Subjectivity and Irreligion

Atheism and Agnosticism in Kant,
Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

Matthew Alun Ray

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SUBJECTIVITY AND IRRELIGION

This book asks specific philosophical questions about the underlying structure of Kant's, Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's thoughts on atheism and agnosticism; thoughts that represent one of the most concerted attacks on monotheistic religion in modern philosophy. Yet commentators interested in philosophical atheism have frequently ignored this tradition.

Matthew Ray concludes that Kant's moral theology is largely undersupported; Schopenhauer's metaphysical and ethical atheism is flawed in several areas; and Nietzsche's naturalistic attack on Christianity is only partially successful. Taking a critical stance toward the atheistic orthodoxy in modern philosophy, Ray argues that the question of God's existence remains characteristically unresolved in post-Kantian philosophy.

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Subjectivity and Irreligion

Atheism and Agnosticism in Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

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ASHGATE

Only by accepting the physical presence of night have we come to accept it morally.
Lautréamont, *Poésies*

Thus the lord indulges his slaves and even enjoys their insolence.
Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

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)

Gr *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans H.J. Paton (London: Routledge, 1989)

LPT *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. A. Wood (Ithaca: 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)

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

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

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

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 §, 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.

Chapter 1

Apologia

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*

I Historical Background and Scope

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 (such interests are automatically screened off) but only their political or social effects: liberating us to enter a politically charged world only to now discover it framed within an existentially incomprehensible universe. It is 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. Although René Descartes 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 now made God central to what was no longer considered to be a religious philosophy and left the atheist – at least on one particular construal of

Descartes' escape from doubt – knowing little or nothing.[1] 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 of this 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.[2] The culmination of Berkeley's philosophic vision might 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 (God was himself unknowable) or for ontology (since God was also theoretically unprovable).[3] In this advance beyond what Kant – long before Feuerbach and Heidegger – explicitly 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 the grandly systematic philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer and the classical philologist turned ethical philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Kantian religious thought, of course, did not give birth to just one subsequent tradition: Kant's philosophical legacy is as diverse as it is profound. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's singular development of Kantian thought seems to be notable among post-Kantian philosophies for its self-conscious antagonism toward the Semitic monotheistic religions from the very outset. Other immediately post-Kantian thinkers, such as G.W.F. Hegel and F.W.J. Schelling, were overtly concerned to square their philosophy with the revelations of the Christian religion (albeit with questionable success). And post-Hegelian phenomenology, whether in its Husserlian or its Heideggerean variety, effectively presents no sophistication of the fundamentally agnostic Kantian response to the question of God. This, needless to say, 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 analytic philosophy – where various logical-positivist authors have maintained that atheistic theses, being neither empirical nor analytic, are as meaningless as theistic ones – 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, 'ordinary language philosophy' can be seen to leave atheism without any effective conceptual tools with which to attack religion. Those heavily influenced by the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, frequently 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, 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 (that is, within a certain religion).

It would nonetheless be asinine to deny that there are significant post-Kantian atheists outside of phenomenology, existentialism, ordinary language and analytic

philosophy; the most significant probably being Ludwig Feuerbach, Max Stirner and Karl Marx, who all belong to an important and closely connected neo-Hegelian tradition. But even though Feuerbach, Stirner and Marx seem to be important modern atheistic thinkers disfavoured – but by no means entirely neglected – here, in mitigation of this shortcoming it may fairly be said, first, that these specific thinkers seemed to have been mediated through the singular 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 the development of Kantianism itself. Secondly, Feuerbach's attempt to discredit Christian theism whilst remaining true to its moral involvements and Stirner's immoralising response to Feuerbach's (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 nihilistic pessimism is profoundly alien to the tone and substance of Feuerbach's enthusiastic writing). 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 – even, at the limit, criminal – individualism all find strong parallels in Nietzsche's thought (the threads of this will be taken up in the second chapter on Nietzsche, Chapter 6). Further mitigation might also be sought in the fact that fairly recent books on the history of modern philosophical atheism such as P. Masterton's *Atheism and Alienation* and G.E. Michalson's *Kant and The Problem of God*, cover pretty much this neo-Hegelian ground that has to some extent been disregarded here.[4] 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 Cartesian *cogito* 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 only cursorily mentioning Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as forerunners to existentialism or, as in the second instance, by failing to 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 and, at one remove, Nietzsche.

II Structure

The chapters that follow will be asking philosophical questions about the underlying structure of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's thoughts on atheism and agnosticism; thoughts that represent one of the most concerted attacks upon monotheistic religion in the whole of modern philosophy. In anticipation of my conclusions, it might be stated that Kant's tentative and quasi-existential moral theology will be found to be largely unsupported, philosophically; Schopenhauer's metaphysical and ethical atheism will be found to be intriguing but flawed in several respects, and Nietzsche's peculiarly naturalistic attack upon Christianity only very partially successful. The question of God's existence will therefore be found to be characteristically unresolved even in this aggressively atheistic fork of post-Kantian philosophy.

We begin with the work of the mature Kant, explaining how his innovative epistemology in the *Critique of Pure Reason* treats the question of the sense experience of God and how his essentially moral theory of biblical hermeneutics – most explicitly articulated in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* – treated the question of divine revelation through scripture, before examining Kant's moral proof of the being of God. We begin with Kant because, although not himself 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. In one sense, Kant thus belongs to the pre-history, or to the backdrop, of that branch of philosophical atheism treated here. Nevertheless, examining this backdrop will prove to be indispensable.

After Kant, the atheistic philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer will be considered. Sketching the unusual presentation of his atheism and the possible explanations for this, the methods by which Schopenhauer excludes God from his vast and despairing ontological picture will then be illuminated. Fundamentally, Schopenhauer's initial argument against the existence of God will be seen to be an argument from exclusion. Schopenhauer accepts a version of transcendental idealism – to the extent that Schopenhauer's atheistic project may be said to be pursued, as it were, from within a Kantian parenthesis – but then protests first that Kant's opposition to the objectivity of space and time should have lead him to deny the possibility of separating creator and creation, and second 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 atheistic endeavour, however, and certain of the main problems will be marked out. Schopenhauer's metaphysical thought will not emerge wholly unscathed and we will have to conclude that – irrespective of its possible philosophic successes in other areas – it is unable to substantiate his strong atheistic claims. In the second chapter on Schopenhauer (Chapter 4), he will also be seen to construct an intentionally un-Kantian 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 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 the book, which aims to introduce the Nietzschean notion of the 'ascetic ideal' in one of the precise locations where Nietzsche himself first discovered it, will be primarily elucidatory. We shall discover that this area of the Schopenhauerian philosophy shares a core commitment with the Christian religion, a commitment that is critically, at times perhaps even obsessively, considered at great length in the later writings of Nietzsche, who was alerted to the phenomena of pessimism, which he then related to the deeper historical movement of nihilism, by an early intimacy with Schopenhauer's thought.

Two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) are devoted to a writer who is unarguably one of the foremost atheists of the European literary and philosophical tradition. In the detailed reading of Nietzsche's poetic and polemical attack upon theistic religion that will be undertaken here, what will prove to be of surprising importance will be his largely implicit proto-Austinian theory of language; a theory which Nietzsche uses to expose certain of the deleterious effects of religious speech in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In this and other texts, Nietzsche also elaborates a metapsychological and physiological analysis of the type of person allegedly inclined towards believing in the monotheistic tradition, famously arguing that theism is deeply connected with a yearning for escape and for the moralisation of the socially unaccountable. 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 historical remarks concerning secularisation, will be the subject of my second and final chapter (Chapter 6) on that author. It will be concluded 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, anyway, controversial.

Essentially, then, the three central claims of the present work 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 appears largely to have been forgotten.

Notes

1   R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 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 – wryly described as 'a very unexpected circuit' by Hume in the *Enquiries* – 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 (that is, 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.

2   G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in *Works* (London: Dove, 1890), p. 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. p. 160; see also pp. 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 argument; cf. D. Berman, *George Berkeley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 47–8. Nevertheless, it is in this manner that Berkeley is customarily interpreted.

3   Choosing David Hume instead of, or alongside, Descartes and Berkeley might 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.

4   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).

Chapter 2

Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum

I The Unrepresentable

Almost everywhere in the architectonic of the system of Kant's transcendental idealism one finds the transcendent. Kant's critical philosophy establishes key relationships with the unrepresentable: in epistemology (the noumena), in ontology (the thing in itself), in ethics (noumenal freedom) and in aesthetics (the mathematically conceived sublime). Moreover, this inaccessible space of the unrepresentable allows for the theoretical promotion of a legitimate primacy of the ethical – even in the least obvious instance, aesthetics, the experience of the sublime is said to lead to, or to be conducive to, moral behaviour – and the promise, connected to it, of the preservation of religion. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant sets up the conditions for what seemed to be this, his great spiritual wish: not a tolerated – because disguised – atheism but rather a truly rational faith in God consistent with the tenets of his transcendental system.

Examining Kant's philosophy of religion here will both illuminate its own intrinsic merits, tensions and problems and also bring to light the manner in which it then allowed Schopenhauer to argue for his specifically post-Kantian variety of atheism, an ontological atheism which in turn greatly influenced the philosophy of Nietzsche. The present chapter will be structured as follows: first, a little scene-setting by means of a brief and therefore selective look at the general argument of Kant's major work, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, followed by a study of 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. The final section of this chapter turns 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 two possible ways in which it might be seen to fail will be developed. Given the ultimate inadequacy of Kant's positive attempt to rationally justify the positing of God within the critical system, it will be suggested that it would be sensible for 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

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

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much in accordance with the main thrust of specifically modern philosophy from René Descartes onwards by beginning his inquiry 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 his predecessors, Descartes and Berkeley – has disturbingly little to say on this particular aspect of alterity (a charge familiar from Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant*). 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 353–4]

which, far from solving the sceptical problem of other minds, serves only to highlight it. It is worth emphasising 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 is meant 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 inquiry, 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 (even Kierkegaard insists on this, despite his repeated claims concerning an absolute difference obtaining between God and man). 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. And, in this connection, it is noteworthy that the thought that the self apparently indicated by self-awareness or the *cogito* might itself be God is, in fact, briefly entertained by Descartes in 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. Specifically, it relied on an argument from illusion, the suspicion that we might be continually dreaming – later laid to rest because of dreaming's unconnectibility with past experience – and the even more extreme 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 he rediscovers an Augustinian truth – on the basis of which he will rebuild his knowledge from robust foundations: namely, that his own existence is indubitable: I think therefore I am: *cogito ergo sum*. 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 but a finite creature. This argument, 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,[1] thereby saving the Cartesian project from an 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. 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 then quickly dispatched with what must surely be still considered to be a knock-down argument: 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.[2] 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?[3]

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.[4]

Kant too, although he sophisticates Cartesian self-knowledge by distinguishing between the phenomenal self as an object of inner sense and the existence indicated by apperception 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 – an explicit answer in the *Lectures* but only implicit 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 – to be knowingly followed by Kierkegaard[5] – suggests that God does not think what he means is that God's knowledge is not conceptual but 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 (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, though, might be thought to lead to a troubling 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 these concerns here is a series of remarks by H.E. Allison in his *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, a text 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.[6]

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 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, we should not feel compelled to state what exactly this 'other omniscience' need be. Admitting our ignorance of what God is seems 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 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 aiming to show that they are intuitions rather than concepts. It is worth mentioning the arguments in summary fashion (concentrating on the arguments concerned with space: the corresponding arguments for time are parallel formulations), as a grasp of their

structure would seem to be a prerequisite for an understanding of the nature, and the implications, of Kant's concept of God.

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. 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 embodied self* in the first place. Our knowledge of space must therefore be *a priori*: absolutely independent of experience. This, however, was not Kant's only argument for the *a-priority* of space and time. A second argument which Kant used to this effect – Schopenhauer considered this particular argument 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', that is, 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 arguments could be brought to bear on the discussion at this point. In opposition to the first argument, for example, one could claim 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*.[7] And in response to the second argument, P. Guyer has pointed out that even if space was an empirical representation it could conceivably become so entrenched that it could not be imagined away, even if any particular object could.[8] Yet here we are not going to labour any such criticism of the structure of transcendental idealism itself. Rather, it seems better 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 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 infinitely divisible.⁹ Space, Kant again concludes, therefore must be thought to be an intuition – 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 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, to which it lacks any appreciable application).

The primary conclusion of these four compressed arguments – and it will be with this conclusion and the implications that follow from it that we shall often be concerned – 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 (sometimes known as the 'neglected' or 'missing alternative' argument). S. Körner 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.'¹⁰ 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.'¹¹ This argument consists of 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 71–2]. 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 (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 coherent¹²). 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 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 transcendentally 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 human experience is

further structured by twelve *a priori* logical 'categories'. 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 – even by Kant's standards – uncommonly 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.[13] 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 – that is, has to be 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 (judging some shape in one's field of vision to be an object is to bring it under the concept of an object). 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. The last thing to note here is that this unity is experienced as *active*: Kant repeatedly insists the mind is aware of the *spontaneity* of its acts of synthesis. As previously noted, however, this seems inconsistent with the notion of God *qua* intellectual intuitor and abandoning the latter notion was suggested (there remains the option of abandoning, or qualifying, the former).

This necessity of the structure of both perceiving and thinking that is built into human experience from the very 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 judgements) but that are nevertheless possible independently of experience (*a priori* judgements). A paradigm case of such judgements is the metaphysical claim: 'every event has a cause.' Such a judgement of universal causality cannot in fact 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' (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 supported this

by sophisticating Locke's 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 thought of as a completed whole) were to be regarded as natural and unavoidable. For Kant, the idea of God is therefore neither innate, as it was 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, 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][14]

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 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).

