THE AESTHETICS OF LOSS: RETHINKING SCHOPENHAUER'S THEORY OF THE SUBLIME

Abigail Turner-Lauck Wernicki

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Dissertation Committee Chair

Robert S. Corrington, Ph.D.

Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Philosophical Theology

ABSTRACT

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Abigail T. Wernicki

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This dissertation seeks to elucidate and expand upon Arthur Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime. It affirms Schopenhauer's account of the mathematical sublime, which correlates to the forms of space and time, and the dynamical sublime, which correlates to causality, but goes beyond these by positing a third category, which I call the *ontological* sublime. I argue that the ontological sublime is called for by Schopenhauer's identification of the subject-object relation as the 'root' of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The subject-object relation plays a key role in Schopenhauer's 'discovery' of the will-to-life and operates on a more fundamental level for consciousness than space, time, and causality. I attempt to fill a previously unidentified gap in Schopenhauer's thinking by arguing that the ontological sublime correlates to the subject-object relation. I suggest that the feeling of the ontological sublime is triggered through experiences of profound loss either in nature or vicariously through art. Like the established categories of the sublime, the feeling of the ontological sublime is initially painful but ultimately pleasurable, where the pain results from the threat to the subject-object relation via loss and the pleasure results from the feeling of transcending loss. I argue further that the concept of the ontological sublime is compatible with Aesthetic Naturalism, especially insofar as it reveals to consciousness that loss is built into the structure of one's being via a confrontation with the 'natural difference'.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Nick, who is my dialogue partner in philosophy and in life. I am also grateful to my family, including parents and siblings of all sorts, for their abundant support and encouragement. I especially thank my sister, Rachel, for loving me unconditionally and my dad, Joe, whose steadfast faith in me has lifted me out of doubt countless times. Thanks to Hyo-Dong Lee for serving on my committee. Thanks also to my committee member Sandra Shapshay for her tremendous generosity, valuable insight, and thoughtful advice. I am immensely grateful to my advisor and committee chair, Robert Corrington, who has served as a beacon of wisdom and generosity of spirit throughout my graduate education that I suspect will always remain unparalleled. Finally, it is the memory of my mother and her spirit that inspired this inquiry and enabled its full fruition.

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Chapter One: The Riddle of Existence and Schopenhauer's Metaphysical Roots

Schopenhauer's philosophical project, especially his seminal work, *World as Will and Presentation,* can generally be characterized as a response to some of the central assertions made and most pressing questions left unanswered by Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason.* Schopenhauer adheres to Kant's transcendental idealism, in broad strokes, but tries to go beyond Kant in saying something determinate about the thing in itself, and he makes several major modifications to Kant's aesthetic theory.

Kant's main contribution in the first critique[1] is his theory of transcendental idealism, which is an attempt to resolve a perceived conflict between the philosophical skepticism and pure scientism that had gained popularity among philosophers in the West leading up to and during his lifetime. Additionally, Kant's critical philosophy was a kind of response to the classical theories of systematic metaphysics that had come to dominate Western philosophy. Classical metaphysics at the time was further broken down into two traditional approaches—empiricism and rationalism—both of which Kant found lacking and shortsighted.

These three main camps of philosophical thought in modern philosophy—skepticism, scientism, and systematic metaphysics—represent three divergent responses to the rise of modern science, in particular Newtonian physics and the Galilean-Copernican revolution. For example, the general spirit of skepticism was to call into

[1] *The Critique of Pure Reason* is also known as Kant's first critique. He subsequently published a second and third critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason* in 1788 and *The Critique of Pure Judgment* 1790.

question long-held pseudo-scientific theories about the world, which had been arrived at 'intuitively', i.e. through 'common sense.' Modern science effectively debunked 'common sense' philosophy by demonstrating that certain commonly held views had no empirical ground on which to rest. Skeptics were thus characterized by not only their inclination to question common sense views that had previously been regarded as true, but also by their tendency to doubt valid truth claims, i.e. claims made on empirical grounds. Scientism, as opposed to skepticism, embraced empirical methodology and rejected most non-science based theoretical advances. Scientism would eventually evolve into positivism and contemporary philosophies of mind. The third camp, classical systematic metaphysics, is unique in that it marks the onset of a *systematic* approach to ontology. Karl Ameriks makes the following observation about the distinct character of systematic metaphysics during the modern era, as well as the two epistemological traditions of which it was comprised:

> Familiar as [skepticism and scientism] have become, especially in our own time, most of classical (i.e., pre-Kantian) modern philosophy seems to have taken a third and quite different course. In rationalism and empiricism alike – in Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, as in Berkeley and (much of) Hume and Mill, among others, what one finds is not primarily a direct development of skepticism or anything like a proto-Quinean physicism. What one finds is rather the construction of intricate and massive "systems of the world," each set out with many of the formal features of the new highly systematic sciences of the Newtonian era, but with ontologies – for example, of monads or other special substances, or all-encompassing impressions – determined ultimately by philosophers alone, and in considerable contrast to the "furniture" that ordinary scientists take themselves to be discussing. (Ameriks 2000, 44)

Kant's critical philosophy is certainly born of the tradition of systematic metaphysics to which Ameriks makes reference in this passage, but it also marks the beginning of a

fourth camp that begins to evolve out of modern philosophy that has relatively modest metaphysical aims, which is how Kant viewed his philosophical project. The modesty can be seen in an attitude shift among philosophers that admits to the evasiveness of ultimate reality, but resists the route taken by skeptics to renounce the possibility of any objective knowledge at all. Kant's critical philosophy is systematic, and therefore scientific to a certain degree, but is self-conscious of the limitations of a systematic approach, which, like science, can only investigate phenomenal reality.

Kant's transcendentalism idealism, broadly put, is the view that there are two realms of reality, the noumenal and the phenomenal, distinguished from one another by the degree to which they are accessible to human reason. The noumenal realm is understood as ultimate reality or the 'thing in itself' *(Ding an sich)*. The phenomenal realm is the *appearance* of ultimate reality, but not ultimate *in itself*. The main argument of transcendental idealism can be broken down as follows:

1. We (human beings) can only have knowledge about things that we can experience.
2. Our experiential access to the world is limited to the phenomenal realm.
3. Therefore, our knowledge about the world is limited to discoveries that can be made about our experience of the world, and does not extend to the world *in itself.*
4. Furthermore, because ultimate reality lies beyond our experiential scope, *knowledge* of ultimate reality, which is the primary aim of metaphysics, is impossible.

The most novel aspect of Kant's transcendental idealism is that it offers a systematic theory about the world that does not directly oppose the scientific view, but posits certain *a priori* truths that govern the laws of science; in other words, Kant seeks to uncover the formal categories of reality that are necessary conditions for experience, knowledge, and therefore all scientific truth claims. His methodology is transcendental rather than empirical or rationalistic because he does not establish the validity of these categories by relating to them as empirical objects or through detached thought experiments, but rather by deducing their necessity through critical philosophy.

Kant's transcendental idealism is the product of his epistemological modesty, which prevents him from asserting anything determinate about the thing in itself. Hence we have the phenomenal/noumenal divide—the division of the world into knowable and unknowable—ideal and ultimate—realms. For Kant, to escape the ideal in order to know the ultimate would remain the impossible goal, the riddle of existence.

However, for Schopenhauer, many have argued, the riddle could be solved. Whether this is indeed the case, from Schopenhauer's own perspective, is a matter of contention that is often overlooked in part because of the subtly of his main metaphysical argument in *The World as Will and Presentation*. The prevailing interpretation of Schopenhauer's main work is that in it he claims to have located Kant's thing in itself in the will *(Wille)*, a term he elevates beyond the mundane to a kind of generic principle of striving or desire (and also of repulsion and hostility) that lies at the core of all phenomenal existence. The criticism that often accompanies this interpretation is that

while claiming always to remain a Kantian himself, Schopenhauer betrays his Kantian allegiance by purporting to have experiential access to ultimate reality.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason and its Fourfold Root

In his first published work, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason,* Schopenhauer, inspired by Kantian epistemology, probes into the transcendental structure of cognition. In doing so, he also lays the foundation for his philosophy of will, which he develops in the first volume of *The World as Will and Presentation* and expounds upon, refines and amends in the second volume.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason, as a general philosophical concept, is the notion that everything that happens has a reasonable explanation; in other words, everyone, everything, every idea comes into existence as the next step in a chain of causation. According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, no event that has occurred in history could have happened differently than it did. One of the conclusions drawn from the Principle of Sufficient Reason is that every fact of the universe—every event, being, physical law—is *necessary* in the sense that it could not have happened any other way. Furthermore, sometimes an explanation may be difficult to decipher, and sometimes as simple as a basic mathematical equation, but nothing in the phenomenal world is exempt

from being understood in reasonable terms. *The Fourfold Root* has become a seminal text in the evolution of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR).[2]

As Robert Wicks notes, the formal establishment of the PSR was preceded by Aristotle's Laws of Thought, which can be seen as a sort of companion set of principles to the PSR in the sense that they both "apply to *all* thought, so they are presupposed in their very own formulation," which makes it "impossible to 'prove' that the PSR or Laws of Thought are true, since any proof would presuppose their truth to begin with" (Wicks 2008, 31). Aristotle's Laws of Thought include the Law of Identity, Law of Excluded Middle, and the Law of Non-contradiction, and, as paraphrased by Wicks, assert that:

1. Whatever we think about retains its identity as we think about it. If this were not so, there would be nothing to pick out and refer to in our reflections. For example, even when we say that time flows endlessly, or, with Heraclitus, that one cannot step into the same river twice, we coherently identify and fix objects of attention called "time" and "the river."
2. Among the various qualities that there are, each quality has only one exact opposite, and if an object has either one of these, then it cannot have the other.
3. An object cannot have two exactly opposing qualities at once, in the same respect. (Wicks 2008, 31)

The Laws of Thought establish a kind of meta-logic that governs our knowledge about things and qualities of things. Similarly, the PSR points to the inherent law within phenomenal reality that governs our understanding of the causal relations that bring about a particular thing's existence, as well as our understanding of what determines that a particular thing has a given set of qualities or traits. The origin of the PSR can be traced back to pre-Socratic thinkers such as Anaximander and Parmenides, however it was first

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[2] In the 1974 translation of *The Fourfold Root* published by Open Court Press, the Principle of Sufficient Reason is translated as the Principle of Sufficient *Ground*. In the present work, Principle of Sufficient Reason/Ground will be abbreviated to PSR.

explicitly presented as such by Leibniz in his *Monadology* (together with his Principle of Non-Contradiction) in the following terms:

> 31. Our reasonings are grounded upon two great principles*, that of contradiction*, in virtue of which we judge to be false, whatever involves a contradiction and true, that which is opposed, or contradictory, to what is false.
> 32. *And that of sufficient reason,* in virtue of which we consider to fact to be true or existing, and no statement true, unless there is a sufficient reason why it should be such and not otherwise, although often we cannot know the reasons. (Wicks 2008, 32)

In *The Fourfold Root,* Schopenhauer discusses the contributions of various philosophers whose work addresses the PSR including Leibniz, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hume, and others whose contributions he deems less significant. Of special note is his discussion of the writings of Christian Wolff, the highly influential 18th century German philosopher. Schopenhauer adopts Wolff's definition of the PSR in *The Fourfold Root* referring to it as the "most general": "Nothing is without a ground or reason why it is" (Schopenhauer 2012, 6). Schopenhauer, like Wolff, has no interest in *proving* that the PSR is a true principle, as he argues that engaging in such a proof would have to assume the truth of the principle from the outset. His position is that the PSR is self-evident. He writes:

> Moreover, to seek a proof for the principle of sufficient reason in particular is especially absurd and is evidence of a want of reflection. Thus every proof is the demonstration of the ground or reason for an expressed judgment, which precisely in this way obtains the predicate *true.* The principle of sufficient reason is just the expression of this necessity of a reason or ground for every judgment. Now whoever requires a proof for this principle, i.e., the demonstration of a ground or reason, already assumes thereby that it is true; in fact he bases his demand on this very assumption. He therefore finds himself involved in that circle of demanding a proof for the right to demand proof. (Schopenhauer 2012, 33)

Thus, having no interest in establishing 'proof' for the PSR, taking it as self-evident, he seeks instead to discover the *root* of the PSR. By the root he means a kind of starting

point for the ground of all understanding, or knowledge. He asks: if the PSR gives us a set of laws by which we can understand the causal relations of the world, is there one supreme law from which all others are derived? This is the point at which Schopenhauer distances his work from Wolff's analysis of the PSR. Interestingly, however, Schopenhauer credits Wolff as the only philosopher to "expressly separate the two main meanings of our principle and to expound the difference between them"; in other words, Wolff is the first philosopher who attempts the sort of 'root cause' analysis of the PSR that Schopenhauer takes on in *The Fourfold Root.* Schopenhauer's own analysis mostly closely resembles Wolff's, however there are some critical differences between the two. Wolff establishes three types of causation, all encompassed within the PSR, which can be paraphrased as follows: 1) material cause, which has to do with a thing taking on a certain property due to external factors, 2) essential cause, which has to do with a thing's essential characteristics that provide it with certain potentialities, and 3) conscious cause, which has to do with a thing's internal impulse or will.

Schopenhauer argues that the "root" or genus of experience, and thus the binding category of the PSR, is the distinction between subject and object. The necessary and sufficient condition for an experience, he argues, and therefore cognition, is the presence of both an apprehending subject and an object to apprehend. In perhaps one of the most significant passages of *The Fourfold Root,* he writes:

> *Our knowing consciousness, appearing as outer and inner sensibility (receptivity), as understanding and as faculty of reason (Vernunft), is divisible into subject and object, and contains nothing else. To be object for the subject and to be our representation or mental picture are the same thing. All our representations are objects of the subject, and all objects of the subject are our*

> *representations. Now it is found that all our representations stand to one another in a natural and regular connexion that in form is determinable A PRIORI. By virtue of this connexion nothing existing by itself and independent, and also nothing single and detached, can become an object for us.* (Schopenhauer 2012, 42)

He then goes on to discuss that the subject strives to understand or *explain* the object and in so doing is constrained by the PSR not only in the most general sense, but in one of four particular senses as well; hence, the "fourfold root". He writes:

> Therefore the relations, forming the basis of the principle and to be demonstrated in more detail in what follows, are what I have called the root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Now on closer consideration in accordance with the laws of homogeneity and specification, these relations are separated into definite species that are very different from one another. Their number can be reduced to *four*, since it agrees with *four classes* into which everything is divided that can for us become an object, thus all our representations. (Schopenhauer 1974, 42)

The four classes Schopenhauer identifies are 1) material things, 2) abstract concepts, 3) mathematical and geometrical constructions, and 4) psychological forces. Following this distinction, he identifies four corresponding sub-methods of understanding, which are, respectively, 1) empirically observable cause and effect, 2) logic, 3) spatial and quantitative explanation, and 4) moral or teleological reasoning. Schopenhauer's argument in *The Fourfold Root* is that all things that are present in the world, whether empirical or abstract, mathematical or psychological, can be *apprehended* and *understood* through the terms of the PSR. Recall the distinction discussed above between Kant's phenomenal and noumenal realms of reality. Schopenhauer clearly makes the case in *The Fourfold Root* that the phenomenal realm is that which can be apprehended and understood through the PSR, whereas the noumenal realm remains as yet inaccessible to human understanding.

The World as Will and Presentation

Schopenhauer refers to the PSR, in particular the form of the PSR constituted by space and time, as a "principle of individuation" because it distinguishes objects from one another and in doing so makes them perceivable by our consciousness in phenomenal reality. However, Schopenhauer readily admits that there is a component of reality that eludes the PSR. As Wicks suggests, *The World as Will and Presentation*[3] reveals the "tension between what Schopenhauer recognizes as knowable and expressible within the constraints of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and what he wishes to indicate as the reality that underlies and to some extent transcends, everything that can be expressed within the Principle of Sufficient Reason's scope" (Wicks 2008, 36). This tension pervades all of Schopenhauer's subsequent philosophical works.

The felt tension between what is knowable, through reason and experience, and what remains beyond the grasp of human cognition is indeed the preeminent theme of *The World as Will and Presentation.* Having established the necessity of individuation in *The Fourfold Root,* Schopenhauer shifts the focus of his inquiry in *World as Will and Presentation* onto the nature of un-individuated reality, i.e. what the world is *in itself*, independent from its 'presentation' to human consciousness. He wonders whether reality

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[3] Alternative translations of Schopenhaur's *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* translate '*Vorstellung*' to representation. I think Richard E. Aquila's translation of the word to *presentation* is a purer interpretation of Schopenhauer's intent. As he comments, "the case for 'presentation'" vs. representation "goes hand in hand with the need to avoid the sense of *possession* generally attaching to possessive pronouns. More positively, the point is to promote what we take to be the central intention in Schopenhauer's use of the term: not possession by, but presentation of objects *to,* a cognizant subject" (Aquila's Introduction in Schopenhauer 2008, xiii).

can be said to exist in an un-individuated state, and to what degree, if any, we can claim to have knowledge about such a state. In Book Two of the first volume of *World as Will and Presentation*, he writes:

> What is now impelling us to inquire, however, is precisely that it does not satisfy us to know that we have presentations, that they are such and such, and that they are interconnected in accordance with these or those laws whose general expression is in every case the Principle of Sufficient Ground. We want to know the meaning of those presentations: we are asking whether this world is nothing more than presentation—in which case it would have to be passing before us like a dream with no essence, or a ghostly vision, unworthy of our regard—or whether it is something else besides, something else beyond that, and what it might then be. (Schopenhauer 2008, 135)

He acknowledges, therefore, that the PSR adequately accounts for the world of, or rather, the world *as* representation. Yet his primary line of inquiry remains Kantian and indeed Idealist in spirit: he seeks to know what *informs* the presentations—what gives them their fundamental truth. Or, as he wonders in the passage above, is there perhaps nothing at all beyond presentation? Is the world made up of mere shadows, i.e. is ultimate reality in fact Plato's proverbial cave and not, as previously suspected, the unchanging Forms that were supposed to have created the shadows? Schopenhauer discounts this notion rather readily (perhaps too readily). He moves swiftly from the less committal musings above to the following speculation about the nature of something that might lie beyond the world as representation:

> This much is certain at once: that this something after which we are asking must be utterly and in its entire essence fundamentally distinct from presentations, to which even the latter's forms and their laws must be thus utterly foreign; thus we cannot attain to it starting from presentation, under the direction of laws that only connect objects, presentations, with one another. Such are the modes of the Principle of Sufficient Ground… We already see here that the essence of things can never be approached *from outside*: however much we may examine things,

> we gain nothing from images and names. We are like someone circling a castle, vainly seeking an entrance and occasionally sketching the facades. And yet this is the path that all philosophers before me have walked. (Schopenhauer 2008, 135-136)

Here we see the beginning of Schopenhauer's turn away from the objective and toward the subjective point of view in his pursuit of something "utterly and in its entire essence fundamentally distinct from presentations." His epiphany is a perspectival one and grounded in his discovery that the PSR is necessitated by the subject-object distinction. He reasons: if I can never know an object in itself, then I must seek ultimate reality not in objects, but elsewhere. The elsewhere is none other than the *subject* in itself—one's own self. Following this perspectival shift, Schopenhauer discusses the ways in which we can know the self as both subject and object:

> To the subject of cognition, which appears as an individual through its identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely distinct manners: on the one hand as presentation in perception by way of understanding, as an object among objects and subject to their laws, but then at the same time also in an entirely different manner, namely, as that, immediately familiar to everyone, which the word *will* designates. Every true act of its will is at once and inevitably also a movement of its body: it cannot actually will an act without at the same time perceiving that it makes its appearance as a movement of the body. (Schopenhauer 1974, 137)

This passage marks the beginning of Schopenhauer's discussion of the 'givenness' of the body to the subject. His argument is that there are two distinct ways in which the body is 'given' to the self. Firstly, the body is given as presentation, which is mediated through the subject's perception, as are all other empirical objects it encounters. Secondly, the body is known almost immediately as will. Therefore, although the body is always represented to the subjective self as object, we have on the one hand knowledge of the body that is mediated through our faculties of perception and understanding, and on the

other hand nearly *unmediated* knowledge of the body *as will*. The latter seems to easily escape explication, at least initially, by Schopenhauer. His language is evasive; besides stating its immediacy he simply refers to this second mode of cognition of the body as "that which the word *will* designates" (Schopenhauer 2008, 137).

