sup>18</sup>). All possible proofs of God thus collapse into the ontological proof, which itself is – as we have already seen – fallacious, according to Kant.

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<sup>18</sup> J. Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 256.

So much, then, for the general structure of Kant's overall reasoning in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (and his rather problematic position on God's 'intellectual intuition'). It is time now to narrow down our focus and examine some of the main implications for theistic religion of this intriguing account: firstly, Kant's construal of God as existing outside of space and time and then what we shall term his 'falsificationist' scriptural hermeneutics. In the final part of this chapter, I will then turn to tackle Kant's moral proof of God.

### ***III Kantian Moral Deism: The Unsacrificable***

In the review of critical thought given above, it was implied that Kant unconditionally ruled out the possibility of human contact with a divine being. I should now like to say a little more about this and also about its implications for the study of religious scripture.

The first step that allows Kant to rule out any human experience of God is his premise that we can perceive nothing and therefore know nothing that is not in space and time. We have already noted the thinking behind that premise. His second step is to construe the supreme being as just such a non-temporal and non-spatial existence, as we have also already acknowledged in considering what Guyer called Kant's 'theological argument against the ultimate reality of space and time'. This construal of God is also illustrated in other of Kant's important works – so in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, for example, we read that 'The existence of God in space involves a contradiction' [Rel 130 n]; whilst in the second *Critique*, Kant writes of 'The infinite Being, to whom the condition of time is nothing' [CPrR 149]. Should it need spelling out, the condition of time



is said to be nothing to God because ‘if God were in time he would have to be limited. But he is a *realissimus*, and consequently he is not in time’ [LPT 71]. So Kant thinks that ‘God is wholly distinct from the world and has no connection at all with space and time’ [LPT 104] because otherwise spatial and temporal boundaries would limit God, and a restricted God is, by definition, a contradiction. It should probably be stressed here that we cannot picture or represent such an atemporal and aspatial God however, since on Kantian premises we cannot represent to ourselves anything lying outside what are essentially our forms of representation, the ways that we picture things at all. As Kant puts it in the *Critique of Judgement*: ‘We think of the eternity of God as presence in all time, because we can form no other concept [...] or we think of the divine omnipresence as presence in all places, in order to make comprehensible to ourselves His immediate presence in things’ [CJ 337]. But however established this conception of God as outside of temporal and spatial determinations might be – itself a controversial issue, as there is still debate in philosophical theology as to whether God should rather be construed as eternally existing through time – it nonetheless means that, on Kantian premises, we are unable, even in principle, to encounter God sensibly at all. Since we necessarily see the world through space and time but God as conceived of by Kant exists outside such qualifications, then, as Kant himself puts it, the ‘feeling of the immediate presence of the supreme being would constitute a receptivity for which there is no sensory provision in man’s nature’ [Rel 163]. Yet this is quite obviously not an atheistic position, since by the same token knowledge of the non-existence of God is similarly ruled out in principle.

From a traditionally Judaeo-Christian-Islamic religious perspective of course, the spaceless and timeless God of Kant's philosophy appears to expressly contradict the revelations of God which we find in scripture (it could be argued that this is also a problem for certain other, more orthodox, Christian theologians who are committed both to Platonism and the Christian scriptures: but that is another, more expansive story and I will not be concerned to argue the wider point here). We are, for example, told by the Bible that God made the heavens and the earth in six days and that he has intervened in our physical world in various visible capacities. For a Christian the problem of the Kantian aspatial and atemporal God contradicting the Biblical account might appear to be very stark indeed, since according to the Nicene creed – published by the council of Nicaea in 325 to combat the heresy of Arianism – Jesus Christ was a wholly divine figure who nevertheless entered into human history and experience. So according to Christian tradition, God entered space and time but according to Kant: 'God is wholly distinct from the world and has no connection at all with space and time' [LPT 104]. Consequently, from what we know of Kant's – partly evasive – Christology, it seems that Kant, instead of sacrificing human reason to this paradox about an eternal God becoming finite and accordingly seeing Christianity as being rationally indefensible, as Christians such as Kierkegaard (himself possibly forced into such a position by his prior acceptance of a broadly Kantian epistemology<sup>19</sup>) were to appear to do, was instead scarcely inclined to treat Christ as divine<sup>20</sup>. But might we not suspect this position to be irreligious?

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<sup>19</sup> See R. M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 136: 'Kierkegaard's very understanding of why Christ is the 'absurd' presupposes Kant's epistemology'.

The Kantian approach of trusting reason above revelation through scripture, in other words, might be open to the objection that the resultant concept of God is not truly the Christian God but has rather substituted a ‘God of the philosophers’. This is why Kant could be charged with being a ‘deist’ in a way that Kierkegaard could not. What do I mean by ‘deist’? By terms such as ‘deists’ and ‘deism’ I mean to refer to those who reject the evidence of historical revelation of God but believe the existence of God to be nonetheless assured by reason. So, has Kant indeed irreligiously spurned divine revelation? I would now like to investigate Kant’s examination of Biblical theology in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* to see if Kant can answer such a charge.

In the first few pages of *Religion*, Kant acknowledges that philosophical theology is not the only kind of religious thought: a religion such as Christianity which has been historically revealed, at least in part, through specific, extant, canonical texts must include hermeneutic reflection as part of its discursive apparatus. Yet, to rehearse the point made above, the Kantian God and the God revealed through the Bible seem to oppose each other. The Kantian God remains outside of the human world of space and time and history whilst the God of scripture, especially (but not only) Christian scripture is a providential God who fully enters into human historical affairs. How does Kant attempt to resolve this conflict between reason and revelation? In a late work, Kant set to work solving it by analysing the relationship between Biblical theology and his own epistemology. Put bluntly, this analysis of Biblical theology in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* effectively discredits the Bible as an unquestionable

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<sup>20</sup> See G. E. Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 102.



source of divine revelation by the apparent detour of entering into theological debate about the relationship of priority between God and the moral good.

Readers acquainted with the history of philosophy will doubtless recall that this debate is in fact of ancient lineage, perhaps finding its *locus classicus* in Plato's *Euthyphro*: 'Is the holy approved by the Gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is approved?'<sup>21</sup>. In that dialogue, the character of Euthyphro himself espouses the second clause (7a), a position which is duly problematised by Socrates, who argues that strife within the Greek pantheon on moral questions vitiates any recourse to the Gods as final ethical arbiters, a theoretical difficulty within Greek polytheism that is perhaps ignored in Socrates' own admission in Plato's *Apology* that a so-called divine voice had advised him not to take certain courses of action and that is in any case logically absent from the corresponding position in any monotheistic religion, as is demonstrated in many of the writings of the Christian author, Søren Kierkegaard. By means of illustration, it is worth pointing to the logic of one of Kierkegaard's texts in particular: *Fear and Trembling*, which turns on the account of Abraham's potential sacrifice of his son in *Genesis* Ch. 22, a morally ambiguous incident which crops up regularly in controversies about and dramatic meditations upon this topic. In this incident, common to all three of the Semitic monotheistic faiths<sup>22</sup>, Abraham receives a summons from God commanding him to sacrifice his son. Abraham neither doubts nor challenges the *vox dei*: knife in hand, he takes his son to the designated spot only to be granted a last minute reprieve. One of Kierkegaard's

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<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 10a.

<sup>22</sup> Although Islam is at odds with both Judaism and Christianity in claiming that the son in question is Ishmael and not Isaac.

chief arguments in this text is simply that given such sanguinary stories in the Bible one cannot paint God as wholly moral without doing some serious violence to the authority of scripture. It seems that on such a view, which in fact accords to some measure with that of St. Augustine, we are to obey the revelations of God even if they seem madness to our moral standards – even if, as Kierkegaard states, our moral standards then themselves become the temptation that would prohibit us from doing God’s will<sup>23</sup>. So what is the basis of Kant’s disagreement with such a clear and consistent position?

The main premise of Kant’s alternative view is that God is essentially moral. This is a conclusion that follows on naturally from the Kantian ‘moral proof of God’, which is itself based on the necessity of morality (and I will be returning to the question of the validity of this particular proof in the succeeding section of the present chapter). Kant argues that we are thereby given reliable criteria for recognising as either spurious or (potentially) authentic revelations or commands that might or might not be believed to have come from God Himself instead of having to trust them by a criterionless faith, after the manner of Kierkegaard. In

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<sup>23</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 88; see also Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 267: ‘Abraham was not heterogeneous with the ethical. He was well able to fulfil it but was prevented from it by something higher, which by *absolutely* accentuating itself transformed the voice of duty into a temptation’. Also St. Augustine, *City of God* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), Book XIV, Ch. 15, 575; Book XVI, Ch. 32, 694: ‘Abraham’s obedience is renowned in story as a great thing, and rightly so, because he was ordered to do an act of enormous difficulty, namely to kill his own son’; ‘Abraham, we can be sure, could never have believed that God delights in human victims; and yet the thunder of a divine command must be obeyed without argument’.



other words, since it has been philosophically decided by Kant that God is to be wholly good, anything in the scriptures that suggests otherwise must be reinterpreted by us to fall in with the philosophical (Kantian) view of God. Thus is the revelatory power of religious scripture and by implication the freedom of the God of religious scripture and the Christian tradition subordinated to certain of the tenets of Kantian philosophy<sup>24</sup>. Our moral reason therefore supplies a

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<sup>24</sup> Given the many apparent inconsistencies in scripture it might be argued that *any* consistent interpretation depends, at least tacitly, upon certain prior philosophical commitments (i.e. there is no specifically Biblical theology so we have to construct a philosophical one). The crucial question then surely becomes: are the set of commitments in question religiously acceptable? I have been suggesting that in Kant's case they are not. It might of course be thought that since religious acceptability is defined in terms of the religious tradition one belongs to, then it is a somewhat arbitrary standard to judge one's interpretative commitments by. I have largely eschewed trying to answer such a large-scale objection to religious tradition explicitly in this study but it is worth pointing out, although I cannot do full justice to this here, that it has been argued that certain social traditions – such as the Christian religious tradition – embody conceptions of rational enquiry within them and that innovation can indeed occur within traditions but that if such innovation does not in turn transform the sociological map by establishing enduring variant religious traditions – traditions again being conceived of as embodying forms of rational enquiry – then such innovation must be deemed not to satisfactorily answer any of the internal philosophical problematics of the preceding religious tradition. On this view, espoused by A. MacIntyre, what justifies a theory is 'the rational superiority of that particular structure to all previous attempts within that particular tradition to formulate such theories and principles', *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 9. If successful, this type of response (which denies the possibility of an objective rationality outside – and therefore able to adjudicate between – all traditions) answers the charge that it is arbitrary to accept the philosophical commitments of a given religious tradition by showing that these commitments are not surd sociological facts but rather have themselves evolved by ironing out the problems in the preceding set of commitments.



criterion for our decision on the authenticity of outer revelation from religious scripture and so, as Allen W. Wood has rightly put it, ‘our moral conception of God provides us with a means of determining the moral purity – and consequently the possible authenticity – of the alleged revelation of such a God’<sup>25</sup>. There is no rational way of knowing whether a seeming revelation of God is absolutely true but there is a rational way of knowing whether it is false: i.e. if it does not meet the test of our internal moral reason. It is therefore Kant’s considered opinion that divine revelations can never be verified – but that they can be conclusively falsified.

So if something ‘flatly contradicts morality it cannot, despite all appearances be of God (for example were a father ordered to kill his son who is, as far as he knows, innocent)’ [Rel 82]. This remark clearly alludes to the narrative of Abraham and Isaac, which is also explicitly mentioned later in *Religion* when Kant notes that since an ostensibly divine injunction is always interpreted by men ‘Even did it appear to have come from God himself (like the command delivered to Abraham to slaughter his own son like a sheep) it is at least possible that a mistake has prevailed’ [Rel 175]. Thus since Kant’s moral proof of God is taken to furnish us with an indication of God’s existence and also with actual (moral) information about God, it furthermore provides what I have termed in this study a ‘falsificationist’ guiding thread for Biblical exegesis. Scripture is thus not seen by Kant to be a higher court of appeal than those conclusions supplied to us by our faculty of reason: our moral reason limits what scripture can tell us.

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<sup>25</sup> A. W. Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1970), 205-206.

Review of our discussion so far in this chapter reveals that although the Kantian and Biblical Gods do seem to contradict each other, Kant purports to explain this by pointing out that a wholly moral God is the philosophically rigorous one whereas the God of the Bible is, in a sense, not to be wholly trusted since the Bible itself is not a vehicle of autonomous revelation. The answer to the Pascalian objection that Kant is not dealing with ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’ as revealed to us through holy scripture is to concede that Kant has indeed replaced that personal and historical revealed God who is inscrutable to the human moral sense. The God whom Kant has put in His place is aspatial, atemporal, unconditionally moral and non-interventionist (Kant also wanted to argue that this God was an ‘intellectual intuiiter’ but we saw that this feature appeared incompatible with other elements of Kantian thought and for the sake of consistency should perhaps be abandoned). Yet this of course conflicts with the Biblical God who enters history and who sometimes seems incommensurable with normal human moral standards but Kant’s implied answer to this is unequivocal: so much the worse for scripture. Given, in other words, that the Judaeo-Christian God is one wholly active in the course of history and that Kant seems not to hold this, Kant must be regarded as a philosophical rather than a religious monotheist: we must deem Kant to be a deist. And it should be noted in this connection that one Kantian commentator has suggested that Kant was the ‘last great exponent’ of deism, whilst another has admitted that Kant’s concept of God is ‘little removed from that of deism’<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> C. J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 12; M. G. Rearden, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 172.

#### *IV The Moral Proof of the Being of God*

Kant, of course, conspires to present the God of his philosophy as the God of our religious tradition but as we have seen construing Him as absolutely excluded from space and time appears to challenge the content of Christian scripture, and the scriptures of the Judaeo-Christian religion are also themselves challenged by being presented not as definitively revealing God but as providing ‘falsificationist’ support for an autonomous morality. Yet it remains to be mentioned that Kant does attempt to philosophically justify the positing of his God. This is principally attempted by means of the so-called ‘moral argument for the existence of God’. Kant’s moral proof of God, as we have already remarked, is taken to furnish us with an indication of God’s existence and also with actual (moral) information about God (which obviously backs up Kant’s approach to reading scripture). I should therefore now like to say a little more about this proof.

Kant’s philosophy, as we have seen, withdraws God from the world of experience and from direct revelation through scripture. It still does, to be sure, suggest that we are nonetheless compelled to form an idea of God but even conceding – against a mass of sociological and historical evidence to the contrary – that the human mind is led to form an idea of one God, we still have no reason to believe this idea to be anything other than a unavoidable fantasy. But whatever the demerits of his account of illusions (the details of which I have largely set to one side in this study), Kant’s central indication of God, found in



all three *Critiques*, is based squarely on the importance of our moral lives<sup>27</sup>. As I intend to demonstrate presently however, there are flaws to be found within the structure of Kant's argument. There is a sense in which this may not come as a startling disclosure: there are, after all, probably few explicit believers in Kant's specific version of moral deism today – but it might nevertheless be argued that a generic type of moral deism nevertheless haunts the thoughts of more theologically minded reflective people on this subject, though perhaps it is less as a temptation than as a last resort, a residual feeling that in order for the world to be morally justified, God must exist. If this be accepted, then there is even more reason to examine a major philosopher's attempt to construct a proof of God based on ethics. Now, the moral proof's final formulation is to be found in a sequence of passages in the *Critique of Judgement* under the section heading 'Of the Moral Proof of the Being of God'. It is this portion of text that will form the spine of our explication and examination of the moral proof, although it will also

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<sup>27</sup> Both Kant and Levinas are religious philosophers of moral duty – but what is misleading about this often made comparison is that in the one case, the duty is to the pure form of the moral law; whilst in the other, the duty is towards the theoretically incomprehensible but still morally demanding existence of the 'Other' subject. Still, in both cases this ethics is explicitly conceived of in religious terms and one might further argue that (a Levinasian) recognition of the 'other' must precede the (Kantian) application of the categorical imperative: the imperative to, on one formulation, treat the other as an end and not simply as a means (this brings the epistemological problem of other minds and the ethical problem of moral recognition clearly and decisively into the Kantian picture). For one of the most explicitly Kantian formulations of Levinasian ethico-religious thought, see the foundational essay 'Is Ontology Fundamental?' in E. Levinas, *Basic Philosophic Writings* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).

be supplemented by the other Kantian accounts, where this will prove helpful<sup>28</sup>. I will first give an account of what I take to be Kant's proof more or less without criticism before subjecting it to investigation. The proof runs as follows.

First, Kant seems to claim that although the formal moral law requires us to act regardless of consequences, our human sensible nature requires us, if we are not to despair, to have some end in mind when we act: happiness. The moral proof is therefore an empirical one insofar as it relies on the non-illusory nature of our phenomenological experience of ourselves: what Sellars would, in a different context, later term our 'manifest image' and what Joyce would declare to be 'the ineluctable modality of the visible'. The moral proof thus 'concerns us as beings of the world' [CJ 298]. Happiness, then, has such a purchase on us because we are not purely noumenal beings: our real sensible existence involves certain needs, the satisfactions of which are captured in the distinctively human concept of happiness: 'Happiness is the satisfaction of our desires' [CPR A 806=B 834]. Our desire for happiness can therefore be said to be distinctively human because although the non-human animals can of course be attributed desires they cannot readily be said to possess the second order desire for the fulfilment of their first order desires<sup>29</sup>. Given, then, that we have a sensible side

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<sup>28</sup> Kant formulates the moral proof of God in many places, e.g. CPrR pp 150-158, CPR B 425-426, A 811=B 839-A 815=B 843, A 828=B 856. Fortunately, the argument does not differ significantly from the second *Critique* to the third, although some of the formulations in the first *Critique* are perhaps a little too uncomplicated to rely on as being definitive statements.

<sup>29</sup> Relatedly, nor can they readily be said to want to possess different desires, which is a constitutive part of Harry Frankfurt's concept of a 'person', see his 'Freedom of the Will and the

which desires happiness to our human nature as well as our intelligible side, the highest good for beings *such as we are* is a happy moral perfection: a *summum bonum* or ‘highest good’ that cares for our actual sensual needs (happiness) as well as our moral requirements [CJ 300].

So, as partly intelligible and as partly sensible beings we have a dual aim. Nevertheless, this dual aim need not fissure us irreconcilably, as it can be united: ‘Virtue and happiness together constitute the possession of the *summum bonum* in a person’ [CPrR 135]. More specifically, happiness and virtue can be combined not analytically – in which case they would have to be eudaemonistically identified to some measure in a way that Kant plausibly denies<sup>30</sup> – but rather *synthetically*: our highest good is a place where virtue is rewarded with the happiness we all desire.

In order, then, not to be torn in two different directions, we need to aim at a *summum bonum*. But how is such a happy moral perfection to be achieved? Happiness and moral worth are only contingently (if at all) related in this sensible world. Nature, therefore, clearly affords little hope for the systematic reward of good. Likewise, man as a species is extremely limited as regards his ability to control the consequences of his actions in the natural world and so man, no more than nature, can be expected to harmonise virtue with deserved happiness. Indeed, there is no *a-priori* guarantee that the moral law will not

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concept of a Person’, in *Free Will* ed. G. Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 81-95.

<sup>30</sup> Kant denies, that is, that virtue is a part of happiness or *vice versa*. See Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion*, 87: ‘An excess of happiness cannot go proxy for a good moral character’.



conflict with our sensible pursuit of happiness<sup>31</sup>. In such a disharmonious case, our practical reason would be antinomically torn between the sensible claims of happiness and the intelligible claims of virtue, claims neither of which we can eschew. On the one hand, eschewing the claims of morality is not an option because in the first place it is Kant's own view that the moral good is a 'non-hypothetical', 'apodeictic' or 'categorical imperative'; and in the second place, Kant also seems to have seen with unparalleled perspicacity what his contemporary, De Sade, did not: that we must accept morality because, psychologically speaking, we are not really cut out for undertaking acts of pure evil<sup>32</sup>. And on the other hand, eschewing the claims of human sensibility in the same way that we might eschew the claims of those of our baser desires that drag us down to the level of feral nature is no easy option for Kant because the desire for happiness is not a part of non-human nature: our desire for happiness is distinctively human (it is, to repeat, a second order desire for the fulfilment of first order desires). Eschewing the claims of happiness would thus be like writing off the call of our own nature. Furthermore, it would, as at least some of Kant's remarks very strongly suggest, lead us to a despair in which we gave up acting ethically altogether.

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<sup>31</sup> Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, 316.

<sup>32</sup> This seems to me to be the clear message of CJ 302, CPR A 828=B 856 and, particularly, Rel 30. For a dissenting view, see Allison *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 150. There it is suggested that Kant rules out the possibility of a devilish will, not because of psychological reasons that could only be empirically grounded but because to recognise the good is to recognise it as having valid claims.

Therefore, since neither man nor nature can ever be hoped to systematically harmonise that which we want as sensible humans and that which we desire as intelligible beings we must – to do justice to both of the rational claims on us and to avoid a despair in which neither claim could be answered – assume an effective harmonising force to exist outside the sensible world. That is to say, we are obliged to be moral and so if we can only be so by postulating a force that rewards virtue with happiness then we are also obliged to practically postulate that force. The only theoretical framework within which such a proportionate causal relation obtaining between virtue and happiness can be posited however, Kant concludes, is a theological one:

We must assume a moral world cause (author of the world) in order to set before ourselves a final purpose consistent with the moral law, and so far as the latter is necessary, so far [...] the former must also be necessarily assumed, i.e. we must admit there is a God. [CJ 301]

So we can only imagine a realm where people are rewarded for their goodness (which is what we want to aim at if we are to be true to both our sensible and our intelligible nature and not to despair) as being under the command of an omniscient and omnipotent God who will take upon himself the task of organising, in Michalson's censorious characterisation, 'a mysterious proportioning process occurring after my death in an unimaginably remote noumenal zone'<sup>33</sup>. Yet the supposition of a wise author and ruler is, it should be stressed, conditional upon us accepting the claims of morality and of our sensible

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<sup>33</sup> Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God*, 116.

nature. If we believe in morality and if we also need happiness to aim at, our ultimate goal can only be a rewarding afterlife administered by an essentially benevolent God.

Kant's moral proof of God is clearly a complex one but it at least seems to be coherent though at the risk of repetition it should probably be stressed that it is a proof that results from practical reason, not theoretical reason, which means that it results not in an objective finding but a kind of necessary existential commitment: we have to assume and hope for God's existence to marry our two separate goals and stop us despairing. Yet even on this existential basis certain objections can be made to the proof, although I should initially say that the question of the acceptability of Kant's account of the 'categorical imperative', or absolutely obliging nature of morality, that underlies the moral proof is not an issue which we can discuss adequately here, so that important aspect of Kant's practical philosophy will have to be largely set to one side. There are, however, at least two objections that can be made to Kant's moral proof of God as it now stands. The first relates to the fact that Kant controversially introduces happiness as a subjective condition of man striving, whilst the second relates to the limited nature of the God at stake.

## I

A difficulty with happiness being assumed to be a condition of, or at least involved in, man's aiming for moral excellence arises simply because it is arguable whether Kant's psychological account of us 'as beings of the world' really rings as true as Kant himself supposed. Let us consider the position in



what is probably its most comprehensive statement, articulated around the conceit of a righteous but faithless man, where it at least seems to be suggested that without the hope for happiness we would cease to act morally:

His effort is bounded; and from nature [...] Deceit, violence and envy will always surround him, although he himself be honest peaceable; and kindly; and all the righteous men he meets will, notwithstanding all their worthiness of happiness, be yet subjected by nature, which regards not this, to all the evils of want, disease and untimely death, just like the beasts of the earth. So it will be until one wide grave engulfs them all (honest or not, it makes no difference) and throws them back - who were able to believe themselves the final purpose of creation - into the abyss of the purposeless chaos of matter from which they were drawn. The purpose, then, which this well intentioned person had and ought to have before him in his pursuit of moral laws, he must certainly give up as impossible. [CJ 303]

This is a nightmarishly well made point but it is hardly an uncontroversial one and it might be possible to attack Kant's moral proof of God here at its root by simply questioning whether we actually need the expectation of individual human happiness – the expectation of the satisfaction of the second order desire for the fulfilment of first order desires – as an end for human action (in the absence of which we would despair). The assumption that we do strive for such a happiness (which only God can systematically provide) to so impel us is seemingly central to Kant's moral proof but is it really possible that acting morally without the belief in adequate reward in terms of individual happiness alone would lead us to despair? It should be noted at this point that I am not going to give a precise definition of what constitutes a 'good reason' to act, or to

act morally, in this study. Instead, I propose to approach the issue by accepting some of Kant's assumptions in the moral proof and then trading upon certain of our intuitions in this area and asking the following question: Can anything else can be thought to function just as well as happiness in terms of motivating us to act without incurring despair? Now, one might think that an attachment to a personal cultivation of the virtues, particularly those tied up with a more terrestrial and more attainable 'perfectibility', might be enough to keep us acting without sensing any futility and then despairing<sup>34</sup>. However, given that Kant has of course eliminated any objective reason to think of ourselves as subject to a natural teleology of the sort which underpinned the original and the most famous version of such virtue ethics, Aristotle's, and that in any case such a teleology seems to rely on some slightly discreditable presuppositions today, any such attachment to terrestrial perfectibility would have to survive without the structural support of Aristotle's metaphysical biology. Could there be a metaphysically truncated theory of the virtues which would survive in a form that was consistent enough to move men in accordance with morality? Well, as just such a theory has recently been elaborated by Alisdair MacIntyre in his *After Virtue*, there would clearly be something to be gained by considering this work as a test-case in just a little more detail.

*After Virtue* is an explicitly anti-Kantian attempt to reconstruct a justification of moral action, seeing itself as radically departing from the moral grounding of modernity: 'Nothing less than a rejection of a large part of that [i.e. the modern -

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<sup>34</sup> Kant would not see such an attachment as a moral one, of course, but neither does he see our desire for happiness as being moral. The point is that virtue ethics and Kantian deontology are not incompatible if one is taken as relating to our sensible ends and one to our intelligible ends.

MR] ethos will provide us with a rational and morally defensible standpoint from which to [...] act'<sup>35</sup>. MacIntyre thinks that the notion of virtue is linked to that of a social practice and I now want to argue that his attempt to ground the motive of human moral activity on such attainable grounds is at least as plausible as Kant's attempt to connect motivation with happiness. The conclusion to which I am moving is obviously that happiness is not essentially connected with human motivation because it is not the only imaginable human end and that therefore we are not called upon to posit God by the fact of the necessity of morality alone.

To ground ethical action MacIntyre introduces the notion of a kind of constant we can aim for that is as cross-cultural and as trans-historical as is the expectation of happiness or as would be a purported human metaphysical *telos*: a 'practice'. So although there is, for MacIntyre, no given biological *telos* of a human life as such, there are nevertheless social practices, such as sailing or playing in a string quartet, that are found in some form or other across all human cultures and that clearly constitute goals for human desire. His technical definition of a practice runs as follows:

By a practice I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 2000), x.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.



This is a compact definition and so it might be worth explaining in a little more detail here what ‘goods internal to a practice’ actually are. Such goods, we might say, are those goods which can only be achieved through participation in that specific practice and such goods must moreover have historically evolved standards of excellence internal to them. On this account, social activities like playing chess would count as practices because the good of playing chess well can only be achieved through engaging in precisely that practice, a practice with a developed standard of excellence. The same can be said of playing in a string quartet. Human lives are thus intertwined with social practices and are, in a sense, therefore given certain goods (I omit here discussion of many of the technicalities and qualifications of MacIntyre’s account). Virtue then becomes the name for those human capabilities that allow us to pursue practices and therefore aim for the goods internal to those practices. Resilience, for instance, allows us to pursue the good internal to the practice of sailing a ship. Similarly, diligence allows us to pursue the different good internal to the practice of playing in a string quartet and honesty allows us to pursue the good internal to, say, playing chess (we *could* of course cheat in any given game of chess but only external goods could be achieved that way: a rather restricted and short-lived form of social prestige, perhaps). And all these practices, because they have historically developed standards of excellence, call for the virtue of accepting the judgement of a legitimate authority on our part: as novices or beginners, we have to accept the judgement of a past master as to what the good of chess, or of a particular kind of musicianship, consists in. MacIntyre’s concept of a virtue thus requires the background of a practice and the corresponding notion of recognised

internal goods and therefore his main disagreement with Kant lies in his suggesting that in order to be reasonably motivated to act (without moral weakness) we need not aim for a highest good partly constituted by a – otherwise than theologically, unattainable – happiness but rather that we can aim at fostering virtues which support goods internal to socially given practices, goods that do as a matter of fact matter to us, arguably as much as does happiness. Put differently, both Kant (at least in an important part of the moral proof, at any rate) and MacIntyre seem to agree that some pre-existent desires are somehow involved in practical reason but MacIntyre points out that one kind of moral reasoning appeals to desires for goals that do not need God to help us achieve them.

Given, then, that we simply cannot say, without taking a dogmatic stance upon whether communitarian goods given through practices or libertarian individual happiness provides the better or stronger motive for human action without futility, *After Virtue* must surely be accepted as articulating a not indefensible way to ground or accompany action and specifically ethical action without calling upon the expectation of an omnipresent divinity with abilities to reward us with happiness so as to tie in our two aims<sup>37</sup>. And if MacIntyre can so ground or support ethics in this manner then Kant's claim that man, if he is not to succumb to dejection and immorality, must expect some reward for his endeavour and that this reward *must come from God* and cannot be reached by our own powers has been shown to be an unreliable assumption.

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<sup>37</sup> It could further be argued at this point that as happiness is enjoyed by man *qua* phenomenal being or quasi-Heideggerian 'being in the world', then it follows that Kant cannot postulate any *noumenal* happiness anyway.



It is also worth remarking here that, even if, as in any case seems unlikely, the moral man's resolve did break in the way that Kant thought it would if he did not have faith in God and a desire for happiness, perhaps despair might not be so uncondusive to ethical rectitude as Kant seems to suppose. This is perhaps more obvious in our era than it was in Kant's time. Since that time, we have seen repeated instances of people coping with personal tragedies of religious faith that are wholly unaccompanied by moral weakness or failure. The alternative Kantian idea that such despair necessarily leads to immorally self-serving acts or even acts of malicious evil is perhaps today only the commonplace of a certain kind of modern European narrative centrally concerned with sociologically disconnected 'loners'. For real life individuals suffering from, or working through, the kind of post-Heideggerean anxiety that we find in the existentialist novels of atheists such as Sartre and Camus generally cannot be said to fall into the kind of highly immoral behaviour which we often associate with the 'heroes' of such fiction<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> I would like to draw attention to two further criticisms that have been raised against Kant's moral proof by Hegel and C. D. Broad, respectively. Hegel noted that 'In the assumption that the highest good is what essentially matters, there is admitted a situation in which moral action [...] does not take place at all', *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 376. The problem obliquely suggested here is one of consistency in the critical system: Kant's morality was established as being self-validating but Kant now assumes that without divine goodness the righteous man would see no reason to continue acting morally in the face of a cold and impersonal world. But to this it has been plausibly replied that happiness could be the foreseen *end* without being the main *motive* of moral action (see, for example, Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, 51). Broad's very different criticism is that stating that something ought to exist implies only that this would involve 'no logical contradiction and that any being who could bring it about ought to try and do so. But it does not imply any such being', *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (Routledge:



## II

We have doubted, granting that humans need ends, whether we actually need the particular second-order end of happiness to motivate us or to accompany us in our pursuance of the good without despair, an end that needed God to synthesise it with our intelligible requirement of moral action. What seems to me to be the relative plausibility of MacIntyre's alternative account in *After Virtue*, which relied upon the perfectibility of social practices to motivate us to virtue, and which we could combine with virtue without calling upon the thought of God, seemed to help our case (though it was not, of course, crucial for its success). I also hinted that despair might in any case not lead straight to immoral behaviour or sullen inaction. This too suggested that we need not assume a moral world cause to engage ethically with our fellows. In exposing what I take to be the second major difficulty with Kant's moral proof of the being of God, I would like to return to the issue of what I have been calling Kantian deism. For I now want to argue that even if the conclusion of this moral proof is that we must admit, albeit in an existential manner, that personally we must believe that there

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London, 1962), 141. What Broad appears to be saying here is that, if we do believe in morality then God indeed ought to exist in order to reward us. But there is no ontological implication to be found in this particular 'ought' because the physical possibility of God bringing about a *summum bonum* is uncertain. An analogy might make this clearer: when someone tells you in everyday life that you ought to do something, the possibility of you being physically able to undertake that action is presupposed in you being able to take that piece of moral advice seriously in the first

is a God, we must also admit that the God in which we must believe is a rather impoverished variety of Deity when compared with the God of the Christian tradition.

The particular problem here might be said to be that the moral proof can only establish some but not all of what Kant claims for it. For it seems that only the simple existence of a moral rewarder of virtue must be assumed to motivate us to act ethically in Kant's system (although some form of resurrection seems to be implied for humans). What this then further suggests is that although we must assume an effective harmonising force to exist outside the sensible world in order to act morally, there is still quite a leap from positing that harmonising force to believing in the traditional Christian God of infinite power, mercy and wisdom. As Y. Yovel has pointed out, the initial introduction of God into Kant's argument actually depends upon our subjective limitations, that is to say, our inability to imagine an 'immanent principle of justice'. Yovel writes of the Kantian moral proof of God as follows:

This procedure of postulation consists of two distinct stages. At the initial stage, which alone has logical necessity, all that we postulate is a vague and indefinite principle [...] Of this something we know nothing except that it is there and it fulfils the function described [...] but here our subjective limitations come into play, forcing us to *imagine* this factor with the aid of metaphoric, anthropomorphic imagery [...] and regard that

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place. Similarly, we cannot take the claim that God ought to exist seriously into consideration before knowing that His physical possibility is vouched for.

‘something’ as a supreme personal being, endowed with understanding and will, who is the ‘moral author of the world’, that is, God<sup>39</sup>

Implicit in Yovel’s characterisation here is the truth that, as Michalson has it: ‘The God of the moral argument is chiefly an instrument in the realisation of a rational goal and little more [...] certainly Kant’s argument does not account for the full roster of divine predicates’<sup>40</sup>. So without the addition of our anthropomorphic imagery, all that logically follows from the moral proof of God is in fact some kind of instrumental principle of justice. And it is highly unobvious that we should identify this bare principle either with the revealed Christian God of history, mercy and redemption or even with the God of the rationalist philosophers, who was the most perfect being, an uncaused cause and who held a providential design for the world. ‘The traits or attributes of the deity who is at issue in the first *Critique* are considerably more numerous than those of the God produced by the moral proof’<sup>41</sup>. Some of the kind of problems that we might associate with Kant’s own aggressive tactics toward theological argumentation in the *Transcendental Dialectic* therefore might be thought to come home to roost here: there is, for instance, no reason to be found in this particular moral argument, which logically proves only a principle of justice, why we must consider this ‘God’ to be the creator of the world. It is in such a connection that D. M. Mackinnon has aptly noted: ‘For Kant, God is less the

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<sup>39</sup> Y. Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 89-90.

<sup>40</sup> Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 34



creator than the ultimate judge'<sup>42</sup> and I would like to add that there seems to be no clear conceptual connection between the notion of a rewarder of just acts and the idea of a personal creator God that would bridge the clear gap in Kant's argument – a gap as large as that between what the cosmological and the physico-theological proofs attempt to prove and what they do in fact prove without the backing of the ontological argument.