Kant included in the first *Critique* a *Transcendental Dialectic* to counteract such natural 'illusions'. We 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, partly because it has been discussed elsewhere by others but also because there is substantially more to Kant's philosophy of religion than this aspect of transcendental idealism's criticism of rationalism. Yet it is worth providing 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*). Oversimplifying, we might say 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 – following Gassendi but *contra* ordinary language – famously disputes this (though whether he is right to do so is not an issue that can 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 to supply the absent predicates). The third argument is the physico-theological proof: in essence, the argument from design. Put 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 purposivness in nature, Kant argues, is at the most 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* 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 relatively reduced aims[15]). All possible proofs of God thus eventually collapse into the ontological proof, which itself is – as we have already seen – fallacious, according to Kant.

So much for the general structure of Kant's overall reasoning in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is time to narrow down our focus and examine some of the main implications for theistic religion of this intriguing account: Kant's construal of God as existing outside of space and time and then his falsificationist scriptural hermeneutics.

III The Unsacrificable

Kant unconditionally ruled out the possibility of human contact with a divine being. The first step that allows Kant to do this 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 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: in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, 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). 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). 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, 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, 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 the wider point will not be argued here). We are 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 – seemingly partly evasive – Christology, it seems that Kant, instead of sacrificing human reason itself 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[16]) were to appear to do, was instead scarcely inclined to treat Christ as divine.[17]

But might we not suspect this position to be irreligious, substituting for the Christian God a 'God of the philosophers'? This is why Kant could be charged with being a 'deist' in a way that Kierkegaard could not (terms such as 'deists' and

'deism' are meant 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). Has Kant irreligiously spurned divine revelation? Investigating Kant's examination of biblical theology in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* is the only procedure that will allow us 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, the analysis of biblical theology in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* effectively discredits the Bible as an unquestionable 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 truly ancient lineage, 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?'[18] 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. This theoretical difficulty within Greek polytheism is 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 is in any case logically absent from the corresponding position in any monotheistic religion, as seems to be demonstrated in many of the writings of the Christian author, Søren Kierkegaard. By means of illustration, it is worth now pointing to the logic of one of these texts in particular: *Fear and Trembling*. It should, however, first be mentioned that Kierkegaard was an author who was intensely concerned with ironising his prolific output, in part by ascribing it to various narrators. According to more recent authors, the (internally consistent) views of these narrators are therefore *not* directly attributable to Kierkegaard himself. Many now therefore attribute the views of, say, *Fear and Trembling* to its pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio. Such a procedure has not, however, been followed in this book. This is chiefly because Kierkegaard's work is used here merely as a expository apparatus in the articulation of Kant's views.

Fear and Trembling explicates the *akedah*: the incident of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son in Genesis 22, a narrative common to all three of the Semitic monotheistic faiths (though Islam is at odds with both Judaism and Christianity in claiming that the son in question is Ishmael and not Isaac). Crudely, Abraham receives a summons from God commanding him to sacrifice his son. Abraham neither doubts nor challenges the *vox dei* and, knife in hand, he takes his son to the

designated spot only to be then granted a last-minute reprieve. One of Kierke-
gaard's chief arguments in this text is simply that given such sanguinary stories in
the Bible one cannot reconstruct 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
elaborately states, our moral standards then themselves become the temptation that
would prohibit us from doing God's will.[19]

Yet Christianity is essentially moral for Kant in a way that it is not for
Kierkegaard. Kant's view is that God is essentially good, a conclusion that follows
on naturally from the Kantian 'moral proof of God', which is itself based on the
necessity and utterly obligatory nature of morality as seen by Kant. 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 instead of having to trust them by a criterionless faith,
after the manner of Kierkegaard. In 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.[20] Our moral
reason therefore supplies a 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'.[21] 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:
if it does not meet the test of our internal moral reason. It is Kant's considered
opinion that claims to divine revelation can never be verified – but that they can be
conclusively falsified.

If some claim to revelation '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). 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 a falsificationist guiding thread for
biblical exegesis: scripture is 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 reveal.

Although the Kantian and biblical Gods do seem to contradict each other, Kant
attempts to explain this by pointing out that a wholly moral God is the philosophi-
cally 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 our moral sense and reason. The God whom Kant has put in His place is aspatial, atemporal, unconditionally moral and non-interventionist. Yet this transparently 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 author has admitted that Kant's concept of God is 'little removed from that of deism'.[22]

IV   The Moral Proof of the Being of God

Kant conspires to present the God of his philosophy as being identical with the God of our religious tradition, but construing Him in Kantian fashion as absolutely excluded from space and time appears to challenge the content of Christian scripture; the scriptures of the Judaeo-Christian religion are further 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 moral God, principally 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.

Kant's critical philosophy both withdraws God from the world of experience and from direct revelation through scripture. To be sure, it still does 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, as Locke was already aware in the *Essay* – 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 the account of illusions (the details of which have largely been set to one side here), Kant's central indication of God, found in all three *Critiques*, is based squarely on the importance of our moral lives. 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, few explicit believers in Kant's specific version of moral deism today. Nevertheless it might yet be argued that a generic type of moral deism still haunts the thoughts of more theologically minded reflective people on this subject, though perhaps less as a temptation than as a last resort, a residual feeling that in order for the world and our abrupt lives 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 be supplemented by the other Kantian accounts, where this will prove helpful.[23]

Kantian humanity, we must bear in mind, rigorously separates *itself* from nature: 'Rational nature separates itself out from all other things by the fact that it sets itself an end' (Gr 99). Moreover, the ends it sets itself include moral ones. However, we have also to remember that although Kant seems to claim that the formal moral law we set ourselves requires us to act regardless of consequences, our human sensible nature still requires us, if we are not to despair, to have some end in mind when we act: happiness: 'There is, however, one end that can be presumed as actual in all rational beings (so far as they are dependent beings to whom imperatives apply) ... by a natural necessity – the purpose, namely, of happiness' (Gr 79).

Happiness has such a purchase on us 'by a natural necessity' because we 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); it is 'the maximum of well-being in my present, and in every future state' (Gr 81). Dieter Henrich nicely states that happiness

> is the self-assuredness of the person who experiences the satisfaction of all his wishes and who sees all his struggles end. Only the person who sees his entire life as a complete success is happy. The concept of happiness implies, therefore, that it is possible to unite all wishes and desires in such an aggregate. Kant disputed this possibility.[24]

So, happiness is a desire that only rational beings can have – but only those rational beings who are subjected to needs, wishes and desires. The moral proof is empirical – 'concerns us as beings of the world' (CJ 298) – only therefore to the extent that we need to know that we have interests of sensibility, although from this empirical premise we can then infer that as rational as well as sensual creatures we would also desire happiness. Our desire for happiness can consequently 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. Our desire for happiness can also be said to be distinctively human in yet another sense: it would also be alien to God, who is obviously not subject to needs. Given, then, that we have a sensible side which desires happiness to our human nature as well as our intelligible side, the highest good for *beings such as we are* – empirico-transcendental beings – 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).

As partly intelligible and as partly sensible beings we have a dual aim (moral integrity and happiness). 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 are not (eudaemonistically) identified here; rather: our highest good is a

place where virtue is rewarded with the happiness we all desire. That is to say, in order not to be torn in two different directions, we need to aim at a *summum bonum* that answers the claims of both parts of our nature. But how is such a happy and moral perfection to be achieved? Happiness and moral worth are only contingently (if at all) related in this sensible world. Nature, therefore, 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 drastically conflict with our sensible pursuit of happiness. 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. Why not?

On the one hand, eschewing the claims of morality is not an option because it is Kant's own view that the moral good is a 'non-hypothetical', 'apodeictic' or 'categorical imperative': Kant probably more than any other major philosopher emphasised the obligatory role of duty and thought that what had moral worth was our intentions. Bringing these two features together, we can say that to act in a morally worthy manner is to act from the motive of duty alone, which commands us irrevocably (what our duty actually consists in is to act according to maxims that are not contradictory, though this topic will not be further examined here). 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 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 human 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.

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 therefore – 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, 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]

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 G. Michalson's censorious characterisation, 'a mysterious proportioning process occurring after my death in an unimaginably remote noumenal zone.'[25] 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 nature. If we believe in morality and we also need happiness to aim at, our ultimate goal can only be a rewarding afterlife administered by an essentially benevolent personal God.

It should probably be stressed that Kant's moral proof is a proof that results from practical reason, not theoretical reason, which means that it results not in an objective finding ('God exists') but in 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 from despairing. 'I believe in the existence of God' must be our conclusion, not the simpler 'God exists'. Yet even on this existential basis certain objections can be made to the moral proof, although I should 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 other objections that can now be raised.

I

First, 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 yet it is hardly an uncontroversial one and it might be possible to assail Kant's moral proof of God here at its root by simply questioning whether we actually need the expectation of individual human happiness 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 would lead us to despair? Can anything else can be thought to function just as well as happiness in terms of motivating us to act without incurring dehabilitating melancholy?

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. Could there be a theory of the virtues which would move men in accordance with morality? Amongst theories of virtue and perfectibility, those of Aristotle and Alisdair MacIntyre are probably most likely to be mentioned. But since the virtue ethics of Aristotle has a problematic residue of teleological arcaneness, this leaves us with the writings of MacIntyre, specifically, *After Virtue*.

After Virtue is an explicitly anti-Kantian attempt to reconstruct a justification of moral action, seeing itself as radically departing from Aristotle's biology and from the moral grounding of modernity. MacIntyre thinks that the notion of virtue is linked to that of a social practice and it will now be argued 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.

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 cooperative 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.[26]

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. Human lives are thus intertwined with social practices and are, in a sense, therefore given certain goods (many of the technicalities and qualifications of MacIntyre's account which are unnecessary for my purposes have been omitted here). 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 allows us to pursue the good internal to the practice of sailing a coracle; assiduity allows us to pursue the different good internal to the practice of playing the triple harp and honesty allows us to pursue the good internal to, say, playing such a game as chess. 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 a particular kind of musicianship such as playing the triple harp 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 matter to us, arguably as much as does happiness. Where Kant juxtaposed moral integrity and happiness, MacIntyre connects moral integrity and practices. 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.[27] It is not, then, that we find our happiness in practices but rather that practical excellence replaces happiness *qua* goal. Nor have we here identified the goal of our sensible nature (internal goods) and that of our intelligible (moral worth). The point being made here is rather that replacing happiness with excellence as the goal of our sensible nature allows us to fulfil that goal ourselves (that is, omitting God) without compromising our morality. Our different natures now have compatible goals and not incompatible goals that only a God could reconcile.

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 unconducive to ethical rectitude as Kant seems to suppose. Since Kant's 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.

II

The second objection to Kant's moral proof I should like to raise is 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 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 by no means 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 us 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 certain of 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 'something' as a supreme personal being, endowed with understanding and will, who is the 'moral author of the world', that is, God.[28]

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.'[29] Nor does it suggest the idea of the Messiah (the coming or second coming of the Messiah being important to all the Semitic monotheistic faiths). 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.'[30] Some of the kind of problems that we might associate with Kant's own aggressive tactics toward theological argumentation in the *Transcendental Dialectic* might therefore be thought to come home to roost here: there is, for instance, little 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 – or sustainer – of the world. This instrumental principle of justice admittedly has to have the power to make the *summum bonum* achievable but still, a less than omnipotent and in any case arguably impersonal demiurge could accomplish such a task. It is in such a connection that D.M. Mackinnon has aptly noted: 'For Kant, God is less the creator than the ultimate judge.'[31] 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 vast 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.

The moral proof, even considered to be the result of practical and not theoretical reason, therefore 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 such as Pascal and 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 them both off in a decisive fashion in the *Transcendental Dialectic* of his first *Critique* and in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, respectively.[32]

V Konigsbergian Nihilism

In rejecting the possibility of human sense experience of God, and in abandoning the prospect of the disclosure of God through scripture, Kant arguably changed the face of the interpretation of religious experience – and the lack of feeling now encountered in the presence of the religious is perhaps the weight by which we appropriately measure our loss.

We know that Kant himself thought that his removal of ontological questions of God's existence was actually open to a fideistic reading in the context of the critical system as a whole, albeit a fideistic reading associated with rationality in a way that Kierkegaard's fideism was not: 'I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith' (CPR Bxxx). And later: '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).

Nevertheless, as we shall see presently, one immediately post-Kantian philosopher will vigorously deny this claim; whilst his one-time disciple will then go on, not only to raise the idea that Kant's 'Konigsbergian nihilism' is ultimately life-denying but also to argue that many possible responses to it – Schopenhauer's included – suffer precisely the same debased fate.

Notes

1   This is, then, a rather traditional proof of God from a consideration of his creatures, except that Descartes begins his proof not from the visible world but from his own mind and ideas – as of course he must do, the visible world not being assured of its reality until a beneficent God's existence has itself been proved, see A. Kenny, *Descartes* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1993), p. 127. Berkeley's proof of God also begins from his own mind and ideas – but in his case for idealist rather than sceptical reasons.
2   I said that this haunted modern phenomenology: Maurice Merleau-Ponty employs the Cartesian exit thus: 'I can never *recognise myself* as God without necessarily denying what I am trying in fact to assert', *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 359.
3   Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, pp. 125–6.