Despite his initial evasiveness about the nature of will*,* Schopenhauer's argument is well crafted and advances Kant's transcendental argument into profoundly different territory. Recall the previously cited passage, in which Schopenhauer asserts that one cannot approach "the essence of things *from outside,"* precisely because it implies that the structure of the encounter would necessarily be subject-encountering-object and therefore within the confines of the PSR. In other words, when we encounter an object *as such,* the thing in itself remains veiled. An object in the world is therefore always distorted first by the mode in which it is represented and second by the cognitive faculty through which it is perceived. The explication of the epistemological problem of the subject-object relation is of fundamental importance to the progress Schopenhauer makes in his effort to move beyond Kant's doctrine of noumenal ignorance. As he suggests above, the essence of a thing must by definition not be approached from without. Simply put, Kant's thing in itself *is not an object of perception*.

Let us now take a closer look at Schopenhauer's identification of will with Kant's thing in itself. Schopenhauer's position is that to know the body in a nearly immediate sense is to know the body *as will*:

> …the cognizance that I have of my will, although it is immediate, is still inseparable from that of my body. I am cognizant of my will not as a whole, not as a unity, not completely with respect to its essence, but rather, I am cognizant of

> it only in its individual acts, thus within time, which is the form pertaining to the phenomenon of my body as to that of any object; therefore, the body is a condition of cognizance of my will. Apart from my body, accordingly, I cannot really present this will to myself. To be sure, in the treatise on the Principle of Sufficient Ground the will, or rather the subject of willing, is put forth as a particular class of presentations or objects; but there we of course saw this object coinciding with the subject, i.e., precisely ceasing to be an object. There we called this coincidence the miracle *κατ' εξοχην*: To a certain extent, the entire present work is an explanation of this. (Schopenhauer 1974, 139)

The significance of the final sentence of this passage cannot be overstated. Not surprisingly, given his strong proclivity for Indian philosophy and mysticism, Schopenhauer's perspective admits to a certain paradoxical nature of the subject-object relation, especially when considering one's own body as an object of cognition. Subject and object coincide and in that coincidence the object "precisely ceas[es] to be an object" (Schopenhauer 1974, 139). It is worth pointing out that this 'miraculous' paradox is inconsistent with Aristotle's Law of non-Contradiction, which, the reader will recall, asserts that "[a]n object cannot have two exactly-opposing qualities at once, in the same respect" (Wicks 2008, 31). In this case, the assertion is that 'x' is both an object and *not* an object.

Although not explicitly put in these terms by Schopenhauer, I propose that the recognition of this paradox is a turning point in his philosophy. It is one in a series of critical strides toward coming to terms with Kant's thing in itself that can be put in the following seccessive terms:

1. Objective knowledge of the thing-in-itself is impossible, but subjective knowledge of it might be possible.

2. One can have interior knowledge of the body in two senses; the first is mediated by the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and is therefore just like knowledge of any worldly phenomenon, and the second is nearly immediate knowledge of the body.
3. The human subject's knowledge of the body is 'miraculous' in that it calls into question the ontological status of the body, which is simultaneously object and *not*-object.
4. In the sense that the body is *not* an object, the body is identical with will.

Following this line of reasoning, Schopenhauer begins what he refers to as the extension of the will. The "double cognizance" of the body, he argues, which is "given to us in two utterly heterogeneous manners, of the essence and effectuality of our own bodies" is also applicable to "every phenomena of nature" (Schopenhauer 1974, 142). This marks another critical advance in Schopenhauer's philosophy. Not only does he establish that self-knowledge is twofold, but he argues that its twofold structure extends to everything that exists in the world. Not only is *he* comprised of will and presentation; the world as a whole is *nothing but* will and presentation.

How does he arrive at such a bold conclusion? Julian Young offers an illuminating analysis of Schopenhauer's reasoning at this stage:

> I have, we know 'double knowledge' (WR I: 103), objective and subjective, of my own body. This doubleness is unique: there is no other human body to which I have subjective access. This, says Schopenhauer, faces me with a choice: either I must assume that my *access* is unique—that other bodies are, like mine, manifestations of will but that I cannot 'see' their wills in the same direct way as I

> can see my own—or I must assume that my *body* is unique—that the reason I cannot 'see' any wills other than my own is that *there are no wills other than my own.* (Young 2005, 71)

Young goes on to argue that Schopenhauer rejects the latter position, which he reduces to solipsism, in which 'I' assume that 'my' body is entirely unique and that mine is the only existing will. Therefore, accordingly to Young, Schopenhauer concludes that we "must extend 'will' to other human beings. Not to do so would be 'mad'" (Young 2005, 71). Schopenhauer follows the logical conclusion of his argument by asserting that the two-fold understanding of will as both interior essence and exterior representation extends not only to every human being, but also to animals, as well as organic and inorganic nature. Thus, will is the essence of all phenomenal existence, including human beings, and is exhibited through presentation of human action and natural forces. Schopenhauer reaches the culmination of his argument on the extension of will in the following passage:

> A phenomenon means a presentation and nothing beyond that: every presentation, of whatever sort it may be, every *object* is a *phenomenon*. But *thing in itself* is solely *will*. As such, it is altogether not a presentation *toto genere* distinct from it; it is that of which all presentations, all objects, are the phenomenon, the visibility, the *objectivization.* It is that which is innermost, the core of every individual thing and likewise of the whole: it makes its appearance in every blindly effectual natural force; it also makes its appearance in the reflectively considered actions of human being. The great difference between the two concerns only the degree to which it makes its appearance, not the essence of that which is making its appearance. (Schopenhauer 1974, 148)

Thus, it has been widely concluded, Schopenhauer presumes to have solved the riddle of Kant's metaphysics: he has demonstrated not only that the thing in itself is accessible through human cognition, but also that it is a universal principle extending to all living things.

Thus far, I have argued that Schopenhauer makes a fundamental perspectival shift that enables him to soundly revise and advance Kant's transcendental argument in such a way that allows him to identify the thing in itself with will. Schopenhauer's crucial breakthrough results in the establishment of the fundamental nature of the subject-object relation and understanding that thing in itself, as such, can never exist as an 'object for a subject'. Schopenhauer writes:

> For the thing in itself is supposed to be, just as Kant held, free of all forms attaching to cognition as such, and…it is only a mistake on Kant's part that *he did not count among these forms, before all others, being-object-for-a-subject*, since precisely this is the first and most general form pertaining to all phenomena, i.e., presentation; therefore, he should have expressly withheld the status of object from his thing in itself, which would have protected him from that major, soon uncovered, inconsistency. (Schopenhauer 1974, 217)

Therefore, by definition, thing in itself is never reducible to the form of 'being-object-for-a-subject', and Kant overlooked this criterion because he failed to establish 'being an object' as a fundamental category of understanding.

One point that remains to be resolved in the present discussion of Schopenhauer's philosophy of will is whether will, on his account, is identical to the thing-in-itself. So far, the following premises have been established:

1. The thing in itself is not an object and therefore we cannot have objective knowledge of it.
2. Knowing the body subjectively *as will* is the closest we can get to non-objective knowledge about the inner essence of the world.

However, where scholars part ways is on the question of whether or not Schopenhauer, after going to great lengths to validate the above two claims, truly intends to imply that

the will, strictly speaking, is identical with the thing in itself. Julian Young refers to this problem as the "black box problem," a problem in which one refers to the "inner mechanism" of a thing without actually explicating the meaning of the mechanism (Young 2005, 73). In most cases, of course, we cannot know the 'inner mechanism' of things; except, as Schopenhauer notes, when it comes to the body. Young is right to point out the dramatic significance this exception represents in Schopenhauer's philosophical thinking:

> This would be the end of the story were it not for a single, dramatic exception of my own body. Here, on account of the 'double knowledge' I have of its 'action and movement following on motives' (WR I: 103), on account of the subjective as well as objective access I have to it, I *can* see inside the black box. I can get 'behind the scenes' with regard to causality: '*motivation* [understanding why given "motives" lead to given actions] *is causality seen from within*', says Schopenhauer, an insight which, he adds, 'is the cornerstone of my whole metaphysics' (FR: 213-4). (Young 2003, 65-66)

For Schopenhauer, one way of understanding the concept of the will is to consider it as the 'behind the scenes' view of the driving force of human life. The notion that will is 'causality seen from within' is recapitulated in Book Two of the first volume of *World as Will and Presentation*:

> Even in us, the same will is blindly effectual in multiple ways: in all those functions of the body not directed by cognizance, in all of its vital and vegetative processes, digestion, circulation, secretion, growth, reproduction…the body itself is altogether a phenomena of will, objectified will, concrete will. Everything that occurs within it has thus to occur through will, although the will is not here directed by cognizance, not determined in accordance with motives, but rather – blindy effectual – in accordance with causes, which in the case are called *stimuli*. (Schopenhauer 1974, 137)

A fair assessment of Schopenhauer's intent in the first volume of *World as Will and Presentation,* at least, is that he believes to have solved Kant's riddle of existence.

However, Young makes a compelling argument for considering the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation* to be his final word on the matter. Young's argument is difficult to dispute because Schopenhauer himself discloses that he published a second volume of *World as Will and Presentation* for the purpose of supplementing, refining, and in some cases *correcting* parts of the first volume.

For example, Schopenhauer softens his language somewhat in the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation* so as to be less conclusive about whether we can 'know' the thing in itself 'as body', or whether perhaps the subjective view of the body is merely the *closest we can get* to knowing the thing in itself. Schopenhauer admits that after all, the will remains a phenomenon of experience. His argument, however, is that we experience it somehow outside the formal categories of space and causality. His cautious attitude about the problem of the will as thing in itself can be observed in the following paragraph from the section in the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation* titled "On the Cognizability of the Thing in Itself," which for the purposes of the question at hand is cited in full:

> Accordingly, even after this last and ultimate step, the question may still be posed, what then is that will which displays itself in the world and as the world, absolutely finally in itself? i.e. what is it quite apart from the fact that it displays itself as *will*, or *makes its appearance* in any way at all, i.e., *is cognized* in any way at all? – This question is *never* to be answered; for, as I have said, to be cognized already itself contradicts being in itself, and everything that is cognized is already as such only phenomenon. But the possibility of this question shows that the thing in itself, of which we are most immediately cognizant in the will, may have, entirely beyond any possible phenomenon, determinations, properties, manners of existence that are for us absolutely incognizable and incomprehensible, and that remain precisely as the essence of the thing in itself when, as was explained in the fourth book, the latter has freely nullified itself as *will,* therefore stepped out of the world of phenomena, passed over into empty

> nothingness. If will were the thing in itself simply and absolutely, then this nothing would also be something absolute, instead of turning out for us precisely there as expressly *relative*. (Schopenhauer 2011, 224)

The position on which Schopenhauer settles here, as a more mature thinker reflecting on his earlier work, can be restated as follows: the most immediate representation of the thing in itself is will, and therefore will is ontologically distinct from the rest of phenomenal existence, but will (being still a mere representation) is not identical with the thing in itself.

Young articulates Schopenhauer's "youthful mistake" as the confusion between what he calls 'representations A' and the thing in itself. 'Representations A,' he argues, are "pure" whereas 'representations B' make up a "subset of representation" and are "those that have been processed – as Schopenhauer puts it 'worked up' by the understanding – into experiences of *objects* that belong together with other objects in public space" (Young 2005, 92). Schopenhauer, having acknowledged his mistake in the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation*, clarifies why he maintains that will ought to be understood as the most immediate representation of the thing in itself, whereas the forms of cognition always mediate other phenomena. His conclusion is that the experience of the phenomenon of will remains in the phenomenal realm but has "escaped the form of space". (Schopenhauer 2008, 197) This conclusion is in keeping with one of the fundamental tenets of Schopenhauer's philosophy: freedom from the forms of understanding is indicative of a kind of purity that is contiguous with the thing in itself. We will see in the next chapter that Schopenhauer's moral and aesthetic theory is characterized by a kind of longing for this sort of freedom.

My position on the matter at hand is that careful scholarship on Schopenhauer must take seriously Schopenhauer's later writings on the subject of the will as thing in itself. Furthermore, it is not the case that Schopenhauer's 'correction' or modification of his original theory discounts the rest of his philosophical work for which the notion of the will is essential. On the contrary, through a careful consideration of the extent to which cognition depends on the forms of space, time and causality, Schopenhauer establishes that will is the *closest we can get* to the thing in itself. This remains an important advancement beyond Kant's position that metaphysical knowledge in any form is impossible.

Adding to the conversation about what can be made of Schopenhauer's effort to identify the will with Kant's thing in itself, Sandra Shapshay examines the issue starting with a consideration of Nietzsche's critique of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche, although initially a kind of disciple of Schopenhauer, ultimately distanced himself from the philosopher and, as Shapshay correctly notes:

> …criticizes [Schopenhauer] for dressing up a 'totally obscure, inconceivable X' in 'brightly coloured clothes with predicates drawn from a world alien to it, the world of appearance'. Failing logical proof that the thing-in-itself is Will, Schopenhauer relies instead, according to Nietzsche, on a 'poetic intuition' to make this identification. (Shapshay 2009: 58)

For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's 'failure' is similar to Young's 'black box' problem. The attempt to articulate the existence of something that transcends objectification is futile because when we do so, we must rely on either logical proof to demonstrate validity or knowledge that has been received by some kind of mystical communion with the truth. Logical proof fails because we immediately become entrenched in the PSR and therefore

commit the sin of objectification. Mysticism is even more problematic because there is no way to externally corroborate the source of knowledge. A third avenue thus becomes apparent to Schopenhauer: intuitive knowledge, which is distinct from objective knowledge or what is denoted by the term cognition. Schopenhauer's subjective experience of the body as will, he argues, gives him special 'intuitive' knowledge of the will as a generic principal of striving. Nietzsche considers this 'poetic intuition' merely another failed attempt to explicate precisely what cannot be made explicit. Shapshay, however, observes that:

> …Schopenhauer is in good company in using a form of poetic insight for the purpose of giving some sensible representation to a concept that lies beyond the 'bounds of sense.' Indeed, it was pursued already in Kant's works from the 1790s, and especially with his recognition of beauty as the symbol of the moral good. (Shapshay 2009, 58)

Shapshay's point here is significant in that it demands a more finely tuned approach to understanding Schopenhauer's concept of will. Taking a cue from Kant's account of the relation of the sensible experience of beauty to the moral good, Schopenhauer relies on *sensible representation* in order to establish the validity of the relation between will and metaphysical knowledge. Thus, intuitive knowledge, 'poetic' insight, or as Schopenhauer eventually names it in *World as Will and Presentation,* 'aesthetic knowledge' gives the individual special access to his or her own subjectivity and therefore reveals truths about the world in itself that can neither be deduced through reason nor arrived at through traditionally empirical methods of observation.

For Kant, aesthetic judgment enables the knowledge that we, as human subjects, are capable of autonomy. Shapshay writes:

> The freedom of the imagination in pure aesthetic judgment, and the harmony of this aesthetic autonomy in nature, are *felt*, on the Kantian account, to be analogous both to our capacity for moral autonomy, as well as to the notion that the good will and nature may work together in tandem. In this way, Kant finds symbolic support for the reality of moral autonomy and for the highest good insofar as aesthetic harmony with nature promotes the feeling that we are indeed capable of autonomy and that nature is not hostile to our moral ends. (Shapshay 2009, 60)

Thus, Shapshay establishes that Schopenhauer follows in the Kantian epistemological tradition by relying on the *felt* experience of subjectivity to lead to the identification of the thing in itself with will. Schopenhauer's bold assertion has been met with much criticism. As Shapshay comments, and as I alluded to previously, the most common critique of Schopenhauer's claim that that thing in itself is will is that one cannot soundly "predicate something of the *Ding an sich* given Schopenhauer's explicit adherence to Kantian stricture on knowledge" (Shapshay 2009, 61). She argues further that there are three possible responses or attempts to "rescue" Schopenhauer's theory from this "notorious problem" (Shapshay 2009, 61) The first possibility is that one could simply deny that Schopenhauer never explicitly identifies the thing in itself with will. Yet this is easily dismissed, as the careful reader of Schopenhauer will find, over and over again, passages like the following in *The World as Will and Presentation:*

> This *thing in itself* (we would retain the Kantian term as our standing formula), which is never as such an object precisely because all objects are in turn its mere phenomenon, no longer it itself, had nonetheless, if it was to be thought in objective terms, to borrow its name and concept from some object, or from something that is somehow objectively given, consequently from one of its phenomena. But as support for our understanding, this can be none other than that among all its phenomena that is the most complete, i.e., the most distinct, most fully unfolded, immediately illuminated by cognition. But this is just human *will.* (Schopenhauer 2008, 149)

Therefore, it is undeniable that indeed Schopenhauer's thesis is that the thing in itself is, at least in one sense, will. Simply denying this is unfounded. The second "possibility for rescuing Schopenhauer from self-contradiction," Shapshay argues, is to claim that Schopenhauer breaks from the Kantian notion that knowledge must be verified by intuition (Shapshay 2009, 62). She views this response as "half right" insofar as Schopenhauer breaks from Kant by *not* requiring that "knowledge…have a corresponding perception in *space and* time" (*ibid.*). Intuitive knowledge or 'feeling', contra rational knowledge or cognition, is knowledge of one's "own willing" that is free from the confines of space and causality, but still within the form of time (*ibid*.). Further, she writes:

> [t]his kind of knowledge provides, according to Schopenhauer's thought, a (partial) insight into the 'in-itself' of the self and world. However, even the most immediate bit of 'feeling' or 'intuitive knowledge', namely, inner experience of one's own will, is still said to be shaped by our mental faculties. In inner perception, then, the thing-in-itself appears under the 'lightest of veils' but it is still veiled; it does *not* afford us *direct*, sensible access to the thing in itself, but it does afford us a representation that is completely unique and thereby monumentally significant. *(ibid.)*

Thus, this second response to the critique of Schopenhauer's betrayal of the Kantian strictures of knowledge fails too, as it can be seen that Schopenhauer maintains the criterion of verification through the form of intuition, despite his position that intuition must not necessarily be grounded in space and causality in addition to the form of time.

The third and final response raised by Shapshay is closest to her own position. It is the view that Schopenhauer's claim that will is the thing in itself is metaphorical. In other words, this response suggests that Schopenhauer's true intention was to point to the

similarities between the Kantian thing in itself and the notion of the will. This third possibility falls short too, Shapshay argues, because claiming likeness or similarity of two things through metaphor does not equal (in the Kantian sense) knowledge of that thing. Thus, we wind up back in Nietzsche's camp, viewing Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will as grounded in mere 'poetic' intuitions and not knowledge of anything at all.

Shapshay posits a novel response to the Nietzschean critique that is along the lines of the third response just discussed. However, she argues that Schopenhauer's use of the term 'will' is in fact not metaphorical but "*metonymical* identification" (Shapshay 2009, 63). She observes that "a metonymy is generally defined as a figure of speech in which the name of one thing stands for another thing with which it is either closely associated, or with which it is actually contiguous... [c]ommon metonymies are 'hands' for workers, 'souls' for human beings, and 'the crown' for the monarchy" (Shapshay 2009, 63). Thus, on Shapshay's view, will as a *metonymical* device establishes the 'contiguity' of will with the thing in itself, and not that the two are merely similar. Her position strengthens Schopenhauer's in that we are able to see exactly how the will works as an extending concept that allows us to begin to sense or *perceive* metaphysical truth.

My argument about Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime is in part grounded on Shapshay's idea that the will is, in a certain contiguous sense, the thing in itself, but that it also retains some distance due to the tension that naturally results when we try to articulate with language that which is beyond our conceptual grasp. Her position is concisely stated as follows:

> What Schopenhauer offers us is metonymical rather than metaphorical insight into the thing-in-itself. He is trying to get us to widen the extension of the concept 'will' which we know from our own immediate experience (in time) beyond the bounds of possible sensation to the thing-in-itself, and invites his readers to do this on the strength of their special insight into their own wills. By metonymically identifying the thing-in-itself as Will, *naming and conceptualizing it after its most important part or feature*, Schopenhauer invites us to feel for ourselves the mysterious connection between our wills and the in-itself of the world in general. (italics added, Shapshay 2009, 65)

Shapshay's view, although not explicitly echoed, seems to share the same trajectory expressed by Cheryl Foster in her treatment of Schopenhauer's theory of "aesthetic recognition". Foster argues that an interpretation of Schopenahuer's aesthetics ought to focus on the primacy of the will over the Ideas, which can serve to "obscure" rather than "clarify" our "aesthetic observations". In her reading of Schopenhauer, Foster implicitly supports Shapshay's position that will is neither a metaphor for the thing in itself nor is it exactly identical to the thing in itself. Rather, it is through the *perception,* 'aesthetic recognition', or 'poetic intuition' of the will (unimpeded by the Ideas) that metaphysical truth becomes available to cognition. In other words, through perceiving or recognizing the will as contiguous with the *inner essence* of the world, i.e. the thing in itself, one can, in Foster's words, "know the truth of our earthly predicament" (Foster 1996, 148). Expounding upon this idea, she writes that "experiences of art and nature are preserved as continuous aspects of one aesthetic whole – the perceptual recognition of our earth-rootedness, or worldliness, the near-constant tempo of Will within and without the drama of living characters on the stage of their environment" (Foster 1996, 137).