So the moral proof, even considered to be the result of practical and not theoretical reason, therefore – and only on the condition that we accept what I have already suggested in my look at MacIntyre that we should not, namely, that we cannot be motivated to moral action without the desire for happiness – proves only a 'vague and indefinite principle'. This 'principle' is not the God of the Christian faith. Yet there are two obvious ways of refurbishing the sparse Kantian concept of a principle of justice that results from the moral proof with a more substantial inventory of divine predicates. The first would be to return to one of the traditional demonstrations of an all powerful God, such as that to be found in the ontological proof of Descartes. The second would be to concede, alongside thinkers like Kierkegaard, that the real core of the Christian faith in a personal God is to be found in sacred revelation through scripture after all. Yet neither of these argumentative routes are live options for Kant because he has already shut off them both in a decisive fashion in the *Transcendental Dialectic*

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<sup>42</sup> D. M. Mackinnon, 'Kant's Philosophy of Religion' in *Philosophy*, April 1975, vol. 50, no. 192, pp. 131-144.

of his first *Critique* and in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, respectively<sup>43</sup>.

## V Conclusion

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<sup>43</sup> It might be thought that there is yet another Kantian proof of God: for in the first *Critique* we are told that even for the man apparently devoid of right sentiment ‘enough remains to make him fear the existence of a God and a future life [...] this may therefore serve as negative belief [...] a powerful check on the outbreak of evil sentiments’ [CPR A 830=B 858]. Although the negative modulation of the concept (of belief) here is a recognisably Kantian procedure – one is reminded of Kant’s concept of negative pleasure in the third *Critique*’s discussion of the sublime [CJ 83] and of negative moral perfection in the second [CPrR 189] – it is nevertheless misleading. For negative belief is not actually any kind of belief but is rather an agent acting *as if* he believed. This issue is further explored, twelve years later, in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. In this work, Kant notes that the recidivist who entertains no hope of moral improvement glimpses an ‘incalculable misery’; a ‘cursed eternity’ [Rel 63]: representations psychologically powerful enough, despite their potential untruth, to serve as an incentive if not to goodness then at least to restraint and God fearing ‘without our having to presume to lay down dogmatically the objective doctrine that man’s destiny is an eternity of good or evil’ [Rel 63]. It will be noted that neither the account in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* nor that which we found earlier in the *Critique of Pure Reason* declare that fear depends on the malefactor being committed to a belief in God and in the existence of human subjectivity in perpetuity: ‘Nothing more is required than he at least cannot pretend that there is any certainty that there is no such being and no such life’ [CPR A 830=B 858]. This ‘proof from fear’ then, on closer inspection, is not a proof after the manner of Pascal at all but rather a form of policing behaviour with the end of getting people to act as if they believed in God. Moreover, given Kant’s rigorism or strict doctrine of the categorical imperative, any deeds done from other motives, like fear, than those of duty can never be classed as moral. So it is a peculiarity of this supposed ‘proof’ that it neither commits men to a belief in God nor truly evinces the moral good.

Kant rejected the possibility of any human sense experience of God by claiming that God, if He existed, did so independently of space and time. Kant also abandoned the possibility of the disclosure of God through Biblical scripture: we could never conclusively verify, Kant argued, but only conclusively falsify a divine revelation. I therefore attributed to Kant what I termed a ‘falsificationist’ philosophy of revelation (I need hardly remark that the dormant reference here is to a famous philosophy of science). This ‘transcendental idealist’ rejection of direct religious experience and ‘falsificationist’ rejection of direct divine revelation led us to believe that Kant could be best characterised as a ‘deist’: someone sceptical of the testimony of historical revelation but nonetheless convinced of the existence of God through reason. And indeed, Kant further argued that the mind naturally fabricates a so called idea of God. But the burden of theological proof within Kant’s critical system clearly fell on the moral indication of God’s existence. This proof however, was seen to rely on the questionable empirical assumption that without our expectation for happiness human moral action would be ruled out and to in any case prove only an abstract ‘principle of justice’.

Kant himself, as is well known, thought that his removal of the ontological question of God’s existence was actually open to a fideistic reading in the context of the critical system as a whole: ‘I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge’, he declares in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, ‘in order to make room for faith’ [CPR Bxxx]. Later, in the more unapproachable recesses of the first *Critique* he remarks: ‘For although we have to surrender the language of science we still have sufficient ground to employ, in the presence of the most exacting reason, the quite legitimate



language of a firm faith' [CPR A 745=B 773]. One immediately post-Kantian thinker however, will deny even this reduced claim, as we shall see presently.

### ***3. Schopenhauer I: The Basic Structure of Schopenhauerian Atheism***

#### ***I Introduction***

Schopenhauer, although he attempted to retain what he took to be its moral essence<sup>44</sup>, definitively abandoned – rather than held in abeyance, as being beyond the scope of human knowledge – the metaphysics of Christian theism. He had both an indirect metaphysical argument and a more direct but wholly unKantian ethical argument for this atheism. The argument of this present chapter intends to demonstrate and examine the indirect metaphysical method used by Schopenhauer to argue for atheism. His direct ethical argument will be examined in the next chapter.

I should however, state at the outset that as the focus of my interest is Schopenhauer's atheism, this means that detailing a convincing philosophical reconstruction of the whole of Schopenhauer's impressively comprehensive metaphysics of the will is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Nor is the concept of 'will' itself as it appears in Schopenhauer's text something I should like to define *precisely* in this study. Nevertheless, it is in this chapter both possible and necessary to outline the Schopenhauerian metaphysic of the will in a serviceable way; that is to say, in a manner which allows us to look at

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<sup>44</sup> Schopenhauer writes that 'Christianity is composed of two very heterogeneous elements. Of these I should like to call the purely ethical element preferably, indeed exclusively, the Christian, and to distinguish it from the Jewish dogmatism with which it is found' [W I 387-88]. This very partial acceptance of Christianity – particularly Catholic asceticism – further explains Schopenhauer's positive, if slightly unsettling, appreciation of Jesus Christ as an important prophet of asceticism [W I 91, see also W II 584, W I 329 and W II 628].

Schopenhauer's attempt to argue against the existence of God. The chapter will be structured as follows. First, we shall examine the possible strategic reasons for the rather ambiguous presentation of Schopenhauer's atheism (and I begin with this issue because the way in which Schopenhauer presents his atheism has recently been critically questioned). Next, I shall then turn to the more philosophically substantial issue of how Schopenhauer broke with Kant's tentative metaphysical scepticism: Schopenhauer's philosophy, it will be seen, leads from certain of the assumptions of Kantian transcendental idealism to a distinctive ontology that absolutely excludes the transcendent personal God of the monotheistic tradition. It also apparently excludes the immanent God of much of monistic philosophy (such as that of Hegel) and does so by extrapolating from self knowledge to 'noumenal knowledge' – a kind of knowledge which Kant of course thought impossible – by means of an argument from analogy (a superfluous argument, as it turns out). After describing Schopenhauer's position, we shall then selectively investigate certain of Schopenhauer's arguments. They have had various objections raised against them and although a full survey of all of Schopenhauer's perceived philosophical errors is clearly beyond the limited scope of this chapter of my study, I will illuminate what I take to be two of the more troubling ones for our purposes. What we shall conclude is that Schopenhauer's metaphysical exclusion argument, whilst initially pursued according to strictly Kantian premises, was nevertheless flawed as an argument specifically against the existence of God, which, perhaps surprisingly, makes Schopenhauer's philosophy no less agnostic than Kant's.



In the next chapter, we shall then see how Schopenhauer nevertheless reinforces this indirect metaphysical contradiction of the existence of God with an important ‘argument from evil’ that presents a rather more direct challenge to Christianity and, in a sense to be further explained, stems directly from his metaphysics as described in the present chapter. First, though, I would like to begin with an exploration of the presentation of Schopenhauer’s atheism.

## *II The Presentation of Schopenhauerian Atheism*

Whatever the philosophical successes, or otherwise, of his philosophy might turn out to be, Schopenhauer must surely be historically regarded as a deciding figure in the development of atheism within the mainstream of Western philosophy, a figure about whom Fredrich Nietzsche, writing shortly after – and often under the influence of – Schopenhauer, approvingly remarked:

Schopenhauer was the first admitted and inexorable atheist among us Germans [...] the ungodliness of existence was for him something given, palpable, indisputable [...] This is the locus of his whole integrity; unconditional and honest atheism is simply the presupposition of the way he poses his problem. [GS #357]

Nietzsche admits to admiring Schopenhauer’s forthright atheism in several other places too, and he is certainly correct in suggesting that Schopenhauer quite self-consciously built an entire metaphysical system without feeling the need to have either explanatory or ornamental recourse to the concept of God, an approach of indirect contradiction to the Christian religion which was strongly at variance with most of his philosophical forebears and contemporaries. Accordingly, it will

not surprise us to learn that in the preface to the second edition of his magnum opus, *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer himself complained – with an apparent detachment that actually contained not a little condescension towards his professionally employed peers – that his philosophy lacked ‘the first requirement for a well paid professorial philosophy, namely, a speculative theology’ [W I xxvi]. Schopenhauer later specified that this lack of a theological component in his thought was due to the fact that he was not ‘a person who aims with his writings at the approbation and assent of a minister’ [W II 461]. Schopenhauer seems to have deeply mistrusted professional university philosophers, apparently on the grounds that they were heavily compromised by, amongst other things, religious affiliations, whilst he himself aimed – as he never ceased of reminding his readers – solely at the truth, which he took to be a duty of philosophers that can bring them into conflict with precisely those religious interests that the institution of the university more or less explicitly aims to support (also interesting in this connection is that Schopenhauer began his university studies in science and not, as was the case with Hegel, Schelling and others even including Nietzsche, in theology<sup>45</sup>). In accordance with this aim, Schopenhauer, without recantation, ever avoided what he regarded as being the conciliatory attempt to find a place for God in his philosophy. Schopenhauer also thought that such attempts to introduce God into philosophy, quite apart from being economic, social and political compromises, in any case exhibited a measure of ignorance with regard to the recent philosophical achievements

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<sup>45</sup> See J. E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer: The Human Character* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 13.

brought about by Kant: ‘as if the *Critique of Pure Reason* had been written on the moon’ [WN 4]. It is Schopenhauer’s philosophic objections to the introduction of God into philosophy that will concern us in the pages that follow.

Nietzsche’s claim in *The Gay Science* that Schopenhauer had been the first admitted and inexorable atheist among the Germans has however, recently been questioned by one commentator. Not that David Berman thinks that Schopenhauer was not in fact an atheist (that is surely beyond all doubt); nor that Berman has discovered an even earlier admitted atheist of comparable philosophic significance among the Germans (there were, of course, well-known materialistic atheists who anonymously confessed their atheism during the French Enlightenment, such as Baron d’Holbach): rather, Berman’s scepticism turns principally on the fact that Schopenhauer, against the subsequent interpretation of Nietzsche, seems not to have *admitted* very much at all in the way of his own personal religious unbelieving: ‘Schopenhauer’, Berman claims, ‘was cautious and dissembling about his atheism’<sup>46</sup>, by which it is meant that Schopenhauer did not in fact deny God’s existence outright; nor did he ever avowedly call himself an atheist; nor does Schopenhauer ever articulate an explicit argument against the existence of a monotheistic God. All this seems to be true (with the possible exception of the final claim, as we shall see in our next chapter on Schopenhauer’s ‘argument from evil’) but far from being unique to Schopenhauer it reflects a wider tendency that is observable in many atheistic writers – from Feuerbach to Freud, and arguably including Hume – to leave their

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<sup>46</sup> D. Berman, ‘Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: Honest Atheism, Dishonest Pessimism’, in *Willing and Nothingness*, ed. C. Janaway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 178-195; 186.



atheism half hidden, chiefly to avoid prosecution or offence. But as Berman concedes, any dissembling that Schopenhauer may have indulged in – though it seems to me that, strictly speaking, Schopenhauer was more guilty of omission than dissembling – by means of this mild form of self-censorship could scarcely have obscured the fact that his ontology was nevertheless as utterly atheistic as any that could be imagined. Schopenhauer's metaphysics is, in intention, intrinsically atheistic and so Schopenhauer does not require a separate argument to establish his atheism, a point with which Berman cannot but agree in his paper. Yet Berman goes on to make the controversial point that Schopenhauer was cautious about loudly disseminating the atheistic conclusions of his metaphysical system because 'open atheism was liable to drive the vulgar crazy'<sup>47</sup>. If I understand this ambiguously expressed sentence correctly, Berman conceives of monotheism seen from within the Schopenhauerian system as providing support for morals and public order and this function of the protection of civil order explains Schopenhauer's reluctance to admit his atheism. Now, the principal place where Schopenhauer seems to admit that religion had a function is in a late essay included in *Parerga and Paralipomena* entitled 'On Religion: A Dialogue', any interpretation of which should make allowance for the dialogue form and the conventions pertaining to it. One of the two characters in the dialogue, Demopheles, ascribes a certain sociological importance to religion that is captured in the following, high-handed, way:

The needs of the people must be met in accordance with their powers of comprehension. Religion is the only way to proclaim and make plain the high significance of life to the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

crude intellect and clumsy understanding of the masses who are immersed in sordid pursuits and material labour. [PP II 324]

This, it might be thought, offers some *prima facie* support for Berman's interpretation but the religious function referred to here is clearly metaphysical comprehension rather than the preservation of social order and moreover, there is no obvious reason why Schopenhauer should be wholly identified with Demopheles; nor indeed why he should not be identified with Demopheles' equally imaginary interlocutor, Philalethes: both of the characters in this dialogue are in fact atheists, their only dispute being over the presentation of that atheism. Even if the dispute reflects an ambiguity in Schopenhauer's own position (and that it is legitimate to use the dialogic form in philosophy when a subject admits of two views is accepted at PP II 7) and Schopenhauer is therefore willing to entertain the view of Demopheles – i.e. that religion has a beneficial function – to some degree, the function and importance of religion referred to in part of that dialogue, to return to my first point, is not at all social restraint but rather individual metaphysical consolation. 'Religion is', not the Marxist opium, but rather the Feuerbachian 'metaphysics of the people' [PP II 325]. Furthermore, ancient Greek, Hindu and Buddhist cultures remained perfectly lawful whilst also refraining from monotheistic belief, as Schopenhauer records in the guise of the character Philalethes [PP II 331]. It might also be worth mentioning that Berman's view neglects that important strand of Schopenhauer's sociological thought – the threads of which will be picked up by Nietzsche – which maintains that religious faith was in any case simply dying out: 'Mankind

is growing out of religion as out of its childhood clothes' [PP II 392, see also FFR 179, WN 5, W I 357].

I therefore agree with Berman to the extent that Schopenhauer is not, strictly speaking, an admitted atheist but I disagree with him in so far as Berman seems to think that Schopenhauer hides the atheistic conclusions of his philosophy so as ensure social restraint. Schopenhauer seems to me to be forced by his own position to have to admit – and if, *contra* my exegetical intuitions, he does not in fact so admit, then he is at any rate to my mind best reconstructed as admitting – that the main, but nonetheless still dispensable, function of religion is personal consolation and not social order, in part because he acknowledges that atheistic and non-monotheistic cultures are not immoral and in part because Schopenhauer thought that religion was in any case dying out. There are good reasons, then, for not reading Schopenhauer in the way that Berman does.

So much for my interpretation of the potential reasons behind the cryptic formal presentation of Schopenhauer's position as an atheist. Now we must examine the first, indirect, line of argument he actually provides for this atheism. This first line of argument is indissociable from certain of his metaphysical concerns but we shall have to be relatively selective in our examination and confine our research mainly to the basic assertions and doctrines that have an immediate bearing on Schopenhauer's atheism. With some of the wider philosophical issues raised by *The World as Will and Representation* we shall, therefore, of necessity not be concerned. Ultimately, it will be seen that Schopenhauer's line of metaphysical argument, irrespective of the partial successes it may achieve on other philosophical points, cannot be regarded as successfully excluding God from ontology.



### ***III Atheism and Idealism***

As is well known, Schopenhauer elaborated his main philosophical theories in his major work *The World as Will and Representation*, which was first published in 1819 and then revised in 1844 and once again in 1859. These revisions are additions rather than major doctrinal changes and instead of being interleaved with the remainder of his work they themselves constitute a second volume. Schopenhauer also published collections of short essays and longer self-contained essays on specific philosophical themes such as ethics and the problem of free will but these in no way – except perhaps on very minor points – contradict the conclusions that Schopenhauer had already reached on such matters in his *magnum opus* and largely stuck to throughout his philosophical career. It is this work, *The World as Will and Representation*, therefore, that must bear the brunt of any attempt to appreciate the Schopenhauerian philosophy. I cannot, to re-emphasise, offer an absolutely exhaustive account of Schopenhauer's philosophy as a whole here, of course, but the main line of reasoning that leads up to the exclusion of God can be put as follows.

Schopenhauer opens *The World as Will and Representation* with some meditations on idealism. We are initially treated to a consideration of what he calls the representation (*Vorstellung*). Leaving aside the difficult question of what exactly Schopenhauer takes a representation to be (there would seem to be no clear answer to this, further than its obviously being mind-dependent), at first sight this position might perhaps seem to be heading in the broad direction of an ontology of pure experience à la the sceptical David Hume. Hume notoriously

conceded that on his empiricist premises he had failed to find any experience that answers to what we, in everyday life, call the self. He thereby – in the *Treatise* if not the *Enquiry* – became the first major modern philosopher to question the Cartesian orthodoxy that *ego sum*. As good a way as any of phrasing the Humean challenge would be to say that when we try to perceive ourselves all we actually find are one or another perception: all that we can know to exist, therefore, are perceptions. So we might think that Schopenhauer was agreeing with Hume but such an interpretation would be premature. For Schopenhauer's own gloss on the term representation is that it is: 'an object for a subject' [W I 169]. From a consideration of the representation, the subject is therefore immediately introduced, since Schopenhauer appears to follow Kant's attack on Hume in arguing that coherent experience necessarily requires an experiencer, despite never himself appearing to subscribe either to the specifics of Kant's own approach (say, the doctrine of the syntheses of apprehension, reproduction and recognition which present unified subjectivity and enduring objectivity as intimately connected in the first edition transcendental deduction) nor to the format of transcendental arguments generally, which on one common interpretation characteristically assume that there is experience or experience of a certain sort and then attempt to show that a specific condition or set of conditions must be satisfied for there to be that experience in the first place. Schopenhauer therefore eludes what we might term the 'negative logic of the subject' that is latent in Hume's empiricism by maintaining instead that the self is a necessary condition of experience and, as Christopher Janaway has remarked, he is in fact justified in doing so because without the condition of subjectivity that Kant and Schopenhauer supply, the ontologist of pure

experience, such as Hume, is left at a loss when he asked to explain why bundles of experience are organised in precisely the way that, as a matter of fact, they happen to be<sup>48</sup>.

So, Schopenhauer is not following Hume – but might he not instead be said to be following Berkeley? Schopenhauer, like Berkeley, refuses to consider the object as it is presented to a subject with any ontological implications about the perceiver-independence of that object put out of mind or bracketed (i.e. reduced in a kind of transcendental *epoché*) and instead construes the object as a wholly perceiver-dependent entity. Moreover, the arguments he sparingly uses to establish this idealistic position also appear to owe a good deal to the Irish Bishop. In now considering such arguments however, we shall see that the perplexities of Berkeleian idealism are not as relevant to the Schopenhauerian exclusion argument and so therefore are not as relevant to our present concerns, as we might at first suppose.

Now, Schopenhauer plausibly considers realism to be the natural and the most intuitively attractive philosophy for the modern (Western) mind but nevertheless thinks that a little philosophical analysis can expose this initial plausibility as being wholly spurious. This now brings us to what is on one interpretation possibly one of the most notorious moves associated with the metaphysics of *The World as Will and Representation*, for Schopenhauer seems to argue – and it is an argument notoriously also to be found in Berkeley<sup>49</sup> – that since anything that I imagine exists in my imagination, the possibility of a perceiver-independent

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<sup>48</sup> C. Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 104.

<sup>49</sup> See Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in *Works*, 139, 183.



world existing without subjects cannot even be imagined and therefore: ‘In the assumption that the world as such might exist independently of all brains [*sic*] there lies a contradiction’ [W II 5, also W I 15, W II 486, for further positive references to Berkeley’s achievement see W I 434, W I 95, W I 444]. We should probably not ignore at this point the fact that the word ‘brains’ in this claim marks an obvious confusion between Schopenhauer’s Berkeleian idealism and the neurophysiological realism within which this argument is framed, a confusion which Schopenhauer – with arguable sincerity – elsewhere actually imputes to Berkeley himself [see W II 3]. Yet this confusion is actually foregone in Berkeley’s own immaterialism, where talk of the subject is invariably conducted in the clearly non-material terms of *spirit* and where the brain itself is explicitly and consistently construed idealistically: ‘The brain, therefore, you speak of, being a sensible thing, exists only in the mind’<sup>50</sup>. But overlooking the apparent confusion and possible disingenuousness here, we can still say that this well-known Berkeleian argument for establishing idealism, *if Schopenhauer is in fact subscribing to it*, is in fact inconclusive, for at least two reasons. Firstly, it seems unreasonable to say that unperceived things cannot exist only *because* we cannot imagine them, not least due to the fact that Berkeley and Schopenhauer seem not to have been very rigorous in distinguishing between representations and the objects of those representations in this argument. What I mean here is probably best captured by the suggestion that despite its apparent superfluity, substance might nevertheless exist and, if so, its existence would not be endangered by Schopenhauer’s Berkeleian argument to the effect that

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<sup>50</sup> Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, 156.

representations cannot exist without a representer (because substance would be distinguishable from those representations). Secondly, some unacceptable consequences follow from holding this argument, such as the fact that either author would also be committed to suppose that nothing can exist when unperceived by them – Berkeley and Schopenhauer – themselves<sup>51</sup>. Unlike Schopenhauer however, it is noteworthy that Berkeley did not rely solely on this argument and had, amongst others, an argument from perceptual relativities to purportedly show that matter was incoherent. Schopenhauer however, was uninterested in sceptical arguments about sense perception<sup>52</sup>.

But perhaps Schopenhauer's argument for idealism, despite his apparent confession of influence, is on further examination other than Berkeleian and can therefore be reconstructed along other, perhaps much stronger, lines. One such possible line might be that suggested by T. L. S. Sprigge, who has argued that amongst what confronts us in perception are various characteristics which can be fitted under three headings: perspectival character; gestalt organisation (as is clear, for example, in the duck-rabbit picture much discussed by Wittgenstein);

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<sup>51</sup> I. Tipton, *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1994), 160-161.

<sup>52</sup> At one stage of the *Principles of Human Knowledge* (XV), Berkeley admits that arguments from perceptual relativities only show that we do not know which property exists in the object, not that no property so exists (which does not explain, as commentators frequently note, why Berkeley makes considerable use of such arguments in the later text, the *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*). Perhaps Schopenhauer recognised this weakness in arguments from perceptual relativities and was reluctant to place any emphasis on them.

and aesthetic quality<sup>53</sup>. One cannot, it is Sprigge's contention, imagine an object stripped of these three kinds of qualities; which, given that they are 'subject implying properties', means that an object is inconceivable without assuming *a* - not necessarily *our* - subjective perspective on it ('In the assumption that the world as such might exist independently of *all brains* there lies a contradiction' [W II 5 italics added], Schopenhauer wrote; we must once again disregard the neurophysiological realism). But whether or not this is in fact so, it should, I think, be noted that further discussion on our part is *doubly* unnecessary. First because it would lead us too far away from the essentially theological and atheological considerations of the present study and second because it is far from clear whether Schopenhauer actually needs to rely on this type of idealism derived from Berkeley – or indeed on the reconstruction by Sprigge – in the way in which he appears to do, given that Schopenhauer in any case accepts the Kantian view that 'properties which presuppose the spatiality and (or) temporality of their bearers (properties pertaining to extension, location, duration, weight or colour, for example) characterise nothing as it is in itself'<sup>54</sup>. For 'transcendental' idealism – that is, idealism of a Kantian sort, which argues for the ideality of space and time and by implication all properties dependent upon them but nevertheless assumes the reality of some non-spatio-temporal 'thing-in-itself' – is arguably all that Schopenhauer really needs to prove for the purposes of his 'exclusion' argument, given that he will soon, *contra* Berkeley

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<sup>53</sup> See T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), pp. 110-140.

<sup>54</sup> J. Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 4.



(for whom, incidentally, space was an empirical, not *a-priori*, representation), arguably supply a thing-in-itself ‘behind’ the spatio-temporal world of representation<sup>55</sup>. Of course, it may well be that none of the Kantian arguments for the transcendental ideality of time and space accepted by Schopenhauer himself in his writings would be accepted by Schopenhauer’s own (modern) readers – but that is quite another story and one which need not detain us here: I have in the previous chapter already mentioned my strategy of provisionally accepting the conclusions – thereby to some extent leaving aside criticism of the particular arguments – of Kantian transcendental idealism so as to examine their specific implications for religion. I so remain within the scope of the critical philosophy, not by virtue of any assumed infallibility, but rather in order to illuminate its cogency. I now extend the same courtesy to Schopenhauer’s transcendental idealism. It therefore perhaps suffices to say, in concluding these necessarily sketchy and provisional remarks on the establishment of Schopenhauer’s own idealism, that on one possible reading that idealism may be detached from Berkeley’s in Sprigge’s way but that in any case nothing crucial to the Schopenhauerian exclusion argument hangs on establishing Berkeleian idealism because the essential assumptions of the exclusion argument can be supplied by Kantian transcendental idealism alone (although whether or not Berkeley’s idealism is thereby assimilated to or incorporated into Kant’s, being supplemented there with the notion of *a-priori* representations, rather than being ‘undermined’ by Kant’s *Transcendental Aesthetic*, as Kant himself thought [CPR

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<sup>55</sup> See Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*, 150: ‘For all his complaint that Kant is not a consistent idealist because he relies on the thing in itself [...] when it comes to the crux Schopenhauer will do the same’.

B274], is not an issue I should like to settle definitively here). In so far as our concentration on the exclusion argument is concerned, then, Schopenhauer links his project to Berkeley's in a way that we may regard as being, for present purposes, misleading.

Schopenhauer is therefore best seen, for our purposes, as following neither Hume nor Berkeley but rather Kant, by establishing the *a-priori* ideality of space and time. Yet it should further be mentioned here that Schopenhauerian argumentation so far might still not be accepted as being entirely problem free for at this stage of the argument a collapse into solipsistic subjective idealism might seem possible, since Schopenhauer is describing a world where all that can be known to immediately exist is representations and the representing subject. It is evident however, that Schopenhauer consciously wishes not to assimilate his position to subjective idealism (by which I mean the ontological thesis that all that exists is the isolated subject) or to Cartesian scepticism (by which is meant the epistemological thesis that all that can be known to exist is the individual subject), for he expressly excludes such solipsism – which he discusses under the title of ‘theoretical egoism’ – from legitimate debate, stating that theoretical egoism is really only seriously believed by lunatics and so requires ‘not so much a refutation as a cure’ [W I 104], which is just as well because he concedes here that it ‘can never be refuted by proofs’. However, it is worth further mentioning that this latter claim is itself one that could be protested against from a variety of anti-sceptical philosophical positions today; for example, by Wittgenstein's argument against the possibility of a private language in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In light of this argument of Wittgenstein's, which I am not going to further examine here, we should perhaps



regard Schopenhauer's claim as not as self-evidently true as Schopenhauer himself supposed.

It might of course be further protested at this point that Schopenhauer's position, though it attempts to avoid solipsism, nevertheless unintentionally entails such a solipsistic commitment as one of its unfortunate implications. Georg Lukács, for one, thought precisely this to be the case with regard to Schopenhauer's philosophy, although perhaps only because his own views on Schopenhauer had been prejudicially deformed by his adherence to a Hegelianised version of Marxism<sup>56</sup>. The views and remarks of polemicists aside however, in reality Schopenhauer is no solipsist because he accepts a feature of Kantian thought that saves him from solipsism. I refer once again to the aforementioned Kantian division between the sensible, phenomenal world of space and time and the intelligible, noumenal world outside of space and time. It is crucial to once again recall that Schopenhauer accepts the ideality of space and time – along with Kant's own arguments for that ideality, which we familiarised ourselves with in the previous chapter – without reserve [see W I 6-7, W I 438]. For him as for Kant, space and time are *a-priori* 'forms of intuition' that originate in us and mask things in themselves from our view; space being the *a-priori* form of outer intuition and time being the corresponding form of inner intuition. In Schopenhauer's thought as in Kant's, time has a certain priority insofar as all experiences must take place in it, whilst only outer experiences take place in space (this necessity of time for our kind of experience will, as we shall see, come back to haunt Schopenhauer's attempted post-Kantian

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<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., G. Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason* (London: Merlin, 1980), 233.



metaphysics). It is also worth mentioning here that – as Julian Young above all has emphasised<sup>57</sup> – Schopenhauer also seems to think that accepting the tenets of transcendental idealism accommodates ‘the undeniable moral significance of human conduct’ [W I 422]. Furthermore, Schopenhauer supplies a little supporting argument of his own for this standpoint: the ideality of time being suggested to Schopenhauer by the supposed ‘fact’ of human clairvoyance [WN 107] and also by the thought that time, unlike all phenomena, exerts no causal influence [W II 301]. Paul Guyer however, has recently claimed that Schopenhauer took ‘Kant’s inference from our a-priori knowledge of a feature of objects to its subjective validity completely for granted’<sup>58</sup> but this does not seem to me to be a very satisfactory description of Schopenhauer’s method, at least with regard to space and time, precisely because his own supporting arguments (although their force is admittedly debatable) provide at least some minimal justification for such an inference.

On the face of it, Schopenhauer can therefore be said to avoid the madness of solipsism because he believes there to exist, not just himself and representations but also a non-spatial and non-temporal Kantian reality outside him: the realm of the thing in itself. Another possible critical response to this position however, would be to argue that Schopenhauer has no reason to suppose that such a noumenal reality exists in the first place. According to this response, it appears unsure whether our representations do actually ‘stand in’ for anything else

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<sup>57</sup> J. Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> P. Guyer, ‘Schopenhauer, Kant and the Methods of Philosophy’, in C. Janaway, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) (hereafter, *Companion*), 93.

external to them. There are at least two answers to this objection that can be made on Schopenhauer's behalf. The first is that the word representation, after all, itself suggests something represented: 'Phenomenon or appearance' as Schopenhauer himself puts it at one stage, 'presupposes something that appears' [W I 486]. Although this answer actually has some Kantian precedent [see CPR Bxxvi] it is all too easily answered by the comment that the term 'representation' is therefore something of a misnomer in this context and so Schopenhauer should be talking of presentations rather than representations. The second and much stronger reply that one can make on Schopenhauer's behalf is that his argument for discovering the character of that noumenal world beyond representation can also potentially double as an argument for that world's existence<sup>59</sup>. Schopenhauer goes way beyond Kant though, in his supposing it possible for us to gain quantitative and qualitative knowledge of noumenal reality. Before examining Schopenhauer's methods of determining the *qualitative* character of the noumenal world however, I first want to observe the way in which he determines the *quantitative* character of that world. In first looking at his quantitative, and then at his qualitative determination of the Kantian thing in itself, it should be noted that the order of our exposition in this chapter will be the reverse of Schopenhauer's own.

#### ***IV Beyond the Limits of Experience***

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<sup>59</sup> This is the general line of argument of D. W. Hamlyn's *Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980). It is also an argument that A. MacIntyre makes on behalf of Freud's discovery of the unconscious in his *The Unconscious: A Conceptual Analysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 30.

As is well known, Kant himself did not commit his critical philosophy to any one view about the quantity of the noumena/noumenon and in his writings he used both the singular and the plural in talking about things in themselves. The possibility that discrete noumenal selves exist alongside their creator in some noumenal region was thus, at least, left open within the critical philosophy of Kant. One of the most obvious Schopenhauerian departures from Kant's view of that world, therefore, is the conviction that it can be numerically determinable. Schopenhauer claims that it is legitimate to collapse the hitherto numerically indeterminate Kantian noumenal world into a single ground. Schopenhauer thus purges the Kantian noumenon – a word that Schopenhauer himself actually did not use, preferring the equally Kantian term 'thing-in-itself' – by means of a fairly straitforward, if heavily compressed, argument: 'The thing-in-itself [...] lies outside space and time, and accordingly knows no plurality and consequently is one' [W I 128]. Schopenhauer's extremely condensed line of reasoning here can be clarified as follows.

First, he adopts the principle, which he shares with John Locke<sup>60</sup>, that it is purely spatio-temporal location that individuates a given empirical thing: 'It is only by means of time and space that something which is one and the same according to its nature and the concept appears as different, as a plurality of coexistent and successive things. Consequently time and space are the

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<sup>60</sup> See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, XXVII, 1, p156: 'The *principium individuationis* [...] is existence itself, which determines a being of any sort to a particular time and space'. I omit here any discussion of the exceptionally problematic Platonic ideas or grades in Schopenhauer, which are not in space and time but are multiple (most commentators advocate excising the grades from Schopenhauer's philosophy).



*principium individuationis*' [W I 113]. Kant himself, it may be remembered, similarly argued that space and time are necessary to represent things as distinct from one another [see CPR A 23=B 38]. Spatial distance thus clearly differentiates entities but so does temporality, for separate things can come to be and pass away in time whilst both occupying the same spatial location (one of the obvious assumptions that allow us to talk of the phenomena of restoration and certain kinds of replacement, for example). After pointing this out, Schopenhauer then alludes to the implications which this may be taken to have for Kant's positioning of a noumenal world outside of such spatial and temporal determinations. If we accept the Kantian noumenal world as being outside of space and time then that world must therefore, Schopenhauer concludes, be thought of as unindividuable – a night in which, not only are all cows are black but one in which the black cows themselves cannot be rigorously differentiated at all: 'It is itself one, yet not as an object is one, for the unity of an object is known only in contrast to possible plurality. Again the will is one not as a concept is one, for a concept originates only through abstraction from plurality; but it is one as that which lies outside time and space, outside the *principium individuationis*, that is to say, outside the very possibility of plurality' [W I 113]. Schopenhauer is maintaining that since the *principium individuationis* is time and space, and given that space and time are absent from the thing in itself, then we cannot differentiate between entities in the Kantian noumenal world: the noumena is a unity (it is undifferentiated). And at least the formal validity of the logic of this argument – i.e. leaving aside the issue of whether he and Locke are in fact correct in surmising that the *principium individuationis* is time and space – seems faultless.

Our extended investigations into Schopenhauer's idealistic system have now reached an issue which has a crucially important bearing on the question of the existence of God: this specific argument can be regarded as the first stage of Schopenhauer's metaphysical exclusion of God from his picture of the world since it obviously leaves no space for a transcendent creator to stand apart from that world. However, it is well worth reminding ourselves at this point that it is nothing more than a first stage because monism *per se* is not a sufficient argument against the existence of God, as is well illustrated by the fact that within the history of philosophy many – if not most – philosophers attracted towards monism, from the Neo-Platonists all the way up to Hegel, though they have of course departed from the traditional dualistic belief in a creator and his creation, have nevertheless managed to maintain explicitly held monotheistic beliefs, in Hegel's case by conceiving of the Christian God as the process of *Geist* or Absolute spirit coming to be self-present in the world. It might however, be thought that the fact that such monists as Hegel held Christian beliefs proves nothing decisively because the thinkers in question might have failed to notice the incompatibility between what they argued for and the religion they claimed to believe in: to take one prominent example, their doctrine of God creating the world from his own substance seems at odds with Biblical creation *ex nihilo*. Yet in responding to just such a point, L. Kolakowski has pointed out in this regard that the Christian expression *ex nihilo* does not 'suggest that Nothingness was a stuff which God moulded things of: there was no stuff other than God himself'<sup>61</sup>. If this point be accepted, then we can see that what separates such monists as

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<sup>61</sup> L. Kolakowski, *Religion* (Glasgow: Fontana: 1982), 148.