4   B. Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1985), p. 145.
5   S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 332: 'God does not think, he creates.'
6   H. E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 289–90.
7   S. Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge: 1999), p. 83.
8   P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 347.
9   Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, p. 93.
10 S. Körner, *Kant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 37–8. Relatedly, Körner has repeatedly pointed out that all transcendental arguments fail to be uniqueness proofs, that is, that they leave open the possibility that another set of conditions could allow the experience in question to occur.
11 Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, p. 352.
12 Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 103.
13 Kant himself further distinguished between the 'objective' and 'subjective' deduction, the latter referring to the first edition's analysis of the faculties (CPR Axvii). We may, following D. Henrich, regard the objective deduction as proof *that* the intuitions are subject to the categories, while regarding the subjective deduction as a proof of *how* they are so subject; see Henrich's meticulously argued 'The Proof-Structure of Kant's Transcendental Deduction' in *Kant on Pure Reason*, ed. R.C.S. Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 66–81, esp. p. 75.
14 This natural dialectic is seen by Kant to take on one of two forms. A good account describing these illusions in their specificity (the idea of a first cause and that of an *Ens Realissimum*) can be found in A.W. Wood's *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 25–79.
15 J. Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 256.
16 See R.M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 136: 'Kierkegaard's very understanding of why Christ is the "absurd" presupposes Kant's epistemology.'
17 On this, see G.E. Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 102.
18 Plato, *Euthyphro*, 10a.
19 S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 88; see also Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, p. 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, p. 575; Book XVI, Ch. 32, p. 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.'
20 Given the many apparent inconsistencies in scripture it might be argued that *any* consistent interpretation depends, at least tacitly, upon certain prior philosophical commitments. It has been suggested here only that Kant's commitments are not religiously acceptable. I have eschewed trying to answer any objections to religious tradition itself here.
21 A.W. Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 205–206.
22 C.J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 12; M.G. Rearden, *Kant as Philosophical Theologian* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 172.

That the consensus is not absolute is evidenced by S. Palmquist in *Kant's Critical Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 83–4.

23 Kant formulates the moral proof of God in many places, for example CPrR 150–58, CPR B 425–6, 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).

24 D. Henrich, *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 77.

25 Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God*, p. 116.

26 A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 2000), p. 187.

27 It could further be argued at this point that as happiness is enjoyed by man *qua* phenomenal being, then it follows that Kant cannot postulate any *noumenal* happiness anyway.

28 Y. Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 89–90.

29 Michalson, *Kant and The Problem of God*, p. 21.

30 Ibid., p. 34. Michalson sees the moral proof as also being undermined by the fact that in Kant's later works on history the theological *summum bonum* is apparently replaced by that of a moral commonwealth, located in space and time, with the result that God, who played a central role in the *summum bonum*, is marginalised (*Kant and The Problem of God*, p. 25). Yet according to M. Despland in *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal and London: Queens University Press, 1973), this apparent antinomy need not really concern us because whilst Kant's philosophy of history is concerned with the political reform of the state and the league of nations, his philosophical theology takes the prolonged view and centres upon the Kingdom of God as the ultimate religious goal.

31 D.M. Mackinnon, 'Kant's Philosophy of Religion' in *Philosophy*, April 1975, vol. 50, no. 192, pp. 131–44, at p. 138.

32 It might be thought that there is yet another Kantian proof of God: the first *Critique* tells us 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 inflection 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 (see the *Groundwork*'s often-made contrast between *conformity with duty* and *from the motive of duty*: only the latter is ascribed 'moral content'). 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.

Chapter 3

Darker Presences

I Introduction

Schopenhauer, although he attempted to retain what he took to be the moral essence of the Christian religion (see W I 387–88), nonetheless 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 ethical argument for this rigorously atheistic position. As the focus of our interest here is predominantly Schopenhauer's atheism, however, detailing a convincing philosophical reconstruction of the whole of Schopenhauer's impressively comprehensive metaphysics of the will in all its depth and ramifications is beyond the scope of the present chapter; nor is the concept of 'will' itself (as it appears in the Schopenhauerean text) something I should like to define precisely here. Nevertheless, it is now 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 Schopenhauer's attempt to argue against the existence of God.

II The Presentation of Schopenhauerian Atheism

Whatever the philosophical successes, or otherwise, of his philosophy might turn out to be, Schopenhauer must be historically regarded as a deciding figure in the development of atheism within the mainstream tradition of Western philosophy, a figure about whom Friedrich Nietzsche, writing shortly after – and often under the obvious 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 candid 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 in indirect contradiction to the Christian religion which was strongly at variance with most of his recent philosophical forebears and contemporaries, particularly the German idealists. Accordingly, it will surprise no one 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. (Interestingly, Schopenhauer began his university studies in science and not, as was the case with Hegel, Schelling and even Nietzsche, in theology.) 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 high measure of indefensible ignorance with regard to the recent philosophical achievements brought about by Kant: 'as if the *Critique of Pure Reason* had been written on the moon' (WN 4).

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. Not that David Berman thinks that Schopenhauer was not in fact an atheist (that is 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: one thinks of Baron d'Holbach). Rather, Berman's scepticism turns principally on the fact that Schopenhauer, against the subsequent interpretation of Nietzsche (and others), 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',[1] 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) but far from being unique to Schopenhauer it actually reflects a much wider tendency that is observable in many atheistic writers – from Feuerbach to Freud, arguably including Hume – to leave their 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. Yet Berman goes on to make the controversial

point that Schopenhauer was cautious about loudly disseminating the atheistic conclusions of his metaphysical system because, as he puts it, 'open atheism was liable to drive the vulgar crazy'. 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.

'On Religion: A Dialogue', an essay included in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, is the principal place where Schopenhauer seems to admit that religion had such a social function, although any interpretation of 'On Religion' 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 (and superficially Marxist) 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 crude intellect and clumsy understanding of the masses who are immersed in sordid pursuits and material labour. [PP II 324]

This offers some *prima facie* support for Berman's interpretation. However, the religious function referred to here is clearly metaphysical comprehension rather than the preservation of social order. 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 – that religion has a beneficial function but only a metaphoric truth – 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). Besides, 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 here 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 inexorably 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).

Berman must be agreed with to the extent that Schopenhauer is not, strictly speaking, an admitted atheist but disagreed with 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 be forced by his own position to have to admit – and if, *contra* certain exegetical intuitions, he does not in fact so admit,

then he is at any rate best reconstructed as admitting – that the main, but 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 the cryptic presentation of Schopenhauer's position as an atheist. Now to 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 irreligion. With some of the wider philosophical issues raised by *The World as Will and Representation* we shall, therefore, of necessity not be concerned.

III Atheism and Idealism

Schopenhauer elaborated his main philosophical theses in *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 written 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 contumacious philosophical career. It is consequently *The World as Will and Representation* that must bear the brunt of any attempt to appreciate the Schopenhauerian philosophy and the main line of reasoning within it that leads up to the exclusion of God can be put as follows.

Schopenhauer opens *The World as Will and Representation* with some timely meditations on philosophical idealism. We are initially treated to a consideration of what he calls the representation (*Vorstellung*). Leaving aside the forbidding 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 system of the sceptical David Hume. Hume notoriously conceded that on his strictly 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 rigorously interrogate 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. We might think that Schopenhauer was agreeing with Hume's diagnosis in the initial stages of *The World as Will and Representation* 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 even 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 the negative logic of the subject that is latent in Hume's corrosive empiricism by maintaining instead that the self is a necessary condition of experience and, as one author has remarked, he is no doubt 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 asked to explain why bundles of experience are organised in precisely the way that, as a matter of fact, they happen to be.[2]

If Schopenhauer is not following Hume, then, might he not instead be said to be following Berkeley? Like Berkeley, Schopenhauer 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 (that is, 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 as we might at first suppose.

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 spurious. This brings us to what is on one interpretation one of the most notorious moves associated with the metaphysics of *The World as Will and Representation*, for Schopenhauer seems to argue – after Berkeley[3] – that since anything that I imagine exists in my imagination, the possibility of a perceiver-independent 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 the fact that the word 'brains' in this claim marks an obvious confusion between Schopenhauer's Berkeleian idealism and a certain neurophysiological realism, 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.' 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 truth inconclusive. It is so inconclusive because it is unreasonable to say that unperceived things cannot exist only *because* we cannot imagine them, 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 is meant 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 representations cannot exist without a representer (because substance would be distinguishable from those representations). 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, though, was consistently uninterested in sceptical arguments about sense perception.[4]

Further discussion of this Berkeleian line of argument, however, is doubly unnecessary. First because it would lead us too far away from the essentially theological and atheological considerations of the present work and second because it is not clear whether Schopenhauer actually needs to rely on this type of idealism ultimately derived from Berkeley 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.'[5] For 'transcendental' idealism – that is, idealism of a Kantian variety, 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, supply a thing-in-itself 'behind' the spatio-temporal world of representation. Of course, it may well be that none of the Kantian arguments for the transcendental ideality of time and space accepted by Schopenhauer himself would be accepted by his readers – but that is another story and one which need not detain us here, and I have 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. It therefore suffices to say, in concluding these remarks on the establishment of Schopenhauer's own idealism, that Schopenhauer's consideration of experience must not be confused with Hume's and that 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. Schopenhauer links his project to Berkeley's in a way that we may regard as being, for present purposes, misleading.

Clearly, Schopenhauer is best seen as following neither Hume nor Berkeley but rather Kant. Yet it should 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 are representations and the representing subject. It is evident, though, that Schopenhauer consciously wishes not to assimilate his position to subjective idealism (by which is meant 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 solipsism – '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*. Wittgenstein, at least on one interpretation, credibly assumes that language use is governed by rules and then appears to argue that the very idea of a rule becomes meaningless when applied to a lone individual because one individual could not maintain a distinction between seeming to follow a rule and actually following a rule (whatever seemed to him to be right could not be further corrected and would stand as right): 'To *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule.'[6] Language, however, needs precisely such a check on whether one was using words correctly, which arguably proves that, since we have a usable language, solipsism is not only refutable but actually refuted. In light of this argument of Wittgenstein's, which I am not going to further examine here, we should at least regard Schopenhauer's claim as not being as self-evidently true as Schopenhauer himself supposed.

Yet it might be further protested that Schopenhauer's position, though it attempts to avoid solipsism, nevertheless unintentionally entails such a solipsistic commitment as one of its hapless implications: Georg Lukács, for one, thought precisely this to be the case, although perhaps only because his views on Schopenhauer had already been prejudicially deformed by an adherence to a Hegelianised version of Marxism.[7] And another Hegelian Marxist – T.W. Adorno – has questionably assimilated Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard on cryptically similar grounds: because 'the principal characteristic of both is the private'.[8] The views and remarks of Marxist polemicists aside, however, in reality Schopenhauer is no solipsist because he accepts a feature of Kantian thought that saves him from solipsism: 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 – without reserve (see W I 6–7, W I 438). 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 (as indeed later in Heidegger's), time has a certain priority in so far as *all* experiences must take place within it, whilst only outer experiences take place in space (the necessity of time for our kind of experience will, as we shall see, come back to haunt Schopenhauer's attempted

post-Kantian metaphysics). It is also worth mentioning here that – as Julian Young above all has emphasised[9] – Schopenhauer also seems to think that accepting the tenets of transcendental idealism successfully 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 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'[10] 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 be said to avoid the lucid 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: it appears unsure whether our representations do actually 'stand in' for anything else 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 verbal answer actually has some vague Kantian precedent (see CPR Bxxvi) it finds its almost effortless rebuttal in the comment that the term 'representation' is therefore something of a misnomer in this context and so Schopenhauer should be talking of presentations rather then 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.[11] Schopenhauer, though, goes way beyond Kant 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, let us observe the way in which he determines the *quantitative* character of that world. 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

Kant himself, as is well known, did not commit the critical philosophy to any one view about the quantity of the noumena/noumenon, using both the singular and the plural when talking about things in themselves. The possibility that discrete noumenal selves exist alongside but separate from their creator in some noumenal region was thus left open. One of the most obvious Schopenhauerian

departures from Kant's view of that world is therefore the conviction that it can be numerically determinable. Schopenhauer claims that it is entirely legitimate to collapse the hitherto numerically indeterminate Kantian noumenal world into a single ground. Schopenhauer purges the Kantian noumenon – a word that Schopenhauer himself actually did not use, preferring the equally Kantian term 'thing-in-itself' – of numerical ambiguity by means of a fairly straightforward, 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 in the following manner.

Schopenhauer adopts the principle 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 *principium individuationis*. [W I 113][12]

Kant himself, it may be remembered, similarly argued that space and time are necessary to represent things as distinct from one another and from our embodied self (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 assumptions that allow us to talk of the phenomena of restoration and certain kinds of replacement, as Aristotle remarks in his *Physics*). 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 unindividuatable, a monochromatic night in which even the dark bovine forms themselves cannot be discerned:

> 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 necessarily an undifferentiated unity. And at least the formal validity of the logic of this argument – leaving aside the issue of whether the *principium individuationis* is time and space – seems faultless.