The present work is informed by Shapshay's position that the concept of the will in Schopenhauer's philosophy is most precisely understood as a metonymical device.

Furthermore, I maintain that an accurate interpretation of Schopenhauer's view, as articulated in both volumes of *World as Will and Presentation,* is that metaphysical knowledge is possible through "aesthetic recognition" of the will in both art and nature. This view makes a clear distinction between conceptual and perceptual knowledge that, although rooted in Kant's theory of the relation of beauty to moral goodness, moves beyond the Kantian notion of aesthetics by grounding metaphysical insight and *not* moral judgment in aesthetic experience.

The Ideas and Aesthetic Cognition

As I have discussed, Schopenhauer was highly influenced by Kant's transcendental idealism. However, it must be noted that the Platonic strain of thought is at least of equal significance within Schopenhauer's philosophy, especially with regard to Platonic Ideas and the role they play in Schopenhauer's aesthetics. The Platonic Idea, Schopenhauer argues, is the closest Plato gets to Kant's thing in itself. Although the Idea belongs to the category of representation, and therefore resides in the phenomenal realm, it is special in that it is not constrained by space, time or causal relations. Schopenhauer observes, however, that the Platonic Idea remains distinguishable from the thing in itself by virtue of the fact that it exists *as an object for a subject*. The Platonic Idea is therefore unique among objects because objectivization is the only form it embodies. Schopenhauer remarks on the similarities and subtle distinction between Kant's thing in itself and the Platonic Idea in the following passage:

> ...if will is the *thing in itself,* while *Ideas* are the immediate objectivization of that will on some particular level, then Kant's thing in itself and Plato's Ideas… —these two great obscure paradoxes from the two greatest philosophers of the West—we find of course not to be identical, but still most closely related and distinguished by only a single feature. The two great paradoxes are even—precisely because, for all of the inner agreement and affinity, they sound so very different on account of the extraordinarily different individualities of their authors—the best mutual commentaries on one another, resembling two entirely different paths that lead to *one* goal. (Schopenhauer 1974, 213)

Thus, Schopenhauer finds an important resonance between Kant's thing in itself and Platonic Ideas in the sense that both direct consciousness toward the ultimate truth of reality. As immediate objectivization of the will, the Platonic Idea occupies the first tier of what Robert Wicks refers to as Schopenhauer's 'two-tiered' model of the objectivization of the will. The first tier, in which the Ideas reside, is the "basic root" of the PSR and the second tier is comprised of its "four specifications":

> The PSR has a basic root and four specifications, each one of which determines a unique style of explanation and an associated type of object. The root of the PSR is the subject-object distinction in conjunction with the idea of necessary connection; its fourfold specification is comprised of logical explanation, mathematical and geometrical explanation, causal explanation, and motive-related explanation, all considered as parallel, non-intersecting explanatory modes. (Wicks 2008, 60)

This 'two-tiered' model of objectivization—the basic root of subject-object distinction giving way to the fourfold explanatory modes—leads to a two-tiered model of cognition in Schopenhauer's philosophy. While he claims in the first book of *World as Will and Presentation* that all cognizance is subject to the PSR, Schopenhauer argues in Book Three that there are two distinct modes of cognition: one for apprehending objects that reside within the first tier of objectivization (Platonic Ideas), and another for cognizing the manifold indirect objectivizations of the will (everything else). Thus, first-tier

cognition, while subject to the PSR, is only constrained by the form of objectivization and not by space and time or causality. Recall the previous section in which the difference between the notion of conceptual cognition and aesthetic/perceptual/poetic cognition was discussed. These correlate to the two tiers of cognition mentioned by Wicks. The first tier, which is concerned only with Platonic Ideas, constitutes aesthetic cognition. Conceptual cognition operates within the second tier of objectivization and sorts through the various phenomena that inhabit the world of space, time, and causality. Thus, aesthetic cognition is a kind of intuitive act of cognizanace, whereas conceptual cognition is mediated by multiple layers of representation.

Another sense in which aesthetic cognition is distinct from conceptual cognition is that it facilitates one's detachment from the desires of the will. Although Schopenhauer seems to suggest in *World as Will and Presentation* that cognition in general is *always* in "service of the will", he allows for an exception to this rule with respect to aesthetic cognition (Schopenhauer 1974, 219). In the case of conceptual knowledge, the cognizing subject views the body as objectified will, and therefore seeks to know things are as they relate to the body's interaction with the *world as presentation.* In other words, throughout the course of our ordinary existence, we are concerned with individual things, i.e. "objects" insofar "as they exist at this time, in this place, under these circumstances, through these causes, with these effects: in a word, as individual things" (Schopenhauer 2008, 220). However, occasionally cognition frees itself from the concerns of ordinary existence and contemplates the Ideas instead. This liberation marks the transition from conceptual cognition to aesthetic cognition. Schopenhauer writes:

> The possible passage—but, as has been stated, it is to be considered only an exception—from ordinary cognizance of individual things to cognizance of Ideas occurs suddenly, with cognizance tearing itself away from the service of the will. Just by that fact the subject ceases to be merely individual and is now the pure, will-less subject of cognition, which no longer pursues relations according to the Principle of Sufficient Ground, but rests in constant contemplation of the given object beyond its interconnection with any others, and gets absorbed therein. (Schopenhuaer 1974, 221)

Note that Schopenhauer refers to the "passage" from regular cognition to cognition of the Ideas as essentially being about *freedom from the will*. The subject achieves liberation upon being released from service to the will. Thus, liberation, in this sense, entails the loss of one's individuality only to gain perceptual access to the Ideas. In other words, the self is exchanged for metaphysical knowledge. Schopenhauer expounds on this sort of liberation in the following passage:

> Suppose that, lifted by the power of spirit, one abandons the usual way of regarding things, stops merely pursuing relations among them, the ultimate goal of which is always relation to one's will under the direction of modes of the Principle of Sufficient Ground, thus no longer considers the Where, the When, the Why, and the Whither of things, but simply and solely the What, nor lets abstract thinking, concepts of reason, consciousness occupy one's thinking; but instead of all of this, one devotes the entire power of spirit to perception, becomes entirely absorbed in the latter and lets the entirety of consciousness be filled with restful contemplation of a natural object just at that moment present to oneself—be it a landscape, a tree, a cliff, a building, or whatever—entirely *losing* oneself…in this object, i.e. precisely forgetting the individual one is, one's will, and remaining only as pure subject… (Schopenhauer 1974, 221-222)

The language Schopenhauer employs here evokes the mood of peaceful detachment; in a liberated state, the self is free from the particular demands of the phenomenal world, free from obligations to and dependence upon other individuals in the world, and is filled with "restful contemplation" of the Ideas. Indeed, contemplation of the Ideas enables one to retreat from the "pushes, pulls, conflicts, and fleeting satisfactions that characterize daily

life" (Wicks 2008, 95). More to the point, pure perception of the Ideas frees one from the inevitable suffering of existence, if only temporarily.

Chapter Two: Philosophy, art, and the human predicament

If apprehension of the Ideas via aesthetic experience offers respite from the inevitable suffering of ordinary existence, why do we not seek to experience the world in this way all the time? Schopenhauer responds to this by arguing that very few people are attuned to the phenomenal world in such a way that allows them to apprehend the Ideas, whether in art or nature, more than very rarely. Instead, he argues, most people are more often than not preoccupied with the demands of ordinary life, and thus remain bound by the demands of the will. They seek constant satisfaction of their desires and feel the need to entertain their every whim. Furthermore, Schopenhauer argues, the ordinary person is prone to seeking out connections with other people and wants to acquire new objective knowledge, create and resolve conflicts, achieve social or political status, and perhaps most urgently, procreate. Moreover, ordinary people believe in the progress of humanity, novel ideas, and the creative power of individuals. The exceptional individual, on the other hand, recognizes the futility of ordinary pursuits such as these. It is the exceptional individual, Schopenhauer argues, who tends to dwell in aesthetic contemplation more often and more fully.

Viewed in light of this argument about the nature of ordinary individuals as opposed to exceptional ones, Schopenhauer's two-tiered theory of cognition, as discussed in the previous chapter, becomes clearer. Recall that aesthetic contemplation occurs when one participates in first-tier cognition. Schopenhauer makes an important distinction between *aesthetic experience*, which he argues most people have in fleeting instances throughout their everyday lives, and *aesthetic contemplation*. His position is that only

very few individuals are able to participate in aesthetic contemplation, which involves more sustained attention on the object of cognition. He discuses the distinction between aesthetic experience and aesthetic contemplation in section 37 of Book Three:

> We must therefore assume as present in all human beings…the faculty of cognizance of their Ideas in things, and just by that fact for momentarily getting outside of their personality. The genius has only the advantage of that much higher degree and more lasting duration in this manner of cognizance which allows him to maintain with it the thoughtful awareness required for replicating the object of cognizance in a work of his choice; this replication is the work of art. (Schopenhauer 1974, 239)

Thus, for Schopenhauer, the capacity for aesthetic cognition is the defining feature of the artist. Art itself is not simply a product of creativity but a mode of cognition—a way of comprehending the world. Art and *true* artists, or geniuses, are concerned with what "alone is truly essential, standing beyond and independent of all relation...that which is subject to no change…in a word: the *Ideas*" (Schopenhauer 1974, 228). For Schopenhauer, art is an entirely different mode of inquiry from science. Science, he argues, is directed toward progress, discovery, and productivity. As he explicates in *The Fourfold Root,* the scientific method draws on the PSR and works to elucidate the "laws, interconnection, and relations" arising from natural phenomena (Schopenhauer 1974, 228). Science is directed toward achieving a particular goal or set of goals, whereas, for Schopenhauer:

> …art is always at its goal. For it tears the object of its contemplation out of the stream of the world's course and holds it isolated before itself. And the individual thing, which was a vanishingly small part of that stream, becomes for it a representative of the whole, equivalent to infinitely many things in space and time. It stays, therefore, with the individual thing, it stops the wheel of time, relations vanish for it; only that which is essential, the Idea, is an object for it…We can therefore characterize art quite simply as *that way of regarding things*

> *which is independent of the Principle of Sufficient Ground*. (Schopenhauer 1974, 228-29)

This passage further reveals Schopenhauer's view that art is a *mode,* instead of a kind of thing or object, and emphasizes its independence from the PSR. Schopenhauer's definition of genius goes hand in hand with his conception of art. The artistic genius has the ability to forget his or her own "personal relationships entirely," he argues and "[a]ccordingly genius is the capacity for maintaining a purely perceptual state for losing oneself in perception, and for withdrawing cognizance from service of the will" (Schopenhauer 1974, 229). While an ordinary individual might have artistic sensibilities and occasionally catch glimpses of the Ideas in art or nature, the genius cannot help but to be overcome by the Ideas, and (often at the expense of maintaining personal relationships) is compelled to reproduce the Ideas in the form of art so that they might be perceived by ordinary consciousness. In this sense, Schopenhauer views the genius as a kind of tragic hero, sacrificing his or her own peace of mind for the benefit of humanity. He writes that the genius is given a kind of "surplus of cognizance" that "liberates" consciousness from service to the will, and therefore "becomes the clear mirror of the essence of the world" (Schopenhauer 1974, 230). One must ask, then, if perception of the Ideas leads to the relief of suffering, and the genius is best suited to do so by virtue of a 'surplus of cognizance', does it not follow that the artistic genius is the best equipped to avoid suffering altogether?

On the contrary, Schopenhauer writes, the disposition of geniuses is characterized by a kind of "restlessness" due to "the present rarely being able to satisfy them because it

does not fill their consciousness" (Schopenhauer 1974, 230). Furthermore, the artistic genius is burdened with the obligation to communicate the Ideas to ordinary consciousness through the activity of artistic representation. Dale Jacquette compares Schopenhauer's theory of genius, especially with regard to suffering, to Plato's theory of enlightenment:

> In its efforts to grasp and communicate the Ideas received from its experience in nature, genius also suffers more acutely than ordinary persons. Like the prisoner released from Plato's cave, the philosophical or aesthetic genius, having caught sight of the forms of reality, is compelled to share nonrepresentational knowledge with those still left behind in darkness. To undertake such a thankless labor is to be condemned to inevitable misunderstanding by those who have not experienced the revelation. It is also to incur additional suffering in acquiring specialized skills and applying every energy of mind and body to harness nondiscursive representational media for the expression of nonrepresentational concepts. (Jacquette 1996, 9)

The artistic genius is therefore freer than the ordinary individual in the sense that he or she is less enslaved by the demands of the will. However, Schopenhauer argues, the genius endures the special burden of being compelled to communicate the Ideas through art to the rest of humanity.

Art, Philosophy, and Genius

The section titled "On the Inner Essence of Art," in chapter three of the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation* serves as a corollary to section 49 in Book Three of the first volume. Here, Schopenhauer probes deeper yet into the meaning of art and makes a distinction between the fine arts—architecture, sculpture, poetry, etc.—and philosophy *as* art. Genuine works of art, poetry, and philosophy, he argues, are rooted in aesthetic

consciousness and thus are characterized by an objective worldview, in which the intellect is temporarily liberated from service to the will:

> Not only philosophy but the fine arts too are fundamentally working toward solving the problem of existence. For in every mind that just once devotes itself to regarding the world purely objectively, a striving has been aroused, as concealed and unconscious as it may be, to grasp the true essence of things, of life, of existence. For this alone is of interest to the intellect as such, i.e., to the pure subject of cognition that has become free from the purposes of the will: just as for the subject cognizant as mere individual, the purposes of the will alone are of interest. (Schopenhauer 2011, 459)

However, this passage alone does not necessarily bind philosophy together with the arts *methodologically.* Schopenhauer suggests here that the project of the philosopher is similar to that of the artistic genius, however we must turn to chapters 29, 30 and 31 in the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation* for a more robust explanation of the similarity of the philosopher and the artist—a relationship which hinges on the distinction between ordinary and aesthetic cognition.

In chapter 29 of the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation II*, Schopenhauer further considers cognizance of the Ideas and discusses in great detail the intellect's liberation from subservience to the will. The key feature of aesthetic contemplation is the primacy of the Idea over any particular reference in the phenomenal world to individual will, whether by way of accommodation or threat. When consciousness abandons its preoccupation with references of particular things to the will, it is able to distinguish between particular things and the Ideas. Furthermore, as Schopenhauer explains in chapter 30, it is through a process of "self-renunciation" that cognizance achieves this sort of freedom. In his words, "apprehension of an Idea, its

entry into our consciousness, only comes about by means of an alteration in us that might also be regarded as an act of self-renunciation, insofar as it consists in cognizance just turning entirely away from one's own will, hence dropping its entrusted precious pledge entirely from sight and considering things as if they could never in any way concern the will" (Schopenhauer 2011, 416).

So far this is a sort of recapitulation of the thesis presented in Book Three of the first volume of *World as Will and Presentation*; Ideas are apprehended when cognizance frees itself from service to the will and aesthetic contemplation is characterized by apprehension of the Ideas. He goes on to remind his reader that "[e]very genuine work of art must be grounded in a cognizance thus conditioned as its origin" (Schopenhauer 2011, 416). Furthermore, he writes, that if "wholly objective, intuitive" apprehension is the fundamental condition of aesthetic enjoyment or experience, then it must also be a prerequisite for their production (*ibid*.). The advancement of his thinking beyond Book Three of the first volume comes to light in the following statement:

> For only what has originated from perception, and more particularly from purely objective perception, or is immediately aroused by it, contains the living seed from which genuine and original achievements can grow: not only in the plastic and pictorial arts but also in poetry, *indeed even in philosophy*. The 'jumping-off point' of every beautiful work, of every great or profound thought, is an entirely objective perception. But such a perception is altogether conditioned by a complete silencing of will, which leaves the person over as *pure subject of cognition*. The predisposition for predominance of this state is simply genius. (Italics added, Schopenhauer 2011, 421)

To be clear, Schopenhauer's point is that the impetus of every true work of art or poetry, and of every genuine work of philosophy, is objective perception. However, that is not to say that the work of philosophy itself belongs to the category of art or poetry, but that the

inspiration for philosophical thought is indeed objective perception. Thus, for Schopenhauer, artistic, poetic, and philosophical expressions share a common point of origin and can justly be characterized as aesthetic based on the argument outlined above.

In chapter 31, "On Genius," Schopenhauer argues that the genius is characterized by a predisposition for objective perception because he is endowed with a "surplus" of "presentational power" and therefore is in a position to serve the human race as a whole (Schopenhauer 2011, 429). Imagination, he argues is the "indispensible instrument" of genius and "objective perception" is the "primal source of all cognizance" (*ibid.*). He then makes an important distinction between the character of the artist/poet and that of the philosopher, though he emphasizes that the origin of each is rooted in a proclivity for what he calls "thoughtful awareness." He articulates the difference in the following passage:

> …as distinctness of consciousness rises in infinite gradations, *thoughtful awareness* makes ever more of an appearance, and it thereby gradually comes to the point that sometimes, though rarely, and then again with extremely different degrees of distinctness, it passes like a flash through one's mind: 'what is all this?' or '*how* are things in their true character?' The first question will, when it attains to great distinctness and lasting presence, make the philosopher; and the second, likewise, the artist or poet. Therefore, the high calling of them both has its root in thoughtful awareness, which originates in the first instance from that distinctness with which they are aware of the world and themselves, and thereby come to reflection upon them. The whole process, however, springs from the fact that the intellect, through its preponderance, sometimes gets loose of the will to which it was originally subservient. (Schopenhauer 2011, 433)

To be clear, Schopenhauer's argument is that both philosophy and genuine works of art seek to uncover the true nature of existence. In other words, philosophy and art are concerned ultimately with the thing in itself. He claims that art does a superior job of

capturing the Ideas, and thus the essential nature of the world, but that philosophy alone probes into metaphysical truth through the "abstract and serious language of *reflection*" (Schopenhauer 2011, 459). In the presence of a work of art, Schopenhauer argues, there is *implied* wisdom, whereas philosophy *explicates* metaphysical insight:

> It follows from all this that all wisdom is certainly contained in the works of the depictive arts, yet only *virtually* or *implicitly;* by contrast, to provide the same *actually* and *explicitly* is the endeavor of philosophy, which is in this sense related to these arts as wine to grapes. What it promises to provide is, as it were, an already realized and cash gain, a firm and lasting possession, whereas what comes from achievements in works of art is one that is constantly to be generated afresh. (Schopenhauer 2011, 460)

Schopenhauer's own philosophy of the sublime can indeed serve as a useful example of the distinction he makes between the artist and the philosopher. With regard to the sublime, the artist's task is an important one: to capture the essence of the sublimity of nature through the medium of painting, poetry, or music, for example. The philosopher's duty, however, is not to merely present a kind of picture of the sublime, but to bring about metaphysical enlightenment through the art object. Therefore, after citing examples of the sublime in nature, Schopenhauer grabs hold of his reader and proclaims that the sublime reveals the nature of the cosmos to us in one fell swoop: *I am not merely an individual but also pure subjectivity, and the phenomena that are presented to me exist both as individuated objects and pure objectivity and their presence depends entirely on the existence of my subjectivity*.

Schopenhauer's inclusion of the philosopher along with the artist and the poet in his understanding of genius is critical to my thesis primarily because it underscores the notion that aesthetic consciousness is not merely limited to encounters with 'art' but is an

available mode of consciousness in any kind of encounter. Moreover, this maneuver justifies the assertion that the way in which consciousness encounters any event in the world, including the loss of another human being, can be elevated out of service to the will and into the aesthetic realm. This sort of elevation brings to light the true character or essence of a thing, and thereby enables metaphysical insight into its nature.

The Objective and Subjective Sides of Aesthetic Experience

Over the past two or three decades, Schopenhauer scholars have gradually become more focused on the content of Book Three of *World as Will and Presentation*, which covers Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory. Among the most influential of these is Christopher Janaway, who makes a strong case for this shift in focus:

> The Third Book must hold centre stage once we appreciate that aesthetics is at the heart of philosophy for Schopenhauer: art and aesthetic experience not only provide escape from an otherwise miserable existence, but attain an objectivity explicitly superior to that of science or ordinary empirical knowledge. (Janaway 1996, 39)

If we take a cue from Janaway and zoom in on center stage, the distinction Schopenhauer makes in Book Three between the subjective and objective sides of aesthetic experience must be taken very seriously. In Chapter One, I argued that one of Schopenhauer's most important modifications of Kantian transcendental idealism is his assertion that the "root" of all knowledge is the subject-object distinction, and that the form of the subject-object relation serves as the foundational form for all other forms of understanding. My position is further strengthened by Schopenhauer's position that aesthetic experience must be understood within the framework of the subject-object relation.