Hegel from more traditional Christians might be more a matter of emphasis, rhetoric or articulation than heresy. But be that as it may, what decisively differentiates Schopenhauerian monism from the monism of such monotheistic thinkers as Hegel – heretical or not – is that Schopenhauer then refused to deify the One; indeed, quite the reverse was true in the case of Schopenhauer: he exhaustively determined the quality of his single fundamental reality in a way that he thought was utterly incompatible with the idea of a wise and benevolent God (and the word God, he thought in line with Christian tradition, was only worthy of being applied to an all intelligent, all powerful, all good creator [see PP II 101]). Schopenhauer so determined this monistic reality by way of a purely metaphysical argument, involving a form of intuitive self knowledge and then an argument from analogy to bridge the gap between self-knowledge and knowledge of the external world. It was necessarily a purely metaphysical move, for although both interested and deeply immersed in the scientific literature of his time, Schopenhauer did not believe that natural science could yield any worthwhile metaphysical result (short of corroboration, that is). This refusal to grant the natural sciences a fundamental place in human enquiry was a result of his belief that such a naturalistic endeavour to conceive the world as a set of entities describable from the third person standpoint – which underpins science – excluded not only a valid component of that world *qua* observable world – i.e. excluded the subjective viewpoint – but that in neglecting the subjective viewpoint it thereby excluded the only constituent of that world that allowed us access to the unobservable, metaphysical world: ‘All the *natural sciences* labour under the inevitable disadvantage of comprehending nature exclusively from the *objective* side and of being indifferent to the *subjective*. But the main point is



necessarily to be found in the latter; and it devolves on philosophy' [PP II 107]. In a Kantian vocabulary, we might say that the experience of the thing in itself will turn out to possess an intensive magnitude and not an extensive one (the only kind of magnitude that science can deal with). I will now engage in a closer examination of the relevant texts to see just how Schopenhauer thought that he himself could get past the restrictions that fettered the scientific understanding that, he wrote, 'carries death in its heart even at its birth, because it passes over the subject' [W I 29].

### *V Phenomenology of the Self*

But first, a brief synopsis. We have so far in this chapter seen that Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation* outlines an idealistic ontology of representations and their subject then bypasses the madness of solipsism by accepting Kant's arguments for transcendental idealism, only to then demonstrate the quantitative character of reality, which – by persuasively exposing deep problems about differentiation in the Kantian noumenal world – effectively rules out the possibility of conceiving of a wholly transcendent, though perhaps not an immanent, God. With his case made for the unity of the thing in itself, Schopenhauer further attempts to advance beyond Kant by unlocking the mysterious secret of the qualitative character of the unified world of the thing in itself in a way that would rule out an immanent God. And although neither anti-scientific nor unscientific (his unhappy forays into scientific dead-ends like the study of physiognomy, *generatio aequivoca* and Goethe's theory of colours are merely mistakes of empirical investigation and

reflect badly neither on Schopenhauer's conception of science nor on his metaphysics), Schopenhauer does this initially by means of recourse to self-knowledge rather than knowledge of the external world, although the self that Schopenhauer has in mind here is not the self found in most of traditional philosophy. I should state here that although any account of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, including this one, has to provide a description of his crucial account of the self (as 'will'), it will not be the purpose of the present discussion to elaborate upon nor to query this account at any length: the subject of the self in Schopenhauer deserves – and in Janaway's *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, has received – a monograph of its own. The present aim is simply to reveal Schopenhauer's exclusion argument against God. To do this I will have to avail myself of the privilege of treating Schopenhauer's conception of the self as a workable theory. Eschewing overt critical engagement with – but not description of – Schopenhauerian thoughts on the self in this way will better allow me to fasten on to the problems specific to the Schopenhauerian identification of the self with the thing in itself which is, after all, the argument that effectively leads to a denial of the existence of God. But before asking why knowing the self in the first place helps us gain access to the thing in itself in such a way that even an immanent God would be ruled out, we must first ask the preliminary question: what is it that Schopenhauer thinks we come to know in self-knowledge?

It is of overriding importance in this regard to recognise that, for Schopenhauer, the question of the self is no longer to be regarded as simply being a question of the thinking mind. But why not? Schopenhauer believes – and the starting point for this belief appears to be a phenomenological one – that

in our everyday life we seem first and foremost to relate to the world in ways prior to pure knowing (he therefore anticipates Heidegger's point in *Being and Time* that Kant did not question the priority of 'knowing' over 'being-in-the-world'<sup>62</sup> and to that extent Heideggerean phenomenology might be taken to support Schopenhauer's thought). Schopenhauer captures this point in the following way: 'How does man become conscious of his own self? Answer: altogether as one who wills' [FW 11]. The thought here is that the self of which we are generally aware is not a primarily thinking being. So whereas Kant very famously postulated an "'I think'" that must accompany all our representations', Schopenhauer – and his intentions here are only partly parodic – postulates an "'I will'" which accompanies all our actions' [FW 95-96]. This particular remark strongly suggests that the will is something of which we are aware in bodily action (and perhaps in bodily action alone), which might therefore be quite close to the position that the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty was aiming for when he suggested 'abandoning the body as an object *partes extra partes*, and going back to the body I experience at this moment'<sup>63</sup>. However, understanding Schopenhauer's concept of will – as it surely begs to be understood in many of his passages – as essentially connected with voluntary bodily movement alone generates at least two philosophical puzzles. Firstly, it is uncertain whether Schopenhauer means to refer here either to intentional actions such as 'saluting' or 'pointing' (in which case the will could scarcely be said to be blind any longer) or whether he instead means to refer to the feeling that accompanies

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<sup>62</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 45.

<sup>63</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1994), 75.



bodily movement (in which case such feelings of bodily movement would certainly have to be construed non-spatially; that is, as truly *partes contra partes*)<sup>64</sup>. And the second difficulty that results from understanding Schopenhauer's concept of will as essentially connected with voluntary bodily movement alone is that willing elsewhere seems to generously involve all affective states, of which some at least – e.g. the experience of pain – can seem to be experienced passively, that is to say, without active experience of bodily action at all (one thinks of feeling a pin-prick, for example). As this point may also be put, if we take seriously Schopenhauer's characterisation of willing as 'not only willing and deciding in the narrow sense but also all striving, wishing, shunning, hoping, fearing, loving, hating' [W II 202] or as 'all desiring, striving, wishing, demanding, longing, hoping, loving, rejoicing, jubilation [...] all abhorring, fleeing, fearing, being angry, hating, mourning, suffering pains - in short all emotions and passions' [FW 11], then our experience of voluntary bodily action would surely be but one instance of what Schopenhauer means by willing.

So, Schopenhauer is rather vague about what willing precisely consists in. In any case, I largely want to forego further comment on what exactly Schopenhauer means by will here but I take it that the concept of will can negotiate the conceptual puzzles mentioned above and be sufficiently explained for our present purpose – i.e. the purpose of elaborating the Schopenhauerian exclusion argument against God – by saying that what he means by will is

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<sup>64</sup> In this connection, see S. Gardner, 'Schopenhauer, Will and the Unconscious', in *Companion*, 375-421, especially 383.

something like ‘the non-spatial feeling accompanying bodily action along with other affective states’. The further debate about whether ‘the body I experience at this moment’ is in point of fact non-spatial is not one that I should like to enter into at this point. Nor should I here like to embark upon the project of connecting Schopenhauer’s remarks on willing and action with comparative accounts in contemporary analytic philosophy. But what I would like to make mention of is that Schopenhauer adds a lot of anecdotal and psychological evidence to support the thesis that the description of us as cognitive subjects – as opposed to conative and affective subjects – does not exhaustively characterise our essential nature but rather must be supplemented with an account of our autonomous ‘feelings of will’. Schopenhauer’s broad methodology here is to suggest that as we are all subject to emotions, wishes and desires that are unbidden (and sometimes even unrecognised) then the will cannot be considered to be under the control of the intellect. Schopenhauer’s case here is both intuitively powerful – particularly in a post-Freudian age such as ours – and convincingly argued and that there is much to be said for this approach is supported not only by the implicit support of some aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis and some aspects of Heideggerean phenomenology but also by the words of one leading commentator, who has remarked that Schopenhauer’s amassed evidence presents a ‘massive challenge to the Kantian notion of the subject as pure, non-worldly, unitary, self-conscious and fully rational’<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*, 248. Much of Schopenhauer’s evidence is assessed and found persuasive by Janaway at pp. 260-263. Let us remember here that the theme of the self as more than an abstract thinking being is also one of Kierkegaard’s, specifically, for example, in his phenomenological analysis of Don Juan.

To develop this point a little by means of reference to the history of modern philosophy, Schopenhauer thus thinks that it is a *philosophical* falsification to suppose that we, *qua* human self, are primarily an abstract thinking being that conceives of willing as a product of thinking, after the manner of, say, Descartes or Locke, who wrote that: ‘To the question, what is it that determines the will? The true and proper answer is, the mind’<sup>66</sup>. Schopenhauer thus reverses what is arguably the traditional relation in modern philosophy between intellect and will: rather than being essentially soul or reason, Schopenhauer claims, we are essentially and most immediately – i.e. pre-reflectively – aware of ourselves not primarily as subjects of knowledge (though, somewhat mysteriously, we are also that<sup>67</sup>) but rather as subjects of affection and of non-spatially experienced bodily action. If we could only, Schopenhauer seems to be saying here, eschew the interpretation of the self which we have been handed down by the philosophical tradition, then we could see that we experience ourselves primarily as *conative and affective* subjects.

We have now roughly described the main elements of Schopenhauer’s argument concerning self-knowledge: we introspectively know our self in the first place not as thinking mind at all but rather as will (will being composed of all affective states including the aspatial awareness of bodily action). If we thus accept such serviceably clear claims of Schopenhauer’s, then we can be said to have *a-posteriori* knowledge of our self as willing. And as was earlier suggested in my brief methodological digression, I will accept these claims: I shall spend

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<sup>66</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, XXI, 29, p117.

<sup>67</sup> See note 69.



no time elaborating upon nor criticising the Schopenhauerian philosophy of the will and the self, even though, despite being fairly intuitively persuasive, Schopenhauer's formulations *may* prove to be far from unobjectionable when subjected to fine grained philosophical analysis (we might, for example, object that the 'active and psychological' nature of will<sup>68</sup> seems to be omitted by this account and/or that the model of self as will conflicts with the Kantian 'transcendental' knowing self that Schopenhauer had earlier espoused<sup>69</sup>). I shall bypass these and other problems for the reason stated earlier: what interests me above all in the context of this study as a whole is Schopenhauer's attempt to use his philosophy of the self as will to exclude God from his monistic post-Kantian ontology; an exclusion which then – as we shall see in the next chapter – leads on to an important ethical argument against God and which only takes place when the argument about the self primarily being a willing self is allowed to get off the ground.

Why, then, we ought now to ask, should the manner in which we know ourselves (i.e. as intensive will) be more indicative of the nature of the thing in itself than the manner in which we know other things (i.e. as extensive, spatio-temporal objects)? Of course, this kind of self knowledge is privileged over our

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<sup>68</sup> Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, 226.

<sup>69</sup> Our understanding of the complexities of Schopenhauer's thinking on the self has been much advanced by C. Janaway's *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, the central thesis of which is that Schopenhauer has two competing and conflicting conceptions of the subject: as knower and as willer (131). Janaway's conclusion is that Schopenhauer's philosophy can ultimately be made consistent only by interpreting the pure knowing subject as 'conditional or apparent [...] an illusion', (269).

knowledge of objects in the external world in Schopenhauer's method because it avoids the Kantian form of intuition that is space. Self knowledge is thus taken by Schopenhauer to bring us closer to the world as it is in itself (as it would be outside of the way we represent it).

### *VI Analogy as a Method*

I have so far discussed the means by which Schopenhauer determines what is 'the self'. Schopenhauer further maintained however, not only that the self but that – rather more improbably, many readers will no doubt feel – the whole of the spatio-temporal world was essentially composed of what he called the 'will'. How did he travel from the determination of the self as will to knowledge of the world as will? In point of fact, he does not need to. He has already determined the nature of the self as will and in very few pages, as we already know, he will numerically determine the world as a unity. So, since he has discovered the character of one part of a world that he will discover actually has no parts, his intuition of the will and the reduction of the intelligible world to one is all the argumentation Schopenhauer needs. Yet Schopenhauer demonstrably commits himself to such unnecessary argumentation, for he proceeds from the self as will to the world as will by an argument from analogy. He writes that: 'We shall judge all objects according to the analogy of this body' [W I 105]. Clearly, an argument from analogy is being proposed at this point, even though we are not, strictly speaking, owed one. Which are the first objects to be so judged?

The most obvious candidates for analogy from human willing are the non-human animals and this is precisely the route that Schopenhauer takes, laying the

blame squarely on Christianity for obscuring our kinship with them: ‘Another fundamental defect of Christianity [...] is that it has most unnaturally separated man from the *animal world*, to which in essence he nevertheless belongs. It now tries to accept man entirely by himself and regards animals positively as *things*’ [PP II 370; see also BM 97]. Schopenhauer follows Aristotle in stressing that men are obviously separated from the animals by virtue of their possession of the ability to reason with abstract concepts (and so also by their supposedly closely related [FR 164] emotional ability both to laugh [W I 59] and to weep [W I 376]) but this fractional separation is not thought by Schopenhauer to be one of essence: ‘The essential and principal thing in the animal and man is the same [...] in the intellect [Man’s] superiority is traceable only to a greater development and hence to the somatic difference of a single part, the brain, and in particular, its quantity’ [BM 178]. Quite apart from the issue of the relevance of his lateral criticism of Christianity (or indeed Judaism) here, it might be said that this analogy which Schopenhauer draws between human and animal willing may seem fairly persuasive, probably much more intuitively convincing than the argument, ascribed to the Cartesian philosophy, that animals are basically automata. This is a view which, despite being already found unappealing by contemporaries of Descartes, seems almost to be mirrored (albeit by default) in certain modern phenomenological methods of enquiry where the descriptive isolation of human subjectivity can engender weighty difficulties regarding the precise status of non-human animal subjectivity<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Heidegger’s philosophical project, by means of illustration, involves expanding ontology so that subjectivity is ontologically categorised as well as objects, though the characteristics of subjectivity are of course found to be very different to the categories of objects, they are ‘possible



Schopenhauer's argument from analogy thus arguably sits better with our intuitions about the lives of animals than does Cartesianism – and *de facto* phenomenological Cartesianism – by suggesting that animals are analogous to men in their essence, their willing. But it then cuts across our intuitions in its unlikely sounding suggestion that the same is as true for plants as it is for animals [W I 110]. What we humans share with the plants is not simply, as Aristotle had empirically surmised in his capacity as biologist, the nutritive faculty and our related ability to grow (or decay), since the often strongly unidirectional and sometimes forcible nature of plant growth suggests to Schopenhauer what we in the human world would term will. In this regard, in a

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ways for it to be, and no more than that'. These characteristics of subjectivity are technically called *existentialia* by Heidegger so as to rigorously distinguish them from the *categories* of Aristotle and other ancients and even those of Kant, who, in construing the categories epistemologically rather than ontologically in the *Transcendental Analytic* nevertheless, according to Heidegger, neglected existential categorisation. Heidegger is clear that these 'existentialia and categories are the two basic possibilities for characters of being'; in other words, a table of existentialia and categories is both necessary and sufficient for a basic philosophic description of the world: 'any entity is either a "who" (existence) or a "what" (presence at hand)'. Yet as has often been remarked by commentators, this Heideggerean ontological distinction of our world into the realm of the "who" and of the "what" is not in fact sufficient for a general philosophical description of our world because it seems to neglect the lives of animals and plants. Accordingly, a little later we hear the concession that: 'Life is not a mere present-at-hand, nor is it Dasein'. Yet we never hear what, exactly, life is. Schopenhauer would regard this kind of hesitation or confusion over the issue of animality as a symptom of Heidegger falling victim to the (purportedly Christian) trap of regarding animals as things; even though it seems clear that Heidegger appears to have striven – albeit with little discernible success, at least in *Being and Time* – to avoid this. For the Heideggerean passages cited in this footnote, see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67, 71, 75.

collection of what Schopenhauer thought to be empirical and scientific corroborations of his theory of the will brought under the heading *On the Will in Nature*, nature's picturesque evidence is said to include the movement of the sunflower toward the light [WN 61] and mushrooms dislodging paving stones to emerge upwards into visibility [WN 69]. In a similar spirit, in *The World as Will and Representation* and *On the Will in Nature*, Schopenhauer then goes on to mention such *inorganic* natural occurrences which also seem to strikingly mirror the will as magnetism [W I 110], rushing water, electricity currents [W I 118] plunging waterfalls [W II 213] and celestial bodies gravitating toward each other [WN 85]. Such natural phenomena as these are all more or less clearly analogous to the human voluntaristic experience of will: 'Everywhere in nature I see each particular phenomenon to be the work of a universal force active in thousands of similar phenomena' [W II 470].

This is no doubt the most appropriate place to mention that in my description of Schopenhauer's method of analogy as a procedure in determining the nature of the noumenal world I am not only giving what I believe to be the most intuitively credible reading of Schopenhauer's text but I am also implicitly rejecting a recent interpretation of Schopenhauer that unusually denies the very existence of such an argument from analogy in his metaphysics. Such is the provocative but, to my mind, eventually unconvincing interpretation of J. E. Atwell, as found in his *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will*. Here it is suggested that Schopenhauer is not essaying an argument from analogy at all: 'The transference of self-knowledge to world understanding does not', Atwell writes, 'take place by means of an argument from analogy [...] contrary to what Schopenhauer sometimes suggests himself



[...] granted, there is a hint of such an argument'<sup>71</sup>. This point of view is clearly too extreme however, for there is substantially more than just a 'hint' of an argument from analogy, as I have demonstrated in the previous paragraphs of this section<sup>72</sup>. Unless we accept that he did use this argument we have to accept the improbable claim that Schopenhauer repeatedly misstated his own position.

This is the end result of Schopenhauer's sustained ontological and analogical argumentation from self-knowledge as will to the qualitative character of the unified thing in itself: animals, plants and even the whole of the inorganic world is seen as the 'objectification' of the universal will<sup>73</sup>. In addition to being the

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<sup>71</sup> J. E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will* (California: University of California, 1995), 102.

<sup>72</sup> And in addition to the many passages I have just cited from *The World as Will* and *On the Will in Nature* where Schopenhauer manifestly strives to compare human willing with animals, plants and natural phenomena like electricity currents and waterfalls, there are also various other passages where a remarkable degree of methodological clarity is exhibited. At one stage, for instance, Schopenhauer tells us that the nature of the world is in us 'and with the clue of the analogy with our inner nature it must be possible to unravel the rest' [W II 274, see also W II 196]. Again in the supplementary essays of volume two, we read that 'Everyone knows only one being quite immediately, namely his own will in self-consciousness. He knows everything else only mediately and then judges it by analogy with that one being' [W II 321]. He also writes of organic natural phenomena that 'only from a comparison with what goes on within me when my body performs an action [...] can I obtain an insight into the way in which those inanimate bodies change under the influence of causes, and thus understand their inner nature' [W I 125].

<sup>73</sup> The necessity of using the word 'objectification' in this context derives from acknowledging the nature of the relation obtaining between the will and the world, which has, on pain of contradiction, to be construed as a non-causal one. This is because Schopenhauer, like Kant, had argued that causality was but a feature of the understanding – he regards it as the first instance of



culmination of Schopenhauer's argument concerning the thing in itself it is also the conclusion of his atheistic argument from exclusion since given both the absence of any principle of individuation within the Kantian intelligible world outside space and time (where God, the theological *summum bonum* and our immortal souls were at least potentially taken to reside in Kant's critical philosophy), together with the intuition of will as the essence of that world found through self-knowledge, one is forced to draw the conclusion that on Schopenhauerian premises God does not exist – as there is simply nowhere for him to exist. He cannot be sensed in the world of representation, as Kant had already pointed out, and the thing in itself – where Kant thought that He might exist beyond the possibility of human sensation – is found by Schopenhauer not to be a holy kingdom at all but rather to be one non-divine, non-wise, non-benevolent, non-personal 'will'<sup>74</sup>.

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the principle of sufficient reason – and so could only be applied to phenomena. What 'objectification' itself actually consists in however, I follow Schopenhauer in leaving it to the reader to determine.

<sup>74</sup> Schopenhauer has demonstrated that, starting from Kantian assumptions about the ideality of space and time, one can draw a thoroughly atheistic ontological conclusion – unless one lapses into a variant of Platonism and posits a world of timeless and spaceless but nevertheless distinguishable objects. Frege thought that natural numbers could be construed as such anti-Kantian objects and Schopenhauer's own 'grades' might be considered for such a role (see Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 101; see also B. Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243). I am not however, going to press this objection against Schopenhauer because it seems to me there are two important objections that can be raised against Schopenhauer's exclusion argument against God at

### *VII Some Points of Criticism*

I have just given an account of the main steps of Schopenhauer's central and ambitiously metaphysical argument in *The World as Will and Representation*, an argument which excludes God from the Kantian noumenal universe by replacing Him with what we might term a universal will. We are therefore now in a position to enlarge upon a couple of key criticisms that might be raised against Schopenhauer's endeavour that seems to lead so effortlessly from Kant's philosophy, through deepened self-knowledge, to atheism. The point of this investigation will be to show that Schopenhauer's philosophy is vulnerable to one of the objections and so therefore cannot be regarded as proving God's inexistence from Kantian premises (quite apart from any Platonic or Fregean misgivings<sup>75</sup> concerning the possibility of non-spatio-temporal differentiation: the real shortcomings of Schopenhauerian metaphysics are, in my view, to be found elsewhere). The objections that I will look at are twofold and both concern the legitimacy of the claim that inner experience, as experience outside space, is closer to the thing in itself – and thus to the ontological 'space' where God might be found – than all other forms of experience. The first objection will turn out to be unsuccessful however but it will nevertheless be illuminating to see in what way in is so unsuccessful, especially as it is an objection that naturally springs to

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this point without our having to espouse an alternative metaphysical commitment of dubious status.

<sup>75</sup> See note 74.

mind when one is made aware of certain other, apparently inconsistent, features of Schopenhauerian thought.

## I

The first objection which I would like to consider to Schopenhauer's exclusion argument against the existence of God, an argument which suggests that the blind feeling of will that we experience in movement and affection suffuses our entire universe, is one concerning the consistency of the Schopenhauerian system as a whole. More specifically, it draws upon a part of Schopenhauer's characterisation of the sense of hearing. For Schopenhauer – in the broader context of a rather Aristotelian passage concerning the senses – states that hearing, like willing, involves the *a-priori* form of time but not of space [W II 28]. Yet we might object here that if hearing is non-spatial then it too should surely be eligible for being an experience of the thing in itself – yet it remains stubbornly unlike such an experience, thereby giving us a strong reason to disbelieve that the will (also a non-spatial experience) is an experience of the thing in itself. As this objection may also be put: since willing and hearing are both non-spatial experiences and since it is by virtue of its non-spatiality that willing brings us closer to the thing-in-itself, why are not hearing and willing more similar? Three possible answers to this objection might be made on Schopenhauer's behalf.

In the first place, we might say that hearing *can* actually be an experience of will. In his 'metaphysics of music', for example, Schopenhauer declares music to be not only 'in time alone without any reference to space' [W II 453] but also the



sole art form which communicates an experience of the will directly to us: ‘Music is as *immediate* an objectification and copy of the whole *will* as the world itself is [...] Music is by no means like the other arts’ [W I 257]. Schopenhauer influenced Nietzsche in his unconditional rejection of ‘descriptive’ music, so for him music is an art form qualitatively different from all others in that it does not seem to represent anything – so it cannot, unlike all the other arts (except perhaps architecture and dance, which Schopenhauer curiously ignores in this connection) relate to the world of the Platonic ideas (here I am anticipating a theme I shall introduce in the next chapter). Unlike Kant, who remarked that ‘of all the arts *poetry* [...] maintains the first rank’ [CJ 170], Schopenhauer therefore regards music as occupying the most distinguished place amongst the arts, and his decision in this regard will influence Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* as much as Kant’s preference will inform Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

It thus seems to follow for Schopenhauer that music “mirrors” the pure will; it is, in other words, a form of hearing that is an experience of willing<sup>76</sup>. But there is also another form of hearing that is purportedly an experience of willing:

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<sup>76</sup> However, Malcolm Budd has argued that music does not, according to Schopenhauer, excite the will of the listener – and so is not an experience of the will after all – but rather *represents* an analogue of the human will. Budd has further argued that here we must understand the word ‘represent’ here in a non-literal way: music presents neither concepts nor images to capture the will but rather is itself a structural counter-part to the form of the metaphysical will as manifested in time, e.g. by the way its melodies are resolved or unresolved: the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the will is analogued through consonance and dissonance in music; *Music and the Emotions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 90-95.

hearing a ‘voice’. Closely following the Aristotelian – and no doubt broadly correct – distinction between ‘voice’ and ‘speech’, the former of which applies to both non-human animals and men<sup>77</sup>, Schopenhauer writes: ‘The animal voice serves only to express excitement and agitation of the *will*; the human however, serves also to express *knowledge*; this is consistent with the fact that the former almost always makes an unpleasant impression upon us’ [PP II 565]. This passage includes another form of hearing in addition to hearing music in the experience of will and it further explains why hearing human speech seems not to involve the will – i.e. because its propositional content obscures the emotional charge inherent in its vocal articulation. Schopenhauer thus concedes that both hearing music and hearing voice are experiences of the will, so to some degree the non-spatial experience of hearing can be regarded as an experience of the will. Nevertheless, since hearing *qua* hearing and not only hearing either music or expressive voice takes place in time but not space – at least according to Schopenhauer: one could conceivably argue that space is required for sound but I shall leave this point pass – one feels that Schopenhauer is being inconsistent in only attributing the experience of will to certain forms of audible perception.

The second possible way of attempting to deal with this problem of hearing not giving us an experience of the thing in itself not only claims that hearing *can* be an experience of will but further claims that all hearing is in fact an experience of the will. Such an argument is supported by the thought that since hearing is a perception that is always a pain or pleasure, it is consequently also an experience of the will as much as is the feeling accompanying bodily

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<sup>77</sup> See Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1253a.



movement. But Schopenhauer himself did not accept this ‘hedonic’ view of hearing<sup>78</sup>: ‘There are [...] a certain few impressions on the body which do not rouse the will [...] the impressions are therefore to be regarded directly as mere representations [...] here are meant the affections of the purely objective senses of sight, hearing and touch’ [W I 101]. There would, in any case, seem to be only an unproved empirical basis for such a claim that every perception contained a degree of pleasure and pain. This empirical basis has above all been debated by Berkeley scholars discussing Berkeley’s conflation of qualities with hedonic states but it is still to find any lasting consensus amongst such scholars: whilst A. C. Grayling, for example, has exhorted us to place our finger over the flame of a candle and see whether the resulting sensation is simple or compound, his own view being that it is a simple sensation (and not one of both pain and the flame’s heat<sup>79</sup>), other keen arguments, often similarly phenomenological in form, have been advanced to the contrary: A. A. Luce, for instance, has claimed that there can sometimes be a ‘perceptible time interval’ between sensation and pain<sup>80</sup>. Even dogmatically siding with Grayling and accepting the Berkeleian thought that sense perception *in extremis* is nothing but a pain or pleasure there is still a strong and obvious disanalogy between the spaceless inner experience of voluntary movement (which is *always* experienced as will) and the spaceless experience of hearing (which is only *very rarely* experienced as will related – the

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<sup>78</sup> Not in *The World as Will and Representation*, at any rate. For the controversial claim that Schopenhauer extends his view to include representations as affecting the will (just as Berkeley did) in a later text, see C. Janaway, ‘Will and Nature’, in his *Companion*, pp.138-170, 155.

<sup>79</sup> A. C. Grayling, *Berkeley* (London: Duckworth, 1986), 69.

<sup>80</sup> A. A. Luce, cited in Tipton, *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, 229.



senses of smell or taste seem much better placed to play this role, as is of course implicitly evidenced by their exclusion from Schopenhauer's reference to the 'purely objective senses of sight, hearing and touch'). And if the phenomenology of hearing does not give us access to the will except in extremely rare and special cases we are still in no way afforded better access to the will through this particular non-spatial experience.

I have discussed the first two attempted responses to this objection and have seen that they have been ultimately unavailing: no truly satisfactory explanation of why willing always reveals the noumenon but hearing does not has been offered by either response. There remains however, a final and more successful answer to this objection which has been provided by D. W. Hamlyn and which does successfully distinguish willing from other non-spatial experiences. Hamlyn's way of answering the problem generated by the epistemological disanalogy between the spaceless experience of hearing and that of willing is therefore not – as above – to partially or wholly conflate them in a more or less surprising way but rather to argue that willing affords us better access to the thing in itself than does hearing for the reason that non-spatial experiences such as hearing (not his example) are markedly different from willing. The relevant point here is that experiences such as hearing are nonetheless still representational experiences whilst affective experience as will is not. Hamlyn thus provides a strong distinguishing characteristic that willing does not share with any other non-spatial experience, and we may justifiably take this distinguishing characteristic to account for why it allows access to the monistic, noumenal world, principally as representations belong, by their very nature, to a

pluralistic world<sup>81</sup>. The objection that hearing is an aspatial experience as much as willing is but does not reveal the thing in itself (or the same kind of thing in itself, at any rate) thus ultimately fails because hearing is significantly different from willing insofar as it remained tied to the phenomenal world of representation. This, it seems to me, is the right way of dispatching the objection that aspatial experiences other than willing, like hearing, could give us access to the thing in itself. Nevertheless, it has been instructive to see precisely how this objection does so fail, if only because it affords us an example of the hazards of following a very long line of philosophical critics and thinking of the Schopenhauerian philosophy as being so patently internally inconsistent that it needs little attention.

We have taken this particular objection concerning hearing, through many twists and turns, as far as it can go. But it has led us into a dead end: aspatial experiences such as hearing were significantly different from willing in that they failed to escape representation, that is, they were always representations presented to a separate knowing consciousness, not feelings of the monistic whole. We are not stuck at this argumentative impasse however, as

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<sup>81</sup> Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, 37. Janaway remarks: 'His thinking is that if there is a way of knowing something about oneself which is not at all a matter of representation, then it is bound to provide access to oneself considered not as representation' *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, 192. Hamlyn, I should point, further demands 'at least the additional premise that anything that is not a representation is a thing in itself', 93. I suggest above that such a premise be linked with the notion of representations belonging to a pluralistic ontology (i.e. there being no subject/object divide in affective experience).

Schopenhauer's exclusion argument against God *is* vulnerable to a second and rather different kind of criticism, as we shall see presently.

## II

The final problem that I would like to look at can now be levelled against Schopenhauer's attempt to exclude God from the realm of the thing in itself. This objection is one that takes as its target the claim that since we can never, as subjects of experience, escape the form of time ('Before Kant [...] we were in time; now time is in us' [PP I 85] Schopenhauer writes<sup>82</sup>), then inner experience is a phenomenal experience that is nearer to the intelligible world than any other as it is an experience that has shed one of our two forms of intuition. This claim, I now want to argue, is not an uncontentious point even if one accepts Schopenhauerian premises, as can be demonstrated by an examination of a problem that Schopenhauer himself pointed to in his remark that: 'Our self-consciousness has not space as its form but only time' [W II 137; cf. also FFR 48]. He more often graphically uses one of his many metaphors to point to this problem, as when he states that in his philosophy the thing in itself has 'to a great extent cast off its veils but does not appear quite naked' [W II 197]. Here, as in many other places, Schopenhauer therefore admits that the identification of the noumenal world with the will in his philosophy is problematic in so far as our

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<sup>82</sup> This view of the history of philosophy surprisingly simply ignores Berkeley's pre-Kantian contribution to the philosophy of time, wherein time was similarly internal to us, being simply the succession of our ideas.



experience of the will is still bound to the form of inner intuition or time whereas the noumenal world is free even of this residual phenomenal commitment.

The philosopher and sociologist, George Simmel, has endorsed the use of Schopenhauer's metaphor in the ensuing manner: 'If we follow Schopenhauer closely we realise that even will in ourselves is not regarded as being-in-itself (Ding an sich) [...] will itself is a phenomenon, though the one which the impenetrable veil covering our absolute being is the thinnest'<sup>83</sup>. From which it follows that what Schopenhauer's argument from phenomenological intuition of the self as willing proves is, as perhaps might not be realised at first blush, rather limited. For it shows not that the thing in itself is will at all but has rather now dwindled into the much weaker claim that only the phenomenal world minus space as a form of intuition is will. But then the most that Schopenhauer's metaphysics shows is that will is an element of the phenomenal world; arguably at the edge of that world but nevertheless still within its limits. Assuming that removing space from experience does indeed bring us closer to the thing in itself, then we *can* further identify the noumenon with the will we experience in time (but not space). But scepticism about precisely this assumption – that is, about how far the world of the thing in itself actually resembles the phenomenal world without space – is entirely possible. It is in this spirit that Janaway has objected that 'there can in principle be no guarantee that a smaller number of subjective forms of the understanding takes us nearer the thing in itself than a larger

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<sup>83</sup> G. Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986),

number does'<sup>84</sup> – an abstract point which Julian Young has elsewhere illuminated by means of a concrete illustration:

That it is not the case that the apparent features of an object are the more likely to correspond to its true features the fewer 'filters' or 'veils' it is seen through can be seen by observing that grass is perceived with greater verisimilitude through a blue filter superimposed upon a yellow filter than through a yellow filter alone.<sup>85</sup>

Not only is this stark and sceptical objection concerning our access to the world of the thing in itself in the Schopenhauerian system both serious and without any obvious answer but Schopenhauer himself, as I have already mentioned, not only frequently and openly recognises this shortfalling in his argument as a methodological difficulty in arriving at the thing in itself through the will but he also, far from attempting to remedy it, admits it to be an insoluble problem. This might or might not be to his moral credit as an individual – and authors from Nietzsche to Simmel have disputed the question of whether Schopenhauer's system was wrongly imposed upon his insights or whether those insights, to turn the point on its head, broke through his system with a disarming honesty – but it clearly does his system, *qua* system of philosophy, no good at all.

It remains true that whether, after acknowledging this crucially significant shortfall in Schopenhauer's argument, we then go on to construe the will as the thing in itself in appearance and therefore as a wholly phenomenal entity (a line that Atwell takes in *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World*) or whether we

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<sup>84</sup> Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, 197.

<sup>85</sup> J. Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*, 30.

construe the will, in more intricate terms, as situated in a third ontological realm that is certainly distinct from the noumenal world but is equally distinct from the phenomenal world as well (the approach of Young in *Willing and Unwilling*) is, as should scarcely need emphasising, of fundamental importance for the Schopenhauer scholar. It is equally evident however, that it would constitute something of a digression here in a discussion of Schopenhauer's exclusion argument against God: for once it has been established (and we have seen enough to be able to understand that it has indeed been established) that we cannot – cannot in principle – be certain that the noumenal thing in itself is the kind of bleak and manifestly undivine will that we familiarly experience in bodily movement and affection then Schopenhauer's exclusion argument against God, which rests entirely on the identification that has just been put in question, can no longer be regarded as being wholly conclusive. But this is not to say that we can reinstate God as a *separate, transcendent* creator of the world back into the realm of the Schopenhauerian thing in itself. We cannot successfully carry through this particular pro-theological move because of the fact that Schopenhauer has already convincingly argued that there is a lack of means of individuation in the realm of the thing in itself and his particular argument to this effect is not at all troubled by the permanency, for true Kantians, of the form of time in human perception. Nevertheless, the possibility of an *immanent* God remains; an 'absolute', perhaps of the generic form associated with those very German idealists whom Schopenhauer seems to have so despised.

### ***VIII Conclusion***



If we accept the conceptual framework of Kantian transcendental idealism, and I have provisionally done so in this study, it seems that if we want a personal creator God to be wholly separate from his creation then we are also committed to finding a non-spatio-temporal means of individuation; which is something that Kant singularly failed to do. At the end of this chapter, we are now in a position to add that if we also accept the subsequent argumentative framework of Schopenhauerian thought, it seems to follow that if we want an absolutely atheistic ontology, then we are furthermore committed to categorically identifying the absolutely ‘naked’ thing in itself that lies outside space and time with the ‘veiled’ experience of insatiable will with which we are familiar with in time. And this is something that Schopenhauer did not – and given his Kantian premises and assumptions, could not – do.