Our investigations have now touched upon 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. Nevertheless, it is probably 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 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 progressively coming to be self-present in the world. It might, though, 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 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'.[13] If this point be accepted, then we can see that what separates such monists as Hegel from more traditional Christians might be more a matter of emphasis, rhetoric or articulation than actual heresy. But be that as it may, what decisively differentiates Schopen-hauerian monism from the monism of such monotheistic thinkers as Hegel – heretical or not – is that Schopenhauer then refused to deify the One; indeed, 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 the corroboration which is exemplified in Schopenhauerian texts such as *On the Will in Nature*). Evidently, over recent centuries science has provided and today continues to provide exceptionally revealing accounts of our physical universe. Schopenhauer does not deny this. Rather, he, alongside Descartes and others, argues that we are not part of that physical universe comprehended by science, which means that science can claim to be a highly competent but not a comprehensive account of reality. Schopenhauer recognises the power and necessity of science whilst simultaneously recognising that it cannot be the whole story. 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 of 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 – that is, excluded the subjective viewpoint, as contemporary philosophers supportive of the idea of *qualia* still maintain to this day – but also 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

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 discovers the essence of reality 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 admittedly not the self found in most of traditional philosophy. It should be stated here that although any account of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, including this one, must provide a description of his crucial account of the self, it will not be the purpose of the present discussion to elaborate upon nor to query this account at any length. The present aim is simply to reveal Schopenhauer's exclusion argument against God. To do this, the privilege of treating Schopenhauer's conception of the self as a workable theory will be granted. Eschewing overt critical engagement with – but not description of – Schopenhauerian thoughts on the self in this way will better allow us 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'[14] and to that extent Heideggerean phenomenology might be taken to support Schopenhauer's thought). Schopenhauer captures the 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 in this instance are only partly parodic – postulates an ' "I will" which accompanies all our actions' (FW 95–6). This particular remark strongly suggests that the will is something of which we are aware in bodily action (perhaps in bodily action alone). Yet 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 two puzzles. First, it is uncertain whether Schopenhauer means to refer here either to intentional actions such as 'gesticulating' (in which case the will could scarcely be said to be blind any longer: 'voluntary movement is marked by the absence of surprise'[15]) or whether he instead means to refer to the feeling that accompanies 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*). 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 – such as the experience of pain – can seem to be experienced passively, without active experience of bodily action at all (one thinks of feeling a burn). As this point may also be put, if we take seriously Schopenhauer's characterisation of willing 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, also W II 202), then our experience of voluntary bodily action would surely be but one instance of what Schopenhauer means by willing. Schopenhauer is rather vague about what willing precisely consists in. In any case, I largely want to forgo 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 by saying that what he means by will is 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 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, 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 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 Heideggerean phenomenology but also by the words of one leading commentator, Janaway, 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.'[16]

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. 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 – pre-reflectively – aware of ourselves not primarily as subjects of knowledge (though, mysteriously, we are also that) 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.

If we 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, these claims will be accepted: no time shall be spent 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[17] seems to be omitted by this account or that the model of self as will conflicts with the Kantian 'transcendental' knowing self that Schopenhauer had earlier espoused[18]). These and other problems are to be bypassed for the reason stated earlier: of greater interest here 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, though, should the manner in which we know ourselves be more indicative of the nature of the thing in itself than the manner in which we know other things – as extensive, spatio-temporal objects? Self-knowledge is privileged over our 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

Those are the means by which Schopenhauer determines the self. But he also maintains that the whole of the spatio-temporal world is essentially composed of the will. How did he travel from the determination of the self to knowledge of the world?

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 beyond the *principium individuationis*. Which

means that since he has ascertained the character of one part of a world that he will discover has no parts, his intuition of the will and the reduction of the intelligible world to one is all the argumentation needed. Yet Schopenhauer demonstrably commits himself to such unnecessary argumentation, proceeding from the self as will to the world as will by an argument from analogy: 'We shall judge all objects according to the analogy of this body' (W I 105). Which are the first objects to be so judged?

The most evident 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 nonetheless 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 between human and animal willing may seem moderately persuasive, 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.[19]

Schopenhauer's argument from analogy thus 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: will. But it then cuts across our intuitions in its exorbitantly unlikely sounding suggestion that the same is as true for plants as it is for animals (W I 110). What we humans share with plants is not simply, as Aristotle had empirically surmised in *De Anima*, 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 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 again in *On the Will in Nature* Schopenhauer 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 this description of Schopenhauer's method of analogy as a procedure in determining the nature of the noumenal world is not only the most intuitively credible reading of Schopenhauer's text but is also an implicit rejection of a recent interpretation of Schopenhauer that, unusually, denies the very existence of such an argument from analogy in his metaphysics. Such is the provocative, though 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*. Atwell suggests there that Schopenhauer is not essaying an argument from analogy at all:

> The transference of self-knowledge to world understanding does not 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.[20]

This point of view appears too extreme, however, for there is substantially more than just a 'hint' of an argument from analogy, as has been demonstrated in the previous paragraphs of this section (see also the methodological clarity exhibited by Schopenhauer in W II 274 and W II 196, W II 321, W I 125). Unless we accept that Schopenhauer did use this argument from analogy we have instead to accept the improbable claim that he explicitly and repeatedly misstated his own position.

Schopenhauer's sustained ontological and analogical argumentation from self-knowledge as will to the qualitative character of the thing in itself reaches its desolate endgame with the assertion that animals, plants and even the whole of the inorganic world are to be seen as the 'objectification' of the universal will.[21] Which is also the conclusion of the atheistic argument from exclusion, since given both the absence of any principle of individuation within the Kantian intelligible world outside space and time, together with the intuition of will as the essence of that world found through self-knowledge, one is obliged to draw the conclusion that on Schopenhauerian premises God does not exist – there is simply nowhere for Him to exist. He cannot be sensed in the world of representation, as Kant had already decisively pointed out, and the thing in itself – where Kant thought that He might exist, beyond the possibility of triggering human sensation – is found by Schopenhauer not to be a holy kingdom at all, nor even the mysterious location of some instrumental principle of justice administering ultimate judgements according to the comparative beneficence of our personalities, but rather one non-wise, non-benevolent, entirely uncaring impersonal entity that appears phenomenally as the brutal injustice of nature.[22] Nature is thus our enemy, at least insofar as she conspires with death.

VII Points of Criticism

We are now in a position to enlarge upon a couple of key criticisms that might be raised against Schopenhauer's enterprise, an enterprise that certainly seems to lead effortlessly from Kant's philosophy, through deepened self-knowledge, to atheism. The first objection will turn out to be unsuccessful but it will nevertheless be illuminating to see in what way it is so unsuccessful, especially as it is an objection that naturally springs to mind when one is made aware of certain other, apparently inconsistent, features of Schopenhauerian thought.

I

We know that Schopenhauer – in the broader context of an extremely Aristotelian passage concerning the senses – states that hearing, like willing, involves the *a priori* form of time but not of space (W II 28). We both hear and will in time alone. But since it is by virtue of its non-spatiality that willing reveals the thing-in-itself, then hearing too should be eligible for being an experience of the thing in itself. Yet it remains doggedly unlike such an experience. Three possible answers to this puzzle might suggest themselves here.

In the first place, we might say that hearing can be an experience of will because in his 'metaphysics of music' 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[23]) relate to the world of the Platonic ideas (we here anticipate a theme to be introduced later). 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*.[24]

It seems to follow that music 'mirrors' the pure will; it is a form of hearing that is an experience of willing. But there is also another form of hearing that is purportedly an experience of willing: hearing a 'voice'. Closely following the Aristotelian – and broadly correct – distinction between 'voice' and 'speech', the former of which applies to both non-human animals and men,[25] 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 – that is, 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) – although one could conceivably argue that space is required for sound but I shall let 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, 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. But Schopenhauer himself did not accept this 'hedonic' view of hearing (in *The World as Will and Representation*, at any rate):

> 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]

In any case, there would 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 been debated by Berkeley scholars discussing Berkeley's conflation of qualities with hedonic states but it is still to find any lasting conclusion. Even dogmatically siding with 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 senses of smell or taste seem much better placed to play this role, as is 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.

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 not – as above – to partially or wholly conflate them 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.[26] 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) thus ultimately fails because hearing is significantly different from willing insofar as it remains tied to the phenomenal world of representation. 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.

II

Our second and final objection takes for 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, ignoring Berkeley at this point), 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. That this claim is not an uncontentious point even if one accepts Schopenhauerian premises 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 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, and indeed in many other places, Schopenhauer admits that the identification of the noumenal world with the will in his philosophy is problematic in so far as our 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.

Georg Simmel 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.[27]

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, fairly limited in metaphysical terms. It shows not that the thing in itself is will at all but has rather now dwindled into the more anaemic 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 a liminal element of the phenomenal world, arguably at the very lip 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 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 number does'[28] – 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.[29]

Not only is this stark sceptical objection concerning our access to the world of the thing in itself both serious and without any obvious answer but Schopenhauer himself frequently and openly recognises this shortfalling in his argument as a methodological difficulty in arriving at the thing in itself through the will. Moreover, he also, far from attempting to remedy it, repeatedly admits it to be an insoluble problem (a strategy of raising unanswered problems that may remind one of Hume). 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 clearly it does his system, *qua* system, very little good.

It remains true that whether, after acknowledging this significant shortfall in Schopenhauer's argument, we go on to construe the will as the thing in itself in appearance and therefore as a wholly phenomenal entity (as does Atwell in *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World*) or whether we construe the will in more ontologically intricate terms as situated in a third ontological realm that is distinct from the noumenal world but is equally distinct from the phenomenal world as well (the approach of Young in *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*) is, as should scarcely need emphasising, of fundamental importance for the Schopenhauer scholar. It is equally evident that it would constitute something of a digression here: 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 – 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 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 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 unchecked.

Notes

1   D. Berman, 'Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: Honest Atheism, Dishonest Pessimism', in *Willing and Nothingness*, ed. C. Janaway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 178–95, 186. The next quote cited from Berman can be found on the same page.

2   C. Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 104. A rendering of this point seems also to be suggested by G. Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 89: 'The given, the mind, the collection of perceptions cannot call upon anything other than themselves. But as it calls upon itself, what exactly is it calling upon, since the collection remains arbitrary . . .'

3   See Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in *Works*, pp. 139, 183. The next quote from Berkeley in this paragraph is from *Three Dialogues*, p. 156.

4   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.

5   J. Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), p. 4.

6   L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), §202; consider also §258.

7   See, for example, G. Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason* (London: Merlin, 1980), p. 233.

8   T.W. Adorno, *Kierkegaaard: Konstruction des Asthetischen*; in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), Band 2, p. 16.

9   Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, p. 7.

10 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*), p. 93.

11 The general line of argument of D.W. Hamlyn's *Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); comparable claims have been made on behalf of the psychoanalytic unconscious.

12 See also Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Everyman, 1991), II, XXVII, pp. 1, 156: 'The *principium individuationis* . . . is existence itself, which determines a being of any sort to a particular time and space.' Omitted here is any discussion of the problematic Platonic ideas or grades in Schopenhauer, which are not in space and time but are multiple (prominent commentators advocate strictly excising the – on this reading, plethoric – grades from Schopenhauer's philosophy).

13 L. Kolakowski, *Religion* (Glasgow: Fontana: 1982), pp. 148.

14 See M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 45.

15 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §628.

16 Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, p. 248. Much of Schopenhauer's evidence is assessed (and found persuasive) by Janaway at pp. 260–63.

17 Ibid., p. 226.

18 Our understanding of the complexities of Schopenhauer's thinking on the self has been much advanced by 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 (p. 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' (p. 269).

19 Heidegger's philosophical project, by means of illustration, involves expanding ontol-
ogy 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 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*, pp. 67, 71, 75.

20 J.E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of Will*
(California: University of California Press, 1995), p. 102.

21 The necessity of using the word 'objectification' in this context derives from acknowl-
edging 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 understand-
ing – he regards it as the first instance of 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.

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

23 See L. Boltzmann, 'On a Thesis of Schopenhauer's', in *Theoretical Physics and
Philosophical Problems* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974), pp. 185–200, 190. In point of fact,
Schopenhauer does refer to dance at PP II 430 as an 'exterior' imposed upon music,
'directed more to lasciviousness than to aesthetic pleasure' (p. 432).

24 Kierkegaard appears to attach immense importance to the non-spatial character of
music, which would align him with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: 'With products of
the other arts, their sensual character indicates precisely that they have an existence in
space . . . Music is a higher, more spiritual art', *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*
(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 79. Attention to the pseudononymous character of
Kierkegaard's authorship, however, reveals that this is the position of the intemperate

author of the 'Seducer's Diary' and that music is valued quite differently by Judge Vilhelm, author of part II of *Either/Or*: 'Music has time as its element but gains no persistency in it; its meaning is to persistently vanish in time; it sounds but fades at the same time and has no duration. Poetry . . . is the most complete of all the arts' (p. 461).

25   Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 1253a. Little has been written philosophically upon the concept of voice, except for marginal hints to be found in Aristotle, Rousseau, etc.

26   Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, p. 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*, p. 192.

27   G. Simmel, *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 33.

28   Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, p. 197.

29   Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, p. 30.

Chapter 4

Questionable Features of Life and Imaginary Benefits of Death

> The suffering of others infects us, pity is an infection.
>
> Nietzsche, *Will to Power*

I Introduction

Reading the foregoing chapter might well have convinced one that it is Arthur Schopenhauer, above all, who has tried most painstakingly – though not necessarily successfully – to accommodate post-Kantian philosophy to a vision of a bleak, hostile ontology. But Schopenhauer's problematic metaphysical attempt to identify the Kantian noumenal world with an undifferentiated will was not Schopenhauer's exclusive argument for the non-existence of God: his resolute attachment to Christian morality supplied him with what he took to be further rational grounds for disbelieving in God's existence; an argument to be examined – and in part, reconstructed – shortly. Later, Schopenhauer's introduction of the notion of a non-theistic salvation into his system will be considered, primarily because this was an account that Nietzsche took obvious pains to discredit in many of 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, basically being the inheritor of Christianity in this regard. Nietzsche thought that the Schopenhauerian – just like the Christian and the ancient Platonic – valorisation of a painless world over our terrestrial one was to be physiologically explained as the preference of an ailing constitution on the part of the valoriser. 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 historical 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'.

More specifically, this chapter will first describe Schopenhauer's moral theory and will also involve a reconstruction of the 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. Three of the most plausible possible construals of Schopenhauer's justification of ethics will be looked at. After a consideration of these alternatives and an eventual espousal of a reconstruction of Schopenhauer's argument along one of these lines, Schopenhauer's criticism of the

assumed existence of God as supported by his ethics will be examined. Then it will be shown how 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 upon certain metaphysical elements of the Schopenhauerian philosophy which are assumed to be true. As it may also be put, after the philosophical reconstruction of Schopenhauer's argument concerning ethics, it will then be shown how Schopenhauer's moral argument against the existence of God is flawed at very basic conceptual level. It could well be objected at this point that in actually providing a specific philosophical foundation (by means of reconstruction) which is subsequently treated as a stalking horse, nothing other than constructing a straw man has in fact been accomplished here. This particular objection assumes, though, that there are many other interpretations of Schopenhauer's ethics to be chosen between that are equally coherent. In what follows, it will be conceded that there is indeed one other supportable and coherent interpretation of the foundations of Schopenhauerian ethics but this other construal shares, as shall be pointed out, precisely the same pivotal assumption which proved the downfall of the interpretation favoured here. To close the present chapter we shall, 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 then critical, indicating how Schopenhauer's model of salvation (confining ourselves, for reasons to be explained, to its aesthetic ramification) shares certain central features with the traditional model of Christian redemption.