The objective side of aesthetic experience, for Schopenhauer, has to do with "the cognizance of the object" not merely as phenomenal reality but as "Platonic *Idea*"; the subjective side of aesthetic experience is located in the "self-consciousness" of the viewer of the object "not as individual, but as *pure will-less subject of cognition*" (Schopenhauer 1974, 240). This is to say that aesthetic experience, for Schopenhauer, ought to be examined from two points of view: first, from the objective point of view in which an object is evaluated based on how effectively it embodies an Idea or set of Ideas; and second, from the subjective point of view in which the viewer derives a certain kind of feeling or set of feelings from his or her encounter with an aesthetic object. The distinction between the two perspectives or 'sides' of aesthetic experience becomes clearer when considered in light of the two primary aesthetic categories, the beautiful and the sublime.

Schopenhauer's division of aesthetic experience into two primary categories, the beautiful and the sublime, is not unique. He takes for granted in *World as Will and Presentation* that the two categories are self-evident. Kant employs the same classification in his aesthetics, which can largely be attributed to the wide-reaching influence of Edmund Burke's 1757 publication, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, which was regarded highly by both British and German philosophers in the 18th century. Burke was the first to systematically develop the notion that the sensations of pleasure and pain are connected to the aesthetic value of

a work of art.[4] Thus, not feeling the need to defend his use of the categories of beauty and the sublime, (presumably because of their widespread acceptance among philosophers at the time he wrote *World as Will and Presentation*), Schopenhauer focuses more on his argument that the Platonic Ideas function as immediate objectivization of will in aesthetic experience, specifically in terms of the beautiful and the sublime.

Schopenhauer devotes several pages toward the beginning of Book Three of *World as Will and Presentation* to discussing the subjective side of the aesthetic experience of beauty. He argues that the experience of pure subjectivity or pure will-lessness is pleasurable in the sense that it temporarily detaches the subject from the suffering that is built into the structure of ordinary existence. Thus, the pleasure derived from the beautiful in the subjective sense has to do with the experience of freedom *from* the will. Furthermore, with regard to the subjective side of aesthetic experience, Schopenhauer argues that the content of a work of art can be of the most mundane quality and still have a powerful effect on the viewer. He writes that:

> [a]n inner state of mind, a preponderance of cognition over willing, can call forth this state [of pure will-lessness] in any surroundings. This is shown to us by those excellent Dutchmen who directed so purely objective a perception upon the most insignificant objects and produced a lasting monument to their objectivity and spiritual repose in *still life,* which the aesthetic beholder cannot regard unmoved. For it makes present to the latter's mind the restful, still, will-less state of mind of the artist that was needed for so objectively perceiving, for so attentively regarding such insignificant things, and for such thoughtful awareness in replicating this perception. (Schopenhauer 1974, 241)

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[4] See the James Boulton's introduction to *Edmund Burke: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) for an overview of this topic.

He goes on to say that "[l]andscape painters…have often painted highly insignificant rural objects in the same spirit, and thereby produced the same effect even more delightfully" (Schopenhuaer 1974, 242). At this point in Book Three, Schopenhauer's hierarchy of the forms of fine art begins to take shape. In order to understand what informs his hierarchical ranking of the fine arts, we turn to Schopenhauer's discussion of the objective side of aesthetic experience.

While one can experience aesthetic pleasure subjectively in pure 'will-lessness', a work of art or natural object is deemed 'beautiful' in the *objective* sense in proportion to the extent to which it conveys the universal Ideas. Schopenhauer argues that certain kinds of works of art are better suited for this purpose than others. In the second half of Book Three, he lays out his hierarchical structure from lowest to highest. He places architecture and landscape design at the bottom of the hierarchy, painting and sculpture near the middle, and poetry (especially tragedy) at the top. Poetry in general, but tragic poetry in particular, he argues, is superior in its ability to convey the essence of the human predicament, which is essentially that we are at war with ourselves. Tragic poetry expresses the paradoxical nature of the individual human being, who is at once her own champion and downfall. Schopenhauer writes:

> Tragedy is to be viewed as the pinnacle of the literary arts…the purpose of this highest poetic accomplishment is depiction of the frightful side of life, that what is here brought before us are nameless pain, the misery of humanity, the triumph of malice, the mocking dominion of chance, and the hopeless fall of the righteous and innocent; for herein lies a significant hint as to the character of the world and of existence. It is the conflict of the will with itself that here, on the highest level of objectivization, most completely unfolded, comes frighteningly to the fore. (Schopenhauer 1974, 302)

It can be seen that Schopenhauer places a premium on a work of art's ability to convey universal truth, but especially universal truth having to do with the human being's relation to the world. However, it is interesting that in his discussion of the hierarchy of the fine arts, Schopenhauer is careful to make clear that the extent to which a work of art can be considered beautiful has nothing to do with the historic or moral properties of its subject matter. In the following passage in Book Three, Schopenhauer discusses the aesthetic value of historical painting. Note that its value is derived from the artist's ability to convey the universal "Idea of humanity" and not from the particular historical events that are depicted:

> Besides beauty and grace *historical painting* also has character as its main subject, whereby we are in general to understand the depiction of will on the highest level of its objectification, where the individual, as a coming to the fore of a particular side of the Idea of humanity, has a unique significance and – not through mere form alone, but through all sorts of actions and modifications of cognition and willing that, visible in mien and gesture, occasion and accompany them – lets cognizance be taken of the fact. Insofar as the Idea of humanity is to be displayed to this extent, the unfolding of its multifaceted character has to be made evident in significant individuals, and these in turn can be made visible in their significance only by way of multiplicity of scenes, events, and actions. (Schopenhauer 1974, 277 – 278)

Thus, although historical facts alone do not make a work of art significant, an historical painting can be meaningful, Schopenhauer argues, if it conveys the essence of a particular historical situation (the Idea of humanity, for example) *via historical facts.* This point is both aesthetically and metaphysically profoundly important. The Ideas must be represented in the phenomenal world in order to be perceived. They do not exist *for us*, properly speaking, until they are embodied to some degree. Furthermore, Schopenhauer argues, the Ideas are as compellingly portrayed through depictions of everyday, ordinary

life as they are through images of great historical events. For example, he follows up the passage above by saying that:

> …one does a great injustice to the superb painters of the Dutch school when one merely prizes their technical expertise, otherwise looking down on them with disdain because they mostly depicted objects from common life, while one to the contrary takes only incidents from world, or from biblical, history to be significant. One should first stop to think that the inner significance of an action is entirely distinct from its outer, and the two often take separate paths. The outer significance is an action's importance in relation to its consequence in and for the actual world, thus in accordance with the Principle of Sufficient Ground. The inner significance is the depth of insight it opens into the Idea of humanity, bringing to light sides of that Idea more seldomly coming to the fore, allowing distinctly and decidedly self-expressive individualities, by means of purposefully arranged circumstances, to unfold their unique qualities. *Only the inner significance matters in art; the outer matters in history.* (Schopenhauer 1974, 278; italics added)

I previously asserted that aesthetic experience, for Schopenhauer, is simply the apprehension of the Ideas in art or nature. Another way to put this is that aesthetic experience is the apprehension of the immediate objectivization of will in the world. This is *not* to say that the will itself is immediately apprehended in aesthetic experiences. It *is* to say that the Ideas, while not identical to the will itself, are the *immediate objectivization of will*. In other words, the Ideas are what happen when the will first becomes an object *for* a subject, but has not yet become constrained by the PSR. The distinction between the Ideas and their phenomena is subtle but critical to Schopenhauer's aesthetics. When the genius perceives Ideas, the incidental aspects of the perceptual experience fall by the wayside; the particular facts, individual things, colors, quantities, notes, are all reduced to arbitrary details. The significance of the encounter is located in the Ideas that are expressed by particular arrangements of colors, notes, or

things that occupy spatial and/or causal relations with one another. Approaching the conclusion of his discussion of the hierarchical structure of fine art, Schopenhauer pauses to reflect before discussing the "special case of music," which he places at the very top of the hierarchy and, in a sense, in a category of its own (Schopenhauer 1974, 306). Notice in the following passage that he simply refers to art in terms of its ability to convey the "objectification of will" and stops speaking about art in terms of the Ideas:

> Having then considered in the preceding all the fine arts in the generality that is appropriate to our standpoint, beginning with the fine art of architecture, whose purpose as such is to render distinct the objectification of will on the lowest level of its visibility…and concluding our consideration with tragedy, which, at the highest level of objectification of will, makes precisely that internal discord evident with frightful magnitude and distinctness – we find, nonetheless, that one of the fine arts has remained, and has had to remain, excluded from our consideration, since, in the systematic context of our account, there was no suitable place for it: it is *music.* (Schopenhauer 1974, 306)

Music, Schopenhauer argues, does not embody the Ideas, but rather embodies the will itself. Music, like the Ideas, is immediate objectivization of the will. I take this to mean that music, according to Schopenhauer's conception of it, is in a sense *beyond* art. Furthermore, music, as non-conceptual and immediate 'copy' of will, is also in a sense *beyond* the Ideas.

The Sublime

Beauty, Schopenhauer argues, is present "when objects accommodate," i.e. when they embody the Ideas with ease (Schopenhauer 1974, 246). Recognition of the Ideas in objects transports consciousness into a state of "pure perception," thus freeing it from service of the will (Schopenhauer 1974, 246). Thus, the subjective side of the

aesthetically beautiful is located in the experience of peaceful detachment, and the objective side of the beautiful is located in the object's easeful embodiment of the Ideas.

In contrast to the feeling of the beautiful, Schopenhauer writes that the feeling of the sublime is aroused when the objects of perception embody the Ideas but also "stand in hostile relation to human will in general" (Schopenhauer 1974, 246). The feeling of the sublime consists of a paradoxical combination of pleasure and pain—simultaneous ecstasy and fear of annihilation. Schopenhauer writes that the feeling of the sublime is the result of an internal struggle, whereas the beautiful never results from conflict:

> Thus what distinguishes the feeling of the sublime from that of the beautiful is this: with the beautiful, pure cognition has gained the upper hand without a battle, insofar as the beauty of the object, i.e., that characteristic of it which facilitates cognizance of its Idea, has without any resistance and thus without notice removed the will and cognizance of relations that serve it from one's consciousness, without even any recollection remaining of the will. By contrast, with the sublime, the state of pure cognition is first won through consciously and forcibly tearing away from references of the same object cognized as unfavorable to the will, through a free elevation, accompanied by consciousness, above the will and cognizance referring to it. (Schopenhauer 1974, 247)

Schopenhauer argues that certain kinds of manifestations of will in nature evoke the feeling of the sublime in us more than others. Schopenhauer notes that whereas light or lightness can be correlated to the beautiful, darkness and emptiness are often characteristics of the sublime. He argues this to be the case because darkness and emptiness are associated with a kind of lacking or mystery, which, instead of accommodating the will, act out of hostility for the will by withholding what it desires: knowledge and enlightenment. Similarly, extreme stillness or quietude in nature can lead to the feeling of the sublime because a lack of connection is felt with one's surroundings.

Schopenhauer alludes to this in the following passage, in which he suggests that one element of the feeling of the sublime is the feeling that one is utterly alone in the world:

> Let us transport ourselves into a most lonely region, with unlimited horizon, under utterly cloudless skies, trees and plants in entirely motionless air, no animals, no people, no moving waters, the deepest stillness—then such surroundings are like a summons to seriousness, to contemplation, together with a tearing of oneself away from all willing and its neediness. (Schopenhauer 1974, 249)

More threatening still, Schopenhauer argues, is a region like the one described above except it contains no plants or trees at all, and has been stripped of any object that might be pleasing to the individual will, or strive to relate to it. Thus, we can see a kind of hierarchy forming of lesser to greater degrees to which the feeling of the sublime can be achieved. Moving up the hierarchy, Schopenhauer argues that an even more powerful feeling of the sublime can result from one's experience of "nature in stormy movement; *chiaroscuro* produced by threatening black thunderclouds; monstrous, naked, overhanging cliffs that block one's view with their folds;" thus, we begin to see a kind of movement in nature that is parallel to Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime (Schopenhauer 1974, 249). First, nature begins to withdraw from the individual will, so as to leave the subject utterly alone, and then it moves through increasingly more threatening states of hostility to the will. Schopenhauer's argument culminates in examples of what causes the most intense feeling of the sublime in nature: a great, rushing waterfall, the raging sea during a torrential storm. The key to experiencing the sublime in these settings, instead of fear, is to remain in pure subjectivity, rather than in service to the will:

> But so long as our personal distress does not win the upper hand, but we remain in aesthetic contemplation, the pure subject of cognition looks through that battle with nature, through that image of a broken will, and—at rest, unshaken, unconcerned—apprehends the Ideas attaching to the very objects that are threatening and frightful to the will. In precisely this contrast lies the feeling of the sublime. (Schopenhauer 1974, 250)

Schopenhauer's particular version of the sublime has, at its core, to do with the precarious balance between the pleasure of peaceful detachment and the pain of a particularly threatening environment or situation. I will elaborate on the nuanced nature of Schopenhauer's account of the sublime in the following chapter.

Reception of Schopenhauer's Aesthetics

Much has been written in the last two decades on the topic of Schopenhauer's aesthetics. In particular, there has been a concentrated effort among Schopenhauer scholars to sort out, as Chris Janaway puts it, "whether [his aesthetics] stand up better to scrutiny and deserve more prominence than contemporary ethics and aesthetics have tended to give them" (Janaway 2008, 2). The traditional tendency to which Janaway refers here is aptly framed by Kai Hammermeister's view articulated in his 2002 monograph, *The German Aesthetic Tradition.* He argues that Schopenhauer's "writings do not mark the beginning of a new productive approach to the riddle of art as much as they signal the beginning of the dismantling of the idealist tradition" (Hammermeister 2002, 111). It is true that Schopenhauer repeatedly expresses his contempt for German Idealism—especially that of Hegel and Fichte—and does his best to distance his own work from that tradition. However, Hammermeister's comments suggest that Schopenhauer offers nothing of

substance to replace the dismantled version of German Idealism with which he leaves his reader. Furthermore, Hammermeister, echoing popular opinion among contemporary critics, argues that:

> [d]espite the forcefulness of his writing and the self-assured declaration of his superiority over Hegel especially, Schopenhauer's thinking achieves neither the conceptual rigor nor the systematic breadth of his idealist precursors as becomes apparent from the many contradictions and inconclusive arguments in his writings… [D]espite the obvious importance that art holds for Schopenhauer both personally and philosophically, his aesthetic theory is often unclear and inconsistent when we get down to the particulars (Hammermeister 2002, 112).

Hammermeister goes on to argue that the basic essence of Schopenhauer's aesthetics is a preoccupation with escape from the inevitable suffering of the world by way of aesthetic experience. He suggests that this marks a historical turn away from the community and toward the individual's desires and concerns. Art in Schopenhauer's system, according to Hammermeister, is only of value to the extent that it allows one to avoid communal engagement, which is now cast in a negative light instead of as an enriching aspect of human nature. The crux of Hammermeister's critique of Schopenhauer's aesthetics is revealed in the following passage:

> Although Schopenhauer insists on art's capacity to grant insights otherwise unavailable, the mediation between this epistemologically optimistic stance and his general antirationalism is problematic. Equally questionable is the insistence on the practical dimension of the aesthetic encounter. The practical moment of aesthetics in Schopenhauer no longer leads to an engagement with the world but to a withdrawal from it. (Hammermeister 2002, 113)

Hammermeister's critique of Schopenhauer is twofold. He suggests first that Schopenhauer's aesthetics, at best, rest on epistemologically shaky ground and, at worst, are wholly inconsistent. Secondly, he argues that Schopenhauer's aesthetics leave no

room for a system of ethics that values engagement with community. The first part of Hammermeister's critique is of interest to me, as it deals with the general soundness of his aesthetic theory. Moreover, it is recapitulated time and again among contemporary Schopenhauer scholars. The concern is with the so called 'optimism' of Schopenhauer's epistemological position that consciousness can simply *decide* to detach from individual willing in order to contemplate the ideas. Schopenhauer calls this the 'abolition of individuality' and suggests it is required for aesthetic experience of any kind, and is required to a greater extent for aesthetic contemplation. The inconsistency Hammermeister points to is that consciousness is necessarily attached to human subjectivity, i.e. individuality. Therefore, he asks, how can consciousness separate from that which makes indeed makes it possible: individuated existence. Alex Neill takes up this issue in his 2008 essay, *Aesthetic Experience in Schopenhauer's Metaphysics of Will:*

> [w]hat conceptual room is there for the idea of 'abolishing' individuality, for the idea that human beings have the capacity to know *other* than as individuals, to have knowledge that is not governed by the principle of sufficient reason? In short, what conceptual space has Schopenhauer left for the possibility of aesthetic experience? (Neill 2008, 30).

As Hammermeister and Neill see it, Schopenhauer himself failed to explicitly carve out the requisite 'conceptual space' for aesthetic experience. I concede that this is the case. Schopenhauer goes to great lengths to describe the relation of intellect to individual will as one of subservience and offers no real metaphysical explanation for how the intellect frees itself from service to the will in order to engage in aesthetic contemplation. He offers a full and rich account of aesthetic contemplation itself, but his system fails to explain why the intellect would ever detach from service to the will at all.

Neill offers a plausible explanation that is consistent with Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will. His argument is that the capacity for aesthetic experience and aesthetic contemplation evolved as a "by-product of the emergence of those capacities of intellect that are determined by the needs of the will in human beings" (Neill 2008, 33). Whereas Schopenhauer refers to the capacity for aesthetic contemplation throughout *World as Will and Presentation* as an 'aberration' or 'glitch,' offering no real explanation for it, Neill's argument is that it sort of comes about has a natural side effect of evolution. For example, he argues:

> …it seems quite clear that the human intellect is capable of any number of things that could not plausibly by thought of as necessitated by the will's needs for 'nourishment and propagation': think of calculus, for example…or music-making. Perhaps the capacity to communicate verbally can be explained in terms of the will's survival needs, but the capacity to sing, or for that matter to play a musical instrument? Furthermore, at least some of these capacities are very common—that is to say, not plausibly accountable as 'unnatural', or as rare aberrations from the norm. The thought, then, is this: if there is an explanation of the occurrence of such capacities that is consistent with Schopenhauer's account of the nature of intellect and its relationship to the individual will, then perhaps that explanation can also be deployed to deliver a coherent (in Schopenhauerian terms) account of how the capacity for apprehension of the Ideas is possible, not just as aberration, in the genius, but in 'all men.' (Neill 2008, 30)

Neill's argument is thus that although the primary function of human reason is to serve the will to life, it also gives way to "rational deliberation, thoughtfulness, self-consciousness" and other intellectual pursuits that do not directly serve the needs of the will (Neill 2008, 31). His argument is based in the notion that the human capacity for aesthetic contemplation emerged, over time, with the evolution of consciousness. Neill's argument successfully resolves the inconsistency that both he and Hammermeister point

out in Schopenhauer's metaphysics and offers a treatment of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will that is generally consistent with the principle of evolution.

Chapter Three: A Foundation for Progress

So far I have argued in favor of Sandra Shapshay's position that Schopenhauer's use of the term 'will' in *World as Will and Presentation* can be most aptly interpreted as a metonymical device that serves to elucidate the contiguity between will and the thing in itself. It follows that Schopenhauer can be understood as not primarily concerned with proving that will is *identical* to Kant's thing in itself, but instead seeks to guide his reader through the discovery process of the will in order to *feel* the contiguity with the thing in itself. The shift away from the question of whether or not the will is identical to the thing in itself solves two problems. First, one can engage in a serious discussion of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, which are inextricably tied to his philosophy of will, without bracketing out his metaphysics. Interpreting Schopenhauer's use of will as a metonymical device enables a richer understanding of his aesthetics, because the will itself is allowed to play an essential role in carving out a deeper understanding of the power of aesthetic contemplation, especially within the context of the aesthetically sublime. In other words, one no longer feels the need to establish a 'stand-alone' theory of the sublime in Schopenhauer's aesthetics, and is compelled to incorporate the will as an essential component of the feeling of the sublime.

The second philosophical problem solved by reading will as a metonymical device is Young's "black box" problem. Will, as a phenomenon contiguous with, but not identical to, the thing in itself, avoids leaving unanswered questions about the nature of the thing in itself, and instead makes the question of identity irrelevant by employing language to demonstrate that when we refer to the thing in itself, we refer to no *thing* at

all. The metonymical relation of the will to the thing in itself facilitates the reader's awareness of the limit situation in which human understanding is entrenched, without attempting to surpass that limit by asserting that the thing in itself is an object.