#### *4. Schopenhauer II: Questionable Features of Life and Imaginary Benefits of Death*

##### *I Introduction*

Reading the foregoing chapter might well have convinced one that it is Arthur Schopenhauer, above all, who has tried – albeit unsuccessfully – to accommodate modern post-Kantian philosophy to a bleak vision of a Godless and even hostile metaphysical ontology. But his problematic attempt to identify the Kantian ‘noumenal’ world with an undifferentiated and even savage will was not Schopenhauer’s sole argument for the non-existence of God: Schopenhauer’s resolute attachment to, of all things, Christian morality supplied him with a further reason for disbelieving in God’s existence; an argument which we shall be examining – and in part, reconstructing – in the first part of the present chapter. Later in the chapter we shall also be examining Schopenhauer’s surprising introduction of the notion of a non-theistic salvation into his system, primarily because this was an account that Nietzsche took great pains to discredit in his writings, on the grounds that since Schopenhauer’s philosophy retained any such notion of salvation it was still to be regarded as being tied to a residual religious bias; indeed, at one stage Nietzsche wrote that it was to be considered as ‘merely the heir of the Christian interpretation’ [TI 102]. Nietzsche thought that the Schopenhauerian – like the Christian – valorisation of a painless world over our terrestrial one was to be physiologically explained as the preference of an ailing constitution. Programmatically outlining the Schopenhauerian account of salvation, where the structural tie obtaining between the concept of salvation

and of present dissatisfaction is often quite self-consciously explicit – as are its ties to Christianity – will therefore prove to be of obvious benefit in preparing us for an examination of Nietzsche's approach to what he takes to be the 'religious mentality' or 'ascetic ideal' in the following two chapters.

The specific line of approach that I propose in this chapter will be as follows. Firstly, I would like to describe Schopenhauer's moral theory. This first part of the chapter will also involve a reconstruction of Schopenhauer's argument concerning ethics in the fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation* and related texts, such a reconstruction being necessary due to the lack of scholarly consensus as to the exact nature of Schopenhauer's argument. I will look at three of the most plausible possible construals of Schopenhauer's justification of ethics. After my consideration of these alternatives and my eventual espousal of a reconstruction of Schopenhauer's argument along one of these lines, I shall then look at his criticism of the assumed existence of God as supported by his ethics. I would then like to show how this moral criticism of God could possibly be countered along just one of the traditional lines of Christian theodicy. I will then further demonstrate that a counter-objection to Schopenhauer along traditional lines of Christian theodicy is, in fact, superfluous in so far as the Schopenhauerian ethical objection to God already heavily relies, in a sense that I shall explain, upon certain metaphysical elements of the Schopenhauerian philosophy which are assumed to be true (from which it follows that Schopenhauer's ethical argument is vulnerable to criticism on the same grounds as his metaphysics). As it may also be put, after my philosophical reconstruction of Schopenhauer's argument concerning ethics, I will then show how Schopenhauer's moral argument against the existence of God is flawed at



very basic conceptual level. I am aware that it could well be objected at this point that in actually providing a specific philosophical foundation (by means of reconstruction) which I then proceed to treat as a stalking horse throughout the first part of this chapter, I have done nothing other than construct a straw man. This particular objection however, assumes that there are many other interpretations of Schopenhauer's ethics to be chosen between that are equally coherent. In what follows, I will concede that there is indeed one other supportable and coherent interpretation of the foundations of Schopenhauerian ethics but this other construal shares, as I shall point out, precisely the same pivotal assumption which proved the downfall of my own favoured interpretation. To close the present chapter I will, as already mentioned, finally turn to Schopenhauer's quasi-Christian account of salvation. The approach of this latter part of the chapter will be primarily elucidatory rather than critical and I will be concerned there to indicate how Schopenhauer's model of salvation (and in my description I will confine myself, for reasons that I shall explain, to its aesthetic ramification) shares certain central features with the traditional model of Christian redemption. First, however, I would like to examine Schopenhauer's ethical theory and then turn to the question of how it is used to argue against the existence of God.

## ***II The Right to Remain Compassionate (Phenomenology of the Passions)***

Schopenhauer, unlike Nietzsche, was unwilling to entertain even the suspicion that Christian ethical claims might be as culture bound as its theological beliefs – he explicitly asserts the contrary – and his writings on ethics accordingly tend, on

the whole, to reflect this (by Nietzschean standards) blithe attachment to the essentials of Western, Christian morality. His thoughts concerning morality are principally to be found in the fourth section of *The World as Will and Representation* and in *On the Basis of Morality*, a much shorter, self-contained philosophical text on ethics. Yet whilst the arguments of these two texts may not exactly parallel each other in every detail – a point that will bear repeating – the main line of reasoning is alike throughout both. But there does not seem to be any general consensus about the nature of some of the basic philosophical assumptions underlying this main line of speculation.

The outline of what can be agreed upon by commentators however, goes roughly as follows. Schopenhauer, unlike Kant, does not start with a certain conceptual determination of morality and so himself strives to avoid formulating an abstract ‘moral law’, preferring examining the actual motives of human conduct as he sees them to *a-priorism* in ethics, drawing up as he goes an empirical short list that includes egoism, malice and compassion. These three motives he regards as the basic data of any ethical theory and to counter the potential objection that he has assumed such data to be transhistorical without any argument whatsoever he amasses various examples from history, literature and the theatre (Shakespeare is a favourite place that Schopenhauer raids for support) throughout the ages to convince us that egoism, malice and compassion are standard human motives. This methodology of foraging in universal human experience and history to find standard norms of human motivation was quite common to earlier – i.e. pre-Kantian – British ethical theorists. And although Schopenhauer – as far as I am aware – nowhere admits his debt to British empiricism in ethics, the outlines of his general methodological position had

already been quite well stated by David Hume in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*:

Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new in that particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations, and furnishing us with material from which we may [...] become acquainted with the regular springs of human action and behaviour<sup>86</sup>.

It is not however, Hume who provides Schopenhauer with the most observable influence in this specific regard but rather it is Hume's own friend and mentor, Francis Hutcheson: these Schopenhauerian classes of human motivation (egoism, malice and compassion) correspond extremely closely to those laid down by the Eighteenth century British empiricist and moral sense theorist Hutcheson in his *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, where Hutcheson categorises the reasons that excite us to action into: 'self-love, self-hatred, or desire of private misery (if this be possible), Benevolence toward others or Malice'<sup>87</sup>. In fact, so closely do Schopenhauer's and Hutcheson's lists correspond that the only difference between Hutcheson's empirical division and Schopenhauer's is that the former tentatively and provisionally accepts the desire for misery (i.e. what nowadays we might designate 'masochism') as a motive.

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<sup>86</sup> D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 83.

<sup>87</sup> F. Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, in *Collected Works* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1971), Vol. II, 216.



Leaving to one side the question of Hutcheson's actual influence on Schopenhauer, we might point out that from this belief that there are a certain select amount of human motivations to the deeper and rather more controversial assumption that there are a corresponding select amount of generic human character types is quite a leap – but it is nonetheless a leap that Schopenhauer makes unreservedly, backed up once again by examples from history (the essay *On the Freedom of the Will* presents examples which are to my mind more persuasive than those Hume presents to suggest uniformity in human behaviour in his *Enquiry*), literature and drama. Hence Schopenhauer claims to have further discovered – and it will no doubt seem an extremely improbable ‘discovery’ to many of his readers – that there exist three or four main human ethical *character* types, types which correspond to the main motives of human conduct and into which individuals are simply born and out of which they cannot be converted. As it may also be put, these character types are inborn and inescapable. Schopenhauer thus allows no room for either psychoanalytic or Aristotelian theories of the development of human moral character in infancy, either by socio-sexual circumstances or by the form of moral upbringing, respectively. He is therefore committed to the extremely counter-intuitive view that a child raised by a morally indifferent and possibly even vicious guardians would be as likely to turn out to be a moral adult as would a child raised by earnest and morally concerned ones. He is also committed to the similarly counter-intuitive position of rejecting the notion of moral immaturity<sup>88</sup>. Irrespective of the question of how

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<sup>88</sup> Schopenhauer's views also seem to conflict with the intuition that we are responsible for something only if we could have done otherwise – but there are in any case well known objections

far Schopenhauer's views on the constancy of moral character mirror those of Kant, they are nonetheless views that, as I have illustrated, sit uneasily with some modern ethical sensibilities (specifically those concerned with the necessity of a moral education). However that may be, these innate and immutable groups are said to include the egoist, the malicious person and the altruist. Briefly put, the egoist is someone who is above all systematically concerned with his own well being; the altruist is someone who is largely selflessly compassionate and the malicious person is a selflessly cruel individual. Now, I rather ambiguously said three or four above because although in *On the Basis of Morality* Schopenhauer elaborates only the three mentioned types, later, in a footnote to the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer amends this tripartite taxonomy of the ultimate motives of human conduct by the addition of a purportedly hitherto suppressed fourth category of unalterable character: the person who is concerned with his own woe, which is to say, the masochist (recall that Hutcheson, too, equivocated over admitting '*self-hatred*' into his catalogue of motives). Further, it seems that this apparent change of view, which seems finally to close the slight distance between Schopenhauer's moral theory and that of Hutcheson, is not a change of view at all but rather a tactic of strategic prudence with which Schopenhauer approached the philosophical audience of his day: 'this fourth motive had to be passed over in silence, since the prize question was stated in the spirit of the philosophical ethics prevailing in Protestant Europe' [W II 607 n6].

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to such an intuitive concept of responsibility which makes avoidability a necessary condition (Frankfurt cases).

Yet it is clear, Schopenhauer thinks, that only the motive of compassion, as manifested by the unalterably altruistic character type, could really be regarded as an authentically moral one. Schopenhauer thus seemingly relies upon the self-evidently moral nature of compassion. However, such an appeal to what we would approve of as being moral is problematic in so far as it seems to take for granted two things. First, that we are sufficiently reflective, informed and impartial at the very moment of such an approval<sup>89</sup>. And second, that our empirical appeals to self-evidence would really reflect a consensus of opinion. And yet, certainly, this latter condition scarcely seems to hold. Kant, to cite just one instance, had explicitly argued against the specifically moral nature of emotions such as pity in the *Groundwork* and elsewhere as a part of his general downplaying of the moral role of the emotions (Nietzsche cites more examples of philosophers who doubted the moral worth of compassion in section five of the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he remarks, with no doubt a certain amount of exaggeration, ‘up till now, philosophers were agreed to the *worthlessness* of pity’). I think it true to say that Schopenhauer never really seriously and satisfactorily confronts this problem concerning moral disagreement; indeed, to my knowledge he never recognises it as a problem at all. Nevertheless, the lack of consensus on the subject of compassion’s moral nature does not amount to a devastating objection to Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion because Schopenhauer also supplies a powerful metaphysical reason to justify compassionate actions.

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<sup>89</sup> See H. Jensen, *Motivation and the Moral Sense in Francis Hutcheson’s Moral Theory* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 54.



Rehearsing the main argument of Schopenhauer's ethical methodology as presented so far, we can say it is thus in the first place empirical and descriptive (after the manner of the empiricists, Hutcheson and Hume): finding the real motivations of human action and then asking which considerations we would approve of as being self-evidently moral. The only one we can ascribe a self-evidently moral character to, he thinks, is compassion. He therewith interprets compassion – i.e. the welfare of *others* being the motive of *my* actions – as resting upon some sort of metaphysically justified identification with the other. It is at this point however, as Schopenhauer starts to go beyond metaphysically innocuous empirical description and into the area of speculative justification, marrying British empiricism with German idealism, that commentators lose the thread of Schopenhauer's precise line of reasoning, necessitating its philosophical reconstruction.

### ***III Ethics Reconstructed***

Schopenhauer's insufficient clarity with regard to the main proof structure of his justification of ethics makes possible a number of understandings or misunderstandings. I would now like to look at – and indeed adjudicate between – three central ways in which commentators have philosophically reconstructed Schopenhauer's argument justifying compassion, beginning with the argument that I should now admit I favour, which could be called the noumenally egoistic interpretation.

According to the noumenally egoistic interpretation, what Schopenhauer seems to be noting is that the kind of identification with the other that

compassion manifests is not only self-evidently moral but actually metaphysically appropriate or legitimated for the following reason. Since it has been established through intuition and analogy that there exists an ultimate ontological identity between all existents beyond the principle of individuation (space and time), so it could be said that when in the world of space and time we hurt another being, on a more profound ontological level we are just hurting ourselves: ‘In this root point of existence the difference of beings ceases’ [W II 325]. Therefore the man who is compassionate in his dealings with others is in fact acting in accordance with the metaphysical truth that behind the apparent difference of beings is a so-called ‘root point’, where the difference between him and others is annulled. We might say that, ontologically, our relationship to the noumena is one of *identity* and that, normatively, we should actively *identify* with it. Schopenhauer can therefore say that ‘to be just, noble and benevolent is nothing but to translate my metaphysics into actions’ [W II 600]. The compassionate man is thus, so to speak, a noumenal egoist, believing it to be irrational to hurt others because they are, on one level, extensions of oneself and oneself an extension of them (in the vocabulary of contemporary meta-ethics, this gives us an ‘internal reason’ to be moral). This interpretation has been acknowledged as the correct one by, amongst others, D. W. Hamlyn, who has said of Schopenhauer: ‘His view of morality reduces itself in the end to one based on prudence’<sup>90</sup>. On this view, of the various kinds of emotional response that we can possibly respond to our human situation with, only compassion is self-evidently moral and we are in fact justified in being compassionate to others

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<sup>90</sup> D.W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, 139.

on this spatio-temporal side of the noumenal-phenomenal divide because on the other side, beyond space and time, we are all one and so harming other beings is irrational in the sense that it is fundamentally harming the essence of our self. I mentioned earlier however, that not all commentators accept this reading of Schopenhauer's ethics as noumenal egoism.

It would not be inappropriate to mention here that one commentator, Hans-Johann Glock, has recoiled from interpreting Schopenhauer in the way that I have just done because it 'would turn altruism into a gigantic form of egoism'<sup>91</sup>. Patrick Gardiner has similarly censured the reduction of compassion to egoism<sup>92</sup>. Yet if this class of objection is to amount to more than the view that questioning compassion is in itself in some way morally suspect, then it must be interpreted to mean that the Schopenhauerian reduction of compassion to egoism – albeit to noumenal egoism – contradicts a view expressed earlier by Schopenhauer: that the actual motives of human conduct (as he sees them) include true compassion. In this spirit, Janaway has remarked that the 'strange kind of egoism' involved here rules out genuine compassion, which 'surely presupposes belief in distinctness as a minimum condition'<sup>93</sup>. However, interpreting Schopenhauer as eventually reading compassion as something other than genuine only seems to me to generate a verbal contradiction which can itself be erased by recognising here the oft mentioned developmental or 'dramatic' character of Schopenhauer's philosophy; that is to say, by seeing Schopenhauer as initially presenting an

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<sup>91</sup> Hans-Johann Glock, 'Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein' in C. Janaway, ed., *Companion*, 422-458, 449.

<sup>92</sup> P. Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1963), 276-77.

<sup>93</sup> C. Janaway, *Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 83.



essentially incomplete view in earlier parts of his text which will then be supplemented or even supplanted by a metaphysically deeper account (it is this model of textual arrangement that A. Philonenko recognised in his comment that ‘L’oeuvre de Schopenhauer est comparable à une spirale’<sup>94</sup>). Also, interpreting Schopenhauer as ultimately rendering compassion as something other than genuine in fact solves a more serious problem that his earlier account had generated for how genuine compassion can reside in human nature ‘is deeply mysterious given that the human being is a naturally egoistic expression of the will to life’<sup>95</sup>.

Janaway however, himself goes on to propose a different interpretation of Schopenhauer’s defence of compassion. I would now like to say a few words about this, our second reconstructed account. According to Janaway’s reconstruction of the argument concerning compassion, what might ground compassionate actions is the idea that, though individuals are indeed separate, there is nothing very distinguished about the individual that I am. ‘If the beggar and I are both equal portions of the same underlying reality, equal manifestations of the same will to life,’ Janaway writes, ‘then from the point of view of the world as a whole, it is a matter of indifference whether my ends are promoted or the beggars thwarted, or vice versa’<sup>96</sup>. This ‘indifference to individuality’ thesis is arguably capable of grounding compassion and is indeed supportable by the texts. One possible objection to this line of argument however, is that if it really is a matter of such *indifference* whether mine or the beggar’s ends are promoted

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<sup>94</sup> A. Philonenko, *Schopenhauer: une Philosophie de la tragédie* (Paris: Vrin, 1980), 11.

<sup>95</sup> Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, 82.

then there is no more reason to stop me being partisan than there is to let me vigorously promote my selfish ends. I am not going to pursue this specific criticism at any length however, since I want only to note that both my – and Hamlyn’s – favoured ‘noumenal egoist’ and Janaway’s somewhat different ‘indifference to individuality’ thesis presuppose that underlying our phenomenal (spatio-temporal) differences we are in fact one in a profoundly ontological sense; we are, in Janaway’s words ‘equal portions of the *same underlying reality*’. Both interpretations, in other words, share the assumption of monism<sup>97</sup>.

Turning now to a third possible reconstruction of Schopenhauer’s ethics, another response to the problem would be to point to the self-evident nature of compassion and claim that this alone can ground our ethics in Schopenhauerian moral philosophy. This alternative of reconstructing Schopenhauerian moral philosophy simply on the basis of the evidentness of compassion being morally good was suggested to me by a remark made by Dieter Henrich. In the context of a discussion of Schopenhauer’s and Hegel’s criticism of Kant’s moral theory, Henrich has claimed that ‘Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion [...] stands

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>97</sup> In his *Schopenhauer: The Human Character*, J. E. Atwell points out a difficulty regarding our linking of Schopenhauerian monism and compassion: when intuiting the thing in itself ‘I am facing something that I am more likely to shrink from in horror than I am to sympathise with [...] how could one have compassion for the will-to-live?’, 123. The answer to this objection – an answer which Atwell accepts – involves reverting to the findings of my previous chapter: i.e. that the brutal phenomenal will is not necessarily the noumenal oneness we experience.

entirely in the tradition of the moral-sense school'<sup>98</sup>. Henrich thus seems to think that Schopenhauer, like Hutcheson, is something of a moral sense theorist. To the following extent Henrich is correct: there is indeed a striking resemblance between the categories of motivation in Schopenhauer and in those in Hutcheson. However, stressing Schopenhauer's indebtedness to the moral sense school is nevertheless to some extent misleading because if we distinguish between the motivating reasons for our actions and the reasons for our approval or disapproval of something – between, that is, exciting reasons and justifying reasons – then we can see that whilst Schopenhauer and Hutcheson do share a view of the possible motivational reasons for acting, their reasons for ultimate approval differ. The moral sense theorist's reasons for approval have been characterised by Jeremy Bentham as follows: 'One man says, he has a thing made on purpose to tell him what is right and what is wrong; and that it is called a *moral sense*: and then he goes to work at his ease, and says, such a thing is right, and such a thing is wrong - why? 'because my moral sense tells me it is''<sup>99</sup>. Or, as a less partisan author puts it: 'justifying reasons presuppose a moral sense [...] the appeal to the approval or the disapproval of the moral sense is the end of the line for justification'<sup>100</sup>. In contradistinction to this position, Schopenhauer again and again tells us that virtue springs from the 'intuitive knowledge that

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<sup>98</sup> D. Henrich, *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 68.

<sup>99</sup> J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* in J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 78. Schopenhauer offers a very similar characterisation, which he explicitly connects with Francis Hutcheson's views, at [BM 168].

<sup>100</sup> H. Jensen, *Motivation and the Moral Sense in Francis Hutcheson's Moral Theory*, 59.



recognises in another's individuality the same inner nature as in one's own individuality' [W I 368]. An observer with such an intuitive knowledge that *recognises* an identical inner nature in others as in one's own is very far indeed from the man who can only justify the morality of a certain action with the remark that it is moral because his moral sense tells him, which is what Hutcheson ultimately seems to base his approval on (in most of his works), i.e. a moral sense that is bereft of further rational justification. Thus commentators on ethical intuitionism such as W. D. Hudson appropriately separate moral sense theorists who believe moral awareness is supplied by sense perception (such as Shaftsbury and Hutcheson) from those who argue that it is man's reason or understanding that gives him this awareness (such as Price) and there is every reason to describe Schopenhauer as an ethical intuitionist of the latter sort, i.e. a theorist of 'rational intuitionism' (as opposed to moral sense), who believes that benevolence is both instinctive *and* rational. As Hudson puts it in a characterisation of rational intuitionism: 'This virtue [benevolence - M. R.] is in accordance both with the nature of things *and* the nature of man'<sup>101</sup>. This characterisation seems to sit well with Schopenhauer's position, according to which pity is avowedly a natural emotion but one with an important metaphysical imprimatur. Reconstructing Schopenhauer as a pure moral sense theorist however, which we might consider to be a line of argument that follows on naturally from Henrich's view, means ignoring Schopenhauer's remarks upon metaphysical justification and moreover, leads straight back to the impasse of his appeal to self-evidence being rejected by thinkers of the stature of Kant.

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<sup>101</sup> W. D. Hudson, *Ethical Intuitionism* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 7.

The leading approaches to grounding the goodness of compassion appear now to have been exhausted. I plausibly suggested that such approaches could basically be divided into three main interpretations. The final ‘moral sense school’ interpretation was an unsustainable candidate because Schopenhauer was demonstrably not a moral sense theorist but rather a rational intuitionist who needed a further metaphysical component in his theory and the two surviving metaphysical reconstructions which aimed to supply such a component both hold assumptions about the dependency of goodness upon the possibility of discerning the numerical identity of the noumenal world. With this exposed shared assumption in mind, I would now like to see how Schopenhauer goes on to argue that his ethical theory can be turned against monotheistic religion.

#### *IV Virtue or Religion?*

It will surely come as no surprise at this point to learn that Schopenhauer’s moral objection to monotheism is articulated in terms of an ‘argument from evil’ presented within the framework of his compassionate monism. This is how it is established. First, in the manner we have just seen, Schopenhauer justifies his morality of pity which springs from the knowledge of our ontological intimacy with all life. On the basis of this argument, he then uses this standard of pity to judge the moral standing of the monotheistic faiths. Unsurprisingly, some of the claims of traditional Judaeo-Christian theism are found wanting in Schopenhauerian moral terms. For example, in one of his later essays, entitled ‘Additional Remarks on the Doctrine of the Suffering of the World’, Schopenhauer considers the various creation myths of the world religions,

expressing a qualified approval of certain of them, particularly those of Hinduism and Buddhism. Yet when it finally comes to the Judaeo-Christian account of creation *ex nihilo* by a morally perfect God, Schopenhauer takes a somewhat different view: ‘But that a God *Jehovah* creates this world of want and misery *anima causa* and *de gaiete de couer* and then applauds himself [...] this is intolerable’ [PP II 301].

When first confronted with this compressed argument, the casual reader may perhaps be confused as to whether it is logical or rather moral unacceptability that is being alluded to; that is, whether Schopenhauer is exhorting us to reject the concept of God for being incoherent or to reject God Himself, if he exists, for being immoral. On reflection, it will be seen that it is the former: Schopenhauer is pointing out that according to the Judaeo-Christian creation story God has created a clearly bad world, which is contradictory and therefore philosophically unacceptable because God Himself, according to the monotheistic tradition, is meant to be infinitely good: ‘The synagogues, the church and Islam use the word God in its proper and correct sense’ [PP II 101]. Before going any further, it might be worth emphasising at this point, to dispel any doubts about whether Schopenhauer has in fact got the right target in his sights here, that the God of the theistic tradition *is* indeed infinitely good. One obvious way of doing this is to cite a representative remark from a prominent Christian thinker. The example I have chosen is from a prominent Protestant Christian who puts it in this manner: ‘He is infinite wisdom, righteousness, goodness, mercy, truth, power and life’<sup>102</sup>. This characterisation of God from Calvin is not at all atypical of the

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<sup>102</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 15.



Christian tradition at large and must be understood as entailing that an almost but not quite all good God – or an almost but not quite all powerful God – though he would arguably escape Schopenhauer's objection, would not be the God of the Christian tradition.

We might then say that, according to Schopenhauer, we are justified in not supposing there to be a good God like that pictured by the Hebrew-Christian creation story in *Genesis*, given the misery that that God would be incoherently responsible for:

Generally, such a view of the world as the successful work of an all-wise, all benevolent, and moreover almighty being is all too flagrantly contradicted by the misery and wretchedness that fill the world on the one hand and by the obvious imperfection and even burlesque distortion of the most perfect of its phenomena on the other; I refer to the human phenomenon [PP II 301, see also W I 406-7n].

But to say that when Schopenhauer points out the moral unacceptability of the creator God of the Semitic monotheistic religions he is primarily doing so only to emphasise the incoherence of that notion (it is 'flagrantly contradicted' by misery) is not incompatible with claiming that part of Schopenhauer's programme is also to cast a moral slur upon Christianity, and his occasional remarks upon Christianity's relationship to the animal world and its intolerance and consequent proselytising violence when compared with polytheistic religions [see PP II 358] are obviously intended to fulfil such a function. Nevertheless, this specific argument aims in the first place to show that Christianity's world view is incoherent. This, then, in its essentials, is Schopenhauer's moral argument

against the being of God. It accepts the premise of an all powerful and all wise creator to illustrate how incoherent that notion is within the context of this existentially distressing world. It should of course be pointed out here that Schopenhauer's argument about the existence of evil is so far from being novel that it has for a very long time occupied an important place within philosophical theology. And Schopenhauer himself was alive to the fact that religious thinkers had various strategies to justify the pain and suffering that we find in this world: 'The evils and misery of this world, however, are not in accord even with theism; and so it tried to help itself by all kinds of shifts, evasions and theodicies' [W II 591].

Which neatly brings us to the very objection, or family of objections, to Schopenhauer's argument that I should now like to consider. For although Schopenhauer flirts with the notion that what he prejudicially calls 'shifts, evasions and theodicies' might be raised against his position by theologians and other thinkers sympathetic to monotheistic religion, he does not bother to provide an account of the main trends of thought regarding theodicy; much less does he offer anything in the way of a head-on argument against them. This is probably neither accident nor oversight on Schopenhauer's part: the subtleties of monotheistic theology and theodicy attracted Schopenhauer so very little that he appears to have been unable to entertain them even to the extent of using them as targets of criticism. Schopenhauer is clearly an extremely temperamental writer and seems always to prefer abuse to serious philosophical engagement when he comes up against positions that are, in his eyes, unimportant (think of his *ad Hominem* relationship with the philosophy of Hegel). Nonetheless, this perceived unimportance should certainly not be taken on face value and if we attend to the

history of Christian thought we can find a range of many-layered and powerful arguments against Schopenhauer's central thesis – that the existence of evil in the world is incompatible with the supposition that an all powerful and all good God exists – that are either ignored or only treated to a perfunctory analysis by Schopenhauer himself. Let me now provide some examples taken from the writings of just one Christian thinker who seems to have provided forceful answers to Schopenhauer's charge.

In late antiquity, the church father St. Augustine of Hippo (a man certainly alive to the sense of his own sin, as readers of his *Confessions* will be aware) suggested in his monumental *City of God* that we are in fact all more or less sinful and so all deserving of some punishment, as scripture testifies in the story of the flood. Augustine also argued that natural disasters are sent from God to test man's piety, like the appalling afflictions in the book of Job. Such arguments as these certainly offer good *prima facie* explanations of why there might exist human suffering in a world created by an omniscient and all good God. But however plausible these particular responses to evil by Augustine may be considered, one could still maintain on behalf of Schopenhauer that they have no direct bearing on Schopenhauer's own specific challenge because his conception of suffering is not exhausted by talk of specifically human suffering (in a discussion of this problem of evil he tellingly remarks on the suffering 'of all that lives' [PP I 121]). Recent philosophy of religion has sharpened and sophisticated this reliance on animal suffering in the argument from evil by developing detailed examples of the pointless suffering and death of animals that have never come into contact with human life. Because such animals have never come into contact with humans, these are cases where no afterlife, no presence of free-will



nor any improvement of moral character can be brought into the argument to mitigate or justify the pain suffered<sup>103</sup>. Given, then, that Schopenhauer's remarks upon the suffering in the world partially anticipate – certainly in spirit, if not in precise detail – such 'Bambi cases' (as they are inauspiciously called) or at least that such cases can be regarded as natural extensions of Schopenhauer's own views, are not Augustine's explanations to be considered disarmed by this sophistication? It is reasonable to suppose that they are. However, Augustine's argumentative resources are not themselves empty, for he also claimed that God's ways are simply inscrutable as far as humans are concerned and so God's good judgement is less absent than untraceable for the limited human mind<sup>104</sup>. This may seem an unfashionable argument today but it does at least provide one relatively uncomplicated way of allowing the suffering of the world, including cases of animal suffering, not to bear weight against the existence of God. And it is surely significant that Schopenhauer seems to admit as much at PP II 101: 'Therefore even if we attribute to him the quality of the highest goodness, the inscrutable mystery of his decree and decision is the refuge by which such a doctrine still always escapes the reproach of absurdity'.

These are of course only some of the answers that but one religious philosopher has provided in response to the problem of the existence of pain and suffering in a Christian context. Moreover, my unelaborated sketch of even these answers undoubtedly does violence to their varying levels of sophistication. But

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<sup>103</sup> For critical discussion of such cases, see K. Yandell, *Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999), 137-143.

<sup>104</sup> The Augustinian passages referred to in this paragraph can be located at *City of God*, Book 1, Ch 9, pp. 16-17; Book XXII, Ch. 24, p. 1070 and Book XX, Ch 2, pp. 896-897.

even from this relatively small list of examples from the writings of just one (major) thinker we can see that there are clearly many feasible routes open to the theologian or religious philosopher to argue against Schopenhauer's moral objection to God, even if that objection is taken to include apparently senseless animal suffering.

Yet despite the fact that it seems Schopenhauer was fully aware of Augustinian theodicy – 'Augustine [...] wears himself out in an effort to exonerate the creator' [PP I 63]<sup>105</sup>; – he does not counter any of Augustine's objections themselves with sustained argument. However, I am going to eschew criticising Schopenhauer for neglecting traditional lines of theodicy such as Augustine's here because I next intend to show that the very basis of Schopenhauer's moral objection to God is provided by a position itself already atheistic. And if this is right, then all the examples of Augustinian theodicies given above were therefore not real solutions to Schopenhauer's specific position as the framework in which they arise is a metaphysics that has previously already removed God from ontology. In other words, I would now like to show that as an argument against God, Schopenhauer's moral objection – and therefore any attempted theological solution that tries to confront that objection on its own moral terms – is superfluous on Schopenhauerian premises.

As has already been remarked, Schopenhauer has assumed that there is a good measure of pain, suffering and evil in this world. We can regard this assumption as being uncontroversially true; certainly, the monotheistic religions themselves

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<sup>105</sup> See also W I 406n, where Augustine's sophistic exertions (*Bemühungen und Sophismen*) are mentioned, derisively.

presume this to be the case in propounding doctrines of salvation and forgiveness. And what has then been claimed by Schopenhauer is that the notion of God is of an all knowing and all powerful and all good creator. This is also accurate, it is indeed precisely what the Judaeo-Christian tradition supposes. This then entails that God is responsible for subjecting his creatures, animals and humans alike, to such suffering and therefore seemingly not all good. Another way of putting the point would be to say that given that an all powerful and all good God would be capable of preventing suffering and would be motivated to do so and given also that our world happens not to be a good one, then such a God cannot exist. Yet there is a powerful reason for being suspicious of this argument from evil in its Schopenhauerian form. That reason may now be expressed as follows.

One of the underlying assumptions of this phase of the Schopenhauerian argument against God from evil is that we should care about all the suffering that occurs in the world (and that God is purportedly responsible for). Put somewhat differently, we know that this world is bad because it offends our justified sense of compassion. But there is a crucial problem here: namely, that the terms in which Schopenhauer's justification of compassion is grounded within Schopenhauerian metaphysics – on either my own *or* Janaway's reconstructions – are the terms of an ontology of a single will. What I mean here is that the way in which we come to know that what we call good is justifiable is through an intuition of an ultimate identity between us and all other creatures (which causes us either to act in our noumenal self-interest, or to relinquish individual partisanship). We are, on either Janaway's or my own reconstructions, justified in being and feeling compassionate to other persons and creatures because on a



fundamental metaphysical level we are all one. Our intolerance of apparent divine irresponsibility in subjecting his creatures to pain and humiliation is therefore primarily premised upon a feeling for our fellow creatures derived from an intuition of the oneness of those creatures, ourselves and the world. But this monism that allows us to be compassionate and so to reject God was established by the *already atheistic* conclusions Schopenhauer drew from Kant. And Schopenhauer is compelled to rely on such a monism if he is to escape problems concerning moral disagreement jeopardising his espousal of compassion being self-evidently moral.

So, as should now be clear, Schopenhauer's moral argument levelled against God is therefore already launched from an atheistic metaphysical framework. Which means that criticising God's moral injustice and so ultimately his logical inconsistency (in being contemporaneously both unjust and all good) on such intuitive compassionate grounds as Schopenhauer's is to implicitly rely on a metaphysical argument that has already concluded that God does not exist. Schopenhauer's moral objection to God on compassionate grounds – his *reductio ad absurdum* of the Biblical creation story – therefore *already supposes* an atheistic ontology, albeit covertly. Consequently, we can not but conclude that since Schopenhauer's moral objection against God is already implied by his exclusion argument for the non-existence of God, it not only fails to further strengthen his position but also collapses alongside that atheistic ontology.

Nevertheless, despite its ontological and ethical limitations there can be little doubt that Schopenhauer's system was of high importance in the history of atheistic philosophy and that it dramatically influenced the thought of Nietzsche. But before moving on to consider Nietzsche's own distinctive post-

Schopenhauerian arguments against religion, it will be necessary to touch upon another element of Schopenhauer's philosophy that indirectly but powerfully influenced Nietzsche, if only by spurring him on to refute it.

*V The 'Ascetic Ideal' (aesthetics as a substitute for existence)*

In the following, final few sections of this chapter, I will be concerned to describe some central elements of Schopenhauer's account of salvation and to further maintain that this account does, as Nietzsche will come to persuasively suggest in his reflections upon the 'ascetic ideal' in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and elsewhere, share a central specific feature with mainstream Christian thought. Since Nietzsche – who was to some extent only following hints laid down by Schopenhauer himself – often groups Christianity and Schopenhauer together, the following discussion will therefore enable us, in the next two chapters, to present Nietzsche's often made criticisms of the search for salvation in the actual context in which they arose. In briefly outlining this doctrine of salvation, I will focus solely on Schopenhauer's method of salvation through art, largely leaving to one side his two other methods of asceticism and ethics, partly for reasons of space and focus and partly because it is this particular aspect of his theory that most transparently illuminates Schopenhauer's quasi-Christian valorisation of another painless world beyond this world (and as I have already mentioned Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music in the previous chapter, I will pay no further attention to that branch of his aesthetics here).

‘It is to the end of salvation’, J. E. Atwell has recently written, ‘that Schopenhauer’s philosophy is entirely directed’<sup>106</sup> and Schopenhauer’s account of salvation from the will specifically through art, which takes up a quarter of his *magnum opus*, stresses that this route is thought to be far more expedient for a certain elite of men: the genius (and here, as elsewhere, Schopenhauer is very Nietzschean in his love for the exceptional, although it should be noted that it was of course Kant who inaugurated the Romantic meditation on the figure of the genius). The Schopenhauerian genius is a man with a greater ability to perceive in things what Schopenhauer calls their ‘true form’ and without reference to one’s own self interest. More specifically, the object of art is said to bring about knowledge of a thing’s ‘true form’ in the sense that it exhibits what Schopenhauer calls the thing’s ‘grade of objectification’; a perceptual experience which raises us above the concerns of the will, conferring upon us an aestheticised objectivity which allows us to see the world disinterestedly. A work of art is thus created by a genius in a special state – a state of observing ‘grades’ – and aims to trigger similar states in its spectators. Leaving aside the question of what precisely a ‘grade of objectification’ is, we can at least say that Schopenhauer’s aesthetics – prefiguring that of the later Heidegger in this respect<sup>107</sup> - is premised upon the idea that in our everyday non-aesthetic dealings

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<sup>106</sup> J. E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer: The Human Character*, 180.