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 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 text on philosophical 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 does not start with a conceptual determination of morality – in the manner of Kant – and so himself strives to avoid formulating an abstract 'moral law', preferring to examine 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 particular 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 whatso-ever he amasses various examples from history, literature and the theatre (Shake-

speare 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, literature and history to find standard norms of human motivation was quite common to earlier – pre-Kantian – British ethical theorists (and was also flirted with by Kant in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, which shows some intimacy with writers such as Richardson, Molière, Swift, Fielding and Shakespeare). 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:

> 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.[1]

This is Hume's famous 'experimental method' in the moral sciences: an accurate observation of everyday life comparable with the experiments of the natural sciences. It is not, however, Hume who provides Schopenhauer with the most observable influence in this regard but rather it is Hume's own friend and mentor, the eighteenth-century British empiricist and moral sense theorist Francis Hutcheson. These Schopenhauerian classes of human motivation (egoism, malice and compassion) correspond closely to those laid down by Hutcheson in his *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, where he 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*'.[2] 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 as a motive.

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 some 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 arguably 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 which correspond to the main motives of human conduct and into which individuals are simply born and out of which they cannot be converted: 'He who wants to hire a murderer will look around among the people who have already had blood on their hands' (FW 51). These character types are inborn and inescapable.[3] 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 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.[4] Irrespective of the question of how far Schopenhauer's views on the constancy of moral character mirror those of Kant, they are nonetheless views that 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, it was rather ambiguously said above that there exist 'three or four main human ethical character types' because, although in *On the Basis of Morality* Schopenhauer's characterology marks out 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).

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. Yet 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.[5] And second, that our empirical appeals to self-evidence would really reflect a true consensus of opinion. And yet 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*). It is 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.

Schopenhauer's ethical methodology is thus in the first place empirical and descriptive (after the manner of 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 – 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. Three central ways in which leading commentators have philosophically reconstructed Schopenhauer's argument justifying compassion will now be looked at, beginning with the argument 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. Ontologically, our relationship to the noumena is one of identity. 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 (giving 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.'[6] On such a 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 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. Not all commentators, however, accept this reading of Schopenhauer's ethics.

It would not be inappropriate here to mention that one commentator, Hans-Johann Glock, has recoiled from interpreting Schopenhauer in the way just done because it 'would turn altruism into a gigantic form of egoism'.[7] Patrick Gardiner has similarly censured the reduction of compassion to egoism.[8] 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'.[9] However, interpreting Schopenhauer as eventually reading compassion as something other than genuine only generates 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 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 staggered model of recurring textual arrangement that A. Philonenko recognised in his comment that 'L'oeuvre de Schopenhauer est comparable à une spirale'[10]). 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'.[11]

Janaway, however, himself goes on to propose a different interpretation of Schopenhauer's defence of compassion. 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, 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.[12]

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 then there is no more reason to stop me being partisan than there is to let me vigorously promote my selfish ends (this thesis therefore needs to be supplemented with an account, possibly a quasi-Levinasian one, of why the other counts *qua* other). This specific criticism will not be pursued at any length, however, though it is worth noting 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.

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. 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, who has claimed that 'Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion . . . stands entirely in the tradition of the moral-sense school'.[13] Henrich seems to think that Schopenhauer, like Hutcheson, is something of a moral sense theorist. To the following extent Henrich is no doubt correct: there is indeed a striking resemblance between the categories of motivation in Schopenhauer and those to be found in Hutcheson. Nevertheless, stressing Schopenhauer's indebtedness to the moral sense school is 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.'[14]

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'.[15] In contradistinction to this position, Schopenhauer again and again tells us that virtue springs from the 'intuitive knowledge that 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): 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 the Welsh philosopher, Price); and there is every reason to describe Schopenhauer as an ethical intutionist of the latter sort, that is, 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] is in accordance both with the nature of things *and* the nature of man.'[16] This characterisation seems to sit well

with Schopenhauer's position, according to which pity is avowedly a natural emotion but one with a significant 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.

The leading three approaches to grounding the goodness of compassion appear to have now been exhausted. 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, let us 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. 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 and unsurprisingly some of the claims of traditional Judaeo-Christian theism are found wanting. For example, in one of his later essays, '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 atheistic argument, the reader may perhaps be confused as to whether it is logical or 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. 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.'[17] This characterisation of God from Calvin is not at all atypical of the 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 406–407n]

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 be pointed out here that Schopenhauer's argument about the existence of evil is of course 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 brings us to the very objection, or family of objections, to Schopenhauer's argument that will now be considered. 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 very little (even 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 significant Christian thinker who seems to have provided a forceful treasury of 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 the monumental *City of God* that we are in fact all more or less sinful and so every one of us is 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 *prima facie* explanations of why there might exist human suffering in a world created by an omnicompetent 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 (he tellingly remarks on the suffering 'of all that lives' (PP I 121)). Recent philosophy of religion has 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. Given, then, that Schopenhauer's remarks upon the suffering in the world partially anticipate – 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.[18] 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 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 even from this relatively small list of examples from the writings of just one thinker we can see that there are clearly many potentially 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); at W I 406n Augustine's sophistic exertions (*Bemühungen und Sophismen*) are mentioned, derisively – he does not counter any of Augustine's objections themselves with sustained argument. However, we shall eschew criticising Schopenhauer for neglecting traditional lines of theodicy such as Augustine's here because we 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, 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 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, which is also accurate. This then entails that God is responsible for subjecting his creatures, animals and humans alike, to such suffering and therefore is 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.

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). We know that this world is bad because it offends our justified sense of compassion. But there is a 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. So 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). 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 ethical disagreement jeopardising his espousal of compassion being self-evidently moral.

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 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 ontologico-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 Nietzsche. But before moving on to consider Nietzsche's own distinctively post-Schopenhauerian arguments against religion, it will be necessary, finally, to touch upon a further 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)

Schopenhauer's account of salvation seems to Nietzsche to share a central 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 first arose. In briefly outlining this doctrine of salvation, the focus will be 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 Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music has already mentioned in the previous chapter, no further attention to that branch of his aesthetics will be paid here).

Like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Schopenhauer's infernal philosophy is actually aimed towards salvation. Schopenhauer's account of salvation from the will 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 (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 ontological question of what precisely a 'grade of objectification' is, we can at least say that Schopenhauer's aesthetics – strongly prefiguring the aesthetics of the later Heidegger in this respect[19] – is premised upon the idea that in our everyday non-aesthetic dealings with objects (and 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 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, 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. Our needs are the horizon that, as it were, illuminates what something is understood *as*. 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 we now turn.

VI The Worth of Tragedy

Schopenhauer's argument for the self as primarily a willing self partly relied upon a phenomenological description of our everyday, non-epistemologically oriented behaviour. Yet he also thought, in a strikingly proto-Heideggerean manner,[20] that instrumental perception could be overcome and could be overcome by means of the experience of art. 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, seemingly under the influence of Edmund Burke in this regard, he eliminates all the moral and theological baggage that the concept of the sublime freighted in the critical philosophy), contemplating art removes us, at least for a time, from the world of desiring and ushers us into a painless world of truth. 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 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 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* and which did not appear in the world (unlike Goethe's concrete *Urphänomen*). 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) – 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* 596b) and Schopenhauer's grades are empirically perceived by the senses, which Plato famously denied.

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 highly 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 effective presentation of suffering exhorts us to renounce our willing selves, an interpretation of tragedy as renunciation – explicitly rejected by Nietzsche, particularly in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Nachlass* – 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 beyond 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 contemporary Christian setting.

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 detected between Schopenhauerian salvation and the Christian religion. The link consists in an assumption which Nietzsche diagnosed as being part of 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' assumption, found particularly in 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 is clearly and simply right in this instance: one of the obvious assumptions of Schopenhauer's system – 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 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 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 self-reflective 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 the only such philosopher. On Nietzsche's own interpretation in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Greek tragedians were cases in point ('The Greeks . . . to his [Schopenhauer's] annoyance did not "resign themselves"', Nietzsche writes in a note not intended for publication (WP §851)). As indeed were those Greeks involved in the Dionysian mystery cults (TI 120). But even quite independently of Nietzsche, the young Hegelian Max Stirner, 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'.[21] This 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.'[22] In this last respect he differs also from Schopenhauer: 'Schopenhauer was not strong enough for a new yes' (WP §1017).

Schopenhauer's detached ideal of redemption is strongly related, Nietzsche argues, 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 and consolidated 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 *beatitude*. For a man's happiness or beatitude consists in the vision whereby he sees God.'[23] 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 in metaphysics, morality, religion and science are world-denying 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 afflicted. Engineering an antithesis between a real world and an apparent world and then favouring the spurious '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. The chief 'error' of Western philosophy for Nietzsche is thus not to be historically traced to some fundamental but arbitrarily contingent mistake or omission originally perpetrated by, say, Plato and then perpetuated in ignorance by practically all subsequent theorists, as it is for philosophers such as Heidegger, Rorty and Derrida. Rather, the 'ascetic ideal' that finds expression in many philosophies is the product of a continual possibility of human nature as we know it.

Such a physiological and naturalistic 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

Examining – and partially reconstructing – Schopenhauer's moral argument against God 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 must be understood as an attempt to regard the successive Platonic, Christian and Schopenhauerian rejections 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.

Notes

1   D. Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 83.
2   F. Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, in *Collected Works* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1971), Vol. II, p. 216.
3   Existentialist writers have, however, thought that pointing to some natural disposition was not enough to morally characterise someone because such traits of character had to be freely accepted – often in 'bad faith', as supposedly determining them – or alternatively overcome (see M. Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 44–5). As Kierkegaard wrote: 'Choice itself is decisive for a personality's content', *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, p. 482. Clearly, the difference between Schopenhauer and the existentialists is ultimately reducible to a metaphysical dispute about the freedom of other people, and of oneself (character being a matter of decision or discovery). Incidentally, it might be maintained that this issue exposes a perfect tension in Sartrean philosophy, as affirmed by B. Williams, who registers an 'ambiguity in his thought between the ideas that man has no essence, and that man has an essence, which is freedom', *Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 67.
4   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 to such an intuitive concept of responsibility which makes avoidability a necessary condition (Frankfurt cases).
5   See H. Jensen, *Motivation and the Moral Sense in Francis Hutcheson's Moral Theory* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 54.
6   D.W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, p. 139.
7   Hans-Johann Glock, 'Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein' in C. Janaway, ed., *Companion*, pp. 422–58, 449.
8   P. Gardiner, *Schopenhauer* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1963), pp. 276–7.
9   C. Janaway, *Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 83.
10   A. Philonenko, *Schopenhauer: une Philosophie de la tragédie* (Paris: Vrin, 1980), p. 11.
11   Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, p. 82.
12   Ibid., p. 84.
13   D. Henrich, *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 68.
14   J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* in J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 78. Schopenhauer offers a very similar characterisation, explicitly connected with Francis Hutcheson's views, at BM 168.
15   Jensen, *Motivation and the Moral Sense in Francis Hutcheson's Moral Theory*, p. 59.
16   W.D. Hudson, *Ethical Intuitionism* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 7.
17   J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 15.
18   The Augustinian passages referred to in this paragraph can be located at *City of God*, Book I, Ch 9, 16–17; Book XXII, Ch. 24, 1070 and Book XX, Ch 2, 896–7.

19 The separation of what Heidegger calls the 'ready to hand' from the 'present to hand' 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', that is, as a tool to deal with nails: 'The less we just stare 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*, p. 98. Purposive involvement – '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 demonstrably 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. 162–80.

20 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 essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art', wherein the possibility that artworks instantiated Platonic ideas is explicitly discounted, arguably indicating that Heidegger had a Schopenhauerian aesthetics expressly in mind whilst writing it.

21 M. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 276.

22 R.W.K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 182.

23 St Thomas Aquinas, *The Compendium of Theology* (London: Herder, 1993), Ch. 106.

Chapter 5

An Experiment in Strength

My Innovations – Further development of pessimism; critique of morality, disintegration of the last consolation.

Nietzsche, *Will to Power*

Our most sacred convictions, the unchanging elements in our supreme values, are judgements of our muscles.

Nietzsche, *Will to Power*

I Introduction

Nietzsche's words offer no consolation. Kant denied the possibility of any unambiguous claim to 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 subsequently revealed a philosophic vision of a world that was based upon but at variance with Kant's, destituting us of God but nonetheless stilling our terror 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 Schopenhauer, can be seen to believe that monotheistic religion is being inexorably phased out of our history. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he casually 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 be suggesting, although adding that the resulting space is being filled by morality. Yet we might point out that it is arguable whether this sociological thesis of inevitable secularisation espoused by both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is, in point of fact, historically true. If it is true at all, it is true only of certain sectors of the rarefied Western world and, even then, countries like the United States and Israel seem to be undergoing or to represent something of a religious renaissance within significant pockets of the developed world itself. But at all events, Nietzsche went beyond Schopenhauer by adding a normative objective to his anthropological account by diagnosing Semitic monotheistic religion – and then, for good measure, Schopenhauerian philosophy itself – as pathological, a morbid decadence on the part of the human species that was best avoided. In the Christian populace, he saw 'all the neuroses keep a rendezvous' (WP §180). Nietzsche's cardinal line of argument against the Christian religious tradition is that it is a sign both of escapism traceable to physiological weakness (the 'ascetic ideal' which we have already encountered

in its specifically Schopenhauerian form) and also of what he calls *ressentiment*, and that humanity would therefore be best served forgetting all about it. These are not unsupported opinions about religion and the following pages will explicate 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 first wrote them. The central thesis which will be defended here is that although some elements of Nietzsche's psycho-physiological 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, some preliminary methodological points ought to be addressed.