Having clarified my position on Schopenhauer's philosophy of will, this chapter will include a more careful exploration of his aesthetic category of the sublime. I will take a close look at Schopenhauer's discussion of the differences between the dynamical and mathematical modes of the sublime, and offer an analysis of this distinction that will include an argument for a possible third mode of the sublime that is consistent with Schopenhauer's aesthetics but that he failed to make explicit.

Schopenhauer agrees with Kant that the aesthetic category of the sublime has primarily to do with the confrontation of one's insignificance relative to the world or the whole of nature. In the dynamical mode of the sublime, the individual is made to feel insignificant by virtue of the sheer power of nature, whereas in the mathematical mode of the sublime, one is reduced to insignificance by virtue of the vastness of space and time. The essential nature of the feeling of the sublime, common to both modes, is the paradoxical feeling of being simultaneously threatened and at ease. In the following passage, Schopenhauer describes how this paradoxical feeling arises from the dynamical mode of the sublime:

> …nature, in stormy movement; *chiaroscuro* produced by black thunderclouds; monstrous, naked, overhanging cliffs that block one's view with their folds; rushing, foaming waters; complete barrenness; the wailing of the wind as it sweeps through the gorges. Our dependency, our battle with a hostile nature, our will as broken in the latter is now made perceptibly evident to us. But so long as our personal distress does not win the upper hand, but we remain in aesthetic contemplation, the pure subject of cognition looks through that battle with nature,

> through that image of a broken will, and – at rest, unshaken, unconcerned – apprehends the Ideas attaching to the very objects that are threatening and frightful to the will. In precisely this contrast lies the feeling of the sublime. (Schopenhauer 2008, 250)

Schopenhauer goes on to say that even more powerful still is the experience of the dynamical sublime in which the individual is overpowered by natural forces on a larger scale. For example, being in the middle of the ocean during a storm, rather than viewing it from the shore, or standing next to a giant waterfall, the sound of which is so powerful that no human voice could be detected in its presence. The crashing waves of the storm and the rushing water against the rocks magnify the fragility of the individual spectator's existence. This kind of hostility in nature becomes sublime, in the dynamical sense, when the individual is at once able to be aware of the real and immediate threat presented to her individuality and detach in peaceful contemplation of the Ideas. As Schopenhauer writes,

> Then in the unshaken spectator of this scene, the two-fold character of his consciousness achieves its highest level of distinctness: he feels himself at the same time an individual, a fragile phenomenon of will that can be broken to bits by the slightest blow from those forces, helpless before mighty nature, dependent, prey to chance, a vanishing nothing in the face of monstrous powers, and yet at the same time the eternal, restful subject of cognition that, as the condition of all objects, is the bearer of precisely this entire world, with the frightful battle with nature only a presentation to it, it itself in restful apprehension of Ideas free and foreign to all willing and needs. This is the full impression of the sublime. (Schopenhauer 2008, 250)

Thus, the "full impression" of the sublime is the experience of split or "two-fold character" of consciousness. The ordinary side of consciousness, which is concerned with surviving and thriving in the world according to the PSR, is immediately aware of nature's hostility and the real threat presented to existence. The other side of consciousness, which allows us to experience the world aesthetically, is equally active in

the experience of the sublime. The sublime is so compelling because neither side of consciousness dominates the other. In contrast to the experience of beauty, in which consciousness gives itself over entirely to aesthetic contemplation (if only temporarily), the feeling of the sublime is dual in nature. We remain cognizant of our existence in the phenomenal world, while simultaneously and restfully aware of our utter detachment from the world.

The distinct experience of the mathematical sublime, Schopenhauer argues, can be best understood in terms of the finite nature and scale of the individual human being relative to the magnitude and vastness of the "world in space and time" (Schopenhauer 2008, 251). When simply considering the extension of time into the past and future, or gazing into the infinite depths of space on a clear night,

> …we feel ourselves as individual, as animate body, as transitory phenomenon of will, vanishing like a drop in the ocean, dissipating into nothingness. But at the same time there rises against such a specter of our own nullity, against such a lying impossibility, the immediate consciousness that indeed all these worlds exist only in a presentation to us, only as modifications of the eternal subject of pure cognition that we find ourselves to be as soon as we forget individuality, and that is the necessary, the conditioning bearer of all worlds and of all times. The magnitude of the world that previously caused us unrest now rests within us; our dependence upon it is nullified by its dependence on us. (Schopenhauer 2008, 251)

Here, again, Schopenhauer reveals the paradoxical nature of the feeling of the sublime. In this case, he sees it as a result of our existence as an individual, finite being in the world of space and time. The paradox arises from the two sides of our experience as such. Our dependent, temporary, individual self feels the threat of ultimate irrelevance in the face of the whole of space and time; yet when we experience our own objectivity, that is, when

we rest in the knowledge that as individuals, the world is present only to and *for us,* we are thrust into an exalted state. Thus, the sublime feeling is essentially ecstatic; the individual moves constantly back and forth between despair and exaltation. Schopenhauer argues that the sublime state does not arise as a result of critical reflection, but rather "shows itself as a merely felt consciousness that we are in some sense (which philosophy alone explicates) one with the world and thus not crushed, but lifted, by its immensity. *It is the elevation above the particular individual that one is, the feeling of the sublime*" (Schopenhauer 2008, 251). This statement is perhaps the most succinct account of the sublime offered by Schopenhauer in *World as Will and Presentation*. The feeling of the sublime, whether as a result of the confrontation with the force of nature (dynamical) or the unfathomable depths of space and time (mathematical), is a kind of partial transcendence beyond one's individual existence. In part, what makes this assertion so radical is that Schopenhauer is not suggesting that we *imagine* existing in a mode beyond individuality, but rather that there is a sense in which the feeling of the sublime enables a realization of our oneness with the world will.

As I suggested previously, Schopenhauer's division of the feeling of the sublime into two categories, the dynamical and mathematical, is thought to be basically in keeping with Kant's aesthetic theory. This demands further investigation into the ways in which Schopenhauer does indeed depart from Kant's notion of the sublime and the ways in which he remains bound to Kant. Sandra Shapshay does precisely that in her 2012 *Kantian Review* article, "Schopenhauer's Transformation of the Kantian Sublime." While she acknowledges the progress contemporary scholars have made in comparing and

contrasting Kant's theory of the sublime to Schopenhauer's, she suggests in general there has been a kind of "scholarly neglect of the Kantian inheritance of Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime" due in part to the fact that Schopenhauer himself repeatedly denigrates the Kantian theory for its attachment to "scholastic metaphysics." (Shapshay 2012, 480) Shapshay argues, against the prevailing interpretations of Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime she discusses in the article, that his theory is "best understood as a transformation of rather than a real departure from, the Kantian explanation of the sublime." (Shapshay 2012, 480) She singles out Julian Young's discussion of Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime for its allusion to a "more profound Kantian influence" than others have been able or willing to articulate, yet laments the fact that he does not "offer a sustained analysis" of exactly the ways in which Schopenhauer adheres to the Kantian theory and how, specifically, he reconstructs it (Shapshay 2012, 480).

Shapshay proceeds to offer a thorough and illuminating analysis of the ways in which Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime is both a faithful reiteration of the Kantian theory as well as a thoroughly different version of it. I am most interested here in parsing out the elements of Shapshay's argument that will prove to be pertinent to my own reconstruction of Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime. I will begin with what she calls the two major "phenomenological differences" between the beautiful and the sublime in Schopenhauer's aesthetics. The first difference is that the "beautiful is characterized by a *loss* off self-consciousness whereas the sublime is characterized by *two moments of self-consciousness*" and the second is that the "beautiful is wholly pleasurable, whereas the sublime is characterized as mixed with pain" (Shapshay 2012, 491). These are of

particular importance because, as Shapshay notes, some scholars have argued that Schopenhauer's account the phenomenology of the beautiful and the sublime are not especially different. She refers specifically to Chris Janaway's argument that aesthetic experience for Schopenhauer, whether of the beautiful or sublime, is essentially about tranquility–about seeking an escape from the world of suffering. Others, including Hammermeister, have echoed this line of argument, focusing more on the similarities between the experience of the beautiful and the sublime in the third book of *World as Will and Presentation* than the differences.

The first major difference identified by Shapshay is, she admits, the more controversial of the two and is of critical importance to my own argument about the sublime in Schopenhauer's aesthetics. Again, Shapshay's position is that one of the key differences between the phenomenological experience of the sublime versus the beautiful is that the sublime is characterized by a state of "double-consciousness" whereas an experience of the beautiful is not. The "double-consciousness" is comprised of both a state of disembodied, detached awareness of the object of perception, and a state of awareness that one has achieved a state of detachment. The disembodiment and detachment arouse a feeling of exaltation beyond the individual will that is tainted by the awareness of the "shackled state" in which one remains very much enslaved by one's individual, bodily self. Shapshay therefore proposes that while Schopenhauer himself did not clearly delineate among them, there are three 'distinct moments' within the experience of the sublime. First is the "*conscious act of self-liberation*" in which the subject consciously separates herself from the threat that is presented by the aesthetic

object to her individual will; the second moment is "*aesthetic tranquility"* in which the pleasurable feeling of disembodiment surfaces; the third moment (which is in fact the *second* moment of *self-consciousness*) is defined as "*consciousness of the fact of liberation,*" in other words, consciousness that one has achieved the first moment of the sublime. The third moment in Shapshay's reconstruction of the Schopenhauerian experience of the sublime is derived from Schopenhauer's own description of the kind of exalted state one reaches within the sublime in which one hovers outside of individual will, while remaining consciousness of human willing in general. Thus, Shapshay successfully distinguishes between the phenomenological experience of the beautiful and the sublime by establishing that the experience of the beautiful requires merely that the tranquil state of "pure knowing" be achieved, whereas in order to qualify an experience as sublime, two additional moments of consciousness, as outlined above, must also be achieved.

Shapshay goes on to say quite a lot about the distinction between the Kantian and Schopenhauerian renderings of the sublime. Most critically for my argument, she puts a fine point on the difference between the type of cognitive content each one argues can be gained from sublime experience. The Kantian view is that we gain *moral* cognitive content from sublime experience, and while Schopenhauer clearly opposes this, his position on exactly what sort of cognitive content can be gained from sublime experience is difficult to grasp. Shapshay argues that an accurate interpretation is that sublime experience provides access to "cognitive insight into our nature as supersensible beings via aesthetic feeling" (Shapshay 2012, 494). Schopenhauer's description of the sublime

supports this interpretation, several examples of which will be provided below. Moreover, Shapshay's characterization of the cognitive content gained in sublime experience successfully avoids both nihilism and moralism. Most compellingly and critical to my primary argument is what comes next in Shapshay's line of reasoning. She posits that there two distinct types of 'cognitive insight' to be gained from high degrees of sublime experience. She refers to the different types as 'Elevation 1' (E1) and 'Elevation 2' (E2). E1 corresponds to the phenomenological experience of the dynamical sublime because the subject experiences the feeling of being able to "resist the demands of the will to life":

> E1 is the sense of oneself as having negative freedom, that is, the ability not to be determined by the pressing demands of bodily existence…Although Schopenhauer explicitly repudiates the categorical imperative, his theory of the sublime does, nonetheless, embrace the view that nearly all human beings are capable of actively resisting for a time the demands of egoistic striving in order to contemplate aesthetically. (Shapshay 2012, 495)

E2, she argues, is experienced in the mathematical sublime and has more to do with the subject's experience of "transcending the phenomenal world", although only partially, and of approaching more closely one's union with the noumenal realm of reality:

> E2 is the sense that, in addition to being part of nature, one is also part of the 'in itself' of the world of representation. This feeling that one is part of the 'in itself' of the world of nature is common to Kant's and Schopenhauer's theories of the sublime, but it is explicated in different ways… For Schopenhauer, the mathematical sublime affords a felt recognition of one's status as transcendental subject—as the epistemological supporter of the entire world of representation. In addition, the experience affords a sense of being 'on with the world', i.e. being one with the world as it is 'in itself.' (Shapshay 2012, 496)

I find Shapshay's distinction between the two kinds of cognitive content to be gained from the phenomenological experience of the sublime to be very useful. E1, or the high

degree of the dynamical sublime, provides human consciousness with the feeling that of being able to withstand the impossibly great forces of nature. It forces a kind of paradoxical feeling of power over nature. E2, the high degree of the mathematical sublime, forces a different kind of paradoxical feeling, in which individuality begins to dissolve into the world in itself. It is important to recall that the 'cognitive content' referred to in both cases is absolutely not *knowledge* in the sense that it is not obtained through rational reflection. Cognitive content, insofar as it can be gained through sublime experience, is a felt awareness or 'poetic intuition', to use Shapshay's phrase. Thus it remains entirely aesthetic.

The Modes of the Sublime

In Chapter One, I outlined Schopenhauer's contribution to the development of the PSR in *The Fourfold Root*. The crux of his argument in this work, which also became the first step on his advancement of Kantian aesthetics, is his identification of the subject-object division as the 'root' of the PSR. Furthermore, I have argued that Schopenhauer effectively delves deeper into the origin of human cognition than Kant previously had by establishing that the foundation for experience and therefore cognition is not comprised solely of the faculty for reason and perception, but is rooted in the fundamental distinction between subject and object as well as the paradoxical fact that to exist is to be both subject and object. On Kant's account in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the fundamental components of understanding are the forms of sensible intuition (space and time) and the pure concepts of understanding, which include quantity, quality, relation

and modality but can be reduced to causality or the PSR. The application of the PSR *to* sensible intuitions provides us with cognitive content, Kant argues.

There is an important connection between Kant's division of the sublime into two modes, the mathematical and the dynamical, and his epistemological theory. Recall that the mathematical sublime, for both Kant and Schopenhauer, is that which causes an individual to feel threatened or insignificant due to the vastness and magnitude of space and time. Thus, the feeling of the mathematical sublime does not have to do with being in the world as an individual, but rather is the result of trying to conceive of the world objectively – to view the world from a non-specific perspective as a whole. One might then say that the mathematical sublime is fundamentally tied to consciousness's capacity to have sensible intuitions. The dynamical sublime has primarily to do with the immediate threat (or withholding) of nature. In other words, the dynamical feeling of the sublime is brought about when the PSR unfolds in a way that is hostile to our living in the world. Will to life is threatened by unrelenting causality. Thus, one can fairly trace the origin of the dynamical sublime to consciousness's capacity to apply the pure concepts of understanding (i.e. reason). These analogous relationships can be framed in two ways:

1. The mathematical sublime is to space and time as the dynamical sublime is to causality.
2. The mathematical sublime is to sensible intuition as the dynamical sublime is to reason.

Therefore, if Schopenhauer accepts that there are categories of the sublime that correlate to the intellectual forms of understanding set forth by Kant, it follows that there would be

a third and more fundamental category of the sublime available to our experience that correlates to what Schopenhauer argues is as the “first and most general form” of cognition “pertaining to all phenomena” which comes *before* space, time and causality (Schopenhauer 2008, 217). As discussed in Chapter One, Schopenhauer refers to this form of cognition as the subject-object distinction. Thus, it stands to reason that there ought to be a third category of the sublime in Schopenhauer’s system that correlates to the subject-object distinction. Because the subject-object distinction has to do with the confrontation with the boundaries of being—the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity—I will refer to this proposed third category of the sublime as the *ontological sublime*.

While Schopenhauer himself does not explicitly posit a third category of the sublime, the logical extension of his argument about the structure of cognition is that there would be a fundamental category of the sublime that is more deeply rooted in consciousness than the mathematical or dynamical sublime. This line of reasoning is in fact reminiscent of Schopenhauer’s critique of Kant’s theory of the thing in itself:

> For the thing in itself is supposed to be, just as Kant held, free of all forms attaching to cognition as such, and…it is only a mistake on Kant’s part that he did not count among these forms, before all others, being-object-for-a-subject, since precisely this is the first and most general form pertaining to all phenomena, i.e., presentation; therefore, he should have expressly withheld the status of object from his thing in itself, which would have protected him from that major, soon uncovered, inconsistency. (Schopenhauer 2008, 217)

Schopenhauer applies his discovery of the ‘root’ of the PSR to Kant’s notion of the thing in itself and as a result is able to develop his rich and elaborate theory of the will. However, he fails to apply the same reasoning to his theory of the sublime in the sense

that he does not explicitly *go beyond* the mathematical and dynamical sublime. His language is cognizant of the relation of the mathematical sublime to space and time and the dynamical sublime to causality, yet he does not heed his own advice and fails to "count among these forms, before all others, being-object-for-a-subject;" had he done so, it is my position that he would have named a third category of the sublime that is more fundamental the two already established modes.

Furthermore, returning now to Shapshay's argument that there are two distinct types of high degrees of the sublime—one that correlates to the dynamical (E1) and the other to the mathematical sublime (E2)—it would seem that the high degrees she identifies might in fact belong to the category of the ontological sublime. Shapshay begins her argument about the degrees of sublime experience by asserting that:

> …[o]n Schopenhauer's account we gain two sorts of cognitive content from sublime experience. First, and explicit on his view, we perceive the Platonic Ideas: the essential features of the phenomenal world. The second sort of cognitive content, however, is not fully fleshed out in Schopenhauer's writings; it enters the picture only in high degrees of the mathematically and dynamically sublime. (Shapshay 2012, 494)

Shapshay rightly points out that Schopenhauer alludes to a 'second sort of cognitive content' gained from sublime experience on several occasions in *World as Will and Presentation*. That there would be a second and 'higher' sort of cognitive content gained only in certain kinds of experiences of the sublime supports my argument that there is a third and more fundamental category of the sublime altogether, offering different cognitive content from what can be obtained in the dynamical or mathematical modes of the sublime. Moreover, she points out that Schopenhauer suggests that this distinct sort of

cognitive content has fundamentally to do with the 'two-fold' nature of human consciousness. Shapshay goes on to say that, according to Schopenhauer, the 'two-fold' nature of consciousness is comprised of both "the *feebleness* of the human individual qua natural being" and "the *powerfulness* of the subject qua supersensible being" (Shapshay, 2012, 495). In other words, consciousness feels the fullness of its bipolarity when it is the grips of the sublime. Consciousness is at once painfully aware of the limitations of the body and its cognitive faculties and blissfully attuned to the illusory nature of such limitations. The 'powerfulness' described by Schopenhauer is derived from a sense that one is the universal, pure subject of knowing and not merely an individual being.

Recall the distinction Shapshay makes between E1 and E2. E1 has to do with resisting the power of the demands of the will, whereas E2 has to do with transcending the phenomenal world. Thus, there are two kinds of 'powerfulness' that consciousness feels during a sublime experience that correlate to the modes of high degrees of sublime experience. Shapshay's argument is that examples of E1 and E2 are found throughout *World as Will and Presentation* in Schopenhauer's descriptions of both the mathematical and dynamical modes of sublime experience. I maintain that the 'high degree' identified by Shapshay actually marks a transition into the *ontological* feeling of the sublime.

Therefore, I propose that the ontological sublime can sometimes originate in mathematical or dynamical modes of the sublime. In other words, the point at which Shapshay suggests consciousness transitions from a low degree of sublime experience into E1 or E2 in fact marks the transition from either the mathematical or dynamical sublime into the ontological sublime. For the purposes of explicating this point fully and

to demonstrate how my argument compares to Shapshay's position, I will refer to the same passage she cites as an example of the 'high degree' of the mathematically sublime, but I will break it up into three sections and offer a comparison of Shapshay's analysis to my own:

> If we lose ourselves in contemplation of the infinite greatness of the universe in space and time, meditate on the past millennia and on those to come; or if the heavens at night actually bring innumerable worlds before our eyes, and so impress on our consciousness the immensity (*die Unermeßlichkeit*) of the universe, we feel ourselves reduced to nothing; we feel ourselves as individuals, as living bodies, as transient phenomena of will, like drops in the ocean, dwindling and dissolving into nothing. (Schopenhauer qtd. in Shapshay 2012, 496)

Here we get the full sense of the 'feebleness' of the subject 'qua natural being.' The subject experiences the discomfort of the reality that in terms of spatial existence, she is unfathomably insignificant compared to the whole of matter. Her temporal existence is but a fleeting glimmer in the vast expanse of time that extends endlessly forward and backward. Then, her spirit is resurrected by the 'powerfulness' of her subject 'qua supersensible being' and she begins to transition into an elevated state:

> But against such a ghost of our own nothingness, against such a lying impossibility, there arises (*erhebt sich*) the immediate consciousness (*das unmittelbare Bewußtseyn)* that all these worlds exist only in our representation, only as modifications of the eternal subject of pure knowing (*nur als Modifikationen des ewigen Subjekts des reinen Erkennens*). This we find ourselves to be, as soon as we forget individuality; it is the necessary, conditional supporter of all worlds and of all periods of time. The vastness of the world, which previously disturbed our peace of mind, now rests within us; our dependence on it is now annulled by its dependence on us. (Schopenhauer qtd. in Shapshay 2012, 496)

I am in agreement with Shapshay here that this marks the beginning of the feeling of elevation that is characteristic of the sublime. There is a sense in which the subject moves

out of her embodied, individuated self and begins to see the world as if she existed outside of it, as the ‘eternal subject of pure knowing.’ The resulting feeling is the sense that one escapes the threat of being reduced to nothing by way of the felt significance derived from being the bearer of the representations of the world. The symbiotic relationship between the self and the phenomenal world becomes apparent; the world as presentation exists *for* the subject of pure knowing. At this point, the subject has not yet transitioned into Shapshay’s E2 stage. That occurs when individuality begins to disappear altogether: “All this, however, does not come into reflection at once, but shows itself as a consciousness, merely felt, that in some sense or other (made clear only by philosophy) we are one with the world, and are therefore not oppressed but exalted by its immensity” (Schopenhauer qtd. in Shapshay 2012, 496).