<sup>107</sup> The separation of what Heidegger calls the ‘ready to hand’ from the ‘present to hand’ in his analysis of everyday life in *Being and Time* is a phenomenological distinction which closely corresponds to the Schopenhauerian distinction drawn between ‘the ordinary way of considering things’ and the way of considering ‘the *what*’. For Heidegger, the ordinary way of considering a hammer would be to see it as ‘equipment’, i.e. as a tool to deal with nails: ‘The less we just stare



with objects (and, sadly, other subjects) in the world, all we desire to know about them is their relations, by which Schopenhauer means their many ‘connections in space, time and causality’ [W I 177]. That our everyday interest in objects is so instrumental follows from the Schopenhauerian contention (examined in the previous chapter) that we are tethered to the world in the first place by a relation other than knowing. There, our nature as essentially striving creatures was described. Since, therefore, the self in Schopenhauer’s eyes is primarily a willing one, its view on the world is influenced by the requirements and expediencies of willing: ‘In the immediate perception of the world and life, we consider things as a rule merely in their relations [...] For example, we regard houses, ships, machines and the like with the idea of their purpose and suitability’ [W II 372]. From day to day, then, in the first place we do not meditate on the objects that we encounter; rather, we use them (or avoid them) because we are essentially willing, and not knowing, beings (or in the terms of Schopenhauer’s speculative

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at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment’, *Being and Time*, 98. Purposive involvement – which Heidegger terms ‘caring’ – rather than detached perception is thus the primary way in which we relate to the world: detached knowing is just one mode of already being in the world. However, this changes for the later Heidegger, when rather than being an *a-priori* form of human perceiving, the instrumentality of perception is seen to be a form of ‘disclosure’ historically tied to the post-industrial world. It therefore follows that we can in fact rid perception of this instrumentality and one prominent way in which we can do so, Heidegger suggests, is brought about by the aesthetic attitude. For an overview of Heidegger’s development in this regard, drawn with Schopenhauerian parallels in mind, see J. Young, ‘Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Art and the Will’ in *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, Ed. D. Jacquette (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 162-18.

account of evolution: the quasi-Kantian faculties that we possess have evolved for the purpose of the manipulation of the external world according to our needs). The fact that ‘the ordinary human comprehends quite clearly in things only that which directly or indirectly has some sort of reference to himself (has an interest for him)’ [WN 81] can thus be explained by our nature as selves, which tends to biological prudence. Prudence is not all powerful however, and we can, Schopenhauer suggests, occasionally ‘relinquish the ordinary way of considering things’ and ‘no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither but simply and solely the *what*’ [W I 178]. This relinquishing of ordinary instrumental perception in favour of painless and disinterested insight is seen by Schopenhauer to constitute a form of salvation and such an unusual kind of representation is most obvious in aesthetic experience, a subject to which I now turn.

### ***VI The Worth of Tragedy***

Schopenhauer’s argument for the self as primarily a willing self, we saw in an earlier chapter, partly relied upon a phenomenological description of our everyday, non-epistemologically oriented behaviour. Yet he also thought, in a radically proto-Heideggerean manner<sup>108</sup>, that instrumental perception could be overcome and could be overcome by means of the experience of art.

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<sup>108</sup> The possibility is not excluded here that we must rethink Heidegger’s relationship to Schopenhauer, notably on this issue of aesthetics and particularly with regard to Heidegger’s work of art essay, wherein the possibility that artworks instantiated Platonic ideas is explicitly discounted, arguably indicating that Heidegger had a Schopenhauerian aesthetics expressly in mind.



Schopenhauer's views are that purifying human perception of its instrumentality can be achieved by developing an aesthetic sensitivity, which discloses the essential truth about things. For Schopenhauer, who seems to have Kant's notion of aesthetic disinterestedness somewhere in mind and even follows Kant in distinguishing the beautiful and the sublime in aesthetics (though, to my mind under the influence of Edmund Burke in this regard, he ditches all the moral and even theological baggage that the concept of the sublime freighted in the critical philosophy<sup>109</sup>), contemplating art removes us, at least for a time, from the world of desiring and ushers us into a painless world of truth. For Schopenhauer, an object's truth or 'true form' means that we see through the empirical object into the now unconcealed 'ideal type' that it represents. This study is not the place to deal with the extremely controversial question of the ontological status of those improbable entities, the 'ideas' 'grades' or 'forms' in Schopenhauer but it will serve our present purposes to make the relatively uncontroversial claim that

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<sup>109</sup> Theological implications creep into Kant's account via the first *Critique*, where it is said that the contemplation of immensity backs up the Kantian moral proof of God because it leads to or is accompanied by 'illimatableness in the possible extension of our knowledge and a striving commensurate therewith' [CPR B 426]. In the third *Critique* it is explained that the contemplation of absolute enormity (experience of the mathematical sublime) makes us aware of a supersensible faculty – reason – in our mind and this awareness, which he calls respect, then gives us a (moral) respect for our supersensible destination [CJ 109]. As P. Crowther puts it: 'The judgement of sublimity is in accord or harmony with the law of our rational vocation because it produces a state of feeling analogous to the effect of that produced by morality and this (Kant presumes) will make it conducive to morality', *The Kantian Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 100; see also Jean Francois Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 126-127.



Schopenhauer's ideal type or 'grade of objectification' is an entity that is meant to be a little like the original Platonic notion of forms, which were unchanging *universalia ante res*. Schopenhauer appears to believe that there exist innumerable observable forms that the will achieves – in nature but *not* in the articles manufactured by men [W I 211, W II 365]<sup>110</sup> – which are eternally existing templates: 'Different grades of the will's objectification expressed in innumerable individuals, exist as unattained patterns of these, or as the eternal forms of things [...] these grades are nothing but Plato's ideas' [W I 129]. Yet the distinction between Platonic Idea and Schopenhauerian grade cannot be entirely collapsed since Plato's Ideas are not simply of organic species and other natural items in the way that Schopenhauer's are (see *Republic* 596 b) and Schopenhauer's grades are empirically perceived by the senses, which Plato famously denied.

So when we appreciate art, what Schopenhauer thinks is going on is that we are contemplating these quasi-Platonic Ideas and are consequently removed from the mundane world of desires and needs (it is this sense that we must understand Schopenhauer's occasional and very approving allusions to the celebrated Platonic metaphor of the cave [see W I 171, W I 419]). This relation to the 'forms' holds for nearly all the non-musical arts: painting, sculpture and poetry, the highest form of the latter being tragedy, which by its presentation of suffering exhorts us to renounce our willing selves, an interpretation of tragedy as

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<sup>110</sup> I would suggest that recent attempts in analytic philosophy to argue that natural kind concepts have a specific nature – e.g. dog – whilst non-natural kind concepts only have a function but no essence – e.g. water carrier (of which there can be very different instances) – has a direct and supportive bearing on this Schopenhauerian issue.

renunciation – explicitly rejected by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* – which allowed Schopenhauer to support the notion of a properly Christian drama [W II 434]. In point of fact, Schopenhauer argues there that modern drama, under a Christian influence, is actually *superior* to its ancient counterpart. Schopenhauer thus goes much further than John Milton, who in the introduction to his *Samson Agonistes*, convincingly suggested that the form of Greek tragedy can be rendered equally acceptable – although not enhanced – in a Christian setting<sup>111</sup>.

Such, then, concludes our brief description of salvation in its Schopenhauerian, aesthetic form: one is removed from instrumental engagement with the world by aesthetic contemplation of the grades or ideas.

No one will deny that we have only very briefly sketched Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory of salvation here. Nonetheless, we are now in a position to illustrate the link between Schopenhauerian salvation and the Christian religion. The link consists in an assumption which Nietzsche termed the 'ascetic ideal' and attacked in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. According to Nietzsche, this line of Schopenhauerian reasoning on aesthetics which stresses the need for detached abstraction from our everyday world of desires should be criticised on the basis of what he thought to be a remaining 'religious'

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<sup>111</sup> Schopenhauer makes it clear however, that the connection between Christianity, modern tragedy and the asceticism and detachment which he espouses is a contingent one; Bellini's opera *Norma*, for example, is said to be a model of tragedy even though 'No Christians or even Christian sentiments appear in it' [W II 436]. Hence Schopenhauer states it is in reality immaterial whether denial of the will to live 'proceeds from a theistic or an atheistic religion' [W I 385]. But there is nothing here which endangers Nietzsche's diagnosis of Schopenhauerian philosophy, Christianity and atheistic religions as all being subject to a life denying 'ascetic ideal'.



assumption, found particularly in one specific religion: Christianity. The assumption that Nietzsche took to be religious was simply that some kind of escape from the everyday instrumental empirical world of purposes and desires in which we live *should* be found. Nietzsche, I would claim, is clearly and simply right in this instance: one of the obvious assumptions of Schopenhauer's system – and arguably even of the semi-Schopenhauerian 'system' of Nietzsche's own *Birth of Tragedy* – is that it is better to be outside of or detached from our earthly world of purposes and activities than it is to be in it (there is, as this point may also be put, an *inference* from suffering to worthlessness in religious pessimism). That this is so can be demonstrated by the fact that certain other thinkers accepted a description of the world that was not in fact significantly different from Schopenhauer's but that they argued, to the contrary, that far from requiring a palliative through art or other means, we should instead enjoy this world of rapacious instrumental exploitation. That Nietzsche himself is one such thinker should be obvious from such remarks as: 'My instinct went in the opposite direction from Schopenhauer's: toward a *justification of life*, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious' [WP #1005]. But Nietzsche is not however, the only such philosopher. On Nietzsche's own interpretation in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Greek tragedians were cases in point. But even quite independently of Nietzsche, the 'young Hegelian' Max Stirner, for instance, wrote that: 'For me, no one is a person to be respected, not even the fellow man, but solely like other beings, an object, in which I take an interest or else I do not, an interesting or uninteresting object, a usable or unusable object'<sup>112</sup>. This

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<sup>112</sup> M. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 276.



position has been glossed as follows by one commentator: ‘Stirner considers all human relationships to be founded on exploitation in one form or another. This truth is not something to be deplored but something to be accepted - and in turn exploited. In this last respect he differs from Heidegger’<sup>113</sup>. In this last respect he differs also from Schopenhauer.

Schopenhauer’s detached ideal of redemption is strongly related, Nietzsche believes, both to the views of Plato, who famously favoured the intangible world of forms over this mundane world and to the views of Christianity (‘Platonism for the people’), as perhaps best exemplified in the medieval theological notion of the beatific vision of God that, as St. Thomas Aquinas writes in his *Compendium Theologiae*, fulfils all our hopes ‘so that nothing can remain to be desired [...] This ultimate end of man we call *beatitudo*. For a man’s happiness or beatitude consists in the vision whereby he sees God’<sup>114</sup>. Now, these – Platonic, Christian, Schopenhauerian – traditions understand themselves to be bemoaning the state of the world and its unmistakable drudgery, suffering and pain but since Nietzsche believes that one can actually joyously affirm precisely such an unmerciful world as this one, he feels compelled to offer in addition a further interpretative explanation of why certain strands of thought are world denying

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<sup>113</sup> R. W. K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 182.

<sup>114</sup> St. T. Aquinas, *The Compendium of Theology* (London: Herder, 1993), Ch. 106. The similarity between the Christian beatific vision and Schopenhauerian aesthetics is recognised by W. Caldwell in his *Schopenhauer’s System in its Philosophical Significance* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1993), 368 and also by P. Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 233-235.

whilst others are not: ‘Now, when suffering is always the first of the arguments marshalled *against* life, as its most questionable feature, it is salutary to remember the times when people made the opposite assessment’ [GM 47]. Put differently, because just describing a world of suffering is not justification enough for seeking to escape it – as is confirmed by others describing a similar world but then accepting it or affirming it – another reason must be supplied to explain why those who seek salvation feel that need. Nietzsche’s conclusion with regard to Schopenhauerian and religious pessimism is that it is not the world *but rather the individual in whom the world inspires such pessimism* that is at fault and that intellectual detachment which aims at salvation, far from being a virtue, is a sin of evasion that exposes the unhealthy. Favouring the ‘higher world’ (Platonic ideas, Christian heaven, Schopenhauerian grades, arguably even the Kantian thing in itself...), Nietzsche thinks, whatever goal the Christian theologian or Schopenhauer saw themselves to be pursuing, should, in fact, therefore best be read as an inadvertent expression of the preference of a physiologically afflicted human being: ‘Exhaustion can be acquired or inherited – in any case it changes the aspect of things, the value of things’ [WP #48]. The chief ‘error’ of Western philosophy for Nietzsche is thus not to be historically traced to some fundamental but contingent mistake or omission originally perpetrated by Plato and then perpetuated in ignorance by practically all subsequent theorists (as it is for philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida and Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*). Rather, the ‘ascetic ideal’ that finds expression in many philosophies is the product of a continual possibility of human nature as we know it.

Now, this physiological interpretation by Nietzsche appears to be a major insight into the psychology of religion and of salvation. Whether it is actually sustainable in the face of empirical and conceptual investigation however, is an issue to be addressed in the next chapter.

## *VII Conclusion*

Let me now attempt to draw together some of the findings of this chapter and to point towards the aim of the next. Examining – and partially reconstructing – Schopenhauer's moral argument against God in the first part of this chapter was important because it is an attack on the Judaeo-Christian concept of God that is periodically asserted or implied by Schopenhauer. And even in its failure we saw that it did exhibit a strong degree of consistency with and was supported by other elements of his philosophy. Furthermore, demonstrating how Schopenhauer then connected his metaphysics to a doctrine of secular salvation has been useful in serving to illuminate the great resemblance between Schopenhauerian redemption and Christian salvation to which Nietzsche's philosophy is, in part, a reaction. Nietzsche will come to suggest that the Schopenhauerian prejudice against life as manifested in, amongst other places, his aesthetics is physiologically rooted in the kind of constitution that Christians, for the most part, also share. One central thrust of Nietzsche's work thus has to be understood as an attempt to regard the successive Platonic, Christian and Schopenhauerian rejection of the empirical world as belonging to an essentially religious frame of mind because the desire for escape indicates dissatisfaction (and this still holds even though, phenomenologically, they might turn out to be slightly different



kinds of escape: there is, for instance, no notion of a positive salvation in Schopenhauer, whereas in Christianity salvation of the soul is positive ecstasy and not mere redemption from suffering). We shall now turn to Nietzsche's account, according to which such apparently positive judgements about death and disinterest are symptomatic traces of a certain – for Nietzsche, degenerate – kind of life and the conclusion that those judgements should be reviled follows only from an unnerving aesthetics of health that Schopenhauer does not share.

## 5. Nietzsche (1): An Experiment in Strength

*'Sinfulness' in man is not a fact but rather the interpretation of a fact, namely a physiological upset, - the latter seen from a perspective of morals and religion which is no longer binding on us*

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* [GM 100]

### **I Introduction**

Nietzsche's words offer no consolation. Kant denied the possibility of any unambiguous revelation or of any human sense experience of the divine but nevertheless invoked God both as a necessary dialectical illusion and, along with the *summum bonum*, as a practical presupposition of moral conduct. Schopenhauer revealed a philosophic vision of a world without any trace of God but stilled our terror, as we have just seen, with the possibility of a certain kind of redemption. Nietzsche however, almost alone amongst philosophers, does not seek out the absence of suffering. This he takes to be the mistake of religion.

In certain passages to be found in his work, Nietzsche, like his predecessor Schopenhauer, can be seen to believe that monotheistic religion is being phased out of world history. In the important *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, he refers to 'the unstoppable decline of faith in the Christian God' [GM 67]. As a sociological phenomenon, religion is becoming a thing of the past, Nietzsche seems in places to have forcefully argued, although he added that the resulting 'social vacuum' was being filled by morality. Yet we might point out that it is arguable whether this sociological thesis of inevitable secularisation espoused by

Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is, in point of fact, historically true. If it is true at all, it is surely true only of certain sectors of the rarefied Western world and even then, it could be objected, countries like the United States and Israel seem to be undergoing or to represent something of a religious renaissance within the developed world itself. But at all events, Nietzsche nevertheless went beyond Schopenhauer by adding a normative objective to his anthropological account by diagnosing Semitic monotheistic religion – and, for good measure, Schopenhauerian philosophy itself – as pathological, a morbid decadence on the part of the human species that was best avoided. It is this normative account that will be our main subject of consideration in this chapter. Nietzsche's principal line of argument against the Christian religious tradition is that it is a sign or symptom both of escapism traceable to physiological weakness (the 'ascetic ideal' which we have already briefly encountered in its Schopenhauerian form) and also of what he calls *ressentiment* and that humanity would therefore be best served forgetting all about it. Despite, perhaps, their appearance within the Nietzsche *corpus*, these are not unsupported opinions about religion and in the following pages I will explicate what I take to be the arguments for, and presuppositions of, Nietzsche's principal theory of the degeneracy of the Christian tradition. These Nietzschean arguments have deep philosophical roots and have not, as one might expect, gone uncontested since he wrote them and in this chapter I will be focusing on the criticism that Nietzsche's account receives at the hands of P. Poellner and A. Danto. The central thesis which I will be defending will be that although some elements of Nietzsche's psychological characterisation of the Christian religion are in actual fact surprisingly coherent and endure much of their recent philosophical criticism, other elements cannot



be sustained in their present form. Before such an examination of Nietzsche's criticisms of the Christian religion can be embarked upon however, I would first like to remark upon some preliminary methodological points and then to mention Nietzsche's attitude toward the founder – as opposed to the adherents – of the Christian religion.

## *II Problems of Interpretation*

It is well known that certain difficulties beset any reception of Nietzsche's philosophic thought, not least because with Nietzsche one feels that a certain traditional way of doing and presenting philosophy changes: for although he often addresses problems – of metaphysics and epistemology as well as of ethics, politics, culture, aesthetics and value – that are without doubt philosophically conventional, his writings not only often hold views which many people would see as far from 'sensible' but his style is unconventional in the extreme, not because of its obvious irony and sarcasm, the presence of which is in any case hardly unique in the history of philosophy (one thinks especially of Socrates, Hume or Kierkegaard in this regard) but rather because of the aphoristic form and because of its being abbreviated, "literary", hectoring, and even exhibiting a tendency toward being abusive when not being consciously obscure. Such stylistic extravagances are clearly to some degree inherited from the example of Schopenhauer's prose but in their exaggerated Nietzschean form they make the problem of reading Nietzsche one degree more difficult, even to the extent that it is rare to find a book on Nietzsche today without some preparatory consideration of the question of how 'Nietzsche's style' is related to his overall philosophical

and cultural programme. But not only does Nietzsche's literary style problematise the interpretation of his work, so does the fact that, unlike Kant and Schopenhauer, he wrote no *magnum opus* – the posthumously published series of notes known as the *Will to Power* can not be considered his masterpiece, despite the ambiguously motivated efforts of Heidegger to prove the contrary – but rather published over a dozen, often fragmentary works. This means that I should state in advance that this study will claim only to have isolated what appear to this reader to be the central themes of the *mature* Nietzsche's writings on religion. Mature: I have followed the by now fairly standard division of Nietzsche's thought into three periods (the mature thought beginning around the time just after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*).

Also, I have not followed what one could broadly call a 'Heideggerean' approach to the problem of Nietzschean exegesis. By this I simply mean that I think that Martin Heidegger's influential published lecture notes on Nietzsche – which extend to several volumes – and the work on Nietzsche that he in particular inspired (especially in some recent French philosophical circles) will not have much bearing on the outcome of this chapter and will not even be critically dealt with at any substantial length within this – or indeed any other – section of my study. This is because Heidegger, rather confusingly, offers, not an account or explication of the tenets of Nietzsche's philosophy but what he himself calls 'an *interpretation*, that is, a confrontation in the light of the grounding question of Western thinking'<sup>115</sup>. Needless to say, the 'grounding question of Western thinking' is not Nietzsche's own but is rather a part of

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<sup>115</sup> M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (New York: Harper and Row, 1991), II, 151.

Heidegger's enduring and pervasive personal preoccupation with a certain question of ontology. Whether or not these lecture notes be read as one of Heidegger's celebrated '*Destruktionen*' of the history of philosophy, given this persistent ontological preoccupation, Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche in 1936 tells us far more about Heidegger's own philosophy than it does about any kind of Nietzscheanism; it is an attempt to read the history of philosophy through the lens of Heidegger's own ontology of being. And although Nietzsche is presented in Heidegger's work essentially as a philosopher of value – a thesis that this chapter and the next will indeed follow – nowhere in Heidegger's writing do we, for instance, find an account of Nietzsche's central concept of nobility, despite the fact that Heidegger wrote more on Nietzsche than he did on any other philosopher. Rather, we again and again encounter the question of being and how it relates to Nietzsche. Consistent with the vast remainder of his work, in his *Nietzsche* lectures Heidegger is elusive on anything other than Being. In not concentrating on specifically Nietzschean problematics, Heidegger thus definitively sets the tone for the recent, popular and generally French 'post-structuralist' or 'deconstructive' readings of Nietzsche, such as *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, written by Jacques Derrida<sup>116</sup>. Such meditations upon the 'deconstruction' of reading as this text – which is at crucial points quite obviously indebted to Heidegger's questionable and thematically intrusive reading of Nietzsche – often, more or less obliquely, suggest that Nietzsche himself is very concerned with certain theses about language, theses that he shares with the author of the critical text. Not all of these purportedly

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<sup>116</sup> J. Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).



‘Nietzschean’ theories of reading were published in French, of course; Paul de Man’s *Allegories of Reading*, which claims to be consequential for Nietzsche studies, is another avowedly deconstructive study, although de Man rightly admits that Nietzsche’s own theories about language take up but ‘an inconspicuous corner of the Nietzsche canon’<sup>117</sup>. Nevertheless, de Man takes the philosophical ramifications of this modest piece of Nietzsche marginalia to be all too obtrusive, eventually concluding, with Derrida, that the Nietzschean text in some way subverts its own authority. It is not however, my intention in this study to deal with the ‘deconstructive’ issues raised by Derrida and de Man since they demonstrably attend less to the difficulty of reading Nietzsche than to the difficulties attending the process of reading as such. Nevertheless, when these rather apocalyptically expressed theories of reading can be seen to touch on more local difficulties of Nietzschean exegesis I will not hesitate to call upon, or to put into question, their testimony.

I have now detailed what I shall be avoiding and why but I should like to assure the reader that what I will be focusing attention on will be at least as interesting as these other areas. Methodologically, I shall be undertaking what we might term a ‘naturalistic’ reading of Nietzsche (the interpretation that I feel to be least exegetically contentious). By this I broadly mean that I will be reading Nietzsche as offering an account of man as a part – an extremely interesting part – of nature, and shall therefore see *ressentiment* and other phenomena as being as explainable – though not necessarily in precisely the same way, of course – as

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<sup>117</sup> P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 103.

is the animal behaviour of other species. In this I am following Nietzsche himself, who referred to the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* as ‘a piece of animal psychology (*Tierpsychologie*), nothing more’ [GM 110]<sup>118</sup>. The function of this chapter will be to show that Nietzsche’s atheism is, in intention, as philosophically grounded as is Schopenhauer’s, although that grounding will take a very different form. The chapter will be structured as follows. We shall see that Nietzsche analyses the Christian religion in terms of two enduring features we can find in its adherents. Firstly, the individual’s ‘decadent’ need for salvation (an ‘ascetic’ need we saw shared by Schopenhauer in the previous chapter’s examination of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics). In examining Nietzsche’s psychological critique of Christianity as being obsessed with salvation and therefore supposedly being a crutch for the weak and physiologically maladjusted, we shall see that this interpretation seemingly fails according to one recent commentator, P. Poellner, because certain strong and healthy individuals also converted to Christianity. I will be arguing that although Poellner’s objection seems to be overcome *via* the doctrine of ‘bad conscience’ contained in the second essay of Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*, that doctrine itself is not without its own intrinsic problems. Secondly, Nietzsche can, in various places but particularly in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, be seen to analyse Christianity in terms of a submissive desire to assuage a fear of, and a need for revenge upon, <sup>1</sup>one’s superiors which finds expression in the propagation of a purportedly divinely underwritten universal moral code. When

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<sup>118</sup> In this connection, see also Nietzsche’s many notes on the ‘naturalisation of morality’ [e.g. at WP #462]. But for a dissenting view, see S. Gardner, ‘Schopenhauer, Will and the Unconscious’, section VI, ‘The Unconscious in Nietzsche’.

we look at Nietzsche's characterisation of Christianity as vengeful and therefore base or unhealthy and, moreover, as condemning as wrong precisely those drives that lead to the establishment of monotheistic religion in the first place, we will find that this account is based upon an investigation into the language of morality. Is it then simply a linguistic rather than an ethical inquiry? I shall argue that it is not and in so doing will make use of certain theses first introduced into philosophy by J. L. Austin. We shall also see that this account has been disputed, by A. Danto, on the grounds that its conceptual grounding is fundamentally flawed. The disputation is itself unsuccessful however, I will maintain, since it can be shown that it has misinterpreted the true intentions of Nietzsche's analysis of religion and morality. But before proceeding to examine the two main Nietzschean objections to religion (as escapist and as the product of *ressentiment*) in more detail, I would first like to briefly clarify Nietzsche's attitude toward the figure responsible for the genesis of the Christian religion: Jesus Christ.

### ***III 'Truly, too early died that Hebrew' [Z 98]***

In earlier chapters, I may have mentioned but I certainly did not explore at any length the attitude of Kant and Schopenhauer to the figure of Christ, whereas I am now going to characterise Nietzsche's position on Jesus. I make an exception in the case of Nietzsche because he, far more than Kant or Schopenhauer, was haunted by Christ: notoriously, he even titled one of his last books *The Anti-Christ*. That book is essentially a sustained polemic against the Semitic monotheistic tradition split into two parts: a preparatory analysis of what



Christianity – and its precursor, Judaism – represent in psychological terms, followed by a more specific psychology of the figure of Christ himself.

Nietzsche, it emerges, felt acutely that one should not confound Christianity as a movement with the historical figure of Christ: ‘One should not confuse Christianity as a historical reality with that one root that its name calls to mind [...] What did Christ deny? Everything that is today called Christian’ [WP #158; cf. AC #31, WP #164]. The thesis is scarcely an exceptional one and reminds one of similar remarks by certain Christians themselves, such as William Blake and Kierkegaard. What, then, was the true message of the historical Christ that, according to Nietzsche, was denied and replaced by the later church? According to Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*, Christ was physiologically so constituted as to be susceptible to pathologically extreme degrees of suffering and so consequently developed an ascetic and forgiving way of life with the purpose of avoiding social or interpersonal conflict to feel at home in a world that was, as Nietzsche put it, ‘undisturbed by reality of any kind’ [AC #29]. This physiological description of Christ as being disproportionately perturbed by the events of everyday life is undoubtedly highly speculative. But leaving issues of historical verification to one side for a moment, Christ’s pronouncements were thus taken by Nietzsche to refer to an individual psychological goal and it is this psychological “inner world” and not the eschatological fantasies of the evangelists that constitutes the true Christian kingdom of God (Nietzsche takes the tale of Christ’s cursing and withering of the barren fig tree in the Gospel of St. Matthew to be ‘a dreadful corruption’ by the Gospels [WP # 164]; and presumably Nietzsche feels the same way about Christ’s enraged overturning of the tables of the merchants in the temple). And although Nietzsche does come to

finally condemn Christ – in *The Anti-Christ* he calls Christ's physiological condition 'a sublime further evolution of hedonism on a thoroughly morbid basis' [AC #30] – this is only after a hesitancy on Nietzsche's part that suggests that Nietzsche ascribes to Christ a genuine nobility. Even in his middle period, when Nietzsche seems to have thought that Jesus *did* proclaim himself the son of God, he sympathetically adds that 'one should not judge too harshly, because the whole ancient world is aswarm with sons of Gods' [HATH #144].

Turning now to the question of Nietzsche's attacks on Christianity itself rather than on the person of Christ, it should be pointed out that Nietzsche, as I have suggested, characterises the Christian religion as being composed of two psychological strands that can both be subjected to evaluation by determining the level of power or strength – a term we shall be examining – they presuppose in their adherents. These two characteristics of Christianity are seen to be a desire for salvation from this terrestrial world and the fear of, and desire for revenge upon, a type of person whom one has already experienced as superior. Let us now assess, in turn, the plausibility and coherence of these two psychological characteristics of religion and see how they are then evaluated by Nietzsche. Initially, I will advance what I take to be the main thrust of each of Nietzsche's views more or less without criticism before then considering important objections to Nietzsche's description of each of the two characteristics.

#### *IV Christianity as Escape*

Nietzsche, in *Ecce Homo*, tellingly described the French Christian philosopher, mathematician and religious thinker Blaise Pascal as the most



instructive of all sacrifices to Christianity [EH 57], instructive because in his posthumously assembled *Pensées* – and particularly in those dealing with his so-called ‘wager’ argument – Pascal represents an explicit example of Nietzsche’s egotistical Christian, believing in God simply because of a subjective redemptive interest in the Christian religion’s blissful afterlife: ‘Pascal as type’ [WP #51]. Nietzsche contends – and it is a charge which is of course earlier to be found in the work of Feuerbach and later to an even greater degree in Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* – that all Christians are of this type, yearning for a painless *summum bonum* for themselves located beyond the reaches of this world. It is not only the case that ‘The Christian makes all existence revolve around the question of the salvation of man’ [WP #917] but that even more parochially the Christian makes all existence revolve around the issue of his own personal salvation: “‘Salvation of the soul’ - in plain words: “The world revolves around me”” [AC #43]. The desire for painless immortality finds natural expression in the doctrine of a personal God awarding us rewards in the afterlife and it is a personal God presumably because cold nature gives us little reason to believe in immortal reward and so, as our look at Yovel’s reading of Kant’s moral proof of God in an earlier chapter illustrated, our subjective human limitations arguably constrain us to imagine an anthropomorphic rewarder if we are to believe in a redemptive reward at all. The next question Nietzsche addresses as part of this first characterisation is why Christians are as concerned as they are with the next life and what this might indicate about them personally (Deleuze has aptly told us that Nietzsche asks, not the Socratic question ‘what is...’ but rather ‘who?’). Christians must be so obsessed about an afterlife, Nietzsche argues, because they experience this terrestrial life as dissatisfying and painful, an elementary but still



significant insight which Nietzsche shares with certain other atheists such as Feuerbach and Schopenhauer<sup>119</sup>. That is to say, if this life were felt to be inherently satisfactory then there would be little in the way of motivation to attain a heavenly state. It might readily be said in this connection that the very presence of the desire for salvation, like the presence of the emotion of envy, indicates a certain dissatisfaction as a condition of the possibility of its being held. Yet it should be pointed out that Christians like St. Augustine had already used this insight concerning dissatisfaction as a part of their theodicy, arguing that this world is painful because it is corrupt and needs to be escaped: its intrinsic unsatisfactoriness naturally leads us to God. Nietzsche however, advances beyond the insight of Feuerbach and Schopenhauer and thereby challenges St. Augustine by making the further point that this world cannot be intrinsically sorrowful because some humans do not feel the need to seek redemption: ‘Now, when suffering is always the first of the arguments marshalled against life, as its most questionable feature, it is salutary to remember the times when people made the opposite assessment’ [GM 47]. The Christian’s sense of terrestrial dissatisfaction, Nietzsche can be taken to be remarking here, is in a certain sense a matter of taste rather than a reflection of fact. Nietzsche then addresses the quintessentially naturalistic question of how

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<sup>119</sup> Schopenhauer writes that ‘To the hope of immortality there is always added that of a “better world”; an indication that the present world is not worth much’ [W II 467]. Likewise, Feuerbach remarks ‘Belief in the heavenly life is belief in the worthlessness and nothingness of this life. I cannot represent to myself the future life without longing for it, without casting down a look of compassion and contempt on this pitiable earthly life’, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), 161.

such a taste could arise in some individuals (but not in others). Nietzsche comes to the conclusion that Christians earning for salvation must be the ‘physiological casualties and the disgruntled’ [GM 72, GM 96, GM 102]. Supposing some individuals to be physiological casualties explains why they might experience this world as being unsatisfactory in a way that others would not. The main point encapsulated here, and it is a point that we touched upon in the previous chapter, is that if a given individual was well adjusted to the world, as some indeed seem to be, such an individual would not strive after deliverance from his present condition, as some indeed seem to do not. The physiological twist added by Nietzsche at this point is just that being well adjusted is primarily a biological matter. The body itself perfects the soul.

Individuals – it is specifically individual Christians who bear the brunt of Nietzsche’s physiological characterisations – who are excessively concerned with their salvation are, on this account, unhealthy or ill-adjusted: they simply cannot cope with being in this world without fabricating metaphysical consolations. This Nietzschean criticism is applied not only to Christians of course but also to adherents of other religions with rather similar soteriological structures to Christianity – particularly religions historically connected to Christianity, such as Judaism and occasionally also Islam: ‘Mohammedanism in turn learned from Christianity: the employment of the beyond’ [WP #143]. It is also applied to the work of philosophers such as Schopenhauer, whose account of aesthetic contemplation of the ‘grades of objectification’ clearly assumed a desire to escape the empirical world. The desire to escape this world is thus, for Schopenhauer and thinkers like him (although perhaps in a less graphic fashion in their case, with the arguable exception of Plato) less a philosophical

contention than a religious one. And such religious philosophies and philosophical religions of escape are, Nietzsche contends, in fact signs 'of profound sickness, moroseness, exhaustion, biological etiolation' [BT 11]; hence 'the almost inevitable bowel complaints and neurathensia which have plagued the clergy down the ages' [GM 17]. Those who want redemption are, by definition, having a hard time of it and Nietzsche thinks that this dissatisfaction and suffering can be successfully explained in physiological terms. Such physiological reductionism toward religion is in clear evidence in many of Nietzsche's late works – he is particularly enthusiastic about it in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and in *Ecce Homo* – and is also given great attention in his notebooks:

Preoccupation with itself and its "eternal salvation" is not the expression of a rich and self-confident type; for that type does not give a damn about its salvation - it has no interest in happiness of any kind; it is force, deed, desire - it imposes itself upon things, it lays violent hands on things. Christianity is a romantic hypochondria of those whose legs are shaky.

Wherever the hedonistic perspective comes into the foreground one may infer suffering and a type that represents a failure [WP # 781].

Christians are pictured here as physically degenerate and therefore their level of power or strength is evaluated as extremely low. Christianity is severely regarded as a religion catering for the weak and for the unhealthy, an institutionalised support system for the physically distressed and therefore as a phenomenon of little worth: 'To divide the world into a "real" world and an "apparent" world



[...] in the manner of Christianity [...] is only a suggestion of *decadence* – a symptom of declining life’ [TI 49]. In this way, then, Nietzsche can be said to reduce religion to a question of the (unhealthy) body. Nietzsche, at this point may also be put, considers the inevitable and inescapable shortcomings of religious people to be the consequence of certain ultimately physiological defects. In doing so however, Nietzsche has obviously made some significant and controversial claims about those who desire salvation and I will now question to what extent they are justified.