II Problems of Interpretation

It is well known that certain difficulties beset any reception of Nietzsche's thought, not least because with Nietzsche one feels – rightly – that a certain traditional way of doing and presenting philosophy changes. Although he often addresses problems – of metaphysics and epistemology as well as of ethics, religion, 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 would have to consider Socrates, Hume and Kierkegaard as ironists of equal or greater measure within that history), 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 vituperative 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 we should state in advance that this work will claim only to have isolated what appear to be the central themes of the mature Nietzsche's writings on religion – the mature thought beginning around the time just following *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (following the now fairly standard division of Nietzsche's thought into three periods).

This is no doubt the right place to mention that a Heideggerean approach to the problem of Nietzschean exegesis has not been followed here. Martin Heidegger's

influential published lecture notes on Nietzsche – which extend to several volumes – and the work on Nietzsche that he in particular inspired will not have much bearing on the outcome of this chapter and will not even be critically dealt with at any substantial length. This is chiefly because Heidegger offers us 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'.[1] The 'grounding question of Western thinking' is not Nietzsche's own but is rather a part of Heidegger's enduring and pervasive personal preoccupation with a certain question of ontology (the question of the meaning of Being). 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 obvious attempt to read the history of philosophy through the distorting 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 we 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 as a result definitively sets the tone for the recent deconstructive readings of Nietzsche, such as *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, written under a broadly Heideggerean aegis by Jacques Derrida.[2] Meditations upon the deconstruction of reading such as this text – which is at crucial points self-consciously indebted to Heidegger's questionable 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. *Allegories of Reading*, by Paul de Man, which claims to be consequential for Nietzsche studies and subjects Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in particular to a detailed analysis, 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'.[3] 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, the intention of this book 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 apocalyptically expressed theories of reading can be seen to touch on more local difficulties of Nietzschean exegesis, we will not hesitate to call upon, or to put into question, their testimony.

Thematically, the following is religious in scope. Methodologically, it undertakes a naturalistic reading of Nietzsche (the least exegetically contentious interpretation). By 'naturalistic' it is broadly meant that Nietzsche will be read as offering an account of man as a part – an extremely interesting part – of nature, and we

shall therefore see *ressentiment* and other such phenomena as being as explainable – not necessarily in precisely the same way, of course – as is the animal behaviour of other species. In this we seem to be 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). Given comments and passages such as these, attributing to Nietzsche a naturalistic theory of man seems less far-fetched than supposing him attached to a view according to which the human soul is unamenable to empirical or scientific investigation.

We shall presently see that Nietzsche analyses the Christian religion in terms of two enduring features we can find in its adherents. first, the individual's decadent need for salvation and second, the submissive desire to assuage a fear of, and a need for revenge upon, one's superiors (which ultimately finds expression in the propagation of a purportedly divinely underwritten universal moral code). But before proceeding to examine these two main Nietzschean objections to religion in more detail, we 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)

The Anti-Christ is a sustained polemic, split into two parts, against the Semitic monotheistic tradition: a preparatory analysis of what Christianity and 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 exceptional: on the contrary, it reminds one of similarly striking remarks by maverick Christians themselves, Christians such as William Blake and Kierkegaard. What, then, was the true message of the historical Christ that was purportedly denied and replaced by the later church? According to *The Anti-Christ*, Christ was physiologically 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 interpersonal conflict to feel at home in a world that was '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. However, leaving issues of historical verification to one side for a moment, Christ's pronouncements were 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); presumably he 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 his own part that suggests that he ascribes to Christ a genuine nobility. Even in the writings of 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 Christ's personality, it should again be pointed out that Nietzsche characterises the Christian religion as being composed of two psychological and physiological strands that can both be subjected to evaluation by determining the level of power or strength 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 – but will not admit to be – superior. Let us now assess, in turn, the plausibility and coherence of these two characteristics of religion.

IV   Christianity as Escape: Idiosyncrasy of the Degenerate

Ecce Homo tellingly describes 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* – particularly in those dealing with his '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 promise of a blissful afterlife: 'Pascal as type' (WP §51). Nietzsche contends – a charge 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 (WP §450). 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 unfeeling nature gives us little reason to believe in immortal reward and so, as our glance at Yovel's reading of Kant's moral proof of God 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 the quintessentially Nietzschean one 'who?'). Christians must be so obsessed about an afterlife, he concludes, 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.[4] 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 any

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 impression of terrestrial dissatisfaction is in a certain sense a matter of taste rather than a reflection of fact. Nietzsche then addresses the naturalistic question of how such a taste could arise in some individuals (but not in others) and comes to the conclusion – influenced in its general direction, as much recent scholarship has shown, by the German materialism of Lange and others – that Christians yearning for salvation must be the 'physiological casualties and the disgruntled' (GM 72, GM 96, GM 102). Supposing some individuals to be physiological casualties in this way explains why they might experience this world as being unsatisfactory in a way that others would not. The main point encapsulated here 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 not to do. 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 brutal physiological characterisations – who are excessively concerned with their salvation are, on this account, ill-adjusted and simply cannot cope with being in this world without fabricating unblemished metaphysical consolations. This Nietzschean criticism is applied not only to Christians 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 quasi-Platonic account of aesthetic contemplation of the 'grades of objectification' clearly assumed a desire to escape the downright painful 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 terms of the physiology of individuals. Such physiological reduction-

ism toward religion is in clear evidence in many of Nietzsche's late works – he is particularly enthusiastic about it in *Twilight of the Idols, 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]

The Christian faith is regarded here as a ghoulish religion catering for the weak and 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, Nietzsche attempts to persuade his readers to reduce religion to a question of the (unhealthy) body. Nietzsche, as 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 spiritual deliverance.

We might say that Nietzsche's characterisation of Christianity as enervated and therefore worthless comprises two levels of assertion. 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: here we could point to Pascal, the theological utilitarians, Kierkegaard (the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* repeatedly emphasises eternal happiness) and Kant (who thought that happiness was an essential part of our ultimate goal, our *summum bonum*). 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'.[5] Nietzsche's empirical claim is then followed by the secondary naturalistic 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 elimination (TI 99, AC §2). Possible theoretical objections to Nietzsche's hypothesis could, however, be launched at either – empirical or interpretative – level of statement. 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 *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, Peter Poellner has argued against precisely this contention of Nietzsche's, finding fault with it by citing – and here he is explicitly following the 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 whimsical reference to 'bowel complaints' is no doubt a reference to that 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, Poellner, following Scheler, cites the example of St Francis of Assisi as being 'What Nietzsche would call physiologically well constituted'.[6] If allowed to stand, this apparent exception would cast considerable 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 falters because, whilst for Schopenhauer, St Francis was indeed an example of healthy humanity denying the will to live (see W II 614), there is clear textual evidence to show that Nietzsche 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); and 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. 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, they are perhaps no more uncertain than those of the opposition.

Poellner's specific critical response to the interpretative historical claim that Christians are 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, Kierkegaard, Kant or Augustine, centrally concerned with the afterlife. This 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.[7] Poellner admits in this regard that in view of his dark sayings 'Eckhart might be thought to be unrepresentative' but nevertheless maintains that 'Teresa is a more orthodox figure'.[8] 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). 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, though, this response is not particularly convincing, largely because it needs considerable fleshing out in terms of explaining how strong people could accept conversion. But Nietzsche 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. When, therefore, 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 *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 are not wholly resolved by such an answer, for elsewhere Nietzsche – in a manner strikingly foreshadowing Freud's account of the neuroses – argues 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 rather socially and politically contextualised. This is particularly so in the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* – '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 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 self-denial as an act of aggression. 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 (exterior) denial and a partial
(interior) expression of cruelty, an internal expression of a drive that is denied
external 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 is a persuasive 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 therefore run as follows: typical
Christians, like Pascal, Kierkegaard and St Augustine, are generally captivated by
the thought of redemption and salvation and so are therefore weak and worthless
by Nietzschean standards; certain exceptional Christians who, powerful and poten-
tially cruel but with no outlet for their cruelty, have to internalise it. Such strong
Christians therefore utilise their religion as an 'enjoyable' way of suffering. The
majority of Christians can still be seen to be thus indeed obsessed with personal
salvation, 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, criminal 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 the strong, bereft of prudence
as they are, have little reason *not* to outwardly express their cruel, aggressive
instincts and follow an ethic of imprudent squandering. If the strong hold within
them a great passion for chance and insecurity (as is convincingly suggested in
Bataille's Nietzsche-interpretations), 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 simply because of the unexplained existence of 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 and transgressing its demands.

V   Christianity as *ressentiment*

Ressentiment is the second reason Nietzsche had for believing Christians to be worthless; it is his technical term for the thought that the Christian way of life is, in its unmasked and essential form, a specific way of domesticating or taking revenge upon the more flourishing and dangerous members of our species. Nietzsche thus attempts to expose the supposedly good and virtuous man as a vindictive and embittered, as well as weak and wearied, individual.

Before examining such claims in more detail, it should probably be mentioned that a certain background assumption to such declarations can be found throughout much of Nietzsche's work (it is an assumption no doubt buttressed by certain elements of Schopenhauer's thought): 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. 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 'evidently offered in an empirical spirit'.[9] In this next passage, 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 substantial background assumption about the non-beneficent character of nature, let us turn to the specifics of Nietzsche's argument concerning *ressentiment*.

The approach of characterising Christianity as a product of *ressentiment* is most systematically developed by Nietzsche in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he 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 (Nietzsche continually refers to 'words' and 'ideals' throughout the *Genealogy*), all Nietzsche is therefore doing in this book is linguistics: describing and criticising the language of an ethical tradition but 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 he was explicit that this was of ethical 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*'.[10] The following pages will be arguing for the acceptance of two points: first, that the same kind of thing is true for Nietzsche, and second that Nietzsche consciously intended this to be an integral part of his account.

Genealogy as a method appears to involve 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'). The idea of a historical approach to morality through a study of its language had actually 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 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 preferred examples[11] – provides him with a clue for comprehending the genesis of morality as we know it. Central to *On the Genealogy of Morals* is the basic insight that the word 'good' has not always had the same sense (thus this highly speculative pre-history 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 put to use 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 it would be best to first 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[12]).

VI   The Slave Revolt in Morals: Performance Not Description

It is important both to note that Nietzsche characterises the slave's designation as a *deed*, and that this is a characterisation that Nietzsche actually 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).[13] It is significant because Nietzsche's distinction between thought and deed in language clearly suggests that the latter is something like what, following the pioneering analyses of Austin, has become known as a 'performative' or a 'speech act', in the sense that it is not primarily or not solely the transmission of information but that it also contains a performative dimension. From the perspective of recent philosophy of language, language comprises – 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). Looking anew at the slave revolt in morals from the position of speech act theory, we can see that the slave's condemnation of the strong as outlined in the *Genealogy* is a performative act, since it is important primarily not for its meaning but for its accomplishments: it reverses 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 that all language was in fact performative[14]). For Nietzsche and for 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 is itself an act. The act of condemnation is, however, 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*.[15] Verdictives are those set of performative acts that pronounce a verdict upon a given party and as such belong to the realm of ethics and not simply linguistics.

If we are to construe the first slave revolt in morals as a speech act, though, we must 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*.[16] With regard to these distinctions, the slaves' condemnation is obviously a locutionary act (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). Rather, it seems to be a perlocutionary act, which is the 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 acted in a way that an ordinary member of the public could not have done. Here, however, there is 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 much to say about the last pope – but what about the first priest? 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? On the other hand, assuming such conventions are 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 and is helped out of the apparent impasse considerably by Austin's albeit brief allusion to the very initiating of the procedures that frame illocutionary acts. According to Austin, someone can initiate a set of conventions necessary for an illocutionary act simply by 'getting away with it'. Austin notes that the terminology here employed is rather suspicious (by which he presumably means vague) but nevertheless regards 'getting away with it' as essential.[17] The priest's first condemnation of the strong can, 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 and speech act theory in order to return and review Nietzsche's exposition of the first value assumption in human social history. 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 such an account as this, 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 – it is 'a heated eruption' – 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' 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 brought about by it (words are voiced by the nobles after all, and the slaves may well be rendered quite unstrung by them). Nevertheless, given that the nobles do not seek any social changes by means of their locution but rather seek solely to express their self-pride, there is 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, it being a spontaneous cry of enthusiasm. The idea of emotive linguistic enthusiasm – whereby the noble 'I am good' can be roughly translated as 'I approve of myself' – seems a Nietzschean one and further.it is 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. The priests, driven by the will-to-power as much as anyone else, enlisted the common man to help undermine the strong type.[18] The priests found willing accomplices in this venture because the base, 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*, experiences things as painful – 'everything hurts' (EH 45) – in a way that constantly leads him to recriminate, to apportion blame, to impute, to accuse.[19] The priests 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 order to make their condemnation of the noble type and noble values more effective, 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 condemn 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 a key term in his 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 religious 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 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). 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 now that the religiously

shaded concepts of 'equality', the 'immortal soul', 'free will', 'guilt', 'punishment', 'responsibility' and, ultimately, 'God' are introduced into human languages, twisting 'the earth into a hospital' (WP §395). Our world now deteriorates into a 'vast tepid aquarium' as Foucault once wrote, where men are imprisoned 'behind nothing but sheer terrifying concepts' (TI 67). Obviously, more will need to be said about this.