In these final sentences of Schopenhauer’s description of an example of the mathematical sublime, Shapshay argues, the subject experiences the highest degree of the sublime or ‘Elevation 2’. She is exalted by the immensity of the world. Indeed there is a distinctly different quality about the feeling of the sublime that is achieved at the end of this passage. The subject feels her ‘powerfulness’ to the extent that she transcends her individuality and begins to feel ‘one with the world.’ To have a feeling of ‘oneness’ with the world is a distinctly different kind of feeling than the feeling of symbiosis with the world that was described earlier in the passage. At first, the subject is elevated by the feeling that she, as universal ‘knower,’ serves as the condition for the world *as presentation.* She feels powerful in the sense that the world depends on her, while she also depends on the world. The transition from this sort of feeling into a feeling in which

the division between self and world—between subject and object—becomes fuzzy marks the transition from the mathematical sublime, in this particular example, to the ontological sublime. I would argue that one does not become more elevated but instead more grounded. The subject, of course, continues to toggle between the initial discomfort of the experience and the sort of peaceful feeling of wholeness achieved in the end.

The same is true in the dynamical feeling of the sublime. Schopenhauer observes in both volumes of *World as Will and Presentation* that tragedy in the literary arts is one of the most efficacious art forms for evoking an experience of the dynamical sublime. In the first volume, he writes:

> Tragedy is to be viewed as the pinnacle of the literary arts, which respect to the magnitude of its effect as well as the difficulty of its accomplishment… It is the most significant for the whole lf all our considerations, and to be borne well in mind, that the purpose of this highest poetic accomplishment is depiction of the frightful side of life, that what is here brought before us are nameless pain, the misery of humanity, the triumph of malice, the mocking dominion of chance, and the hopeless fall of the righteous and innocent; for herein lies a significant hint as to the character of the world and of existence. (Schopenhauer 2008, 302)

Schopenhauer goes on to discuss how tragedy as an art form depicts the will to life. While he does not explicitly discuss tragedy in terms of the sublime in this particular example, I maintain that his description aligns with his understanding of the sublime, especially considered in terms of Shapshay's 'Elevation 1' or the high degree of the dynamical sublime. In tragedy, which Schopenhauer defines as essentially a "[d]epiction of a great misfortune," the will to life becomes apparent in all its paradoxical madness, and the subject experiences the sort of 'negative freedom' Shapshay argues is characteristic of E1 (Schopenhauer 2008, 303).

> It is the conflict of the will with itself that here, on the highest level of its objectivization, most completely unfolded, comes frighteningly to the fore. It is made visible in the suffering of humanity, which is here brought forth on the one hand by chance and error appearing as rulers of the world…on the other hand it proceeds from humanity itself, through the cross-purposes of the willful endeavor on the part of individuals… It is one and the same will that lives and makes its appearance in all of them, but whose phenomenal do mutual battle and are mutually lacerated. In this individual it comes powerfully to the fore, in that one more weakly, here more, there less, brought to reflection and mitigated by the light of cognizance until finally, in individual cases, purified and heightened by suffering itself, this cognizance reaches the point where the phenomena, the veil of Maya, no longer deceives it, the form pertaining to the phenomenon, the *principium individuationis,* is penetrated by it, the egoism resting on the latter by that very fact dies out; thereby, one's previously so powerful *motives* lose their force, and in their place complete cognizance of the essence of the world, working as a *quieter* of the will, brings forth resignation, abandonment not merely of life but of the entire will to life itself. (Schopenhauer 2008, 303)

In his discussion of the aesthetic value of tragedy, Schopenhauer's description of how the will to life is depicted in tragic art forms is unmistakably in alignment with his theory of the dynamical sublime. To be sure, as Shapshay notes, in the second volume of *World as Will and Presentation,* Schopenhauer admits that "[o]ur pleasure (*unser Gefallen*) in the *tragedy* belongs not to the feeling of the beautiful, but to that of the sublime; it is, in fact, the highest degree of this feeling" (Schopenhauers qtd. in Shapshay 2012, 498). In the example above, Schopenhauer notes that, at first, the subject experiences the senseless and inevitable conflict that arises from tragedy due to the will's individuation. Contrasting motives and desires *necessarily* lead to suffering. Thus, in terms of the dynamical sublime, the tragic subject experiences the overwhelming hostility of the will in terms of causality. When the subject then shifts into the perspective that no longer views the *principium individuationis* or 'principle of individuation' as ultimately real, he begins to experience the sublime in terms of the negative freedom that defines

Shapshay's 'Elevation 1'. The resignation expressed toward the end of the passage is a kind of withdrawal from the world. In other words, the subject exhibits his power to resist the demands of the will to life. Again, I would argue this 'high degree' of the sublime is indeed an example of the ontological sublime. The ontological sublime, I have argued, has primarily to do with one's realization of the illusory nature of the distinction between the self and other. Here, the tragic subject realizes that the individuation of the will is merely an illusion, i.e. the 'veil of Maya.' The distinction between self and other, between subject and object, is reduced to nothing. On a fundamental level, it no longer exists.

Tragedy, the Sublime, and Liberation

To the extent that the ontological sublime might be an available mode of human experience, I want to explore how close it comes to Schopenhauer's notion of salvation or liberation, both of which are alluded to in his discussion of the aesthetics of tragedy. Schopenhauer deals more explicitly with the theme of liberation in the Book Four of the first volume of *World as Will and Presentation,* at which point he has for the most part concluded his discussion of aesthetics. There remains, of course, a definite connection between aesthetic contemplation and liberation that might be made clearer in the context of the ontological sublime.

Schopenhauer's position on liberation is that it is achieved through denial of the will to life. Another way of putting this is to say that liberation is achieved through denial of the principle of individuation. Thus, freedom, in this sense, is the same sort of

'negative freedom' discussed by Shapshay in her analysis of high degrees of the dynamical sublime. Negative freedom or *freedom from* something implies an attitude of detached ambivalence. In the case of Schopenhauer's metaphysical framework, one would achieve freedom by way of detachment from the will to life. According to John Atwell, the will to life is directly connected to the fact of our embodiment:

> What accounts for individuality in the human being is embodiment: it is the body (*der Leib*) that "roots" the human beings in the world—the world subject to the principle of sufficient reason (hence the world of necessity), the world governed by the *principium individuationis* (hence the world of temporally and spatially distinct objects), and finally the world manifesting the will to life in conflict with itself (hence the world of suffering and misery). Consequently, liberation could be characterized as freedom from the body as much as freedom from individuality (and sometimes, particularly in his account of the ascetic, Schopenhuaer suggests this very point). (Atwell 1996, 82)

I agree with Atwell's point that liberation can be put in terms of both freedom from individuality and freedom from the body. The body serves as the vessel by which the will becomes distinct from others and enslaved by the forms of sense perception (space and time) and causality. From the beginning of an individual's existence, there is a felt tension between individual will and the will in itself that persists until an individual's eventual death. In light of the traditional qualitative distinction made between mind and body in traditional western philosophical thought, leading up to Schopenhauer's time, Schopenhauer's perspective is highly controversial. It seems that his view situates mind (reason) at the very pinnacle of the individuating principle. This is evident in his theory of aesthetic contemplation. The cognitive content that is gained through the 'feeling' of the sublime, for example, is not knowledge proper but rather a kind of intuition or 'felt awareness.' Aesthetic contemplation is thus a freer mode of operating than the PSR

because it brings the individual closer to the realization that individuation is an illusion. This is to say that the mind, for Schopenhauer, is not independent from the body but rather the product of a highly sophisticated physiological entity.

Returning to my previous question, does the framing of the sublime as *ontological*, in addition to mathematical and dynamical, bridge the transition from Schopenhauer's theory of aesthetic contemplation to his discussion of liberation? In other words, does it provide a helpful link that fills in some of the gaps that some scholars have found to be glaring? Bart Vandenabeele, for example, argues that Schopenhauer's discussion of tragedy belongs in the gray area between the sublime and the liberating. He seems to suggest that tragedy in art or literature cannot inhabit both the realm of the sublime and the salvific:

> So, despite Schopenhauer's insistence, what is ultimately at stake in tragedy cannot be captured *wholly* in terms of aesthetic experience, not even in terms of the complex feeling of the sublime. One gains *understanding* (not necessarily 'knowledge') from a tragedy, and this understanding is distinct from the aesthetic affect. The understanding one gains from the depicted scene may even lead to a change of one's personal attitude toward life, and to complete resignation. Schopenhauer may be right that watching a tragedy is ultimately beneficial, but not because, as he thinks, it is ultimately a pleasurable experience. (Vandenabeele 2008, 51)

Vandenabeele raises an important concern about Schopenhauer's categorization of tragedy as an art form that can arouse the feeling of the sublime. The main point of contention, he argues, can be found in what he views as Schopenhauer's inability to reconcile the assertion that tragedy can result in "sublime pleasure" and that one can "gain understanding" (but not 'knowledge') from watching or reading a tragedy.

Vandenabeele sees an inherent conflict to suggest that understanding can be 'aesthetic.' He goes on to say that:

> Schopenhauer is trying to justify his theory of the sublime and maintain the unity of his aesthetic theory by insisting on the idea that the value of art can be completely explained in terms of aesthetic experience, i.e. experiencing a sublime, hence complex and mixed, but ultimately pleasurable feeling. But watching tragedy is *not* a purely aesthetic experience in this sense. The value of great tragedies such as *Othello* and *Wallenstein* is tightly intertwined with a profound concern for the rough and brutish aspects of human nature. Since what we understand about the world and human nature is undoubtedly horrifying, it cannot be justified aesthetically but only through moral resignation. Furthermore, it is hard to see how a metaphysical truth about the baseness and sufferings of mankind, which is horrible in its own right, may yield pleasure—apart, of course, from the pleasure that *any* discovery of truth may arouse. (Vandenabeele 2008, 51)

While I concede that tragedy, as an art form, blurs the lines between aesthetics and ethics, Vandenabeele misconstrues the origin of sublime pleasure with regard to tragedy. He suggests that the pleasure in works of tragedy like *Othello* has to do with the realization of the "baseness and sufferings" of mankind, to the extent that such a realization is a discovery of metaphysical truth. He wonders just how pleasurable the discovery of truth can be when it has to do with the horrifying nature of mankind. However, it seems that he attaches the pleasure to the wrong part of the phenomenological encounter with tragedy. In fact, the realization of the horrifying nature of mankind represents the uncomfortable and painful side of the "complex and mixed" feeling of the sublime. The sublime pleasure is a result of the realization that the *principium individuationis* is a mere illusion. In other words, the feeling of pleasure is possible through the metaphysical realization that the suffering of mankind, while inevitable, is in another sense a mere illusion. The feeling of exaltation that is characteristic of sublime pleasure can be understood as the

feeling of rising above the inevitable suffering of humankind, by way of the metaphysical *feeling* that there is ultimately no difference between the *in itself* of each individuated will. This revision of Vandenabeele's interpretation aside, I believe he would still take issue with Schopenhauer's placement of tragedy in the category of the aesthetic instead of the ethical. He views the resignation that is arrived at through sublime pleasure as categorically moral resignation.

My hope is that the category of the ontological sublime might help to resolve some of the tension that Vandenabeele argues is a result of the inconsistent classification of tragic art forms as merely having aesthetic (and not moral) value. Framing the sublime in the ontological realm, while maintaining Schopenhauer's understanding of the structure of the aesthetic experience, one can side-step the question of whether or not tragedy belongs to the moral realm and place it firmly in that of the ontological. Tragedy has to do with the ontological makeup of the human being. The pleasure and pain that are experienced in the phenomenological experience of tragic art forms simultaneously stirs a feeling of horror about the inevitability of suffering and a deep feeling of connection with the *in itself* of the world.

In Chapter Four, I will consider whether there is a specific kind of subject matter dealt with in works of art that tends to evoke the feeling of the ontological sublime, as opposed to the mathematical or dynamical sublime. I will cite examples in visual art as well as literature and poetry and make the case that they are specifically well suited to deal with the ontological sublime. I will then examine what sort of natural event or encounter might lead to the experience of the ontological sublime. Going forward, the

present work will be informed by the following positions that were established in this chapter. First, the ontological sublime is a third and distinct category of the sublime from the mathematical and dynamical sublime. Second, the ontological sublime is a more fundamental and therefore deeper feeling of the sublime than the mathematical and dynamical. Third, one gains ‘cognitive content’ from the feeling of the ontological sublime that is not the same as conceptual knowledge but cannot be categorized as ethical in nature (thereby occupying a third category associated with the aesthetic realm). Finally, tragedy as an art form is exceptionally well suited to evoke the ontological sublime.

Chapter Four: The Phenomenology of the Ontological Sublime

The previous chapter outlined how one might experience the ontological sublime by way of the mathematical or dynamical sublime. This chapter will consider the possibility of a 'pure' experience of the ontological sublime by addressing the following question: If the experience of the mathematical sublime is grounded in the subject's confrontation with the vastness of space and time, and the dynamical sublime originates in the confrontation with the overwhelming forces of causality in nature, what does it mean, in practical terms, to say that the ontological sublime becomes available to the human experience within the specific context of the subject-object relation? In other words, is there a particular kind of encounter, whether in nature or through art, that stirs the feeling of the ontological sublime in human beings and is distinct from those that lead to experiences of the mathematical sublime and dynamical sublime?

Broadly put, the sublime, according to Schopenhauer, is a state in which the subject simultaneously experiences the pain that results from what appears to be an immediate threat to the will and the blissful calm that results from some kind of nullification of that threat. In the case of the ontological sublime, I have argued that the eventual state of pleasure is the result of the intuited feeling that the principle of individuation (*principium individuationis*) is a mere illusion—a feeling of oneness with the world. It stands to reason, therefore, that the initial threat within the context of the 'purely' ontological sublime would become manifest in a feeling of fundamental detachment or severance *from* the world. I therefore propose that within the context of the subject-object relation, this sort of threat presents itself when an inter-subjective relation

is abruptly severed. The subject-object relation within the context of the ‘for-itself’ (*pour-soi*) is actually one in which each subject takes another subject as its object of investigation. I rely here on Sartre's use of ‘Being for itself’ developed in *Being and Nothingness* in the generic sense that it denotes *subjectivity as object*. For Sartre, as such the body is not distinct from the situation of the ‘for-itself’, since for the ‘for-itself,’ to exist and to be situated are one and the same. On the other hand, the body is identified with the whole world inasmuch as the whole world is the total situation of the ‘for-itself’ and the measure of existence. To be clear, neither subject can be reduced to a *mere* object, but in terms of the phenomenological experience of the other, each functions *as* object to a certain degree for the other subject. When an inter-subjective relation is fractured, the remaining subject is left feeling overwhelmed by the sensation of the absence of the other. The absence functions as a powerful and hostile void where a life affirming presence used to exist. The most abrupt and violent losses often occur as the result of the death of the other. But loss can be experienced in numerous ways. Simply not being present (being absent) is a kind of loss for the subject who has been left alone. Other kinds of losses include experiencing divorce or separation from a spouse and giving up one’s child for adoption. The experience of loss, within the context of an inter-subjective relation, threatens the subject-object relation *itself*. In keeping with Schopenhauer’s general theory of the sublime, the feeling of loss within the context of the ontological sublime is not one of sadness, anger, or some kind of mixture of the complex emotions one often feels in these situations, but rather the overwhelming feeling that subject-object relation *in general* is at stake.

Schopenhauer discusses death and the human response to loss in Book Four of the first volume of *World as Will and Presentation.* While he does not frame his analysis in terms of the sublime, the combination of themes he addresses resembles the structure of the ontological sublime that I have established. In the following passage, he reflects on the elaborate and life-affirming rituals performed by Greeks and Romans following a person's death:

> The purpose was obviously to direct one's attention most emphatically from the death of the individual mourned to the immortal life of nature, and thereby, even if apart from the abstract knowledge, indicate that the whole of nature is the phenomenon and indeed the fulfillment of the will for life. The form pertaining to this phenomenon is space, time, and causality, by means of these in turn individuation, with the attendant consequence that individuals have to arise and pass away; this, however, disturbs the will for life, of whose phenomenon the individual is only, as it were, a single example or specimen, as little as the whole of nature is harmed by the death of an individual. (Schopenhauer 2008, 327)

Schopenhauer's allusion to the existential predicament of humankind remains focused on the abstract idea that human existence is fleeting and finite. He gets close to emoting a kind of sublime feeling in the last sentence of the passage above, where he comments on the insignificance of the individual human's life compared to the 'whole of nature.' But this comes closer to the mathematical sublime in its tone than the ontological sublime in the sense that the small, insignificant subject feels meaningless in comparison to the vast expanse of all of existence. At this point in the work, Schopenhauer has said nothing about the experience of loss with regard to the subject-object relation and thereby fails to realize what his own epistemological discovery about the 'root' of experience entails: that the death of another does not merely remind us that we, too, will die some day but that it actually threatens to annihilate the subject-object relation. And yet, while not addressing

the subject-object relation explicitly, his grappling with death tows him along a trajectory that looks a lot like the sublime. After having established the despair that human beings face when confronted with the inevitability of their own death, his tone becomes more contemplative, more at peace:

> Thus [nature] is constantly prepared to let go of the individual, which is accordingly not only exposed to destruction in a thousand-fold manner, through the most insignificant of chances, but in fact originally destined for it and led to face it by nature itself, just as soon as it serves the maintenance of the species. In an entirely different manner, nature itself hereby pronounces the great truth that only Ideas, not individuals, possess true reality, i.e., are complete objectivizations of will. Since, then, the human being is nature itself, and at the highest degree of its self-consciousness, while nature is only objectified will for life, *the person who has comprehended this point of view and stays with it may indeed and with right console himself over his death and that of his friends, through reflection on the immortal life of the nature that he himself is*. (italics added, Schopenhauer 2008, 328)

Thus, Schopenhauer observes, one can arrive at a state of blissful calm after experiencing the loss of another, but only through the *discovery of the will*, which unites each individual with all others and the whole of nature itself. The question remains whether or not this sort of realization can be framed as *aesthetic*. My position is that it can be and I maintain that this is consistent with Schopenhauer's view that whenever consciousness moves into a state that is no longer in service of the will, it participates in aesthetic contemplation.

In short, my view is that loss (or absence), experienced as a natural event or vicariously through art, is the fundamental experience that triggers the feeling of the ontological sublime. Furthermore, the ontological sublime is comprised of two contradictory poles of experience: first, the felt threat to the subject-object relation

through perceived loss/absence and second, the blissful feeling of oneness with the world (and therefore oneness with the lost object/individual). What follows is an inquiry into the phenomenology of the ontological sublime. I situate this inquiry within the context of the 'aesthetics of loss'.

The Ontological Sublime in the Visual Arts

Themes of loss and absence pervade much of contemporary photography and painting. Oftentimes, especially with photography, the works invite the viewer to contemplate what is conspicuously absent from the image that is captured. The result is a kind of vicarious experience of loss through the encounter with the work. A profoundly moving example of this can be found in Aimee Joyaux's collection of black and white photographs titled "Vanishing Petersburg," which portrays broken-down and abandoned homes in a small, rural town.[5] She describes her experience while taking the photographs that eventually became the collection as a kind of experience of loss in itself:

> Wandering the neighborhoods around town, I was struck by the beauty and loneliness of these empty houses. One house in particular moved me, 333 Mistletoe St. and I returned several times to photograph it. One day, it was gone and I began photographing other empty lots. Some of these houses have been reclaimed, some are falling further into disrepair and many have been demolished. Entire neighborhoods are beginning to disappear. (www.aimeejoyaux.com/work/#/vanishing-petersburg/)

The homes pictured are in varying states of disrepair and some of the most powerful images in the collection are simply of empty lots; in some cases, only the foundation or a set of stairs remain. These are left as signals of homes and inhabitants that no are *no*

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[5] The collection can be viewed on Joyaux's website, http://www.aimeejoyaux.com.

longer there. The viewer can feel the void of the people who used to inhabit the homes; vitality has been replaced with lifelessness. As Joyaux remarks, however, there is a kind of beauty in these old homes. The beauty she observes coupled with the loneliness she describes is akin to the mixture of despair and elevation that comprise the feeling of the ontological sublime. The photographs simultaneously instill a sense of loss and a feeling of detached stillness.