We might say that Nietzsche’s characterisation of Christianity as enervated and therefore worthless is comprised of two levels of allegation. First, the empirical suggestion that Christians are obsessed about the afterlife, which *prima facie* does not appear to be obviously untrue, at least in certain versions of Christianity: we could of course point to Christians such as Pascal, the theological utilitarians and Kant (who thought that happiness was an essential part of our ultimate goal, our *summum bonum*) here but we might also mention that no less a figure than St. Augustine, for example, concedes in this regard that ‘God is to be worshipped for the sake of eternal life and everlasting gifts and participation in that city on high’<sup>120</sup>. Nietzsche’s empirical claim is then followed by the secondary interpretation that this obsession with salvation must indicate a dissatisfaction rooted in a state of physical unhealth from which, given Nietzsche’s own concern with the value of power, it follows that it must be worthy only of abandonment or eradication [TI 99, AC #2]. Possible theoretical

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<sup>120</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book V, Ch. 18, p. 211; see also Book VI, Ch. 9, p.247: ‘It is, strictly speaking, for the sake of eternal life alone that we are Christians’.

objections to Nietzsche's hypothesis could however, be launched at either – empirical or interpretative – level of statement. So, might not the example of either a *physically healthy Christian* or a *Christian devoid of interest in the afterlife* be seen to falsify this aspect of Nietzsche's characterisation and evaluation of Christianity?

In his recent book on *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, Peter Poellner has argued against precisely this contention of Nietzsche's, finding fault with it by citing – and here Poellner is to some extent following the defensive work of the Christian phenomenologist Max Scheler – certain prominent cases where Christians were apparently very “healthy” by Nietzschean standards and even totally unconcerned with an afterlife and so, by extension, thereby neither weak, unhealthy nor unsatisfied. Admittedly, some clerics were famously unhealthy and Nietzsche's comic reference to ‘bowel complaints’ is no doubt a reference to a troubled feature of Martin Luther's life. Yet it seems improbable, an objector could maintain at this point, that a defective constitution is common to all clerics. In this spirit, as an instance of a healthy Christian, Poellner cites the example of St. Francis of Assisi as being ‘What Nietzsche would call physiologically well constituted’<sup>121</sup>. If allowed to stand, this apparent exception would of course cast doubt on Nietzsche's *interpretative* assumption that Christians are physiologically weak or badly constituted (and that this explains their being disgruntled). However, this specific objection does not seem to hold. It falters because, whilst for Schopenhauer St. Francis was indeed an example of

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<sup>121</sup> Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 239; for Max Scheler on the health of St. Francis, see his *Ressentiment* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 91-92.



healthy humanity denying the will to live [see W II 614], there is clear textual evidence to show that Nietzsche, whose opinion of asceticism was very different to Schopenhauer's, would not call St. Francis well-constituted. In an unpublished note he wrote with characteristic provocativeness of: 'Francis of Assisi, neurotic, epileptic, a visionary, like Jesus' [WP #221; the general notion of religious sensibility as being conditioned by epilepsy is present elsewhere in Nietzsche, see WP #135]. Poellner declares that there is no evidence to support this characterisation and – leaving aside the debatable question of whether we are to explain reports of St. Francis's stigmata in psychopathological terms – he seems indeed to be historically correct but nonetheless Nietzsche, confirming and reinforcing the standing of this particular unpublished note in *The Anti-Christ*, writes that the psychological type of 'St. Francis of Assisi is contained in the legends about him in spite of the legends' [AC 152]. We cannot determine the actual state of health of the historical St. Francis but we can at least note that Nietzsche was aware of such objections to his theory of the weak Christian and strove to counter them on grounds that, whilst not certain, are perhaps no more uncertain than those of the opposition.

Poellner's specific critical response to the *interpretative* historical claim that Christians are, as it were, born of poor health thus cannot be substantiated any more than can Nietzsche's original claim to the contrary. But Poellner also notes the absence, not only of physical ill health but also of any concern with salvation in the textual testimonies of historical literary Christians like Meister Eckhart and St Teresa of Avila. This acknowledgement attacks the first, more descriptive and empirical claim of Nietzsche's: that all Christians are, after the manner of Pascal, Kant or Augustine, centrally concerned with the afterlife. This level of



response to Nietzsche's characterisation of the Christian as morbidly obsessed with redemption and thus as unhealthy and furthermore as worthless seems better placed to succeed. Neither of these two prominent figures in the Christian literary tradition, Poellner rightly asserts, appeared to make all existence revolve around salvation. Quite the contrary: St. Teresa, in particular, in a well known declaration suggested that she would love God regardless of his punitive or rewarding abilities<sup>122</sup>. Poellner admits in this regard that in view of his dark sayings the mystic 'Eckhart might be thought to be unrepresentative' but nevertheless maintains that 'Teresa is a more orthodox figure'<sup>123</sup>. So according to Poellner, St. Teresa is a more orthodox Christian who seems to be unconcerned about the afterlife and so contradicts Nietzsche's theory that all Christians are physiologically maladjusted people who possess a need to escape from this hard, competitive world. But yet, for Nietzsche, once more the matter is quite to the contrary: he considers St. Teresa to be quite as exceptional as Eckhart and in a note entitled 'When the Masters could also become Slaves', Nietzsche advises us to 'Consider St. Teresa, surrounded by the Heroic instinct of her brothers - Christianity appears here as [...] strength of the will, as a heroic quixotism' [WP #216]. Nietzsche's response to Poellner's objection that not every Christian cares about the afterlife is that those who do indeed hold such a 'tragic faith' are the exceptions, in that they are strong people who have accepted conversion to Christianity: 'Truly many of them once lifted their legs like a dancer [...] And now I have seen them bent - to creep to the cross' [Z 198].

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<sup>122</sup> See Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 183, n. 17.

<sup>123</sup> Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 248.

According to Nietzsche, Christianity does not originate amongst the strong but it can be taken up by them, although for very different reasons than those by which it originally captured the imagination of the weak. As it stands this response is not particularly convincing however, largely because it needs considerable fleshing out in terms of explaining how strong people could accept conversion.

But all is not lost for Nietzsche's naturalised account of the Christian need for salvation: he does go on to provide such a naturalistic explanation of religious conversion itself. In answer to the question of how strong people like St. Teresa could submit to Christianity, Nietzsche further suggests that it is the strong's immoderate love of danger. Nietzsche believes that the strong oppose any 'calculation of prudence' [GM 13]. According to the Nietzschean interpretation, although Christianity arises in the hearts and minds of those who feel impotent in this world and so want or need a salvation of some sort, it can also convert the strong because of the strong's love of enduring hardship and their lack of prudence: precisely the opposite of a need for salvation. Out of a love for risk and danger the strong masochistically turn their aggressive and cruel instincts back upon themselves and thus the phenomenon that Nietzsche calls 'bad conscience' is born. Therefore, when it progressed from the lower, slavish orders 'Christianity no longer had to presuppose weary human beings but inwardly savage and self-lacerating ones' [AC 143]. There is, as he writes in a passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*:

an abundant, over abundant enjoyment of one's own suffering, of making oneself suffer - and wherever man allows himself to be persuaded to self-denial in the *religious* sense

[...] he is secretly lured and urged by his cruelty, by the dangerous thrills of cruelty directed against himself [BGE #229].

Unfortunately for Nietzsche, the difficulties that Poellner articulates so well are not wholly resolved by such an answer, for elsewhere Nietzsche – in a manner strikingly foreshadowing Freud’s account of the neuroses – argues that that our instincts are internalised only when the desire for cruelty cannot find outward expression and is channelled inwards. The internalisation of acts of aggression are therefore seen not as products of mere masochistic whim nor capricious experiment but are socially and politically contextualised. This is particularly the case in the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, entitled ‘Guilt, ‘bad conscience’ and related matters’, which attempts to understand bad conscience specifically and our modern moral and political capacities generally as products of an extremely violent kind of social enforcement posterior to the establishment of a *polis*:

I look on bad conscience as a serious illness to which man was forced to succumb by the pressure of [...] that change where he finally found himself imprisoned within the confines of society and peace [...] I do not think there has ever been such a feeling of misery on earth, such a leaden discomfort, - and meanwhile, the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their demands! But it was difficult and seldom possible to give in to them: they mainly had to seek new and as it were underground gratifications. All instincts that are not discharged outwardly turn inward – this is what I call the *internalisation* of man: and with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his ‘soul’. [...] Animosity, cruelty, the pleasure of pursuing, raiding, changing and destroying – all this was pitted against the person who had such instincts: *that* is the origin of ‘bad



conscience'. Lacking external enemies and obstacles and forced into the oppressive narrowness and conformity of custom, man impatiently ripped himself apart [GM 61, see also HATH #137, BGE #76].

Nietzsche thus sees a profound psychological purpose behind those 'monkish virtues' such as 'penance, mortification, self-denial' that Hume could only turn away from with aversion: the pleasure of internal instinctual discharge is detected. The secret lure of inner torment such as that which the strong, like St. Teresa, supposedly find in the Christian religion is thus interpreted as a partial (outward) denial and a partial (inward) expression of cruelty; an internal expression of a drive that is denied outward manifestation. Nietzsche calls this phenomenon of the self infliction of pain either 'internalisation' or 'bad conscience' and he explicitly connects it with the desire to believe in a monotheistic God of the Christian type in the following manner:

That will to torment oneself, that suppressed cruelty of animal man who has been frightened back into himself and given an inner life, incarcerated in the state to be tamed [...] has discovered bad conscience so that he can hurt himself, after the more natural outlet of his cruelty has been blocked, - this man of bad conscience has seized upon religious precept in order to provide his self torture with its most horrific hardness and sharpness. Guilt towards God: this thought becomes an instrument of torture [GM 68].

This now seems like a step towards a more coherent and psychologically tenable answer to the riddle of why there are individual Christians unconcerned about

salvation; for these are not said to be 'original' Christians but rather strong men and women denied any other way than inward to express their aggressive drives.

Suitably reformulated, Nietzsche's account might now run as follows: typical Christians, like Pascal and St. Augustine, are generally captivated by the thought of redemption and salvation and so are therefore weak and worthless by Nietzschean standards, apart from certain exceptional Christians, like St. Teresa, who, powerful and potentially cruel but with no outlet for their cruelty, have to internalise it. Such strong Christians therefore utilise Christianity as an 'enjoyable' way of suffering. The majority of Christians can still be seen to be thus indeed obsessed with personal salvation in the manner of Pascal or Augustine but pointing out counter-examples as Poellner does only marks out those converts who use Christianity as an internal vent for their exuberant strength and relentless, repressed cruelty.

Yet there remains an unresolved problem even in this reformulated account. The problem starkly emerges when we consider what Nietzsche means when he thinks that the strong have no outlet for their cruelty. For surely, it may be maintained, the strong, bereft of prudence as they are, have no reason not to outwardly express their cruel, aggressive instincts and follow an ethic of imprudent squandering. If, in other words, the strong hold within them a great passion for chance and insecurity, then they would assuredly let their animal nature run free even within the confines of the polity. Elements of Nietzsche's account of Christianity as 'ascetic', that is, as an escapist desire for heaven, are therefore highly problematic. But this is not because of the unexplained existence of simple counter examples, such as St. Teresa. Rather, it is because the further explanation of those counter-examples that Nietzsche does give fails

to account for why the supposedly strong favour self-destruction of a specifically Christian – rather than exuberantly antisocial – nature. ‘Heroic quixotism’ does not explain why the strong convert to Christianity when the greater heroism would appear to lie in ignoring it.

There is, then, an important shortcoming in the Nietzschean characterisation of religion as ascetic and escapist, at least in its present form. Nietzsche’s second attack upon Christianity however, will prove to be much more coherent under scrutiny. It is to this issue, then, that we now turn.

### *V Christianity as Ressentiment*

We have mentioned that Nietzsche seems in places to have thought that individual Christians, since they eschewed personally negotiating the conflicts and rigors of this world in favour of hoping for a painless afterlife, were to be naturalistically interpreted as disgruntled escapists, inventing worlds in which to enjoy the successes that this life denied them. One problem with this belief however, we noted, was that it apparently failed to account for those Nietzsche would regard as being healthy or strong Christians who did not express any such interest in a painless afterlife.

The equally important second reason Nietzsche had for believing Christians to be weak and worthless is that he thought that the Christian way of life is, in its unmasked and essential form, a specific way of domesticating or taking revenge upon those who Nietzsche thought were the more flourishing and dangerous members of the human species. Nietzsche thus attempts to expose the supposedly good and virtuous man as a vindictive and embittered, as well as



weak and wearied, individual. Once more, I will offer what I take to be the main thrust of Nietzsche's view more or less without criticism before subsequently interrogating it.

First of all however, I would like to very briefly mention – but only at this stage to mention – a certain background assumption to the argument that can be found throughout much of Nietzsche's work (and it is an assumption, no doubt buttressed by certain elements of Schopenhauer's thought, that I will return to in the next chapter). Namely, that Nietzsche appears to have induced a general law of nature and history with which to compare the actions of the religious people he brings into his argument. For example, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes 'I have followed every living creature, I have followed the greatest and the smallest paths; that I might understand its nature [...] where I found a living creature, there I found will-to-power' [Z 137]. This passage – however poetically expressed it may be – clearly suggests that Nietzsche has generalised the hypothesis of a barbarous nature by means of an inductive inference from facts observable in natural history and zoology. It is, as Kaufmann notes in his gloss, 'evidently offered in an empirical spirit'<sup>124</sup>. In this next passage I would like to

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<sup>124</sup> W. Kaufmann *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 206. Kaufmann has said of the concept of the will to power that 'Nietzsche based his theory on empirical data and not on any dialectical ratiocination about Schopenhauer's metaphysics', *ibid.*, 207; Cf. also the reiteration on 229. Others however, such as Poellner, think it a metaphysical theory similar in many respects to Schopenhauer's – see *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 268 – and yet others believe it to be a thought experiment (see K. Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966), 318). I am not going to examine any of Nietzsche's specific arguments for the will to power in this study however (though if pressed I would point out that it

look at, Nietzsche implies that he has generalised a picture of a nature essentially red in tooth and claw from an examination of human history: ‘the whole of history is indeed the experimental refutation of the proposition of a “moral world order”’ [EH 128]. From here, Nietzsche reaches the conclusion that there is ‘No goodness in nature’ [WP #850]. Now that we have simply registered Nietzsche’s important background assumption about the non-beneficent character of nature (and it is an assumption to which I will return in the next chapter), let us turn to the specifics of Nietzsche’s argument concerning what he calls *ressentiment*.

The approach of characterising Christianity as a product of *ressentiment* is most clearly developed by Nietzsche in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. There, Nietzsche undertakes an investigation of the development of our religious, moral and political language. An objector could perhaps make the immediate rejoinder here that since *On the Genealogy of Morals* is primarily an investigation of language (and Nietzsche indeed continually refers to ‘words’ and ‘ideals’ in the *Genealogy*), all Nietzsche is therefore doing in this book is linguistics, describing and criticising the language of an ethical tradition and not what is actually *done* in that given tradition. This question concerning whether examining the language of morality tells us about morality or just about language applies equally to Nietzsche, J. L. Austin and just about anyone who examines speech situations with an eye to their ontological import. Austin got around this difficulty by stating that speech did not describe an ontological state of affairs but actually contributed to it. And Austin was explicit that this was of ethical

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is given most prominence as an inductive inference in the published work), partly because even conceding to Nietzsche the will to power we are still left with a mass of problems in his philosophy of religion, as the next chapter will make clear.



significance: ‘A great many of the acts which fall within the province of ethics are *not*, as philosophers are too prone to assume, simply in the last resort *physical movements*’<sup>125</sup>. In what follows I will be arguing for the acceptance of two points: firstly, that the same kind of thing is true for Nietzsche and also, secondly, that Nietzsche consciously intended this to be an integral part of his account.

Nietzsche’s inquiry primarily involves embarking upon a historical description of the emergence of moral language so as to show that although in its declarations it purports to objectivity (that is, it claims to be reporting on matters of discernible ethical fact) it is in fact the instrument of subjective interests (the *Genealogy* could therefore fairly be said to be an ‘error theory of morality’ in something like J. L. Mackie’s sense and we might further say – and this will become clearer – that Nietzsche’s ethics is a mix of emotivism and prescriptivism). The idea of a historical approach to morality through a study of its language has been a recurrent theme throughout Nietzsche’s writing – emerging as early as *Human, all too Human* and surfacing in various other texts [see HATH #45; also D #26; Z 65] – but it is only in 1886’s *Beyond Good and Evil* that Nietzsche coined the definitive phrase ‘the slave revolt in morals’, where this phenomenon of stigmatising the enemy not only as opposed but also as evil begins to be concretised in a historical and not fortuitously religious setting. The psychological process is at this point and henceforth historically interpreted (in what would be wholly anti-Semitic terms, were it not for Nietzsche’s passion for the kings as opposed to the priests of Israel as expressed

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<sup>125</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to do things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 20.



in the *Anti-Christ* and his fervour for the Old Testament as opposed to the New in the *Genealogy*). ‘The Jews’, Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

achieved that miracle of inversion of values thanks to which life on earth has for a couple of millennia acquired a new and dangerous fascination - their prophets fused ‘rich’, ‘godless’, ‘evil’, ‘violent’, ‘sensual’, into one and were the first to coin the word ‘world’ as a term of infamy. It is this inversion of values (with which is involved the employment of the word ‘poor’ as a synonym of ‘holy’ and ‘friend’) that the significance of the Jewish people resides: with *them* there begins the *slave revolt in morals* [BGE 195 cf. also GM 19].

Yet although it has often been gestured towards, the Jewish and then the Christian slave revolt in morals does not receive anything like a comprehensive treatment until the first, short essay of Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where an etymology of the terms for ‘good’ (*gut*) in certain languages – German, Greek, Latin and Gaelic are Nietzsche’s chosen examples – provides him with a clue for comprehending the genesis of morality as we know it. Central to *On the Genealogy of Morals* is the insight that the word ‘good’ has not always had the same sense (thus the highly speculative pre-history of the *Genealogy* can be very roughly situated at a time after the acquisition of language but before the emergence of what we would recognise as morality). This is shown, Nietzsche thinks, by the fact that it has been opposed by two kinds of terms: bad (*schlecht*) and evil (*böse*) – hence the title of the first essay: “‘Gut und Böse’, ‘Gut und Schlecht’”. In what way have people tended to equivocate with the word ‘good’? Primarily, the word ‘Good’ has been utilised by a type of person that Nietzsche

characterises as the ‘masters’ or ‘nobles’ to designate their own aggressive nobility: ‘Good and bad are for a time equivalent to noble and base, master and slave’ [HATH #45, GM 12]. We will need to return to this initial notion of the noble man characterising himself as ‘good’ but I would first like to consider the second element of the slave revolt: the fact that, secondarily, the word ‘good’ is used by those who Nietzsche calls the ‘base’ or the ‘slaves’ to define themselves in contradistinction to the masters whom they, as an opening gesture, have already condemned as evil. ‘Good’ is a contrastive concept only for base, slavish souls.

It is important to point out, on the subject of the second way of using the term ‘good’, that Nietzsche says that the base’s condemnation of the noble man as ‘evil’ is not, as the noble’s condemnation was, an afterthought but rather ‘the actual *deed* in the conception of slave morality’ [GM 24, original italics<sup>126</sup>].

### ***VI The Slave Revolt in Morals: Performance Not Description***

It is crucially important to note that Nietzsche characterises the slave’s designation as a *deed*, and that this is a characterisation that Nietzsche emphasised elsewhere in the text: ‘Slave morality says ‘no’ on principle to everything that is ‘outside’, ‘other’, ‘non-self’ and this ‘no’ is its creative deed’ [GM 21]<sup>127</sup>. It is so significant because Nietzsche’s distinction between thought and deed in language clearly suggests that the latter is something like what,

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<sup>126</sup> It is extremely important to note here that this is *not* a quirk of translation; in this regard, see Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. K. Schlechta (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1966), vol. II, 785: ‘die eigentliche *Tat* in der Konzeption einer Sklaven-Moral’.

following the pioneering analyses of J. L. Austin, has become known as a ‘performative’ or a ‘speech act’, in the sense that it is not primarily or not just the transmission of information but that it also contains a performative dimension. From the perspective of recent philosophy of language, language is comprised – either wholly or partly – of actions, and previous linguistic philosophy has suppressed the discovery of this aspect of language by mistaking a product (the sign) for its condition of possibility (the speech act). As J. R. Searle puts it: ‘The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of a sentence in the performance of a speech act. To take the token as a message is to take it as a produced or issued message’<sup>128</sup>. Looking anew at Nietzsche’s account of the slave revolt in morals from the highly influential position of the speech act theory of linguistic communication, we can see that the slave’s condemnation of the strong as outlined in the *Genealogy* is clearly what has in recent times been called a performative act, since it is important primarily not for its meaning but for its accomplishments: it reverses the values hitherto venerated and aims to actualise guilty feeling and more behavioural predictability in the strong by ‘aping’, as Austin would say, a description. More specifically, Nietzsche only refers to the slaves’ speech (and not that of the masters) as a deed, suggesting that he reserved the term only for language without any descriptive validity (as indeed Austin seems to have done in the first few chapters of *How to do Things with Words*, before then radically concluding – in a

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<sup>127</sup> Again, Nietzsche uses the word ‘Tat’ here; Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, vol. II, 782.

<sup>128</sup> J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 16.



way that would influence Gilles Deleuze but not John Searle – that all language was in fact performative<sup>129</sup>). For Nietzsche, as for the speech act theorists, language is not necessarily just description; saying ‘you are evil’ is a condemnation, and a condemnation is not simply a report or a description but an act. The act of condemnation is however, clearly not the kind of explicitly performative act that Austin deals with in the opening chapters of his work. It is, instead, what Austin calls a primitive rather than an explicit performative and moreover, seems to belong to that particular class of performatives he calls *verdictives*<sup>130</sup>. Verdictives are those set of performative acts that, as the name suggests, pronounce a verdict upon a given party and as such belong to the realm of ethics and not simply linguistics.

Does anything stand in the way of our classifying the first slave revolt in morals as a speech act? Well, if we are to construe it as a speech act then we must surely be able to determine what kind of speech act it is according to the further division of performatives into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts that comes later in Austin’s *How to do Things with Words*<sup>131</sup>. With regard to these distinctions, the slaves’ condemnation is obviously a locutionary act (in that words with meaning are voiced) but it does not at first glance seem to be what this school of thought calls an illocutionary act, that is an act done in accordance with a social convention that accomplishes something *in the very act* of saying it (say, a judge in court passing a sentence, or a bride in church saying ‘I do’). Rather, it seems to be a perlocutionary act, which is the

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<sup>129</sup> Austin, *How to do things with Words*, 145.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

technical Austinian term for an act that accomplishes something *by means* of saying it (we might frighten someone, for example). Nevertheless, historically developed, the act can be seen to become an illocutionary act: a Roman Catholic priest telling a churchgoer he has sinned in the institutional context of a confessional has obviously acted in a way that an ordinary member of the public could not have done. Here however, there is clearly something of a problem, for it seems unclear how any such perlocutionary effect as the slave revolt in morals could be rendered by a priestly figure *without any conventions whatsoever to back him up*. Without already established religious conventions conferring authority upon the priestly figure there seems little reason for the initial condemnation of the strong to achieve its intended perlocutionary effect: Nietzsche has a good deal to say about the last pope – but what about the first priest? Or, as this point can also be put, who is going to be frightened by the counter-intuitive ramblings of some embittered old man wringing his hands at the margins of the human community? But, on the other hand, assuming such conventions already extant prohibits precisely what Nietzsche intends to explain and describe in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, namely, the emergence of the very first reversal of natural morality. This zone of enquiry is happily not a dead end however, and is helped out the apparent impasse considerably by Austin's albeit brief allusion to the very initiating of the procedures that enframe illocutionary acts. According to Austin, someone can initiate a set of conventions necessary for an illocutionary act simply by 'getting away with it'. Now, Austin notes that the terminology here employed is rather suspicious (by which he presumably

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 98.

means vague) but nevertheless regards ‘getting away with it’ as essential<sup>132</sup>. The priests first condemnation of the strong can, then, after all, be regarded as an illocutionary act and not just a perlocutionary one, since, although not surrounded by a setting of already existing convention it has ‘got away’ with suggesting, and therefore by instituting, such a surrounding.

So much for the potential objection that since *On the Genealogy of Morals* is primarily an investigation of language, it is therefore a contribution to linguistics, not ethics. We must now leave aside this question of the relationship between Nietzsche’s thought concerning the slave’s ‘revolt in morals’ and modern speech act theory in order to return and review Nietzsche’s exposition, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, of the first value assumption in human social history, that evaluation which preceded the slave revolt. The first value assumption was voiced by a human power elite referring positively and spontaneously to themselves, a phenomenon which Nietzsche describes as ‘a heated eruption of the highest rank-ordering and rank defining judgements’ [GM 13]. On this account, we can see that it is human agents themselves and not their actions that are the essential – or at least the original – subjects of ‘moral’ predication. The noble man spontaneously deems himself to be good, not to accomplish anything thereby nor even by measuring himself against an external standard. We might therefore venture to say at this point that the noble’s self ascription of the term ‘good’, the ‘rank defining judgement’ as Nietzsche puts it, has less of a performative force than the slave revolt in morals – although it would be inattentive to deny that a locutionary and possibly some perlocutionary effect is

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 30.



brought about by it (words are voiced by the nobles after all, and the slaves may well be rendered quite panicky by them). Nevertheless, given that the nobles do not seek any social changes by means of their locution but rather seek to express their self-pride, there is clearly a case to be made here for saying that the noble's 'rank defining judgement' has less a performative function and more a kind of 'emotive meaning' in C. L. Stevenson's sense: that is, it simply evokes or expresses an attitude<sup>133</sup>. It is a spontaneous cry of enthusiasm. This idea of emotive linguistic enthusiasm – whereby the noble 'I am good' can be roughly translated as 'I approve of myself' – seems to me to be a very Nietzschean one and further it is, I would like to now suggest, a crucial factor in the Nietzschean account as it is an intrinsic part of the very power or strength of these types: 'The noble method of evaluation: this acts and grows spontaneously' [GM 22].

To spell out precisely how this relates to the emergence of religion, in the pivotal section seven of the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche sites the slave revolt in morals at a time just after a supposed split in the social elite between the warrior and the priestly class<sup>134</sup>. The priests, driven by the will-

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<sup>133</sup> C. L. Stevenson, *Ethics And Language* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1965), 33.

<sup>134</sup> This type of social topography sketched by Nietzsche in the *Genealogy* certainly seems to fit the society of the ancient Celts, or at least the Celts as they were described by the Romans in Britain, i.e. as only possessing two social classes of distinction: the warrior and druidic classes. A very different story however, is to be found in Celtic self-description, at least when this came to be written down: the Welsh speaking peoples, for example (i.e. the pre-Anglo-Saxon peoples of Britain), attached immense importance (as is clear from the laws pertaining to the property that they were entitled to claim) to a class of professional poets and storytellers whose ranks could

to-power as much as anyone else, then enlisted the common man to help undermine the strong type<sup>135</sup>. The priests found willing accomplices in this venture because the base or slavish, who suffer from life, were looking out for some pretext to take their mind off their smouldering emotions of painful inferiority [GM 99]. The slavish man, the man prone to *ressentiment*, thus experiences things as painful – ‘everything hurts’ [EH 45] – in a way that constantly leads him to recriminate, to apportion blame, to impute, to accuse<sup>136</sup>. The priests so undermined the warrior type, with the help of the great majority, by condemning the virtues of the predatory elite – but only because they wanted to disparage the strong: ‘They raise themselves only to lower others’ [Z 119]. In

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only be entered into after a formal training in composition and after learning a common oral tradition of stories, poems and moral aphorisms: the Bards.

<sup>135</sup> Nietzsche does not attempt to explain why the Priestly and warrior class split, as more than one commentator notes; see, for instance, H. Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 48; see also S. Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (London: Athelone, 1993), 51-53.

<sup>136</sup> But does not everyone accuse and apportion blame? In the context of the free-will debate, it has been famously argued that even if we were metaphysically bereft of free will, eschewing emotional responses like resentment and blame would in any case be psychologically impossible: ‘A sustained objectivity of inter-personal attitude, and the human isolation which that would entail, does not seem to be something of which human beings would be capable, even if some general truth were a theoretical ground for it’, P. F. Strawson, ‘Freedom and Resentment’ in *Free Will* ed. G. Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 68. Nietzsche’s account of the noble’s apparent lack of concern with the slave however (alongside some of Spinoza’s remarks), might be thought to presuppose what Strawson and those influenced by him deny but Nietzsche might well answer this *empirical* point by suggesting that the supposed limits of our species as represented here are in fact merely the limits of individuals.



order to make their condemnation of the noble type and noble values more effective (in order, that is, to give it a greater degree of illocutionary force), Nietzsche argues that the priests and the weak who condemn the nobles themselves engage in a kind of wishful thinking with regard to the values by which they condemned that becomes downright self-deception: ‘When faith is more useful, effective, convincing than conscious hypocrisy, hypocrisy instinctively becomes innocent’ [TI 107, GM 108; WP #806; AC #39; AC #46]. This mix of rancour and the consequent self-deception through which it is played out, Nietzsche names *ressentiment*, which now becomes key term in Nietzsche’s work. It is this *ressentiment* based condemnation of the stronger by the weaker that is crucial in Nietzsche’s historical explanation of the emergence of religions and morality: ‘The slave revolt in morals begins by rancour turning creative and giving birth to values’ [GM 21]. Rancour and *ressentiment* not only give birth to values however, but crucially also introduce new words and concepts into the languages of man, concepts to underwrite the new values. ‘The *herd instinct* [...] finally gets its word in (and makes *words*)’ [GM 13]. This is why Nietzsche writes that the slave revolt in morals is a ‘workshop where *ideals are fabricated*’ [GM 31]. The words, concepts and ideals in question are of course those of a monotheistic religious and ethical vocabulary, which are now introduced into the evolution of a historical humanity which hitherto had supposedly only entertained legal categories like ‘barter, contract, debt, right, duty, compensation’ [GM 49]. It is therefore only now that the quintessentially religious concepts of ‘equality’, the ‘immortal soul’, ‘free-will’, ‘guilt’, ‘punishment’, ‘responsibility’ and ultimately, ‘God’ are introduced into human languages. Obviously, some more will need to be said about this.



Religion as we moderns know it (the polytheistic religion of the ancient Greeks is explicitly exempted), it is being suggested by Nietzsche, emerges at a specific point in the development of uncivilised society to mask and yet facilitate by its very language certain social changes – concerning the hitherto hierarchical structure of ‘heroic’ society – desired by the majority of people and their ‘clever, cold, deceptively superior’ [GM 98] priests. How does it bring about these changes? How does it make the aggressive and emotively self-loving nobility take their inferiors into consideration when deciding how to act? Well, the concepts of religion are used *prescriptively* to shatter the ‘pathos of distance’ that the noble caste of men feel towards their subordinates and this is done by introducing, apparently for the first time in human social history, the concept of a ‘soul’ or immaterial spirit that underlies the physiological differences and inequalities we see between physically distinguishable individuals. Thus are the noble caste persuaded that their (physical and psychological) inferiors are nevertheless their (spiritual) equals. As it may also be put, to facilitate the acceptance of a universal normative code of ethics prescribing altruistic virtues ostensibly based on an equality of men that their actual physical presence apparently contradicts, the priests invent the idea of an immortal soul: ‘It was their delusion to believe that one could carry a “beautiful soul” about in a cadaverous abortion’ [WP #226; for an almost identical text see AC 180]. Admittedly, this semblance of equality might be thought to be then erased by the extraordinarily inegalitarian Christian distinction, to be found in versions of Protestant Christianity but also in St. Augustine, between the ‘elect’ and the ‘reprobate’; yet it is wholly restored by the crucial *caveat* to be found in such versions of Christianity that we can never know whether a person is the former

or the latter; as John Calvin himself writes: ‘This can rarely be sensed by us (if it is ever possible), so it would be a more discreet plan to await the day of revelation, and not rashly go beyond God’s judgement’<sup>137</sup>.

To posit the idea of a spiritual soul beyond the body in this Christian way is to effectively suggest two extremely normatively efficacious things. First, and most importantly, as we have already acknowledged, it suggests – and this suggestion will find prime philosophical expression in Kantian ethics, of course – that all men are equally deserving of the same treatment because they are all truly alike, that therefore there should be no more hierarchy: “‘Equality of souls before God”, this falsehood, this *pretext* for the *racune* of all the base minded...’ [AC #62]. Secondly, the idea of a spiritual soul further suggests that a man’s own actions do not follow on from his specific physiology but rather from an incorporeal spring of free will that is capable of all kinds of activity, therefore allowing both punishment for criminal types to be seen as merited in terms of a default of responsibility and for the impotence of non-criminal types to be construed as voluntary asceticism or pacifism: ‘The reason the subject (or as we more colloquially say, *the soul*) has been, until now, the best doctrine on earth, is perhaps because it facilitated that sublime self-deception whereby the majority of the dying, the weak, and the oppressed of every kind could construe weakness itself as freedom, and their particular mode of existence as an *accomplishment*’ [GM 29]. This point is closely related to, though ultimately more physiological than, a similar claim by Schopenhauer concerning the immutability of character: ‘Judaism requires that man should come into the world as a moral zero in order

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<sup>137</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 62.



to decide now, by virtue of an inconceivable *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae* and thus in consequence of rational reflection, whether he wants to be an angel or a devil, or anything else that lies between the two' [PP II 238]. Of course, some recent philosophers have claimed that much less turns on the question of free-will than Nietzsche thinks, in that we can be justified in feeling morally responsible even if we are not the absolute causal starting point for our actions. And a rather different problem is posed by the fact that by no means the whole of the Christian tradition espoused the idea of free-will in the way Nietzsche seems to assume: so this Nietzschean observation will not worry, say, Calvin. The reconstruction of Nietzsche's argument against Christianity as formulated here, therefore, will not rely too heavily on his concerns in regard to the absence of free-will in humanity.

So much for our cherished ethico-religious notions such as equality, the soul, guilt and altruism<sup>138</sup>. These have been shown to be moral concepts that cloak the

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<sup>138</sup> For important qualifications and complications, see K. Ansell-Pearson's 'Introduction' to the Cambridge edition of Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and his *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially 126, where, for instance, it is rightly pointed out that in the second essay of the *Genealogy* justice is said to be invented by the nobility (and associated with the contractual relationship between creditor and debtor) [GM 45]. Nevertheless, it is important to note that by the third essay Nietzsche is back to linking justice with 'vengeance seekers disguised as judges with the word justice continually in their mouths like poisonous spittle' [GM 96]. Following a line of argument that is largely implicit throughout Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athelone, 1992), I would tentatively suggest the nobility invented justice as a non-egalitarian virtue *inter pares* – 'Justice at this first level is the good will, between those who are roughly equal, to come



truth of the self interest of one specific social party: the slaves, the dejected, the physiological casualties. But what about the concept of God Himself? What crucially remains to be mentioned in this account is that the priests also underwrite this idea of an equality of souls and their consequent responsibility with the further concept of a powerful, jealous and vengeful God. The God that emerges from this ‘workshop of fabricated ideals’ – itself essential to the slave revolt in morals – is a God who demands precisely those modes of behaviour that are anathema to the noble man in his original state. The priests are, as Poellner puts it, ‘glorifying a God who allegedly demands of them precisely the virtues which they alone are capable of exercising’<sup>139</sup>. And as Richard Schacht has argued, the two specific hypotheses of God and the soul may dialectically rely upon each other in so far as the soul needs the theological and philosophical intelligibility that the further concept of God can provide and in so far as the concept of God too relies upon the soul for intuitive evidence and, perhaps, a conceptual blueprint<sup>140</sup>. Nietzsche does not however, discuss why the monotheistic concept of God internal to the Christian tradition possesses precisely the attributes it does, nor – leaving aside the implicit and in any case ambiguous apparent reference to God’s infinity in his remark about the ‘Christian God’ being the ‘maximal god yet achieved’ [GM 66] – does he catalogue what those attributes are (nor is he therefore in a position to discuss whether they are collectively coherent). Instead, Nietzsche takes what we are in a

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to terms with each other’ [GM 50] – but this was then, *contra* the intentions of the noble inventors, requisitioned by the ‘slaves’ and universalised to apply to all.

<sup>139</sup> Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 231.

<sup>140</sup> R. Schacht, *Nietzsche* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1983), 131.

position to call a recognisably Kantian rather than dogmatically metaphysical approach to the issue: our concept of God is taken to reflect the demands of moral obligation: ‘God-the-Judge, as God-the-Hangman, as the beyond, as eternity, as torture without end, as hell, as immeasurable punishment and guilt’ [GM 68].