Religion as we moderns know it (the polytheistic religion of the ancient Greeks appears to be 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 wretched majority and their 'clever, cold, deceptively superior' priests (GM 98). 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 (or 'rarely') 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.'[20]

To posit the idea of a spiritual soul beyond the body in this way is to effectively suggest at least three normatively efficacious things. First, it suggests – and this suggestion will find prime philosophical expression in Kantian ethics – 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). Second, the notion of the soul arguably invests the other person with the aura of a mysterious transcendence that prevents his violation and defilement in a way that naturalistic theories of the self might not (the significant difference with the previous point is that here not only are souls equal, but they originate from God). Third, 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 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]

Recent philosophers, though, 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 certainly not worry Calvin.[21] The reconstruction of Nietzsche's argument against Christianity as formulated here, therefore, will not rely too heavily on his concerns with regard to the absence of free will in humanity.[22]

So much for our cherished ethico-religious notions: equality, the soul, guilt, altruism. . . .[23] These have been shown to be concepts that cloak the truth of the self-interest of one specific party: the slaves, the dejected, the physiological casualties. Nietzsche even traces the infection into those moralities which loudly flaunt their supposed lack of theological associations: Nietzsche sees utilitarianism as also centrally stunting human flourishing (in a similar vein, contemporary philosophers accuse Mill's *On Liberty* of being inconsistent with his *Utilitarianism*), of being as obsessed with happiness as are other physiological casualties and also of being naïve in supposing that the consequences of actions can, in any case, be calculated by us with any degree of adequacy: 'Who can say what an action will stimulate, excite, provoke . . . – The utilitarians are naive' (WP §291).

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 is one who demands precisely those modes of behaviour that are anathema to the noble man in his original state. 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 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 in a precise manner (nor is he therefore in a position to discuss whether they are either collectively coherent or whether our world bears any weight against their existence). Instead, Nietzsche takes a recognisably Kantian rather than dogmatically metaphysical approach to the issue: our concept of God is taken to reflect the human demands of moral obligation; God

emerges as '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). Hell is for other people.

Far from arising, as it did in Kant, from a necessary and to some extent beneficial tendency of the mind – though Kant is inconsistent about this – 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 crowd which preached respect and equality between responsible 'souls'. 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 primarily a Kantian God: a judge and not a creator. This 'God' is a 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, those who have a spontaneous emotive sense of their own value. It does so 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).

On the Genealogy of Morals has arguably given us an unnerving insight into the language of religion and morality, language that itself, in a non-descriptive way, manifests spite and ill will. In such a way can Nietzsche condemn Christian morality by means of its speech, its words and ideals, and be doing more than the philosophy of language, or linguistics. And as soon as this second characterisation of monotheistic religion, as a desire for revenge, is sketched in detail we notice also that it exposes 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).

VII A Socratic Objection

> Every advance in epistemological and moral knowledge has reinstated the Sophists.
>
> Nietzsche (WP §428)

The objection about to be raised has little 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. Eschewing such an approach allows us to answer an objection that might be said to be typically Socratic. It is typically Socratic in that it attaches itself to the conceptual analysis of a word that Nietzsche might be thought to be misusing. It is also literally Socratic, for 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'.[24] Callicles' historical insight, which has prominent parallels with the argument of the *Genealogy*, 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 seemingly Nietzschean 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 appears to have induced a descriptive law of nature, which he then contrasts with the kind of morality which Socrates himself expounds, consequently calling it mere convention, which is to say, unnatural. This was also 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). Socrates 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.[25] Given that Nietzsche's position is in some respects quite close to that of Callicles, we should ask whether this distinctively Socratic objection to Callicles can be unproblematically extended so as to apply to Nietzsche, too. 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?

Others have also raised Socrates' objection. It was recently revised – without reference to Socrates' argument – in Danto's *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.'[26] Danto takes the Socratic line of believing that strength cannot, on pain of contradiction, be predicated of those who are obviously subjugated in society by stronger parties. The fact Nietzsche has been charged 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.

The Socratic charge of contradiction can be defeated by questioning the basic conceptual premises of Danto's accusation. For in Danto's argument the implication is 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 normal linguistic usage where we mean something different but are nevertheless still far from speaking metaphorically. Expressions such as 'I will need you to be strong 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. 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 psychical' (BGE §257). Psychical strength is emotional self-sufficiency. On this interpretation, 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 therefore 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. The crypto-Socratic objection to Nietzsche's account of strength is therefore successfully pre-empted by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's second psychological characterisation of religion can therefore be said to be conceptually consistent, although its soundness perhaps relies upon the soundness of the insights and 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 shall be reverted to in the following chapter.

VIII   Conclusion

Nietzsche's analysis of religion as slavish survives here largely undiminished, whilst his analysis of religion as escapist – thanks, in part, to Poellner's criticism – is left unconvincing. Yet the residual question of why we are to value strength over weakness at all might well be asked at this juncture, 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 his extremely negative attitude, at times Schopenhauerian, toward human deficiency and imperfection. (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 aesthetico-ethical 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 metaphysics, or 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. We could maintain here that that particular phrase, like the entirety of Nietzsche's philosophy of religion, can be read in a sense 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.

Notes

1 M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (New York: Harper and Row, 1991), II, p. 151.

2 J. Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).

3 P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 103.

4 In a section of Schopenhauer's *World as Will*, we read 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); for Feuerbach, see *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 161: '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'. A different emphasis is given to this point by Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 75: 'The fuller life is, the more exuberantly it burgeons, the paler and more insubstantial is immortality.'

5 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.'

6 P. Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, p. 239; for Max Scheler, see his *Ressentiment* (New York: Schocken, 1972), pp. 91–2.

7 See Scheler, *Ressentiment*, p. 183, n. 17.

8 Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, p. 248.

9 W. Kaufmann *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 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., p. 207; Cf. also the reiteration on p. 229. Others, however, such as Poellner, think it a metaphysical theory similar in many respects to Schopenhauer's – see *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, p. 268 – and yet others believe it to be a thought experiment – see K. Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1966), p. 318), a psychological explanation for some but not all human behaviour – see B. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 142, or even 'a self-conscious myth' – see M. Clark, 'Nietzsche's Doctrines of the Will-to-Power' in *Nietzsche: Oxford Readings in Philosophy*, eds B. Leiter and J. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pp. 139–49, at p. 139. 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 broadly in support of Kaufmann that it 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.

10 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 20.

11 Heidegger would no doubt have ignored Gaelic. For some further remarks upon Heidegger's eliding of the Celtic languages, see my 'Heideggereans Cymreig' in *Doshisha Studies in Language and Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1, August 2002, pp. 113–30.

12 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, p. 785: 'die eigentliche *Tat* in der Konzeption einer Sklaven-Moral'.

13 Again, Nietzsche uses the word 'Tat' here: Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, vol. II, p. 782.

14 Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 145.

15 Ibid., p. 42.

16 Ibid., p. 98.

17 Ibid., p. 30.

18 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), p. 48; see also S. Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* (London: Athlone, 1993), pp. 51–3.

19 Does not everyone accuse and apportion blame? It has been 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), p. 68. Nietzsche's account of the noble's apparent lack of concern with the slave, however, 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. Gilles Deleuze may be correct in saying that 'We do not really know what a man denuded of *Ressentiment* would be like', *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (Athlone: London, 1992), p. 35; but there is nothing here that leads us to conclude that *ressentiment* is actually ineliminable. Deleuze's later assertion: '*Ressentiment*, bad conscience and nihilism are ... the foundation of the humanity in man' (p. 64) is, however, much stronger – and sanctions the Overman. For the claim that the Overman is a massively overvalued one in Nietzsche scholarship but meant relatively little to Nietzsche himself, see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 115 note; for the tentative marking out of the idea – surely convincing – that the Overman approximates an attempt at a kind of redemption that should probably have been eschewed by Nietzsche, consult G. Fraser's *Redeeming Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 2002). Obviously, if we accept Leiter's point, the exigency of Fraser's is thereby bypassed. It might be further worth mentioning here that I am broadly in agreement with much of Fraser's text but that I cannot agree with two claims made by him: that 'Nietzsche is keen to find in Jesus a kindred spirit' (p. 84) and that Nietzsche's 'hostility is not to religion *per se* but ... hostility to Christianity' (p. 145). On the second point, Nietzsche's hostility is of course to the 'ascetic ideal' which finds expression in most religions.

20 Calvin, *Institutes*, p. 62. Kierkegaard puts the same point with characteristic obliqueness: 'The relationship with God has only one evidence, the relationship with God', *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 446, note.

21 Unless Calvinists not be considered Christians (an imperious move), Stroud makes too overstated a gesture when he links Hume with Marx and Freud in their opposition to

'the views of man found in Christianity ... where there is an emphasis on will and free-choice', *Hume* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.

22 Leiter, in *Nietzsche on Morality* (p. 75), has sketched four reasons Nietzsche possesses for rejecting morality: its normative content, its origins, its universality; its theoretical presuppositions (such as free will). I am thus more or less disregarding the latter (and it should be mentioned that the third is a part of the first, as Leiter subsequently grants). The second, *qua* basis for an internal criticism of morality, is not, according to Leiter, seized upon by Nietzsche with any resolution (p. 175). But the fact that it appears in Nietzsche's published work at all seems significant to me.

23 For important qualifications and complications, see K. Ansell-Pearson's *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially p. 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). 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 to terms with each other' (GM 50); 'justice can be hoped for ... only *inter pares*' (WP §943); 'Equality for equals ... the true voice of justice' (TI 113) – but this was then, *contra* the intentions of the noble inventors, requisitioned by the 'slaves' and universalised to apply to all.

24 Plato, *The Gorgias*, p. 484. The following citation from Callicles can be located at p. 483.

25 Ibid., pp. 488–9.

26 A. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 186–7.

Chapter 6

Abandoned Truth

> 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, *Will to Power*

I   Victory Without Argument?

Nietzsche's obstinate fascination with the Christian religion, M.S. Silk and J.P. Stern have recently argued, only seems to have soured into the 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 commentators on Nietzsche and – therefore misleadingly – by Nietzsche himself in his *post-eventum* reflections on that particular text in such places as *Ecce Homo* and the preface he later added to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886. According to Silk and Stern's convincing reading, Nietzsche, although no longer himself either a practising or believing Christian at this point, nevertheless retained enough sympathy for the religion and its values and 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.[1] But whatever we may think of the merits of that particular association (later denied in *Ecce Homo*: 'Christianity is neither Appollonian nor Dionysian' (EH 79)), and although it may be worth noting that the early Nietzsche might not therefore have been a rabid out-and-out anti-Christian, this insight does not affect the argument of the present book, as it is rightly regarded as a commonplace that matters stand quite differently with his later self. The later Nietzsche condemned the Christian religious tradition again and again in his writings, to the extent that many authors, from varying schools of philosophy and criticism, today regard Nietzsche as the most significant critic of Christianity and, in particular, Christian ethics. Three religious psychopathologies were diagnosed by the mature Nietzsche: an ascetic escapism sought by terrestrial discontents, a kind of resentment which essentially involves self-deception, expressed by those who felt themselves inferior to some 'other', and the psychological masochism which ptolemaically supplemented the escapist account, with regard to those supposedly strong and dominant types who nevertheless still embraced Christianity. We have thus encountered what seemed to Nietzsche to be the three fundamental 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 mode of organisation.

These specific 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 was not a wholly satisfactory account because problems still remained concerning the precise motivation of internalisation. More impressive were Nietzsche's investigations into the historical and linguistic 'slave revolt in morals'; investigations which adequately fended off certain objections. The further point to be made here is that these psycho-physiological investigations clearly carry within them the axiological implication that atheism would be characterised by a more advantageous human relationship to terrestrial reality. Nietzsche seems to make of atheism a bracing and healthy alternative to the escapism, bad conscience and *ressentiment* of the ghoulish worldview of religious 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 only a historical contingency, as is signalled by the fact that it 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 certain physiologically reductionist arguments, 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 resentful – and just as escapist – as those that drove the priests and lay adherents of the monotheistic religions. And there is some indication that Nietzsche believed precisely this.

A heuristically instructive reference to certain of the psychoanalytic doctrines of Sigmund Freud will now be undertaken as a means to examine Nietzsche's view of atheism as first being potentially subject to *ressentiment*.

II Psychoanalysis and *Ressentiment*

The similarity between Freud's thought and that of Nietzsche could easily be, and often is, exaggerated. There are, though, 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'. There is a further *prima facie* similarity between the general structure of Nietzsche's and Freud's criticisms of 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 typical of the obsessional neuroses Freud 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*, *Moses and Monotheism* and *The Future of an Illusion*,

where this account of religion as guilt-allaying is complemented by an analysis of religion's rather different role in fulfilling our wishes (a function of religion 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 respect.

From the History of an Infantile Neurosis is a case study of a child who developed certain socially disruptive behaviour traits. Alongside his excited side, however, the child simultaneously developed what we could call a religious fixation, manifesting itself in a tendency for obsessive praying and for repeatedly making signs of the cross. Yet the child's religious obsession was, crucially, also accompanied by an irreligious streak: so when his mother introduced him to the lessons of scripture, this same child who prayed compulsively automatically responded with various cynical objections and doubts.[2] 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 terminate 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 does is also 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.[3]

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 psychoanalytical specifics (which are 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 not concerned with this question – neither atheism nor theism can regard itself as the psychologically healthy alternative. The prevalent reading of Freud as, purportedly after the manner of Nietzsche, dismissing the Semitic monotheistic religions as unhealthy *simpliciter* is consequently highly misleading: 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 even such an
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 for the Nietzschean genealogist as much as
for the Freudian psychoanalyst.