Perhaps this collection is particularly moving because the images are of homes and not some other kind of structure. Home, homecoming, and homesickness are recurring themes in 19th and 20th century philosophical thought. Martin Heidegger, for example, writes about the feeling of *Angst* that Dasein experiences as the result of feeling "not-at-home" in the world. Dasein is Heidegger's term for our 'being-there-in-the-world'. It is not a particular mode or way of being, but simply 'being-there'. Michael Gelvin's account of Heidegger's theory of Dasein, dread[6] (*Angst*), and 'nothingness' is especially instructive with regard to the potency of home as an existential symbol. He notes that Heidegger "uses the term 'nothingness' to represent that which has existential significance but cannot have any metaphysical referent" and, furthermore, that dread (*Angst*) is "that existential which makes us aware of nothingness" (Gelvin 1989, 117). Thus, for Heidegger, *Angst* triggers that we have become aware of nothingness.

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[6] Gelvin translates Heidegger's *Angst* to dread. In their 1962 translation of *Sein und Zeit*, John Mcquarrie and Edward Robinson translated *Angst* to anxiety. In Joan Stambaugh's 1952 translation of *Sein und Zeit*, to which I will refer, the term is left in the original German.

Moreover, Gelvin observes, this is phenomenologically analogous to feeling as though the world in which one dwells is not 'home':

> …dread does not merely present us with our Being-in-the-world. Because the world is, in the moment of dread, alien to us—we no longer feel at-home in the world—dread focuses upon us as unique individuals. Dread, according to Heidegger, *individualizes.* This awareness of my individuality reveals to me my own possibilities. In fact, we *now* can see *about* what it is we are dreading. We dread our *being able to be ourselves*. (Gelvin 1989, 118)

Thus, for both Heidegger and Schopenhauer, the awareness of individuality—the *principium individuationis*—arouses *Angst* or a feeling of dread. For Schopenhauer, suffering is the unavoidable condition of being an individual, embodied, subject. Considering Heidegger's philosophy of *Angst* and 'nothingness' in light of the phenomenology of the ontological sublime, one could reasonably correlate Heidegger's notion of *Angst* to the first stage of the ontological sublime, in which the subject-object relation is threatened through an experience of loss, where loss is equivalent to 'nothingness' by Heidegger's definition. When considered in light of Joyaux's photographs, the correlation of Heidegger's *Angst* and 'nothingness' to the ontological sublime becomes profoundly illuminating. The broken-down homes are in fact *no longer* homes. They represent a world that is not suitable for and strange to *Dasein*. They facilitate an experience of *Angst* by virtue of their ability to *present an absence* or 'nothingness'.

While there are many important differences between Heidegger and Schopenhauer's perspectives, there do seem to be some very important similarities, especially with regard to the principle of individuation, *Angst*, and 'nothingness'/absence.

In fact, Julian Young has written extensively on what he calls the "striking affinities between the Schopenhauerian and Heideggerian analyses of human beings-in-the-world," however he has also elucidated the fundamental ways in which their perspectives differ:

> …[W]hereas Schopenhauer only purports to be talking about how things, most of the time, *appear* to us – will-moulded consciousness, he says, 'falsifies' (*World as Will and Presentation 2,* 373) the nature of things – Heidegger purports to be doing ontology: the equipmental character of things is not, he insists, a matter of an 'aspect' or 'subjective colouring' given to 'some world-stuff' whose being is independent of *Dasein* and its concerns. Rather, 'readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities, as they are "in themselves" are defined ontologically'; it constitutes their 'being.' (Young 1996, 165)

Young's analysis sheds some light on why Schopenhauer was limited to discussing the sublime in terms of the formal categories of the world, rather than the subject-object relation. Schopenhauer's perspective remains always informed by the epistemological implications of the subject-object divide. He considers what we can know and how we can know it. Had he focused instead on the ontological aspect of the relation, or on the 'being' of the individual subject (instead of the subject simply *as knower*) he might have been more open to the possibility of an ontological experience of the sublime.

The artist Diana Matar's series of photographs titled "Disappearance/Evidence" is another excellent example of the kind of art that can evoke the ontological sublime. This particular collection highlights the absences that are left behind when a man 'disappears' from his home and family.[7] The photographs in the series document the specific ways in which a man who was abducted for political reasons left 'perceivable' absences throughout his home. The photographs and commentary provided by the artist create a

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[7] The collection can be viewed on Matar's website, http://www.dianamatar.com.

void of a human being that both pulls and repels the viewer. The artist offers the following remarks, referring to a pair of photographs in the series that capture the grounds of the man's home, where the wife now lives alone, including an empty chair and work clothes:

> I imagine you light and agile, always greeting the maid with respect. I imagine men pausing in conversation, waiting for you to speak, and your wife wanting to make things graceful for you; your shirts ironed, your salads well seasoned, your papers dusted but left undisturbed. (www.dianamatar.com/disappearance)

Later in the series, Matar comments on two photographs that again depict the grounds and surrounding landscape of the man's home. They are grainy and appear to be out of focus:

> One day I return from the desert. Tariq, your second grandson is taking apart an old stereo and amplifier. Everyone in the family says he is the most like you. He dismantles the apparatus into countless small pieces. I am afraid he will leave them for others to pick up, but he painstakingly cleans every one and then puts the stereo and amplifier back together again. He plugs it in and it works – no static – the volume is just right. Your wife takes the microphone and begins to sing and I hear your name. (www.dianamatar.com/disappearance)

Here, the artist begins to discuss the subtle ways in which a human being, in his or her absence, remains available to sense perception. The philosopher Anya Farennikova has written extensively on the topic of 'seeing absence.' She argues that absences are, literally, perceptible. Her basic premise is that there are actual perceptual qualities in absences that enable us to see a thing's absence, rather than simply infer through reflection that a thing is no longer there. Her work is primarily concerned with our ability to use vision to perceive absences, but she suggests our other faculties of sense perception have similar capacities for sensing absence. For example, she notes, one might

smell the "absence of exhaust in the air," taste the "absence of chlorine in the water" or feel the "sensation of missing a step while going down the stairs" (Farennikova 2012, 452). She makes note of some of the more powerful works of art and film that depict absences in a way that plays with the ontological sublime. One prominent example is a still frame from Alfred Hitchcock's *Young and Innocent* in which a family is pictured sitting at a dinner table. The focal point is the daughter at the end of the table who seems, at first, to be staring directly outward at the viewer. Farennikova elaborates on the mood of the image in a way that highlights the pain and loneliness but also the detached contemplativeness of the daughter:

> You would think that this beautiful young woman is looking directly at us. In fact, Erica is staring at an absence. The black chair in the front is where her father usually sits during family dinners, but Erica has fallen in disfavor and her father is not attending. She is frozen with apprehension and, in a way, she is not really present at the table either. This is the first film frame I have seen that perspectivally establishes an absence so prominently in the foreground. The absence couldn't possibly get closer to us! (www.seeingabsence.com)

Here, again, the viewer is left with the vicarious feeling of loss. But as with the previous two examples of photographic works, the mood is not one of chaos or utter anguish. Instead, the tone is one of simultaneous longing and detached resignation. I maintain that these examples are all in the spirit of the ontological sublime. They are not designed to evoke sadness or nostalgia, but rather point to the tension between the pain of individuation and the sublime pleasure of overcoming it.

The Ontological Sublime and 20th Century Existential Thought

I have argued thus far that the ontological sublime can be reached first through the mathematical or dynamical sublime, but can also be experienced in a 'pure' sense. The eventual state of pleasure for all three scenarios results from an intuited sense of oneness with the world; however, the starting point is different for each. In the case of the ontologically sublime feeling that is achieved by way of the mathematical or the dynamical, the experience is initiated through either a confrontation with the vastness of space or time (mathematical sublime) or the overwhelming power of nature (dynamical sublime). In the case of the 'pure' feeling of the ontological sublime, the triggering event can be experienced either in nature or through art, and is characterized as a kind of loss or perceived absence. Death, therefore, is the most violent of natural events that can evoke the feeling of the ontological sublime, but other kinds of loss or felt absence are also included in this category.

When experienced through art, the ontological sublime is often represented through the presentation of conspicuous absences. I will now turn to an exploration of the ontological sublime in 20th century existential philosophy. In my view, there are two possible instances of unwitting phenomenological explorations of the ontological sublime by philosophers within the existentialist tradition. I have already made mention of the first one, which is Heidegger's analysis of *Angst* or dread, specifically with regard to the feeling of being 'not-at-home' in the world. The second example is the notion of foundering (*Scheitern*) developed by Karl Jaspers primarily in his three-volume work *Philosophie*.

Jaspers's concept of foundering and Heidegger's concept of *Angst* share some structural similarities but also diverge significantly. I will focus first on their similarities and the ways in which they can be viewed as phenomenological explorations of the ontological sublime. The most striking similarity between the two concepts, foundering and *Angst*, is that they are triggered by a confrontation with the finite nature of the subject's cognitive faculties. Robert Corrington makes note of the connection between the feeling of the sublime and Jaspers's notion of 'shipwreck' (*Schiffbruch*), another term employed by Jaspers to describe the feeling of having reached the limits of consciousness:

> In the encounter with the sublime we reach the extreme edges of our meaning horizons, through a kind of transfiguration that can take many forms. Jaspers privileges the idea of shipwreck wherein the self, in its depth-dimension of *Existenz*, breaks open to the Encompassing that lies beyond any and all horizons of meaning. (Corrington 2013, 168)

Both concepts, foundering and shipwreck, refer to a kind of limit situation in which one reaches the outer limits of cognition. Jaspers is certainly informed by Kant in this regard and his epistemology is indeed an adaptation of Kant's phenomena-noumena dichotomy.[8] Similarly, for Heidegger, *Angst* is a kind of encounter with 'nothingness' whereby the subject reaches the limits of his or her ability to describe or account for the object (or non-object) of perception. As Gelvin observes, Heidegger's notion of 'nothingness' is existentially significant but has no metaphysical referent. Therefore, to use Jaspers's language, *Angst* is a kind of limit situation insofar as the experiencing subject feels dread

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[8] See *Philosophie,* Vol. I, *World Orientation,* pp. 79-82, edited and translated by E. B. Ashton.

over no-*thing.* Instead of an experience of fear, which is directed toward a particular object, *Angst* leaves us ignorant about that which we are made to feel ill at ease.

The second common feature of both foundering and *Angst* is that they involve a kind of existential pain or discomfort. The feeling of foundering involves the feeling of having failed, of not being enough; it is the feeling of the 'non-interpretable' nature of being. *Angst*, according to Heidegger, is a kind of surreal feeling of estrangement from the world and everything in it. Having established at least some congruence between the experience of foundering, *Angst*, and the initial stage of discomfort associated with the ontological sublime, one must also determine whether the experience of foundering and *Angst* moves the subject through and past an initial place of discomfort to an eventual state that is in some sense pleasurable. This would need to be the case in order to successfully make the argument that these two concepts are in fact alternative ways of naming the ontological sublime. Following is an attempt to address this question through a closer examination of both foundering and *Angst.*

Foundering

Jaspers offers a full explanation of foundering in Part Four of the third volume of *Philosophie.* In order to understand his explanation, one must first be familiar with his basic metaphysical outlook or "pariechontology." Jaspers in fact rejects metaphysics as a methodology because he thinks it presumes the possibility for objective knowledge of the world as a whole. His "pariechontology" resists the objectifying tendencies of metaphysics and professes instead to carve out the basic 'modes' of being. He uses the

term ‘Encompassing’ as a kind of non-objectifying catchall in order to convey the notion that in fact there is no ‘whole’ of the world but rather an infinite expanse of being in which all things are encompassed. There are two primary modes of the Encompassing: the Encompassing which we are and the Encompassing which being itself is. In other words, there is a subjective side to being (self) and an objective side to being (world). The Encompassing which we are is further divided into four modes: existence, consciousness-as-such, spirit and Existenz. Existenz is distinct from the first three modes by virtue of its ability to participate in transcendence. In their co-edited collection, *Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings*, Edith Ehrlich, Leonard Ehrlich and George Pepper offer a succinct explanation of the difference between existence and Existenz and how Jaspers uses each term:

> Existence is man as object, man regarded as being among other beings in the world. Existenz is man as non-objectifiable self. In connection with this distinction Jaspers discusses the methodological problem of speaking of Existenz, which cannot be objectified and which, insofar as it is thought, is merely “possible” Existenz and never its actuality. (Ehrlich, Ehrlich and Pepper 2000, 62)

There are also two primary modes of the Encompassing which being itself is: world and transcendence. World is everything we, as existence, can perceive; it is objectified being. Transcendence is non-objectified being and inaccessible to the human being as mere existence. Transcendence can therefore be understood as a reconfiguration of Kant’s noumena. In the following excerpt from *Von der Wahrheit*, Jaspers offers an overview of the relation among all four modes of the Encompassing:

> The Encompassing which we are has its limits at the being of the world and a transcendence. Here we do not encompass but are encompassed. The other which is not us is for us—insofar as we are existence, consciousness-as-such, and

> spirit—the perceivable, empirically experiencable other, which is called the world. It is for us—insfoar as we are Existenz—the non-perceivable, empirically non-demonstrable other, which is called transcendence. That wherein and whereby we are *ourselves* and *free* is transcendence. (Jaspers 2000, 172)

Thus, while there are certainly many important differences between Jaspers's and Schopenhauer's worldviews, it would appear as though they base their philosophies on common ground, which is largely owed to the profound influence Kant's transcendental idealism had on both thinkers. Both Jaspers and Schopenhauer base their perspectives on the premise that human beings have limited access to ultimate reality, i.e. the thing in itself. Furthermore, Jaspers's tone of humility with regard humanity's relative importance in the grand scheme of Being is reminiscent of Schopenhauer. He opens the final section of the third volume of *Philosophie* with the following paragraph that is worth quoting almost in its entirety because of how uncannily it resembles the mood of Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Presentation*:

> All forms of the corporeal world are transitory, from fabrics and rocks to the suns; what remains in their unceasing transformation is the matter they were made of. Death comes to all living existence. Man learns in his life and from his history that everything has to end. Realizations become untenable as social conditions change; thought possibilities are exhausted; modes of intellectual life fade out. We see greatness annihilated. We see profundity evaporate, with its effects seeming to continue after it has turned into something else. *In history as a whole there has been progress only in technology and in the rationalization of existence; in the areas of true humanity and of the human mind, a history that brought forth the extraordinary has simultaneously been the triumphal parade route of destructive forces.* Were mankind to develop without limits, no stable state, no permanent mundane existence would be achieved without destroying man as such. Inferiority and vulgarity seem to facilitate survival amid mere change. (italics added, Jaspers 1956, 192-94)

Jaspers's comments on the impossibility of progress for humanity (other than within the context of technology) is not far off from Schopenhauer's view. His reference to

progressive ‘rationalizations’ of existence alludes to a kind of false idea of progress or hope that is professed through religious traditions and philosophical traditions that posit some sort of grandiose teleology or eschatology. Foundering is the experience of living within limit situations in a world that is both abundantly providing and unrelentingly hostile. Foundering is the human confrontation with the finite way in which we are able to understand and navigate the world. We founder when we, as mere *existence,* are unable to comprehend the world but also confront the possibility that there is a sense in which we are beyond our individual, embodied selves:

> *Foundering is the ultimate*, according to an inexorably realistic world orientation. More yet: it is what ultimately comes to mind in thinking of all things. In logic, validity founders on relativity; at the bounds of knowledge we confront antimonies that finish our ability to think without contradictions; what emerges beyond knowledge, encompassing knowledge, is a truth that is not rationalistic. For world orientation the world founders as existence, being not comprehensible by and in itself; it does not become closed, intelligible being, nor can the cognitive process round itself into a whole. What founders in existential elucidation is the being-in-itself of Existenz: where I am really myself I am not myself only. (Jaspers 1956, 193)

Where I am really myself I am not myself only. Jaspers suggests here that when an individual has an experience of foundering, it is actually the ‘in-itself’ of that individual that feels itself located outside of or beyond the self. Thus, the experience of foundering is similar to Schopenhauer’s account of the feeling of the sublime in that it can broadly be described as initially painful or hostile (insofar as the self feels ultimately meaningless and disoriented) but ultimately liberating (insofar as the self participates in the ‘in itself’ of being through Transcendence of existence as Existenz). The continuity between the ontological sublime and foundering comes crisply into focus when considered in light of

Jaspers's account of the experience of the death of another as foundering. Jaspers discusses the fracturing of the subject-object relation, the unparalleled pain that results, and the blissful state that can be achieved by virtue of the subject's realization that the principal of individuation (i.e. phenomenal reality) is simply an illusion:

> The real loss of what has been is indeed beyond solace for me as an existing creature of the senses, but I am capable of a fidelity that turns my loss into the reality of being. When another's death is existentially shattering, not just an objective even associated with particular emotions and concerns, it has served to make Existenz at home in transcendence. What death destroys is phenomenal; it is not being itself. *It is possible for a more profound serenity to rest on grounds of inextinguishable pain.* (Jaspers 1956, 194)

Jaspers's words capture the essence of the *feeling* of ontological sublime: 'inextinguishable pain,' brought about through a profound experience of loss, leads to an even more 'profound serenity.' Taking another cue from Corrington's observations about the connection between the sublime and Jaspers's philosophy, it might therefore be more appropriate to align foundering with the *human experience of the ontological sublime* instead of the category of the ontological sublime *itself,* thus allowing the sublime to exist as a "reality in itself" that can be accessed in varying ways by human beings (and perhaps others). Corrington compares the reality of the sublime to Jaspers's Encompassing, and does so in a way that is consistent with my framing of the ontological sublime:

> We have been arguing that the sublime is a reality in itself rather than a mere subjective state that befalls human consciousness when there are certain triggers in the environment. The ontological status of the sublime is partly unique in that it lives in the great between, that is, it lies between the subject and object poles of experience, opening each dimension or side to the other. On the one hand the sublime is not just bigness over and against our littleness, while on the other hand it is not just what causes us to be fearful as opposed to the quiet joy we experience when we encounter beauty. The sublime is certainly 'big' but in a special sense. It is big in the sense that it encompasses all horizons without being a horizon itself.

> For Jaspers the technical term for this reality is the Encompassing. The sublime can be called the Encompassing in this specific sense; namely, as that which can never *be* encompassed, but which encompasses any and all meaning horizons, both personal and communal. (Corrington 2013, 181)

Thus, a more precise framing of the ontological sublime in the context of Jaspers's philosophy would compare the ontological sublime itself to the Encompassing and the *phenomenological account* of the ontological sublime to that of the experience of foundering which leads to transcendence. The question of whether or not the ontological sublime can be understood as a "reality in itself" and remain consistent with Schopenhauer's basic structure of the sublime requires further investigation and will be addressed in the following chapter.

Angst

As a work of phenomenology and existential philosophy, Heidegger's *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)* is concerned with the meaning and nature of human existence. Like Jaspers, Heidegger sets out to describe the particular mode of existence that is unique to human beings (Dasein), and also wants to say something about the fundamental modes in which Being itself operates. In Chapter VI, he focuses in particular on Dasein. According to Heidegger, the existential character of Dasein is care (*Sorge*). This fundamental character is revealed to us through the experience of *Angst*. *Angst* is therefore the existential foil through which being-itself is revealed. In the following passage, Heidegger discusses how the experience of *Angst* manifests in Dasein.

> What oppresses us is not this or that, nor is it everything objectively present together as a sum, but the possibility of things at hand in general, that is, the

> world itself. When *Angst* has quieted down, in our everyday way of talking we are accustomed to say "it was really nothing." This way of talking, indeed, gets at *what* it was ontically. Everyday discourse aims at taking care of things at hand and talking about them. That about which *Angst* is anxious is none of the innerworldly things at hand. But this "none of the things at hand," which is all that everyday, circumspect discourse understands, is not a total nothing. The nothing of handiness is based on the primordial "something," on the *world*. The world, however, ontologically belongs essentially to the being of Da-sein as being-in-the-world. So if what *Angst* is about exposes nothing, that is, the world as such, this means that *that about which* Angst *is anxious is being-in-the-world itself.* (Heidegger 1996, 175)

This passage raises two significant points of comparison between *Angst* and the ontological sublime. First, *Angst*, like the ontological sublime, involves a feeling of being threatened by an existential void or absence—a 'no-thingness'—that cannot be defined in objective terms. Gelvin offers a helpful analysis of Heidegger's motivation for using the term 'no-thingness' with regard to human existence:

> A human being, through reflection of his own possibilities, becomes aware of his finitude—i.e., he knows he is going to die, to cease to be. The strangeness of this feeling cannot be compared to any other form of human experience, since all other forms of experience are structured in a continuum of time in which the continuation of existence plays an essential role. But in death, or in the awareness of the meaninglessness of existence, one is aware of something quite unlike any experience. To call this "nothingness" might seem an outrage to langue—but any term used to designate that which in principle is incapable of being experienced will by an outrage to language. The term "nothingness" is really quite apt; for what is meant is something that is indeed existentially significant, but is incapable of being the object of an experience. (Gelvin 1989, 116-17)

The second important point of comparison is that *Angst*, like the ontological sublime, reveals something fundamental about what it means to be human that cannot be learned through any other kind of experience. *Angst* reveals the "world as world" to Dasein. The ontological sublime first reveals the fundamental subject-object divide to the subject and eventually reveals the truth that the subject-object division is not ultimately real.