Far, then, from arising, as it did in Kant, from a necessary and to some extent beneficial tendency of the mind and as a necessary pre-condition of moral conduct; or as in Schopenhauer as a more or less unexplained temporary and local aberration of (Western) reason, the idea of God was tactically invented, Nietzsche suggests, by the priests as an anthropomorphic super-agent; an inflated judge to explain why we have equal souls and to threaten to inflict harm on those who chose not to follow the norms of the herd which preached respect and equality between responsible ‘souls’. According to Nietzsche, God is primarily the means by which the priests act at a distance upon the strong. The priests are said to influence the noble barbarian: ‘Only by arousing the belief that they have in their hands a higher, mightier strength – God’ [WP #140]. Theology has thus evolved as an effective answer to certain practical problems; an ontology where one might have expected only an ethics.

Nietzsche’s ‘God’ is thus primarily a Kantian God: a judge and not a creator. Nietzsche’s ‘God’ is <sup>a</sup> concept invented by the weak, partly to help them hope for a redemption that would suit them more than this life by granting them salvation and partly to try and both restrain and also wreak vengeance on the strong and healthy nobility, those who have a spontaneous emotive sense of their own value. It does this by attempting to frighten the noble type, already psychologically scarred by bad conscience, and by better securing the doctrines of the soul and

free-will. From the Nietzschean viewpoint whereby the sole measure of value is strength or power, monotheistic religions must therefore be found wanting: ‘What is the purpose of those lying concepts [...] ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, ‘free-will’, ‘God’ if it is not the physiological ruination of mankind?’ [EH 97, see also AC 175, WP #707].

Nietzsche has arguably given us in *On the Genealogy of Morals* an unnerving insight into the language of religion and morality, language that itself, in a non-descriptive – illocutionary – way, manifests rancour. In such a way can he condemn Christian morality by means of its speech, its words and ideals, and be doing more than the philosophy of language or linguistics. This second characterisation of monotheistic religion however, which is to say the characterisation of religion as a desire for revenge, also has the virtue of exposing the motivations of Christian feeling to be the very desires – hatefulness, vengeance, anger – that Christianity condemns: ‘The *motives* of this morality stand opposed to its *principle*’ [GS #21]. The argument of the *Genealogy of Morals*, therefore, shows Christianity to be contradictory and incoherent in addition to being a tool of the slavish and therefore an activity deserving of little merit. Before concluding our account of Nietzsche’s two-pronged attack on Christian theism however, I would like to counter an important objection to Nietzsche’s denunciation of Christianity that can and has been raised at this point.

### ***VII A Socratic Objection***



The objection that I have in mind has nothing to do with any aspect of the accuracy of Nietzsche's historical explanation. Although Nietzsche's narrative in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* certainly seems underdefended *qua* historical account, any objection to Nietzsche along such lines as these probably runs the risk of being as tenuously speculative as the account it criticises. I have therefore eschewed such an approach in favour of raising an objection that might be said to be typically Socratic. Typically Socratic? By this I mean that it attaches itself to the conceptual analysis of a word that Nietzsche might be thought to be misusing. It is also literally Socratic: in the *Gorgias*, the character of Callicles suggests that moral conventions are made 'by the weaklings who form the majority of mankind [...] in an endeavour to frighten those who are stronger and capable of getting the upper hand'<sup>141</sup>. Callicles' historical insight appears to derive from a rigorously empirical examination of the processes of nature or, at least, Callicles looks to such empirical findings in nature to support his thesis. He sees that in nature the strong always predominate. Since they do not in human society, morality must be an anti-natural ruse on the part of the weak. Callicles asserts that 'The truth of this can be seen in a variety of examples drawn both from the animal kingdom and the complex communities of human beings; right consists in the superior ruling over the inferior and having the upper hand'. From a necessarily limited number of examples, Callicles seems to have induced a descriptive law of nature, which he then contrasts with the kind of morality which Socrates expounds, consequently calling it mere convention, which is to say, unnatural. I have been arguing, as should now be

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<sup>141</sup> Plato, *The Gorgias*, 484. The following citation from Callicles can be located at 483.

clear, that this was also very roughly Nietzsche's methodology (though their respective approaches are not without significant differences, particularly concerning the *origin*, as opposed to the present *purpose* of the concept of justice<sup>142</sup>). Socrates however, then adumbrates the view that the amoral cannot be termed stronger since it is precisely the moral that actually hold power: to call the amoral both stronger and weaker is obviously to ascribe contradictory predicates to them at one and the same time<sup>143</sup>. Given that Nietzsche's position is in some respects quite close to that of Calicles, we should at this point ask whether this distinctively Socratic objection to Calicles can be unproblematically extended so as to apply to Nietzsche. When Nietzsche writes that 'The weaker dominate the strong again and again' [TI 87] or that 'harm comes to the strong not from the strongest but from the weakest' [GM 94], can he then on this view be seen to be making a contradictory statement? Nietzsche seems to be aware of the objection himself, apparently raising – but not answering – it in the guise of an imaginary interlocutor: 'Why do you talk about *nobler* ideals! Lets bow to the facts: the people have won [...] this intoxication has *succeeded*' [GM 20-21].

Others have also raised this objection. It was recently revised – though without reference to Socrates' argument – by Arthur Danto in his *Nietzsche as Philosopher*: 'One would think that strong is as strong does and that it is virtually inconsistent to say of x and y that x is weaker than y, but y succumbs to x'<sup>144</sup>. Danto clearly takes the Socratic line of believing that strength cannot, on pain of

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<sup>142</sup> See note 138.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 488-89.

contradiction, be predicated of those who are obviously subjugated in society by stronger parties. The fact that commentators have charged Nietzsche with such an inconsistency in this connection means that we should, at this point, feel obliged to answer this charge, despite it being fairly simple to spot where the chief problem with the argument lies. Before examining what I believe to be the correct way to vitiate Danto's argument against Nietzsche however, I wish to take an abbreviated look at one other possible answer to this charge of contradiction. In the end, the answer can be seen to fail but it is nevertheless illuminating to see how it does so fail, especially since it is a strategy that could be said to rely on certain hints found in Nietzsche's own texts.

The first answer to the charge of contradiction on Nietzsche's part that I want to examine is not, strictly speaking, an answer to the charge at all. For instead of denying the charge one could concede Danto's point about Nietzsche contradicting himself but then embrace it by stressing the fact that Nietzsche is an irrationalist, an anti-metaphysician, a deconstructionist or an existentialist (attempting, by contradiction, to indirectly touch upon the otherwise inexpressible). On all these readings, different from each other though they undoubtedly are, Nietzsche is fundamentally unconcerned with 'mere' logical inconsistency, which finds support in the fact that Nietzsche indeed seems to have occasionally explicitly rejected the laws of logic, including that of non-contradiction, on the – loosely Kantian<sup>144</sup> – grounds that beyond the world of our

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<sup>144</sup> A. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 186-87.

<sup>145</sup> These grounds are only loosely Kantian because Kant of course thought that the *Antinomies* section of his first *Critique* proved that reality in itself is timeless and spaceless rather than being temporal, spatial and contradictory. See CPR A 506 = B 534.



senses is a cosmos of flux, without entities to which such laws would apply [Cf. WP #516]. Probably the most celebrated exponent of something like this view is Paul de Man, who naturally makes the move of citing WP #516 as support for his picture of a ‘deconstructive’ Nietzsche: for once the principle of contradiction is put into question our assertions are ‘free’ from the constraints of logic<sup>146</sup>. But there are in fact two fundamental flaws that can be associated with subscribing to such a view, one of which is exegetical and one philosophical. In the first place, this position is only rehearsed by the mature Nietzsche in his *Nachlass* and it would therefore be quite uncharitable of us to lay too much critical stress on a view that never even made it into Nietzsche’s mature published works. More importantly, in the second place it can be pointed out that it clearly rests on a certain fallacy (which may explain why the position never made it into his late published work): the issue of whether enduring entities exist or not has no intrinsic bearing on the relationship between logic and reality, since even in a universe of ceaseless change, we should still not be able to say that the cosmos is *both* changing and acquiescent<sup>147</sup>. Moreover, even in a world without substantial entities we could still intelligibly predicate types of movement or change to the fluctuations: they can be fast or slow, viscous or fluid or even sluggish but getting faster. Here the referent to which we are ascribing movement or change would not be an object but *the event itself* – as Nietzsche himself at one point seems to admit, stating that there are ‘complexes of events apparently durable in comparison with other complexes – e.g., through the difference in

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<sup>146</sup> de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 124-125.

<sup>147</sup> See Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 193-194.

tempo of the event' [WP #552]. Even in a cosmos of ceaseless flux without enduring entities then, the laws of contradiction would seem to still apply and therefore to outlaw any apparent self-contradiction on Nietzsche's part<sup>148</sup>.

The second and more promising answer to the Socratic charge of contradiction however, would be to question the basic conceptual premises of Danto's accusation. For in Danto's argument the implication appears to be that the concept of strength in Nietzsche is reducible to and exhausted by talk about empirical socio-physical superiority. Yet it can be shown that this does not seem to be the case at all. Nietzsche is working with a concept of strength that is considerably broader than Danto has been willing to allow.

Although we do often mean by the word 'strength' brute, muscular ability, there are also many cases in quite normal linguistic usage where we mean something quite different but are nevertheless still far from speaking metaphorically. Expressions such as 'I will need you to be strong at your father's funeral tomorrow' demand an interpretation along very different lines, an interpretation that pictures strength in terms not of physical potency but of emotional balance, mental stability or being well-constituted. Moreover, there is good textual substantiation for an ascription of such non-physical view of strength as something like self-reliance to Nietzsche. For example, in the chapter 'What is Noble?' in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche explicitly states of the noble caste that 'Their superiority lay, not in their physical strength but in their

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<sup>148</sup> Another logically possible – but hardly very plausible – answer would be to interpret Nietzsche's seemingly contradictory passages as we interpret phrases like 'the blind see'; i.e. that those who were once strong are now dominated. Yet this reading seems to me not to remain true to the spirit of Nietzsche's writing.

psychical' [BGE #257]. Psychological strength is emotive self-sufficiency. On this interpretation then, Nietzsche's talk of nobility represents a profound sophistication of the Calliclean reading of conventional morality since strength is now defined in such a broadened way as to elude the Socratic charge that the immoralist of the Calliclean stamp is ascribing contrary predicates to one and the same subject at the same time. Nietzsche can consistently talk of the stronger – meaning more noble – being subordinated to the weaker and accordingly can consistently see religion as both socially dominating and a symptom of powerlessness at the same time. Arthur Danto's Socratic objection to Nietzsche's account of strength is therefore successfully pre-empted by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's second psychological characterisation of religion, this time as a desire for revenge against the strong, can therefore be said to be conceptually consistent, although its soundness of course relies upon the soundness of the admittedly scant inductive researches which Nietzsche conducted in the world of nature and human history (because it was the discovery of the will to power or something very like it that allowed him to assume that morality was motivated by drives opposed to its principle). The issue of their particular plausibility I shall revert to in the following chapter.

### ***VIII Conclusion***

It has been maintained here that Nietzsche's atheism is argued for along two cardinal lines. First, by not unreasonably suggesting that Christians are all essentially concerned with a beatific afterlife, a blissful 'beyond', which then shows them to be ill suited to this world and, at least by Nietzsche's unmerciful



standards, worthless. Their weakness on this account is questionable, I found Poellner suggesting, since certain Christians were apparently unconcerned with perpetuity. Nietzsche attempted to pre-emptively counter this objection with a supplementary account of strong individuals converting to Christianity out of heroic risk. But this amendment itself seemed to fail because the social controls that force people into internalisation of their desires would be countered by the truly heroic.

Nietzsche's second main attack on Christianity was based on an reading of nature and history that found these realms to be governed by strength. Since morality and religion claimed not to be so governed, Nietzsche claimed that they were unnatural, weak and therefore were without value. Nietzsche had an anthropological 'story' which detailed exactly how the weak moralists had subordinated the strong: they had invented certain ideals associated with monotheistic religion and brought about particular social effects by means of speech acts. We then examined a philosophic response to this kind of account that had been recently raised: that the strong could not be both subordinated and yet still strong. We then saw that Nietzsche did not actually mean brutal physical strength when he used terms such as noble and strong but rather meant a kind of emotive self-reliance. Nietzsche's account of the origin of religion in *ressentiment* thus eludes a certain Socratic objection (voiced in recent times by Danto) and maintains a certain internal conceptual coherence. We must, then, admit in conclusion that Nietzsche's analysis of religion as slavish therefore survives Danto's criticism largely undiminished, whilst his analysis of religion as escapist – thanks, in part, to Poellner's criticism – is left unconvincing.

Yet the question ‘why value strength over weakness?’ might well be asked at this point, especially since there remains an apparent conflict not only between Nietzsche’s *amor fati* and his obvious disgust with weakness but also between his thoughts on the eternal recurrence needing acceptance of the world as a whole and this extremely negative attitude toward human deficiency. We will render this point more perspicuous in the following chapter. Moreover, given that Nietzsche advocates the overcoming of theism and of theistic morality by an attachment to values of unprovoked strength, health and power, it follows that any kind of atheism would have to be similarly healthy and strong to gain acceptance in Nietzsche’s eyes. And this is indeed the case, as we shall also see in our next chapter.

Ultimately, it is Nietzsche’s own valorisation of health and nobility that are to be seen at the basis of his rejection of God. Nietzsche has no arguments against the miraculous basis of the historical religions of the type that we might associate with Hume nor has he any anti-theological arguments against the concept or the traditional proofs of God of the kind we find presented in the *Transcendental Dialectic* of Kant’s first *Critique*. Nietzsche’s objections to God would seem to be based entirely on value and not at all on ontology. Yet it may well be that Nietzsche’s most famous remark is that ‘God is dead’, which can be read as an apparently, if paradoxically, ontological claim. From the viewpoint of the conclusions I have argued for in this chapter however, we could maintain that that particular phrase, like the entirety of Nietzsche’s philosophy of religion, can be taken in a sense that is other than ontological: it can be taken to mean that the truth of the existence of a creator is an issue marginal to the central and

quintessentially Socratic question of how best a man should spend his time before facing his inevitable demise.



## 6. Nietzsche (2): Ressentiment, Truth and the Nature of Reality.

*One has unlearned the habit of conceding to this posited ideal the reality of a person; one has become atheistic. But has the ideal itself been renounced?*

Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* [WP #17]

### *I Victory without Argument?*

Recently, M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern have argued that Nietzsche's pervasive fascination with the Christian religion only really seems to have soured into the theoretical antagonism that we systematically analysed in the previous chapter after the completion of his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, despite what is standardly noted both by most Nietzsche-commentators and – therefore misleadingly – by Nietzsche himself in his *post-eventum* reflections on that particular text. According to Silk and Stern's – to my mind, persuasive – reading, Nietzsche, although no longer himself a practising or believing Christian at this point, nevertheless retained enough sympathy for the religion and its values and its practices to actually identify the expression of that faith with the 'Dionysian impulse' in *The Birth of Tragedy*, associating, for example, the Christian celebration of the Eucharist with quasi-Dionysian festivity<sup>149</sup>. But whatever we may think of the merits of that particular association, and although it may be worth noting that the early Nietzsche might not therefore have been an out and out anti-Christian, this insight does not effect

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<sup>149</sup> M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 121; see also 213 and 287.

the argument of the present thesis, as it is rightly regarded as a commonplace that matters stand quite differently with his later self. The later Nietzsche – who is the Nietzsche that we are concerned with in the present study – condemned the Christian religious tradition again and again in his writings, to the extent that many authors, from varying schools of philosophy, today regard Nietzsche as *the* critic of Christianity and, in particular, Christian ethics (although at the end of the present chapter we shall be in a position to see whether in fact Christian dogmas, values and practices need necessarily be condemned from the standpoint of the mature Nietzsche). The broad approach of Nietzsche's systematic anti-religious campaign, as we saw in considerable detail in the previous chapter, was to diagnose traditional Judaeo-Christian theism as being psychologically and – since Nietzsche seems to naturalistically reduce the state of the mind to the state of the body – physiologically unhealthy. Three religious psycho-pathologies were diagnosed by the mature Nietzsche: an ascetic escapism sought by terrestrial discontents, a kind of resentment, which essentially involves self-deception, that was expressed by those who felt themselves inferior to some 'other', and the psychological masochism which somewhat ptolemaicly supplemented the escapist account, with regard to those strong and dominant types who nevertheless embraced Christianity, such as St. Teresa of Avila. We have thus encountered what seemed to Nietzsche to be the three principal forms of religion's historic perversion of the human species: the figures of *ressentiment*, 'bad conscience' and the 'ascetic ideal'. These three forms of religious psychopathology are independently treated by Nietzsche in the three successive essays of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, giving that particular text a profoundly anti-religious organisation.

These specific Nietzschean diagnoses of religious impulses were intricately formulated. Nietzsche's account of the escapist 'ascetic ideal', for instance, though it failed to account for the presence of (in Nietzsche's sense) 'strong' Christians, was supplemented by an account of 'bad conscience' which attempted to do precisely that – although this itself, we had to concede, was not a wholly satisfactory account because problems still remained concerning the precise motivation of internalisation by the 'strong'. More impressive were Nietzsche's apparently empirical investigations into the historical and linguistic 'slave revolt in morals'; investigations which adequately fended off certain objections that we raised. The further point that I would like to make here in this chapter is that these psycho-physiological investigations clearly carry within them the axiological implication that atheism would be a belief system characterised by a more advantageous human relationship to terrestrial reality. Nietzsche, it appears fair to say, seems to make of atheism a healthy alternative to the escapism, bad conscience and *ressentiment* of theism. But what is not said here in Nietzsche's account in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and related texts is anything that would really guarantee – rather than simply imply without argument – the purported health of atheism. Yet that the *onus probandi* lies with the theist rather than with the atheist is of course a historical contingency and one that we well know has reversed over time. From which it follows that just because Nietzsche has arguably shown theism to be unhealthy – or has at least cast some doubt upon its health – by means of the physiologically reductionist arguments that we examined at some length in the previous chapter, it does not in fact necessarily follow from such a position that atheism is therefore any the more healthy and valuable: atheism might turn out to be adhered to by the atheist



for unconscious reasons just as escapist – and just as resentful – as those that drove the priests and adherents of theistic religion.

In this chapter, then, I want to accomplish four main tasks. First, I want to establish that Nietzsche does in fact view atheism as being potentially subject to *ressentiment* and therefore as being as unhealthy as religion. Second, I want to demonstrate that Nietzsche also characterises atheism as pathological in a further sense in so far as it is potentially in league with what he calls the ‘will to truth’, which is associated with the ‘ascetic ideal’. Thirdly, I would then like to argue that there is, nevertheless, a way of interpreting Nietzsche so that there remain no obvious self-referential difficulties in Nietzsche’s own atheism. However, in arguing that we can interpret Nietzsche as escaping inconsistency on these points I should not be taken to mean that Nietzsche’s atheism thereby escapes criticism *tout court*. On the contrary, I will be maintaining, a certain charge of artificiality or favouritism may well afflict Nietzsche’s affirmation of one mode of the will to power at the expense of another (this constitutes the fourth and final point that I wish to argue for here). In other words, even if atheism can be shown to be healthy and theism shown to be unhealthy by Nietzschean standards, it nevertheless still remains to be shown why, if everything is to be reduced to the will to power, one particular mode of expression of that will is any better than another. I will be maintaining that this problem, which is a rather different problem to the one of self reference, is the real downfall of Nietzsche’s naturalistic approach to religion. To be as fair as I can to Nietzsche however, I will look at a new way of reading – or reconstructing – Nietzsche’s argument against Christianity’s peculiar expression of the will to power that has recently been proposed by Keith Ansell-Pearson. I will be claiming that although the

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logic of Ansell-Pearson's attentive argument will prove to be faultless, it nonetheless might be thought to be inconclusive because one of its empirical premises is open to dispute. First of all however, I would like to examine Nietzsche's view of atheism as being potentially subject to *ressentiment* and will do so initially by means of a heuristically instructive reference to certain of the psychoanalytic doctrines of Sigmund Freud.

## ***II Psychoanalysis and Ressentiment***

The similarity between Freud's thought and that of Nietzsche could easily be, and often is, exaggerated. Having said that, there are, as was mentioned in passing in the previous chapter, some striking structural similarities between Nietzsche's account of 'bad conscience' as the internalisation of aggression and Freud's in some respects similar account of 'neurosis'. I would now like to argue that there is a further *prima facie* similarity between the general structure of Nietzsche's and Freud's criticisms of religion. To demonstrate this I will of course in the first place have to give some indication of the substance of Freud's views concerning religion. Briefly stated, Freud argued – originally in a paper entitled 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices' and published in 1907 – that religious practice often has the ritualistic character that seemed to him to be typical of the obsessional neuroses he had had clinical experience of in psychoanalytic practice, an insight which then led him to surmise that, like obsessional neurosis which, on the psychoanalytic reading, attempts to expiate guilt for some unacceptable thought or deed by repeated rituals, religion and its sacraments and ceremonials might also be based on a way of assuaging guilt, an



argument from analogy that Freud then attempted to confirm with highly speculative historical and anthropological backing in texts such as *Totem and Taboo* (where this guilt was notoriously traced to a purported primitive parricide), *Moses and Monotheism* and *The Future of an Illusion*, where this highly speculative account of religion as guilt allaying is complimented by an analysis of religion's rather different role in fulfilling our wishes (a function of religion which was also sporadically explored by earlier atheists such as Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity*, as well as by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche). This, in short, is the widely accepted view of Freud's reading of the Semitic monotheistic religions: religion is psychoanalytically interpreted as a reaction to guilt and an expression of wish fulfilment. Yet this is far from being the whole story, for on the other hand, atheism itself is not exempt from the investigations of Freudian psychopathology and *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* is probably the Freudian text that goes the furthest in this regard.

As is well known, Freud's work is broadly composed of two distinct but overlapping types of text: case studies of certain mental disorders and the rather more systematic works on psychology that are meant to illuminate them from the position of an overarching theoretical standpoint. *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* is an example of the former type of text: a case study of a child who suddenly developed some socially disruptive behaviour traits. Alongside his restless side however, the child simultaneously developed what we could call a religious fixation, which manifested itself in, for example, a tendency for compulsive praying and for repeatedly making signs of the cross. Yet the child's religious obsession was, crucially, accompanied by an irreligious or atheistic streak: so when his mother introduced him to the lessons of Biblical



scripture, the child automatically responded with cynical objections and doubts<sup>150</sup>. Now, we might expect a thinker such as Freud, who considered religious ritual to be a psychopathological means of guilt expiation, to psychoanalyse the child's religious tendencies and conclude the analysis there. The cynical objections to religion we might expect to be seen as healthy and therefore disregarded as material for psychoanalysis. But what Freud also does is psychoanalyse this *atheistic* side of the young boy, thereby suggesting that atheism, too, is pathological in the relevant sense. It is worth citing a little of this interesting passage:

His old love for the father [...] was therefore the source of his energy in struggling against God and of his acuteness in criticising religion. But on the other hand this hostility to the new God wasn't an original reaction either; it had its prototype in a hostile impulse against the father.<sup>151</sup>

This analysis of atheism is a remarkable though (as far as I am aware) overlooked illustrative point in the texts that can be taken to constitute a Freudian theory of religion; for here atheism is read as a fully analysable psychologically determined phenomenon. Irrespective of its specifics (which are

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<sup>150</sup> S. Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* in *Penguin Freud Library*, Vol. 9 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 298.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 302. I have used this quote from Freud's *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* to make a similar point about atheism and psychoanalysis in my M. A. thesis, *Atheism and Agnosticism in Modern Continental Philosophy*, which dealt with phenomenology and psychoanalysis., although I have rewritten the surrounding paragraphs for this thesis.

too involved to go into here), this case study well illuminates the point that with regard to the question of our relationship to God, whether the relationship is one of faith or one of disbelief, there is no, as it were, ‘non-pathological position’ according to Freudian psychoanalysis: no standpoint upon the question of God can be taken up without a psychoanalyst being able, at least in principle, to determine the reasons for the psychological attractiveness of that belief to any given individual. Regardless, then, of the eventual truth or philosophical coherence of the theoretical positions concerned – the psychoanalyst *qua* psychoanalyst is simply not concerned with this question – neither atheism nor theism can regard itself as the psychologically healthy alternative to the other. The popular reading of Freud as, purportedly after the manner of Nietzsche, dismissing the Semitic monotheistic religions as unhealthy *simpliciter* is consequently highly misleading since, within the true framework of psychoanalytical theory, no ‘healthy’ position can be looked to so as to contrast it with. The tangential remarks, oblique references and derisory asides that indicate an atheism at the heart of Freud’s theoretical writing must therefore be taken to constitute a concerted though nonetheless a personal standpoint: a literature – rather than a philosophy – of atheism.

As a philosophic description of Freud’s views on religious matters, the summary just given above is no doubt inadequate, perhaps grossly so. But my oversimplified synopsis serves its present purpose if it is simply taken as an illustration of the fact that attacks upon the psychology of theistic religion need not necessarily carry within them the implication that atheism be any the more healthy. And this in fact appears to be the case, I now want to argue, for the Nietzschean genealogist as much as it is for the Freudian psychoanalyst.

Our look at Freud casts a certain amount of indirect light upon Nietzsche's theory of religion because in certain texts, which could otherwise easily be overlooked, Nietzsche seems to find atheism to be the outcome of not entirely healthy psychological tendencies. In a note from the *Will To Power*, for example, Nietzsche argues against supposing atheism to be healthy *tout court* in the following way:

The underprivileged [...] need victims so as not to quench their thirst for destruction by destroying themselves (-which would perhaps be reasonable)...This scapegoat can be God - in Russia there is no lack of such atheists from *Ressentiment* [WP #765].

Here Nietzsche is clearly sketching a theory of atheism as unhealthy – it might be ‘reasonable’ for such atheists to destroy themselves, he tells us – and his use of the technical term *Ressentiment* in this note signals that it is a theory along the same lines as his theory of religion as slavish, i.e. as espoused not for its own intrinsic merits but rather, self-deceptively, in order to denigrate some other party. And although this note was admittedly unprepared for publication, it nevertheless indicates a pattern of thought that does find expression in those of his writings which found their way into his published work: a passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, tells of the so-called ‘English’ – though I take it that Nietzsche actually means ‘Scottish’ here<sup>152</sup> – psychologist's

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<sup>152</sup> I take it, that is, that Nietzsche is referring primarily to Hume. Thus when Nietzsche writes in the *Genealogy* of ‘These English psychologists [...] looking for what is really effective, guiding and decisive for our development where man's intellectual pride would least like to find it (for example, in the *vis inertiae* of habit, or in forgetfulness or in a blind and random coupling of ideas



‘subterranean animosity and *rancune* towards Christianity’ [GM 11]. We have every reason to suppose that what Nietzsche means in this passage by ‘subterranean *rancune*’ is precisely unconscious *Ressentiment*. Also noteworthy in this connection is a passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche disdainfully talks of an ‘indignant man’ who is said to rage at God [BGE #26].

It is apparent from such passages as these that Nietzsche seems prepared to allow that atheism as much as theism could be fuelled by *ressentiment*, his technical term for the tendency which gains pleasure from the prior criticism of others based upon universal criteria that are believed to be but are in fact *not* valued for their own sake, instead being self-deceptively espoused precisely to denigrate the other party. However, it might be thought that such remarks as those we have just quoted are too infrequent in Nietzsche’s works for us to confidently interpret Nietzsche as suggesting that atheism can be *ressentiment* based. To this I reply that we could certainly hope for more elaboration on this topic from Nietzsche but that, few though they may be, the very existence of (at least the published) quotes I have just cited do constitute real evidence for attributing to Nietzsche such a view as a I have here propounded.

If atheism can be based on *ressentiment* though, does it follow that it always is? Not necessarily. The atheist evidently can be subject to *ressentiment* but there is no indication from Nietzsche that he is always so subject. It should therefore be clarified that Nietzsche’s critique of atheism is not that engaging with theistic

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or in something purely passive, automatic, reflexive and thoroughly stupid)’ [GM 11] it may be remembered that Hume’s account of our nature does stress both habit – in his monumentally philosophically influential account of causality, for example – and the mechanistic coupling of ideas through resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect.

religion, as atheism necessarily does, in some sense always perpetuates that theistic tradition and thereby *always* exhibits traces of unhealthy infatuation with one's supposed target. (Although I will not examine the wider implications of this here, Nietzsche therefore could not be said to agree with Freud's view as articulated in the succinct 1925 text, 'Negation', where he writes that 'The content of a repressed idea or image can make its way into consciousness on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of taking cognisance of what it repressed'<sup>153</sup>. On such an interpretation, the negations of theism could be interpreted as expressions of a repressed interest in their subject matter<sup>154</sup>. It is important to note this because if this point about atheism having a suspicious inbuilt reference to theism was indeed the substance of Nietzsche's attack, then any comeback to the charge that, given that Nietzsche himself was actively negating Christianity he was therefore espousing an unhealthy atheism, would be ruled out.)

It might at this stage be worth summarising the conclusions reached so far in the present chapter: taken together and amplified in the manner that I have suggested, the passages from Nietzsche that we looked at earlier suggest that according to Nietzsche atheism *can* be subject to one of the dramatic arguments

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<sup>153</sup> Freud, 'Negation' in *Penguin Freud Library* Vol. 11, 437-438.

<sup>154</sup> The application of the Freudian model of negation to the theoretical position of the atheist was first suggested to me by a reading of David Berman's paper 'Disclaimers as Offence Mechanisms in Charles Blount and John Toland', in M. Hunter and D. Wooton, (eds.) *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 255-272. Berman however, applies this model to the denial of atheism, suggesting that some theists are unconscious atheists; whilst I am applying it to the denial of theism, suggesting the reverse.



that he himself first brought against Christianity: namely, that it expressed an unconscious desire that was symptomatic of the need of a subjected humanity to define themselves as good (and therefore think well of themselves) in contradistinction to some superior, dominant and strong other who makes them feel inferior and whom they have already stigmatised as base. In this case, such subjects of *ressentiment*, by virtue of not having a natural and spontaneous good feeling about themselves, have to establish the conditions – which include conceptual conditions, formed in the ‘workshop where *ideals are fabricated*’ – under which the semblance of such a self-righteous feeling can arise.

In an earlier chapter, I wrote of Nietzsche’s original reflections on *ressentiment* relying for their plausibility on how convincing we find Nietzsche’s insights concerning human motivation. This new account of atheism from *ressentiment* also relies on such a provision. But it might also be vulnerable to a further objection concerning the issue of self-reference. What I mean is that this particular analysis of atheism as born of *ressentiment* that we have extracted from some of Nietzsche’s writings might be thought to be problematic for the coherence of Nietzsche’s thought as a whole because Nietzsche’s analysis of Christianity could be characterised as itself subject to *ressentiment*, i.e. driven (the argument runs) by a resentful expression of the will to power and so as not a healthy alternative to religion at all. Such charges as this are in fact fairly common in some sectors of the secondary literature and are surprisingly consequential, since they entirely undercut Nietzsche’s value critique of religion as unhealthy by implicating that very critique in the pathology it intends to expose. I shall say more about such problems of self-reference shortly. But before my attempt to answer such complaints, I would like to point out that



Nietzsche thinks that atheism can also be motivated by yet another – and no more healthy – drive. ‘The will-to truth’.

### *III Will the Truth Set Us Free?*

But first, a flashback to Plato. In his *Republic*, Plato notoriously thought it good that the guardians of his eponymous political state should actually be deceived about their ancestral origins, a standpoint in defence of deception which is explicitly against his own view in the *Charmides*, where we hear that ‘the discovery of things as they truly are is a good common to all mankind’<sup>155</sup>. For the guardians of the *Republic* at least, then, the discovery of the true, the discovery of things as they truly are, is not a good. But his position in the *Republic* seems little favoured today (except by Nietzsche): in everyday life we tend to believe that finding out the truth about things is intrinsically good and philosophers have tended to share the everyday belief captured in the *Charmides*. Nietzsche however, almost uniquely – although Max Stirner is one other exception that I can think of in this regard, and I will return to briefly discuss his contribution to the debate – doubts precisely this. Such doubts against truth that Nietzsche entertains have the consequence that to argue that Nietzsche espoused atheism not out of *ressentiment* motives but simply because he genuinely – i.e. without self-deception – believed it to be true and assumed that the truth should be known is not a way out of the impasse of self-reference because it can connect atheism to what Nietzsche calls the ‘ascetic ideal’.

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<sup>155</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 389; *Charmides*, 166 d.

What is meant by the thought that wanting the truth is intimately connected with the ‘ascetic ideal’? Well, in the previous chapter we have seen that Nietzsche thought that the Christian search for salvation was indicative of a certain badly constructed physiological type, in so far as it was assumed that healthy people satisfied with this world would have no reason to search for another, ‘ideal’, one. And we saw in the chapter before that that Nietzsche interpreted the Schopenhauerian search for salvation as also indicating a ill-constituted physiological type because Schopenhauer too was suggesting that the contemplation of a – in Nietzschean terms – vague unreal world was better than engaging with our own terrestrial environment. Similarly, here Nietzsche is arguing that the search for, or the acceptance of, truth as a *telos* external to the individual indicates that an individual is setting up an extrinsic standard of value, which further indicates that the individual in question is dissatisfied with his own autonomous evaluations. This is of course a restatement of the now rather familiar Nietzschean point that someone who was physiologically well set up would not need look outside himself for a source of value. Clearly, Nietzsche is not rejecting the (any) concept of truth, he is rather rejecting the all-pervasive value it is accorded by some people. For to seek to accept things simply because they are true without reference to one’s own desires, might be thought to express a certain lack of belief in the worth of one’s own desires. But might there not be circumstances in which this lack of belief in one’s own desire is validated? According to one type of Christian philosophical self-understanding, for example, because this world of rapacious exploitation and competition, which we contribute to, is in itself corrupt and inherently unsatisfactory then we are right not to trust our desires. Nietzsche’s further insight, which is aimed to



counter such Christian self-understanding, can be captured by the suggestion that since not all individuals experience this world as needing to be redeemed, then the feeling of corruption must itself be a symptom of something more subjective. This 'something more subjective' Nietzsche takes to be an, in principle, empirically confirmable physiological weakness. As it may also be put, Nietzsche's contention that if such individuals as Christians were less exhausted they would not desire the calm contemplation of some unchanging reality is supported by the fact that some individuals do not in fact desire such escape.

On such a view as Nietzsche's, even scientists and scholars in the humanities and elsewhere are therefore to be seen as 'sufferers' searching for solace and comfort by an external standard by which to comport themselves and escape: 'Science as a means of self-anaesthetic' [GM 117]. This highly unusual insight into the ultimately physiological nature of the search for truth clearly emerges in Nietzsche's discussion of Socrates in *The Twilight of the Idols*, where the famed Socratic craving for rationality and truth is caricatured as an escape from Socrates' own ultimately physiological disorders (his ugliness and 'auditory hallucinations'). Of course, such a diagnostic case study of Socrates as undertaken in *The Twilight* is as highly speculative as was Nietzsche's case study of Christ or St. Francis in *The Anti-Christ* and cannot really be empirically checked because of a similar scarcity of historical evidence. What I would now like to do, therefore, is not to look at this – or any other – specific case study but to continue explaining and expanding Nietzsche's account of the psychological and physiological roots of truth seeking, to at least be prepared to check the consistency of this account with the rest of Nietzsche's thought.