Our look at Freud casts a certain amount of indirect light upon Nietzsche's
theory of religion because in certain of his texts, often fragments and asides 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]

Nietzsche is clearly sketching a theory of atheism as unhealthy here – it might be
'reasonable' for such atheists to destroy themselves – 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, that is, 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 Nietzschean 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 'English' – 'Scottish'? – psychologist's 'subterra-
nean 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 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
we 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 just cited do constitute real evidence for attributing to Nietzsche such a view as is 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 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.'[4] On such an interpretation, the negations of theism could be interpreted as expressions of a repressed interest in their subject matter.[5] If this point about atheism having a questionable 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: taken together and amplified, the passages from Nietzsche that we looked at earlier suggest that according to Nietzsche atheism *can* be subject to one of the dramatic arguments that he himself first brought against Christianity: namely, that it expressed an unconscious desire that was symptomatic of the need of a wretched 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 evil. 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 – under which the semblance of such a self-righteous feeling can arise.

Nietzsche's original reflections on *ressentiment* relied in part 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: 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 then be characterised as itself subject to *ressentiment*, that is, 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. More shall be said about such problems of self-reference shortly. But before any attempt to answer such complaints, it is worth pointing 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 what is probably his most well-known work, the *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.'[6] For the guardians of the *Republic* at least, the discovery of the True, the discovery of things as they truly are, is not necessarily a good. But his position in the *Republic* seems little favoured today: in everyday life we tend to believe that finding out the truth about things is intrinsically good and philosophers (though scarcely only philosophers!) have tended to share the everyday belief captured in the *Charmides*. Nietzsche, however, almost uniquely – although Max Stirner is one other exception – 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 – that is, 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'.

Wanting the truth simply by virtue of its truth is intimately connected with the 'ascetic ideal'. 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 also 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 irreal world was better than engaging with our own terrestrial environment. Similarly, in his late meditations on truth Nietzsche appears to be 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. As Nietzsche writes in an unpublished note: 'It is only this desire "thus it ought to be" that has called forth that other desire to know what *is*' (WP §333). This is a restatement of the now 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 here, he is rather rejecting the all-pervasive value it is accorded by some people.[7] 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: 'One positively *wants* to repudiate one's own authority and assign it to circumstances' (WP §422). But might there not be circumstances in which this lack of belief in one's own desire is actually validated? According to one type of Christian philo-sophical self-understanding, because this world of rapacious exploitation and com-petition, 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: 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 an exit.

On such a view as this, even scientists and scholars in the humanities and elsewhere are to be seen as 'sufferers' searching for solace and comfort by an external standard by which to comport themselves and abscond from reality: 'Science as a means of self-anaesthetic' (GM 117). This highly unusual insight into the ultimately physiological nature of the search for truth perhaps most clearly emerges in Nietzsche's discussion of the figure 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 'auditory hallucinations' and ugliness. Of course, such a diagnostic case study of Socrates as is 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 be empirically checked because of a similar scarcity of historical evidence. Instead of investigating this – or any other – specific case study, therefore, let us 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 his thought.

The desire for truth as a goal, 'the will to truth', is probably most rigorously subjected to a detailed psychological analysis by Nietzsche in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which traces this kind of escapist psychology to a certain type of deficient physiology. The truth-seeking man, much like the religious man motivated by escapism (St Francis, or Jesus, or even 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 a way that some people escape from themselves, from selves they experience as – but will not admit to be – impotent and unsatisfying. Following the analysis in Poellner's *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, we might say that there are in fact three definite 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.[8] 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 individuals, be seen to be an unconditioned reality external to them that will function as a place of final 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). Third, 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 of Max Stirner's text *The Ego and Its Own*, where 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*.[9]

Stirner came to this insight whilst engaging with the work of 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 as already proved – but rather examines the phenomenon 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.'[10] 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 ('alienation' becomes a key theme amongst the neo-Hegelians, Marx included). 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 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 issue of abandoning an absolute attachment to truth as a goal is evidently pronounced. 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).

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.[11]

Nietzsche is not absolutely unique, then, in questioning the value of truth in modernity (though there are of course differences, particularly in emphasis, between Nietzsche and Stirner). But where he is more innovative is in his emphasising the role of truth in the tortuous process of Christianity being strangely responsible for its own burial. In his later works, Nietzsche sees Christianity as directly contributing to a massive crisis of values in Western civilisation by emphasising and cultivating the virtue of truthfulness to the extent that we are always duty bound to tell the truth; whilst all the time basing 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: '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, 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 ascetic ideal, Nietzsche (and everyone who follows him) is actually perpetuating it.'[12]

IV   Against *Ressentiment*, Against Nihilism

Although Nietzsche attacked the Western monotheistic religious tradition for being unhealthy in certain specific ways, 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. It has now emerged that Nietzsche sporadically charges atheism with complaints similar to those which he brought against theistic religion. Atheism can potentially be 'subterranean *rancune*' towards Christianity or it can be one of the last phases of the ascetic ideal: it can 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 ('God' or '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 (we have already examined the self-endangering character of the noble type, where we saw it could potentially lead to 'bad conscience'), so we should not lay too much stress on spontaneity. The 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 marked out as being insurrectionary by nature, and it is therefore by implication non-religious (at least prior to the advance of 'bad conscience'). Hence, after his description of the emergence of the organisation of the early Christian church, Nietzsche remarks that in stark contradistinction to this development, '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, 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 (condemning it on the basis of an exterior legitimating epistemological standard). 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 be an atheistic type who is naturally aggressive but not unhealthy by Nietzschean standards. But is there any additional 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. We 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,[13] 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 the 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'[14] – fails because Nietzsche's striving to be seen as spontaneously and self-consciously attacking Christianity 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 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, 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 reaction 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 or investigative support to connect Nietzsche's obvious reaction with the further presence of self-deceptive *ressentiment*.

The attempt to portray Nietzsche as subject to the will to truth also misfires. It 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 (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'[15]). The 'critic of Christianity cannot be spared the task of making Christianity contemptible' (AC §57).

Nietzsche identifies not one atheism which is unhealthy but rather three kinds of atheism. All are known 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 more intimate relationship to the will to power.

V   Secularisation, History, Inexorability

So Nietzsche sees atheism as well as theism as being potentially based on *ressentiment* and as being potentially subject to the ascetic ideal. But Nietzsche's atheistic philosophy could nevertheless escape charges of self-reference, at least in principle. This naturally now leads us to 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 – 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?[16]

It is absolutely 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 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 icily 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 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 uncon-

ditionally accepting the hypothesis of the worthlessness of religion that he habitu-
ally admits that the phenomena he at once condemns as slavish, ignoble and base
also actually fascinate him with their profundity, intelligence, interest, ingenuity
and danger. 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. [GM 62]

Thereby arousing 'interest, tension, hope'; 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 or epistemological 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, not the problem of self-reference, seems to be 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 occasion-
ally does – Christianity as another valuable expression of the will to power
(Zarathustra and the saint, laughing together in Zarathustra's *Prologue* . . .). 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
we are alternatively committed to attacking that tradition, would then seem to be a
dilemma resolved by individual decision alone – Kierkegaard or Nietzsche?

Before leaving Nietzsche, however, to be as fair to his influential attack on
religion as is possible, it is worth mentioning, although only rather schematically,
one recent attempted solution to this problem of artificial valorisation and point out
why it seems not to be conclusive.

Keith Ansell-Pearson has 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.'[17] That is to say 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 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. But in response to it, we should like to point out that because such nihilism could also potentially be overcome by siding ever more vehemently – just as Kierkegaard did – 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 (partial renaissances of religion), then it seems 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 actually made such an unnecessary concession to secularisation in the way 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 practices 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.

Notes

1   M.S. Silk and J.P Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 121; see also pp. 213 and 287.
2   S. Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* in *Penguin Freud Library*, Vol. 9 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 298.
3   Ibid., p. 302.
4   S. Freud, 'Negation' in *Penguin Freud Library* Vol. 11, pp. 437–8.
5   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. 255–72. 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.
6   Plato, *Republic*, p. 389; *Charmides*, p. 166 d.
7   Most commentators accept this. The concept of truth in Nietzsche has, however, been controversially analysed by Ruediger H. Grimm in *Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977). Grimm sees Nietzsche as rejecting the traditional correspondence theory of truth (p. 43, on the grounds that, if true, the theory itself would not 'correspond' to anything) in favour of seeing truth as power-enhancement: 'I call something "true" if it increases my will to power' (p. 19). This analysis has itself

given rise to a criticism in Poellner's *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*: if the concept of truth in Nietzsche is nothing more than the feeling of enhanced power, then 'none of his statements would conflict or compete with anything other philosophers or indeed theologians have maintained' (p. 20). More in accord with my line of argument is, in addition to Poellner, K. Geme's 'Nietzsche's Critique of Truth' in *Nietzsche: Oxford Readings in Philosophy*, eds B. Leiter and J. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 40–58.

8   Poellner, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, pp. 114–17.
9   Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, p. 312.
10 Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 24.
11 Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, p. 46.
12 A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 130; see also M. Clarke, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 191, 23; and Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*, pp. 100–101.
13 Exceptions include M. Haar, who writes that 'atheism has as its source none other than the ideal of scrupulous sincerity, the ideal of rigorous intellectual honesty as it is developed under that notion created by Christianity itself: the refinement of conscience', 'Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language' in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. D.B. Allison (Cambridge: MIT press, 1985), pp. 5–35, at p. 23. Deleuze also notes that 'Christianity has a strange result. It teaches us to put God to death . . . an atheism of bad conscience and *ressentiment*', *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 154. But whilst Haar only notices an atheism of the ascetic ideal; Deleuze only acknowledges a *ressentiment* atheism. Even taken together, they still exclude the analysis of a healthy atheism and the ideas are in any case not developed at any length by either author.
14 P. Ricoeur, 'Religion, Atheism and Faith' in A. MacIntyre and P. Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 59–98, at p. 68.
15 Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, p. 313.
16 K. Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1991), p. 107.
17 Ibid., p. 151; see also pp. 107, 122.

Chapter 7

Doubts About Doubt

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 . . .

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

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, *Pensées*

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

Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*

Although many of the problems addressed by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche could not themselves be considered typically Kantian problems, they are nonetheless problems initially confronted from within a broadly Kantian framework, which remains true even if subsequent argumentation on the part of either philosopher significantly deforms that framework. An example: although Schopenhauer clearly owes a massive debt to Kant's understanding of, and arguments for, the ideality of space and time, he nevertheless suspected an incompatibility between this transcendental ideality and the notion of a possibly pluralistic world of the thing in itself and in the ensuing attempt to resolve this metaphysical issue with phenomenological considerations, he transformed Kant's critical philosophy into a vast and horrific metaphysical vision partly concerned in its normative mode with the quietism of aesthetico-ethical asceticism. Another instance: when Nietzsche encountered Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism, although a prominent feature of his eventual response would turn out to be a vicious rejection of that pessimism, this would be a rejection that did not rigorously question all 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. Accordingly, Schopenhauer was not criticised for his initial acceptance of transcendental idealism here, nor was Nietzsche censured unduly for himself criticising what might be regarded to be essentially a Kantian God at the expense of the living Christian God. Rather, what was provided here might be said to be an account and criticism of the internal development of a certain Kantian tradition, certainly not the only one to be initiated by Kant, nor one whose continuities are wholly free from links with other traditions, but nonetheless

one whose arguments at certain key points of internal conflict were both intriguing enough and powerful enough to merit study.

Kant's critical philosophy – to re-emphasise – shifted God out of ontological consideration on wholly epistemological terms which ultimately left the Kantian metaphysic not only agnostic but – despite Kant's arguments to the contrary – also arguably liable to be read in atheistic terms. Such theologically negative consequences of the Kantian project were exposed by Schopenhauer in the reworking of Kantian idealism that is *The World as Will and Representation*. Although Schopenhauer never argued directly for atheism, the acceptance of such was obviously implicit in the metaphysics with which he intended to replace Kantian epistemology – a metaphysics which, nonetheless, failed to convincingly exclude God. Schopenhauer also attempted to argue that a form of redemption free of any theological commitment was still possible for us creatures of will. Yet, for Nietzsche, this Schopenhauerian salvation was just the heir of Christianity and both were merely symptoms of what, in a series of polemics bordering on the obsessional, he termed the 'ascetic ideal'.

However else they may be differentiated from each other, Kant and Schopenhauer's reflections on the human predicament unquestionably have this much in common: Nietzsche rejects them both. Nietzsche approaches religion neither as a necessary practical presupposition nor as a metaphysical aberration but rather as a psycho-physiological fact.[1]

One reason for doubting that Nietzsche has actually given us grounds for rejecting religion, however, is that he also gave ample justification for supposing that certain types of atheistic motivation were themselves unhealthy. Another reason, quite aside from the problematic point 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 essentially about the soundness of Nietzsche's researches into nature which found a will to power at its heart. 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 unresolved, then he has also failed to show why religion should in fact be abandoned as valueless by our species at this stage in its history.

Not one of the three philosophers examined in this book is on absolutely solid ground if our analysis is correct. Kant's epistemological agnosticism seemed 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 the existence of God. Nietzsche's intention was, in one 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, perhaps more Socratically, about how we humans should live our lives out on earth. Yet it depends upon a postulate which even if proved would not itself supply an axiomatic principle that condemned the religious expression of the will to power as valueless.

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 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 of philosophical research 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.

Notes

1   Some writers on Nietzsche might argue that my reading failed to do sufficient justice to Nietzsche's 'perspectivism' or epistemological relativisation of his own work. Yet two things might be said about this here: first, that prior to querying whether Nietzsche's strongly expressed views specifically on religion manage to fit in with his more sporadic claims concerning assertions in general, it would not be such a bad idea to see whether those views concerning religion are, in fact, coherent. And second, that Nietzsche's 'perspectivism' does not in any case necessarily entail 'relativism' has been demonstrated by, for example, Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, p. 20. The basic point is that although according to Nietzsche we necessarily know something from the vantage point ('perspective') of our interests, nothing here rules out the possibility that some perspectives deform the truth about the matter more than others.

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