The desire for truth as a goal, ‘the will to truth’, is probably most rigorously subjected to a detailed psychological analysis in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which traces this kind of escapist psychology to a certain type of deficient physiology. As I have already suggested, the truth seeking man, much like the religious man motivated by escapism (much like St. Francis, or Jesus, or even like Schopenhauer, who Nietzsche took to be tortured by his own sexuality and seeking escape in art and the Upanishads) is stigmatised by Nietzsche as being physiologically degenerate and for the same kind of reasons: if a man was well constituted then according to Nietzsche he would not be inclined to search everywhere for a value that was external to his own desires and which to some extent judges and corrects them. Searching for the truth is, Nietzsche thinks, a way that some people escape from themselves, from selves they experience as – but will not admit to be – relatively impotent and unsatisfying. Following the analysis in Poellner’s *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, we might say that there are in fact three specific characteristics that the desire for truth might be thought to share with the religious man’s search for and devotion to God. Each of these three associations, taken separately, would warrant the identification that Nietzsche draws but as Poellner points out, they are often found concurrently<sup>156</sup>. The first key presumption of this account is that truth, like God, is seen by some people to be an intrinsic good; that is, that the attainment of a state of grasping the metaphysical or absolute truth is seen to be valuable in itself, whatever the character of reality turns out to be. A second assumption of this account of truth seeking that is shared by theism is that truth can, by certain

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<sup>156</sup> Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, pp. 114-117.

individuals, be seen to be an unconditioned reality external to them that will function as a final place of contemplative rest. Indeed, at one point Nietzsche refers to salvation as ‘that finally achieved state of total hypnosis and tranquillity [...] as ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’, ‘being’, as an escape from every aim, every wish’ [GM 103-104]. Thirdly, Nietzsche’s account of the truth seeking man and the religious man share the view that contemplation of their desired object carries with it a normative guide for their actions that gives them a value that otherwise they would not feel they possessed, as though certain modes of life were necessarily legitimated by certain truths and certain other modes of life were not, even though we might desire them.

If all this appears highly eccentric it might well do to further mention at this point that Nietzsche’s sustained attack upon the absolute adherence to truth is not absolutely unique in the history of modern philosophy. One can think, for example, of Max Stirner’s text *The Ego and Its Own*, where precisely the same point is captured thus:

When you were seeking the truth, what did your heart then long for? For your master! You did not aspire to *your* might, but to a mighty one [...] As long as you believe in the truth, you do not believe in yourself and you are a - *servant*, a - *religious man*<sup>157</sup>

Stirner came to his revolutionary insight whilst engaging with the work of his neo-Hegelian predecessor, Ludwig Feuerbach, an atheistic philosopher whose central line of argument in *The Essence of Christianity* did not begin with a demonstration of God’s inexistence – it seems to accept this denial as already

proved – but rather examines the phenomena of religion, which it breaks down into various components, the most important of which for our present purposes being indirect self-realisation. Religion is seen by Feuerbach as being an indirect self-consciousness of our ‘species-being’. Despite his atheism, Feuerbach therefore retained a belief in the divinity of God’s attributes: ‘Why is a given predicate a predicate of God? Because it is divine in its nature; i.e. because it expresses no limitation, no defect’<sup>158</sup>. Relinquishing a belief in a transcendent Christian God but retaining a belief in that God’s attributes as the ‘divine’ attributes of our species would be, Feuerbach thought, no longer alienating but a liberating worship of ourselves as a species (the early Marx similarly talked of religion as ‘alienation’<sup>159</sup>). But Stirner goes much further because the human species was, for Stirner, still an idealistic abstraction as autocratic as a transcendent God, as contrasted with the concrete individual. Stirner refuses to see why any of the divine attributes – which include truthfulness – have, in the absence of that divinity, an intrinsic claim on the behaviour of the individual as opposed to the community. For although truthfulness might be necessary for the continued existence of the community and therefore might be revered, with some

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<sup>157</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 312.

<sup>158</sup> Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 24.

<sup>159</sup> Marx said that all criticism begins with the criticism of religion but I take it that what he meant was that Feuerbach had already obviated the need for further discussion of it: Marx to my mind never engages with religion in a direct and serious manner. Alisdair MacIntyre’s book, *Marxism and Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1969), does not offer a lengthy discussion of the Marxist theory of religion but rather tries to show how Marxism, *via* Hegelianism, has theological conceptual roots.



prudential justification, as an expression of the ‘species being’ of the community, it is arguably not necessary for the continued existence of the individual and so need not necessarily be regarded with reverence by the individual. Stirner, in other words, fails to see why we have more obligation to the species and the virtues pertaining to the species than we do to ‘God’: both the law of God and the needs of the species are abstractions, in Stirner’s eyes, and should not be favoured over the concrete needs of the individual. Feuerbach’s Promethean contribution to the philosophy of atheism is thus given a decisive egotistical twist by Stirner, who attempts to destroy what he believes to be a residual idealistic illusion: that truth and values like it have a value independent of our concrete decision to promote them for our own partisan, individual ends.

The similarity between Nietzsche and Stirner on this precise issue of abandoning an absolute attachment to truth as a goal is evidently pronounced and needs little in the way of further gloss. For both, propagating atheism by appealing to categories of truth and believing that the truth should be known is a left over from the religious tradition which uncritically accepts the idea of truth as an intrinsic good. ‘Honest atheism’, as Nietzsche maintains: ‘is therefore *not* opposed to the ascetic instinct as it appears to be; instead it is only one of the ideal’s last phases of development’ [GM 126]. Thus, as Nietzsche understands it, the ‘honest’ atheist can believe himself to be anti-religious but actually be illicitly perpetuating the religious, ‘ascetic’, ideal:

All these pale atheists [...] believe they are all as liberated as possible from the ascetic ideal [...] and yet I will tell them what they themselves cannot see [...] this ideal world is simply their ideal as well [GM 118].

Nietzsche is remarking that even the atheist can be religious in this broader, fugitive, sense, a fact also implicitly noted by Stirner who, in the context of a discussion of why he opposes avowed Christians and free thinking atheists (“Rationalists”) alike, wrote that:

If one buffets single traditional truths (miracles, unlimited power of princes), then the Rationalists buffet them too and only the old style believers wail. But if one buffets truth itself, he immediately has both, as *believers*, for opponents.<sup>160</sup>

Nietzsche is not absolutely unique, then, in questioning the value of truth in modernity. But where he is more innovative is in his emphasising the role of truth in the tortuous process of Christianity being strangely responsible for producing its own gravediggers. In his later works, Nietzsche sees Christianity as directly contributing to a massive crisis of values in Western civilisation. Christianity is so involved in this crisis by its emphasising and cultivating the virtue of truthfulness to the extent that we are always duty bound to tell the truth; whilst all the time it bases this normative doctrine on a set of interlocking beliefs (such as God and the soul) which themselves will not survive eventual scrutiny at the hands of the very ‘will-to-truth’ they support. Nietzsche therefore foresees the end of Christianity *at the hands of its own morality* and remarks that ‘the sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and of history’ [WP #1]. The process of increasing secularisation, interpreted by

Nietzsche as Christianity dying by its own hands by fostering the value of truth, is a process for which Nietzsche generally reserves the term ‘nihilism’ – a subject to which I shall revert in the concluding remarks of the present chapter.

This now brings us to the second issue of self-reference: the problem of Nietzsche’s own atheism being seen as part of this atheistic contradiction and completion of Christianity and therefore as, self-defeatingly, sharing a continuity of moral essence with Christianity. For if Nietzsche traces atheism to the unhealthy maximisation of the will to truth, then a self referential strategy might be deployed with regard to Nietzsche’s own atheism. Such a self referential strategy would obviously involve reducing Nietzsche’s atheism to the expression of a badly constituted physiological type, with the result that though Christianity on the Nietzschean reading might still be a symptom of terrestrial deterioration, the gain for atheists would be slight because anti-Christianity of the Nietzschean form would no longer be anything particularly healthy either. And many commentators on Nietzsche do only provide him with just one motive for espousing atheism which they then trace back to the ascetic ideal of truth for truth’s sake that Nietzsche associated with religion. The implication to be drawn from such accounts is clearly that Nietzsche, in attacking the ascetic ideal, is once again undermining his own philosophy. According to the view under consideration, Alexander Nehamas was right to claim that: ‘In fighting the

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<sup>160</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 46.



ascetic ideal, Nietzsche (and everyone who follows him) is actually perpetuating it'<sup>161</sup>.

#### ***IV Against Ressentiment, Against Nihilism***

Nietzsche – as we have seen at some considerable length in the previous chapter – attacked the Western monotheistic religious tradition for being unhealthy in certain specific ways (it was ascetic, subject to *ressentiment* and ‘bad conscience’). Yet he thought much the same of Eastern culture: unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche did not consider atheistic Buddhism to be liberating in any way and this alone should probably have made us doubt whether Nietzsche was unconditional in his estimation of atheism. In this chapter it has now emerged that Nietzsche sometimes charges atheism with complaints similar to those which he brought against religion. Atheism can potentially be ‘subterranean *rancune*’ towards Christianity or it can be one of the last phases of the ascetic ideal: it can, in other words, be smouldering *ressentiment* or yearning escapism. But whether this surprises us or not, it should lead us to question the way in which atheism can be considered to be a healthy alternative to religion. The most plausible candidate for a healthy alternative to religion on Nietzsche’s terms would have to be one that emerged spontaneously, as we largely analysed Nietzsche’s idea of healthy nobility in the last chapter as the ability to acknowledge one’s own values independently of any exterior legitimating power

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<sup>161</sup> Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 130; see also M. Clarke, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 191, 23; and Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*, 100-101.

(‘God’ or even ‘Truth’). But there are, an objector could mention at this point, other characteristics of nobility in addition to spontaneous emotive self-reverence, such as the excellence of courageous imprudence (and in this regard we have already examined the self-endangering character of the noble type in the previous chapter, where we saw it could potentially lead to ‘bad conscience’), so we should not lay too much stress on spontaneity. My answer to this is that imprudence *is* a characteristic but it is nevertheless not as important a characteristic, of nobility as is self-reverence, as seems to be demonstrated in the expansive characterisation of nobility to be found in section 287 of *Beyond Good and Evil* (where we read that ‘it is the faith which is decisive here [...] some fundamental certainty which a noble soul possesses in regard to itself’). We can therefore turn to Nietzsche’s other thoughts on atheism with an already formulated question in mind: can atheism be associated with this spontaneity of the noble man as described in *On the Genealogy of Morals*?

The answer to this question is: yes, there can be a spontaneously noble atheism and the basis for such a claim as this – alongside its very elucidation – is to be collected from Nietzsche’s own texts. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* itself, the noble or warrior class is insurrectionary by nature, and it is therefore by implication non-religious (at least prior to the advance of ‘bad conscience’). By means of illustration, after his description of the emergence of the organisation of the early Christian church, Nietzsche remarks that in stark contradistinction to this emergence, ‘The instinct of the born ‘masters’ (I mean here the solitary predatory species of man) is basically irritated and unsettled by organisation’ [GM 107]. Spontaneous aggression against Christianity is invoked in the first person in *Ecce Homo*: ‘If I wage war on Christianity I have a right to do so,



because I have never experienced anything disagreeable or frustrating in that direction' [EH 48, see also EH 51, EH 85]. In such self-characterisations, which are repeated throughout his philosophical autobiography, Nietzsche is not taking revenge on Christianity by condemning it on the basis of an exterior legitimating (moral) standard, nor is he trying to establish certain facts about the universe. Rather, he instinctively desires the destruction of Christianity and he acknowledges this desire for what it is without trying to self-deceptively mask that desire with an appeal to 'higher', more moral motives. Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo* is obviously accommodating himself to his own sketches of the noble man in *On the Genealogy of Morals* as instinctively aggressive toward priestly religion. And it follows that if we take such remarks seriously then there could in principle be an atheistic type who is naturally aggressive but not unhealthy by Nietzschean standards. But is there any further reason why we should take these remarks seriously?

It is true that the simple intelligibility of the concept of an instinctively destructive type within Nietzsche's philosophy does not secure its existence, not without making explicit further assumptions at any rate. Up to a point however, Nietzsche's assumption that there are human types who act aggressively to power that is not their own can be defended as something more than a merely speculative and internally coherent hypothesis (but only up to a point). Briefly stated, this is because any plausibility that such remarks may have derives from Nietzsche's aforementioned empirical researches in nature and history which found an essentially aggressive impulse at the heart of human motivation and nature. I shall not make further study of the plausibility of these researches in this study, for reasons that will become obvious in the concluding section of the



present chapter but it is enough for present purposes to point out that if we accept the postulate of the will to power then we can in principle also accept the existence of atheists who destroy out of spontaneous aggression.

Yet few philosophers have seriously analysed Nietzsche's remarks upon atheism itself, with the result that Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment* or his theory of the will to truth are often referred back upon themselves, supposedly subjecting Nietzsche's account of religion to a critique which is basically taken to be a natural extension of Nietzsche's own philosophy. Yet these attempts are not only all bound to fail from my standpoint in this chapter but it is also worth noting that they further arguably cast doubt on their own plausibility by claiming with one voice that Nietzsche's motives in this regard are all of a certain kind, whilst differing amongst themselves as to whether they should derive Nietzsche's atheism from either the motive of *ressentiment* or that of the will to truth. In any case, either attempt fails. The attempt to portray Nietzsche as himself weak and riddled with *ressentiment* because he is simply responding to theism – as exemplified in Paul Ricoeur's remark that Nietzsche's 'aggression against Christianity is too full of resentment'<sup>162</sup> – fails because Nietzsche's striving to be seen as spontaneously and self-consciously attacking Christianity – without recourse to any exterior legitimating power – strongly suggests that Nietzsche's attack was part of a noble style of life that is destructive but not necessarily self-deceptive. Nietzsche fully accepts that he is 'waging war' on Christianity and does not try to mask that war by subordinating it to another cause (the true, the

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<sup>162</sup> P. Ricoeur, 'Religion, Atheism and Faith' in A. MacIntyre and P. Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 59-98, 68.

good). Ricoeur therefore, fails to prove the specifically self-deceptive, rather than merely reactive, character of Nietzsche's own atheism. *Ressentiment* as we have – following Scheler and Poellner – more precisely defined it here necessarily involves self-deception with regard to values that are in reality not held for their own sake, and so is therefore to be distinguished from what continental philosophers influenced by Deleuze and analytic philosophers influenced by Strawson have often called the 'reactive' attitudes (resentment being taken to be the emblematic reactive attitude in both cases). Simple reaction (a *riposte*, for example), which is certainly involved in Nietzsche's attack on Christianity, could arguably be taken to indicate the potential presence of fully blown self-deceptive *ressentiment* and might perhaps be taken to be grounds for the further examination of that re-action against Christianity to see if any self-deception is in fact involved somewhere on Nietzsche's part. But by itself however, reaction *per se* is not sufficient to prove the presence of *ressentiment* and Ricoeur has done nothing to provide any further argumentative and investigative support to connect Nietzsche's obvious reaction with the further presence of self-deceptive *ressentiment* with regard to values.

The attempt to portray Nietzsche as subject to the will to truth, on the other hand, also fails. This fails because we can say that Nietzsche does reject truth as a goal for his philosophy but that he sometimes, as in this particular case, uses the truth as an expedient (and in any case, would not the avoidance of truth at all costs, regardless of our own aspirations, be just as much of an 'ascetic ideal'?). The following statements would seem to be quite unequivocal in abandoning the reverence of truth *qua* truth with regard specifically to the falseness of Christianity: 'Ultimately the point is to what end a lie is told. That 'holy' ends



are lacking in Christianity is my objection to its means' [AC 56, see also EH 132: 'It is not error as error which horrifies me at the sight of this...'; WP #251; GS #123]. In all such passages as these, only one of which was not prepared for publication by Nietzsche, the issue of the truth of the Christian religion is wholly subordinated – though seemingly not identified, in the manner of pragmatism – to that of its value. But if it does also happen to be untrue as well as worthless – and Nietzsche explicitly states that it does – then we have little reason to blame Nietzsche for sometimes exploiting this expedient for polemical purposes (a specific application of Stirner's more general principle, 'Truths are material, like vegetables and weeds; as to whether vegetable or weed, the decision lies in me'<sup>163</sup>). After all, the 'critic of Christianity cannot be spared the task of making Christianity contemptible' [AC #57].

Nietzsche, we might say, identifies not one atheism which is unhealthy but rather three kinds of atheism. All are identified by their motivational background: an unhealthy and self-deceptive atheism born out of *ressentiment* which aims primarily to disturb theists; an apparently more detached but in fact just as unhealthy atheism that aims at the straightforward goal of establishing the facts about the universe but thereby inflates one of the traditional attributes of God – truth – into an object of respect and worship itself; and finally, an insurrectionary atheism born not out of a self-deceptive reaction to others who have been experienced as better nor from thankful servility to an external value such as truth but out of an insurrectionary disposition itself standing in a closer relationship to the will to power.

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<sup>163</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 313.



### *V Secularisation, History, Inexorability*

At the outset of the present chapter I set myself four tasks to accomplish. So far in this chapter I have tried to defend three out of the four proposals which were initially mentioned. Firstly, that Nietzsche sees atheism as well as theism as potentially being based on *ressentiment*; secondly, that he also sees it as being potentially subject to the ascetic ‘will to truth’ and thirdly, that Nietzsche’s atheistic philosophy could nevertheless escape those common charges of self-reference, at least in principle. This naturally now leads us to my fourth aim and what is without doubt an unresolved problem, perhaps the unresolved problem, of Nietzsche’s theoretical work on religion: namely, that even if an examination – be it metaphysical or empirical – of Nietzsche’s views concerning human motivation and the will to power was to authoritatively conclude positively in Nietzsche’s favour, this would still not obviously support a philosophically sustainable non-partisan basis for preferring the discharge of power characteristic of nobles over the discharge of power that we find in Christianity. From the third person standpoint – i.e. from a standpoint which does not merely reflect Nietzsche’s own subjective opinions or preferences, be they aesthetic, political or even unconsciously or physiologically determined – there is no obvious way to normatively discriminate between them in a non-arbitrary manner. Nietzsche might, it is true, be reconstructed on non-naturalistic lines, as, say, a phenomenologist of value, but whilst this may go some way towards dignifying Nietzsche’s own valorisations, such phenomenology’s limits are such as to prohibit any reasonable attempt to accept those values as our own. In this spirit,

Keith Ansell-Pearson has stated that the coherence of evaluating the relative merits of a strong, abundant will to power over a weak impoverished one on the principle of the will to power must seriously be questioned:

Can the will to power serve the role of principle in the critique when, for example, Nietzsche discovers in the first essay of the *Genealogy* that the slave revolt in morals which reflects a degenerating life shows itself, when viewed historically and in the wider context of culture, to have played an important role in the cultivation and discipline of the human animal and has even served to deepen it? Is it not the case that such a distinction between ascending life and descending life - what we may call Nietzsche's discrimination of will to power - stands in contradiction to a standpoint which strives to be beyond good and evil? Does not such a standpoint affirm life in its totality?<sup>164</sup>

It is certainly the case that other well-known elements of Nietzsche's thought – such as his doctrine of the eternal recurrence, the idea of *amor fati* and the magnanimous notion of the 'innocence of becoming' – do not 'discriminate' life in this sense and do indeed appear to serve to affirm life in its totality, yet Nietzschean 'genealogical critique' seems not to do this, leading us to suspect that the partisan valorisation it contains at its heart is incompatible with the wider framework of Nietzsche's often coldly impersonal and detached thought. So, even if Nietzsche's initial assumptions about the will to power are granted it still therefore does not follow from his genealogical analysis that religion is valueless and that it should be abandoned. At times Nietzsche seems to recognise

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<sup>164</sup> K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1991) 107.

this: even leaving aside those aspects of Nietzsche's work such as the eternal recurrence, *amor fati* and the notion of the 'innocence of becoming', there is an observable tendency in Nietzsche's genealogical investigation itself which does lead him in this direction. Indeed, we might say that Nietzsche is so far from unambiguously and unconditionally accepting the hypothesis of the worthlessness of religion that he habitually admits that the phenomena that he at once condemns as slavish, ignoble and base also actually fascinate him with their profundity, intelligence, interest and danger. So it is that in the same place as he exposes the depravity of the priestly type, Nietzsche also writes that man 'first became an *interesting* animal on the foundation of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priest' [GM 18]. And in the second essay of the *Genealogy*, after giving expression to his own theory of 'bad conscience' Nietzsche remarks: 'Let us immediately add that, on the other hand, the prospect of an animal soul turning in upon itself, taking a part against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, puzzling, contradictory and *momentous* on earth that the whole character of the world changed in an essential way' thereby arousing 'interest, tension, hope' [GM 62]; and elsewhere, and perhaps most importantly, Nietzsche states that one of the enormous advantages of Christianity is that it 'granted man an absolute value' [WP #4]. Given, then, that Nietzsche's rejection of God and religion is based on precisely such considerations of value – rather than on the more usual ontological considerations – there would seem to be some justice in the claim that there are no objective grounds for a rejection of religion in Nietzsche.

This, and not the problem of self reference, is the real downfall of Nietzsche's criticism of religion. For even if we follow Nietzsche as far as postulating a will



to power, this is still not justification enough for overthrowing Christianity. By his own lights, Nietzsche should accept – as he arguably occasionally does – Christianity as another valuable expression of the will to power. Any further choice on our part subsequent to a genealogy of Christianity as to whether we are to commit ourselves to identifying with the Christian tradition or whether alternatively we are committed to attacking that tradition, would then seem to be a dilemma resolved by individual decision alone – Kierkegaard or Nietzsche?

Before leaving Nietzsche however, I want to be as fair to his powerful and influential attack on religion as I can and so would like to mention, although only rather schematically, one recent attempted solution to this problem of artificial valorisation and point out why it seems to me to not to be conclusive.

Keith Ansell-Pearson appears to have espoused the view that Nietzsche sides with a strong affirmation of the will such as that of the noble man over a weak one such as that which we find in Christianity, not out of prejudice or favouritism but ultimately in order to overcome a long term suicidal nihilism of the will. As it may also be put, Nietzsche chooses, given the alternatives of religious *ressentiment* and noble affirmation, to affirm and he chooses this way, not because of considerations about strength being better than weakness but rather as part of a counter-movement against ‘the possibility of a crippling nihilism’ that attends ‘the advent of the death of God’<sup>165</sup>. That is to say, on the Nietzschean account, because Christianity leads to its own death and so ultimately to nihilism and the cessation of willing; the choice is not between two expressions of willing (strong and weak) after all but rather between willing as

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 151; see also 107, 122.

against denying the will. This historical and cultural slide from monotheism to nihilism by means of the will to truth is indeed a significant strand within Nietzschean thought (and Ansell Pearson describes Nietzsche's account of the internal deterioration of monotheism in much more detailed terms than I can do justice to here). But in response to it, I would like to point out that because such nihilism could also potentially be overcome by siding ever more vehemently with a return to the traditional forms of religion that staved off the devaluation of all values for so long, then what becomes crucially important here is the validity of Nietzsche's recognition, already foreshadowed in Schopenhauer (but hardly vouchsafed on that account), of the 'fact' of the demise of Christianity. Because if Nietzsche is wrong about the inexorability of the decline of the Christian faith – if, that is, the process of nihilism can be stopped, reversed or avoided – then it follows that Christian values themselves might successfully stave off the nihilism that threatens to engulf us; which again makes the Nietzschean critique of religion arbitrary: a subjective choice between two expressions of the will. Nietzsche's failure in the matter of discrediting religion might thus be above all his failure to feel the pressure of the resistance to secularisation. History, not Nietzsche, will definitively resolve the question of the inexorability of Christian decline. But given that there are at least some indications to the contrary (including the partial renaissances of religion that I mentioned in my very brief sociological digression at the beginning of the previous chapter) then it seems to me far from being certain that Christianity is absolutely doomed to the dissolution that would prevent it from providing humanity as a species with the values and existential strategies that Nietzsche insists it requires. And if Nietzsche has made such an unnecessary concession to secularisation in the way

that I have suggested, then whilst it has always been fairly uncontroversial to maintain that the problems which Nietzsche addresses are predominantly Christian ones, it would now also be equally valid to argue that a return to Christianity and its practises and values should be seen as a natural extension of those views about our species and our culture for which Nietzsche was, and still is, notorious.



## **Conclusion**

*A reversion, a turning back in any sense is quite impossible - but all priests and moralists have believed it was possible - they have wanted to take man back, force it back to an earlier virtue...*

Fredrich Nietzsche

*When everything is moving at once, nothing appears to be moving, as on board ship. When everyone is moving toward depravity, no one seems to be moving, but if someone stops...*

Blaise Pascal

*A solitary person cannot help or save an age, he can only give expression to the fact it is going under*

Søren Kierkegaard

### ***I: Concluding Remarks On Kant and Schopenhauer***

Although many of the problems addressed by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche could not themselves be considered Kantian problems, they are nevertheless problems initially confronted from within a broadly Kantian framework, and this remains true even if subsequent argumentation on the part of either Schopenhauer or Nietzsche greatly deforms that framework. To take one

example, although Schopenhauer clearly owes a massive debt to Kant's understanding of the ideality of space and time, he suspected an incompatibility between this ideality and the notion of a pluralistic world of the thing in itself and in his attempt to resolve this issue with initially phenomenological considerations concerning what he called 'the will', he radically transformed Kant's critical philosophy into a vast panoramic vision of metaphysical agitation partly concerned, in its normative mode, with questions of ethical asceticism. And to point to another instance, when Nietzsche encountered Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism, although a prominent feature of his eventual response would turn out to be a violent rejection of Schopenhauerian 'quietism' and despair, this would be a rejection that did not radically question many of the aspects of the Schopenhauerian universe. What this might be taken to suggest is that Schopenhauer's arguments can best be understood through their opposition to those of Kant and that Nietzsche's arguments can similarly best be understood through their opposition to those of both Kant and Schopenhauer. Such was indeed one of the guiding assumptions of the present study. As a result, Schopenhauer was not criticised at any great length for his initial acceptance of transcendental idealism, nor was Nietzsche criticised unduly for himself criticising what might be regarded to be an essentially a Kantian God at the expense of the living Christian God. Rather, what I provided in this study might be said to be an account of the internal development and criticism of a certain Kantian tradition; not the only one to be initiated by Kant, to be sure; nor one whose continuities are wholly free from links with other traditions but nonetheless surely one whose arguments at certain key points of internal conflict

were both intriguing enough and powerful enough to merit study. What were these key arguments?

Among the arguments and positions I have examined in this study, the following in particular seemed to me to be especially worthy of highlighting. In the first place, Kant's critical philosophy, which – to re-emphasise – unquestionably provides the principal philosophical framework within which both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's work is to be understood, shifted God out of ontological consideration on wholly epistemological terms by characterising God negatively as existing outside of space and time and then by construing human knowledge on partly empiricist terms which demanded that objects of knowledge appear only within space and time. It was also impossible, Kant maintained, for God to unambiguously reveal Himself to us through scripture. Nevertheless, Kant also argued that the mind was naturally lead to posit a God. I took it that the combination of these factors permitted us to call Kant a deist. Kant also argued that our commitment to morality naturally lead us to postulate God. I however, argued that there were serious objections to Kant's moral proof of the being of God. More specifically, I argued that even if Kant was correct in suggesting that, as sensible finite beings or 'beings of the world' as he himself put it, we needed motivation to act morally and that we were compelled to act in such a moral fashion, that motivation could in fact be supplied by entirely earthly ends – such as those suggested to me by MacIntyre's neo-Aristotelian account of morals – and need not necessarily be those wholly otherworldly theological ends summoned by Kant. This left the Kantian metaphysic, certainly agnostic but also arguably liable to be read in atheistic terms. Such theologically negative consequences of the Kantian project were devastatingly exposed by Arthur



Schopenhauer in the elaborate re-working of Kantian idealism that is *The World as Will and Representation*.

I argued that Schopenhauer never argued directly for atheism in his metaphysics but that his acceptance of such an atheism was obviously implicit in the very structure of the metaphysics with which Schopenhauer intended to replace Kantian epistemology. I also suggested that Schopenhauer's main philosophical achievement might have been to demonstrate that there were deep problems with the very idea of differentiation outside of space and time. Couple this claim, which is perhaps true, with the argument that since self-knowledge is outside space it is nearer to the thing in itself and we are fairly straightforwardly led to the conclusion that what lies behind experience is impersonal 'will' (however we may choose to cash out that word, exactly) and not God. However, there were unresolved difficulties with Schopenhauer's metaphysical project to exclude the Kantian God – primarily with the claim that experience outside space is closer to the thing in itself. Schopenhauer's ultimate ontological standpoint, I concluded, left the noumenal world as 'empty' as it was in Kant's critical philosophy.

Schopenhauer also attempted to show that the Judaeo-Christian creator God as described in the first chapter of *Genesis* was an incoherent idea (thus his ethics, if not his metaphysics, seemed to argue quite directly for atheism). In this connection, we saw that Schopenhauer's specific 'argument from evil', which importantly included animal suffering, was ineffectual. This was because if Schopenhauer's own empirically based moral theory – a theory which in certain

respects owed strong debts to British empiricism in ethics<sup>166</sup> – was to escape crippling problems concerned with moral disagreement, then it must include a metaphysical component but that if it does so include this component, then it already presupposes atheism. In the final stage of *The World as Will* Schopenhauer also attempted to argue that a form of mortal redemption supposedly free of any theological commitment was still possible for us as humans and one of the main ways in which this redemption could be achieved was, he suggested, by the disinterested appreciation of art. Yet his case for this specific position sharply exposed what Nietzsche would call Christianity's and Schopenhauer's common 'life denying' undercurrents. Indeed, for Nietzsche the salvations which are espoused by the Schopenhauerian philosophy and the Christian religion were two of the purest representatives of what, in a series of polemics bordering on the obsessional, he termed the 'ascetic ideal'.

## ***II: Concluding Remarks On Nietzsche***

However else they may be differentiated from each other, Kant and Schopenhauer's reflections on the human predicament certainly have this much in common: Nietzsche rejects them both. Nietzsche approaches religion not as a necessary practical presupposition nor as a metaphysical aberration but rather as a psychological and even physiological fact. This marked shift toward such characterisation that we discern in the move from Kant and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche means that, in contrast to the Kantio-Schopenhauerian metaphysical

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<sup>166</sup> The British empiricism, that is, of Hutcheson and Hume, and not that empirical theory of egoism discussed by Hobbes and Mandeville.

world of shadowy noumenal entities and unobserved extensionless subjects, we find in Nietzsche a theoretical landscape populated by a seemingly far more concrete cast of characters. The two main psychological types into which Nietzsche characterises religious people are the ‘escapist’ and the ‘slave’, both of which types are taken not to benefit the terrestrial cultivation of human excellence. In the first place, Nietzsche reads the human desire for a spiritual heaven as a decadent symptom of subnormal physical life, demonstrating that the celestial notion of salvation, which is unquestionably and explicitly central to at least one strand of Christian belief (and also, as we saw in the earlier chapter, to a central element of Schopenhauerian philosophy, and to much else besides) is related to the concept of terrestrial dissatisfaction. These psychologically disaffected types, it is Nietzsche’s novelty to then suggest, are disaffected physiologically. This is an empirical claim, of course, and we accordingly evaluated it according to empirical criteria, finding it provisionally upheld (or at any rate not unquestionably overthrown). However, Nietzsche conceded that not all such types are physiologically problematic and he suggested that these exceptions were strong but masochistic types affected by ‘bad conscience’. But this claim seemed to run aground on the problem of why supposedly masochistic types would embrace Christianity when the greater heroism would appear to lay in ignoring it.

Nietzsche’s second concrete psychological analysis, an analysis of the very first ‘slave revolt in morals’ as what in contemporary philosophy of language is called an illocutionary act was seen to be central to Nietzsche’s whole endeavour, particularly as it is presented in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, insofar as this particular construal of the ontological status of religious language allowed



him to escape the objection that he was just looking at and attacking the language of morality rather than the actual morality itself. Nietzsche's exposure of the language of morality and religion in the first essay of *On the Genealogy* – an exposure that I detailed with an Austinian conceptual specificity that Nietzsche did not have at his disposal – is not, then, a contribution to linguistics but is rather a contribution to ethics, a contribution taking the form of a history of morals that views morality largely as a mixture of emotivism and prescriptivism.

Admittedly, it might be argued that my reading of Nietzsche in this particular chapter failed to do sufficient justice to Nietzsche's epistemological relativisation of his own work, which is given particularly forceful expression not in *On the Genealogy of Morals* but rather in certain sections of *Beyond Good and Evil*. In mitigation of this apparent omission however, it might be said that prior to querying whether Nietzsche's strongly expressed views specifically on religion manage to fit in with his more sporadic adventurous claims concerning assertions in general, it would not be such a bad idea to see whether those views concerning religion are, in fact, coherent. I have argued that when suitably interpreted, at least *some* of them are. In particular, I have argued that Nietzsche's investigations into the slave revolt in morals fended off certain objections we might be tempted to raise. Does this then mean that Nietzsche has articulated a compelling case for the rejection of religion? Such was the question that I addressed in the subsequent chapter.

We saw there that one reason for doubting that Nietzsche has indeed given us a reason for rejecting religion is that he gave ample justification for supposing that certain types of atheistic motivation were themselves unhealthy; reasons

strongly connected with the method of psychological characterisation into escapist and *ressentiment*-based types that Nietzsche deployed with regard to the motivation of religion itself. One of the arguments against Nietzsche most often insisted upon by his recent critics therefore, is that this characterisation of atheists is in fact incompatible with his own atheism. I argued that Nietzsche's work was however, quite safe from the anxieties that such commentators entertained on the subject of Nietzsche's own atheism being motivated either by *ressentiment* or the desire for truth. Yet this is not, of course, to say Nietzsche's overall critique of religion can therefore be regarded as sound. One reason for doubting the force of Nietzsche's attack, quite apart from the problematic issue of explaining the conversion of strong types to Christianity, is that questions can be raised about his characterisation of Christianity as driven by *ressentiment*, questions about the soundness of Nietzsche's researches into nature which found a 'will to power' at its heart, as it is this latter claim alone that seems to bear the justificatory weight of the idea of morality always being driven by its antipodes: i.e. by immoral and aggressive drives. I did not emphasise this particular criticism at any great length however, because more importantly, even if proved, the assumption of the will to power in any case fails to provide a satisfactory account of why the noble expression of the will to power is, from the third person perspective, an inherently more valuable form than the priestly expression. And if Nietzsche leaves this problem untouched or at least unresolved then he has also failed to show why religion and its theistic concepts should in fact be abandoned as valueless by our species at this stage in its history. In conclusion, I considered a way in which Nietzsche has been reconstructed so as to bypass this problem. I found there however, that this



reflective reconstruction implicitly relied upon a speculative hypothesis about the direction of the history of secularisation. Yet this history, as far as I can see, must remain unpredictable.

So, not one of the three philosophers that I have examined in this study are, on my interpretation, on absolutely solid ground. Kant's epistemological agnosticism was relatively self-consistent but his associated and quasi-existential moral proof of God turned out not to be successful. Likewise, Schopenhauer's metaphysical system, though it can arguably count amongst its achievements an exposure of the problems of noumenal differentiation, was really too limited to satisfactorily uphold either his overwhelming exclusion argument or his related moral argument against God. Nietzsche's intention was, in a sense, rather more complex than Schopenhauer's and even could be said to resemble Kant's: not to tell us anything about heaven but rather to inform us more fully about how we humans should live our lives out on earth. Yet as an account of religion as escape from the corporeal world, it fails to properly account for the phenomena of strong Christians. And as an account of religion as always being driven by egotistic motives and as an explanation of the possibility of there being an aggressive atheism, it itself depends upon a postulate which *even if proved* would not itself supply an axiomatic principle that condemned the priestly or religious expression of the will to power as valueless and therefore to be avoided. We end, then, on a note of some scepticism, unsurprisingly acknowledging the negligible contemporary viability of both Kantian moral deism and Schopenhauer's ontological atheism but also of Nietzsche's relatively culturally influential atheism. We might therefore finally reply to the unsettling doubts collectively raised by the work of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche by saying that in this



area answers are still singularly lacking and that, despite the efforts of these three particular philosophers, the problem of religious faith still afflicts us. It will doubtless continue to do so to the measure that the silence of God still affects us.

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