Similarly, *Angst* pulls the self away from the world but ultimately brings it into awareness of the fundamental and unifying mode of being, which is care. Heidegger's account of the movement of Dasein through *Angst* as a kind of detached state and into care as the unifying principle of being, is parallel to the movement of the subject through the stages of the ontological sublime—an initially painful experience of loss or absence is followed by a blissful feeling of union with the whole of existence.

Here I must pause and reflect on some important points of dissonance that occur when comparing *Angst* to the ontological sublime. First, *Angst* seems to be a far more commonplace experience for Dasein than any experience of the sublime is for most people, at least on Schopenhauer's account. The ontological sublime, given that it is triggered through profound moments of loss or perceived absence, is a more precious kind of experience and not part of our "fundamental attunement" to the world. Perhaps, therefore, it would be more apt to suggest that the ontological sublime can be described in terms of the existential stages of Dasein, *Angst* and care, but that certainly not all experiences of *Angst* and care can be characterized as experiences of the ontological sublime.

The Will, the Encompassing and Being

At this point, it is fair to say that both Jaspers's conception of the transition from foundering into transcendence, and Heidegger's conception of *Angst* as a mode of Dasein that reveals care as our fundamental mode of attunement to the world share common features with my conception of the ontological sublime and the human experience of it. I

have sought to demonstrate that there is a greater degree of resonance between Jaspers's ideas and mine, but there are also striking points of likeness between Heidegger's *Angst* and the initial stage of the feeling of the ontological sublime, which extend into an analogous relationship between the unifying mode of care and the pleasurable feeling of oneness that is reached in the final stage of the ontological sublime.

Another way to consider whether or not the ideas in question are indeed examples of inquiries into the ontological sublime is to further consider whether the larger philosophical framework for each is consistent with Schopenhauer's basic philosophy of the will. In one sense, Jaspers and Heidegger share much more in common with one another than either does with Schopenhauer. Like Schopenhauer, both Jaspers and Heidegger are responding to the basic question of the 'thing in itself' posed in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* but unlike Schopenhauer, they frame their responses in terms of the question of Being. The inquiry into the ineffable essence of the noumena, for Jaspers and Heidegger, comes down to an inquiry into the nature of Being itself. It is interesting to note, as Nam Nguyen observes, that Jaspers was critical of Heidegger's approach to this question:

> Jaspers followed Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in emphasizing the existential selfhood called *Existenz…* Unlike Jaspers, Heidegger believes human subjectivity is the gateway to the understanding of Being. While Heidegger was only interested in the existential question "What is Being?" Jaspers was more concerned with the question "What is human being?" Jaspers rejected Heidegger's ontology, mainly because of its alleged objectification of Being. Heidegger's "fundamental ontology" wanted certainty, cogent knowledge, and universal validity; he wanted to know "what is." Jaspers' pariechontology moved beyond Heidegger's ontology, for being-in-itself can neither be objectified nor grasped by concepts or definitions. (Nguyen 2011, 217)

Nguyen's characterization of Jaspers's pariechontology as an explicit rejection of the kind of ontology developed by Heidegger is indeed accurate. Jaspers goes to great lengths to insist that the Encompassing is not his attempt to assign a predicate to the whole of Being, but rather a way to refer to the fecundity of reality in a way that liberates philosophy from its traditionally objectifying tendencies. Jaspers's critique of Heidegger is, however, not entirely fair is seems to based solely on his reading of *Being and Time* and does not take into account any of his later writings, which reflect a much more tentative attitude approach to the question of Being.[9]

Thus, Jaspers and Heidegger start with the same basic perspective about what the question is*, per se,* but go about addressing it differently. Although *World as Will and Presentation* does not offer an ontology, properly speaking, there is a great deal of resonance between Jaspers's concept of the Encompassing Schopenhauer's concept of the will. First, if will is taken as a metonymical device in Schopenhauer's philosophy, which I have argued it should be, then both Jaspers's pariechontology and Schopenhauer's metaphysical framework leave room for the ineffable. For Schopenhauer, while the will can be felt interiorly and experienced as individuated will, there is a sense in which will cannot be known. Jaspers elevates the human being's freedom to the highest possible

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[9] Jaspers's critique of Heidegger's approach to ontology was only one aspect of the tension between the two thinkers. Although they were fast friends when they first met, their philosophical thinking and institutional allegiances diverged significantly over time. Jaspers presents a poignant and revealing perspective on their relationship in his "Philosophical Autobiograpy," which has been translated by Paul Arthur Schilpp and Ludwig B. Lefebre and published as part of *The Library of Living Philosophers*, Vol. IX, *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers,* edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1981.

degree through the transcendence of *Existenz*, but he still refuses to allow for the possibility that objective knowledge about Transcendence can be obtained through this heightened mode of being for humans. He, like Schopenhauer, suggests that we can have a sense of the thing in itself, that we can *participate in it* even, but that attempts to put the Encompassing into objective terms immediately and always fail. To be sure, Schopenhauer goes further than Jaspers on the way toward assigning definite properties to the thing in itself in that he actually names it as will, but at the same insists that the will "as thing in itself is entirely distinct from its phenomenon" and free from the forms of space, time and causality (Schopenhauer 2008, 151). Consider the following passage from the second book of *World as Will and Presentation*:

> Will as thing in itself lies, according to what has been stated, outside the domain of the Principle of Sufficient Ground in all of its modes, and is consequently absolutely groundless, although all of its phenomena are thoroughly subject to the Principle of Sufficient Ground; it is also free from all *plurality*, although its phenomena in time and space are innumerable; it is itself one, but not as an object is one, of whose unity we are cognizant only in contrast with possible plurality, nor either as a concept is one, having arisen only by abstraction from plurality, but it is rather one as that which lies beyond time and space, the *principium individuationis*, i.e. the possibility of plurality. Only when all of this is made fully explicit…will we fully understand the sense of the Kantian doctrine that time, space and causality do not pertain to the thing in itself, but are only cognitive forms. (Schopenhauer 2008, 151)

Now consider Schopenhauer's explication of the will as thing in itself in light of the following overview of the Encompassing offered by Jaspers in *Von der Wahrheit*:

> As soon as I attempt to illuminate the one Encompassing according to its content, it splits into the modes of the Encompassing. We are left not with a single ineffable constituting an indeterminate and unfilled dimension but rather with an Encompassing divided, at it were, into distinct spaces. . .
> All cognition of the world (i.e. all being-object) is, for us, conditional upon our cogitative consciousness. For example, the unity of any object at all is, in its

> apperception, conditional upon the respective unity established by the unity of consciousness-as-such. Expressed differently: all "being-for-us" is an appearance of "being-in-itself" in the form in which it presents itself to our consciousness-as-such. The development of these notions of Kantian philosophy brings about this jolting of our consciousness of Being: it produces and illuminates our knowledge of the phenomenal nature of being-world by our becoming aware of the Encompassing of consciousness-as-such. (Jaspers 2000, 138-139)

While Jaspers and Schopenhauer certainly have different things to say about human beings and their relative significance to the rest of being, they are both committed to protecting the ineffable space carved out by Kant's transcendental idealism. This is perhaps why Jaspers's notion of foundering and Schopenhauer's treatment of the sublime both honor the firm but indefinite grasp the noumena can have on an experiencing subject in situations where consciousness reaches its limits.

In contrast to this, Heidegger's treatment of Being in *Sein und Zeit* is more clean-cut. Dasein experiences Being itself with no mediation. There are defined categories of Being, which are sometimes difficult to grasp in Heidegger's articulation of them, but there is nothing, so to speak, 'beyond' Being. Moreover, ontology as the study of Being can reveal the truth of Being, which is neither withholding nor mysterious, to Dasein. Heidegger's perspective in *Sein und Zeit* is that human beings fall prey to inauthenticity, which prevents them from acknowledging certain truths, but as authentic beings we can become acutely aware of our distinct and full potential. Limit situations are not inevitable, necessary facts of existence but rather become inhibited by our own tendency to avoid authenticity. This is perhaps, again, why the comparison between Heidegger's account of *Angst* and care to my theory of the ontological sublime is not entirely successful. However, there are still some important likenesses that serve as helpful

signals, especially when considering examples of the ontological sublime in art. Heidegger's description of *Angst* as a feeling of being 'not-at-home' in the world is a powerful analogy that will continue to be instructive as I seek to inquire more fully into the role that the ontological sublime plays in the quest for wholeness, both of the self and with the world.

Chapter Five: Extending the Ontological Sublime beyond Schopenhauer

Philosophical naturalism, in its most generic sense, is the view that nature encompasses all there is and that there is no *super*-natural realm. In *Nature's Sublime: An Essay in Aesthetic Naturalism*, Robert Corrington further develops his branch of naturalism known as Ecstatic Naturalism and reframes it as *Aesthetic Naturalism*. On Corrington's account, Ecstatic Naturalism falls into the same category as the sort of naturalism forwarded by C.S. Peirce, Paul Tillich, Ernst Bloch, Carl Jung, and Julia Kristeva. In his view, the common thread among them is the recognition of the "fundamental divide separating the potencies of nature from the innumerable orders of signification in the world" (Corrington 1994, 19). Thus, Ecstatic Naturalism holds that there are two fundamental metaphysical principles: the potencies of nature and the innumerable orders of nature. Perhaps the most noteworthy contribution of *Nature's Sublime* is Corrington's argument that art is superior to religion when it comes to illuminating the potencies and innumerable orders of nature. Corrington discusses various reason why this is the case, but most importantly it is because the aesthetic perspective can avoid falling pray to the kind of tribalism and imperialism that are inherent in religious communities.

Corrington distinguishes Ecstatic Naturalism from what he identifies as the two other main camps of contemporary philosophical naturalism. He labels the first camp "descriptive naturalism," which includes the philosophy of John Dewey, George Santayana, and Justus Buchler. Descriptive naturalism seeks to uncover and explore the vast terrain of nature and resists imposing teleology upon it. The second main camp from which Corrington distinguishes Ecstatic Naturalism includes any sort of naturalism that

tends to be “honorific” or “eulogistic.” Examples of honorific naturalism include the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Martin Heidegger, and Robert Neville. Process thought can also be placed within this category, although its honorific tendencies are less aggressive than, for example, Emerson’s transcendentalism. Honorific naturalism tends to ascribe special significance to a particular category of being or way of knowing over and above the rest of nature. For Emerson, for example, the honorific category was spirit. Honorific naturalism tends also to include a theory of final cause, which inevitably leads to varying degrees of teleology. Ecstatic Naturalism draws on elements of both the descriptive and the honorific traditions of naturalism, but is distinct from both. For Corrington, the “descriptive intent” of Ecstatic Naturalism is illustrated through attempts to conjure a sense of the “utter vastness of nature” without offering “an overall evaluation or appraisal of nature” (Corrington 1994, 19-20). A complete ‘description’ of nature can never be achieved, nor is it the goal of Ecstatic Naturalism. Yet, Ecstatic Naturalism goes beyond descriptive naturalism insofar as it ‘honors’ potencies of nature as ontologically prior to possibilities:

> Ecstatic Naturalism is honorific when it points to powers of transformation and renewal within the world that are themselves evocative of the primal potencies that represent the birthing ground of actuality and possibility. Potencies are ontologically prior to possibilities because possibilities are emergent within orders of actuality and not free-floating or nonlocated. No possibility could obtain in the first place were it not for orders of relevance that emerge from preformal potencies within nature. Potencies are pre-ordinal and hence obtain in a unique way, that is, they position but are not positioned. Potencies are beyond good and evil even if they have manifestations that may be morally appraised. (Corrington 1994, 20)

To be sure, Ecstatic Naturalism engages in productive dialogue with descriptive and honorific naturalisms. For example, the primary methodology developed and employed by Corrington, "ordinal phenomenology," is a direct descendent of the ordinal metaphysics forwarded by Justin Buchler. Ordinal phenomenology seeks to probe into what Corrington calls the "depth dimensions" of nature without asserting the ontological priority of any one natural order or set of natural orders. Corrington comments in the following passage on the origins of ordinal phenomenology as well as its distinctness from Husserlian transcendental phenomenology:

> The prefix "ordinal" refers to the fact that phenomenology is in and of orders of relevance that surround the human process and make it possible. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which privileges the subjectivity of the transcendental ego and its various thetic or intentional acts, gives way before a larger conception of phenomenology that sees the human process as but one among many other process in the world. Husserl's tactic of "bracketing," which intends to function to eliminate all existence claims that could prejudice phenomenological description, is replaced with a deeper sensitivity to what Buchler calls "ontological parity" (Buchler 1989), which insists that all orders are equally real. Differences between and among orders are not differences of reality, but differences of location and of trait constitution. The concept of "trait" replaces that of "essence," because it is far more open to the infinite varieties of the world and does not assume that these varieties must all point toward the static and 'eternal' realm of quasi-Platonic essences. (Corrington 1994, 13)

Thus, ordinal phenomenology is a method for doing metaphysics that already assumes certain metaphysical claims, including principally that "there is no such thing as *the* trait of traits or *the* order of orders, only innumerable traits that prevail in innumerable ways and phenomenology has the task of tracing out those traits that it deems important for a particular human personal and/or communal need" (Corrington 2013, 9). As previously

mentioned, ordinal phenomenology also embraces the metaphysical principle of ontological parity, which holds that all orders of nature as equally real.

The version of Ecstatic Naturalism developed in *Nature's Sublime* is *aesthetic* insofar as "it affirms the primacy of beauty and the sublime" for a "capacious metaphysics that probes into the deepest dimensions" of nature (Corrington 2013, xiii). Thus, minding the principle of ontological parity, Corrington is careful not to suggest that the beautiful and the sublime are pervasive natural complexes that are relevant to *all* orders of nature. He argues rather that aesthetic experience is especially relevant to what he calls the 'selving' process, which is a uniquely human process of individuation. *Nature's Sublime* therefore integrates the aesthetic concepts of beauty and the sublime into an in-depth account of selving, to the extent that "aesthetic" becomes a more accurate descriptor than "ecstatic" for his naturalism. Aesthetic Naturalism remains ecstatic, in Corrington's sense of the word, in that it does not render nature flat or fixed. It goes further than previous iterations of Corrington's naturalism in that it reveals the sublime especially, but also beauty, as modalities of experience that contribute to a more robust metaphysical interpretation of nature.

Corrington first introduced his concept of selving in *Nature and Spirit* (1992). Selving involves a complex process of individuation that unfolds across three realms of the unconscious: the unconscious of nature, the collective unconscious, and the personal unconscious. Aesthetic Naturalism holds that aesthetic experience, especially in the case of the sublime, plays a primary role in all three dimensions of selving. I will be concerned here with Corrington's development of the concept of the sublime within the context of

Aesthetic Naturalism and the role the sublime plays in the selving process within the dimension of the personal unconscious. Specifically, I want to explore the compatibility of Corrington's Aesthetic Naturalism, as it is cast in *Nature's Sublime*, with my expansion of Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime, which embraces the ontological sublime. I set out to do this primarily because of two striking similarities between Corrington's Aesthetic Naturalism and Schopenhauer's metaphysics. First, *Nature's Sublime*, like *World as Will and Presentation*, points to art and philosophy as deeply and profoundly intertwined approaches to the 'riddle of the universe.' As suggested earlier, Corrington's position is that art is a more efficacious modality for exploring nature's depth dimensions than religion. In contrast to some naturalist traditions, he does not deny that there are sacred and even salvific elements of nature. However, rather than turning to a kind of 'natural religion,' he turns to art which he views as a "more important and more salvific" sphere of experience than religion, in both the "personal and communal" senses (Corrington 2013, xii). Furthermore, with regard to Corrington's treatment of the sublime, although he carefully acknowledges its Kantian roots, his application of the sublime is thoroughly Schopenhauerian.

The second striking correlation that inspired this line of inquiry is between the fundamental metaphysical concepts of Aesthetic Naturalism (*nature naturing* and *nature natured*) and Schopenhauer's explanation of the "world as will" and the "world as presentation." Corrington's concept of *nature naturing* is like Schopenhauer's concept of the will-to-life in that it constitutes the generative side of nature. *Nature natured* is therefore everything that is generated out of *nature naturing*. In Schopenhauer's words,

nature natured is objectivized will. The Schopenhauerian element in Corrington's metaphysics is explicit and deliberate, although Corrington's philosophy goes beyond Schopenhauer in many ways. Corrington writes: "as in Aesthetic Naturalism Schopenhauer divides nature into two dimensions that stand in intimate relation to each other even though they are ontologically and utterly distinct. His parallel to *nature naturing* and *nature natured* is the World as Will and the World as Representation, or Presentation (*Vorstellung*)" (Corrington 2013, 38). He elaborates further on this point later in the text:

> The Will (*nature naturing*) is profligate and unrelenting in its eternal othering into the orders we know as *nature natured*. And, most importantly, we know it directly when we look within ourselves and feel it operating in our own bodies. Epistemologically, the Will is closer to us than the manifest orders of nature, which are the objectification of the Will. (Corrington 2013, 38)

Thus, my inquiry is grounded in the following two key points of resonance. First, it is clear that the arts in general and the aesthetic category of the sublime in particular take center stage in both Aesthetic Naturalism and Schopenhauer's philosophy. Second, the fundamental metaphysical force identified in Aesthetic Naturalism, *nature naturing*, is parallel to Schopenhauer's concept of the will both structurally and in the sense that neither can properly be said to 'care' about its progeny. Furthermore, neither Corrington nor Schopenhauer promotes a kind of dualism in his metaphysics, but simply suggests there are two ways that nature/will operates. It is for these reasons that I suspect Aesthetic Naturalism may serve as fertile ground in which the concept of the ontological sublime can firmly take root.

The Ontological Sublime and Aesthetic Naturalism

Aesthetic Naturalism embraces the view that nature is inclusive of whatever is in whatever way it is. As stated earlier, there are two fundamental 'ways' of nature according to this perspective: *nature naturing*, which is the "uncanny, the powerful, the alien, the abject, yet also the meaningful, and the purposive, albeit within certain limits" and *nature natured*, which includes "the innumerable orders of 'available' nature…an actual infinite of semiosis with neither beginning nor culmination" (Corrington 2013, 48). The divide between *nature naturing* and *nature natured* has profound semiotic, existential, and ontological importance within Corrington's system. This fundamental divide is referred to as the '*ontological* difference' throughout most of Corrington's work, however he replaces that term with '*natural* difference' in *Nature's Sublime* so as to avoid implying that *nature naturing* is simply equivalent to Being itself. Like Schopenhauer, Corrington attributes all human neuroses, suffering, and anxiety to the fact that nature (will) is thrown into individuated existence only to struggle to come to terms with the necessity of such differentiation. Recall that for Schopenhauer, the principle of individuation is the root of all suffering. In the process of individuation the will becomes 'my presentation' and the inevitable result is competition, violence and suffering. Aesthetic Naturalism embraces this view as well, however, as Corrington addresses in great length in *Nature's Sublime,* the natural difference also makes it possible for human beings to participate in liberating and transformative communities and experience the 'emancipatory power' of beauty and the sublime. Ideally, the selving process enables the self to remain open to the natural difference in order to experience the sublime. For

Corrington, “most important is the primal fact that the selving process is shriven by the natural difference between *nature naturing* and *nature naturing*. To be shriven is to be opened up and shaken by the natural difference” (Corrington 2013, 34). In *Nature’s Sublime,* Corrington offers what he views as a companion methodology to ordinal phenomenology, “ordinal psychoanalysis,” which embraces the metaphysical perspective of ordinal phenomenology but takes the unconscious as its object of investigation. He frames ordinal psychoanalysis in terms of the potencies of nature (*nature naturing*) and the possibilities of nature (*nature natured*) but in the specifically human context of consciousness and the unconscious:

> The ordinal reconstruction of psychoanalysis follows the same path as the ordinal reconstruction of phenomenology with the difference being that psychoanalysis is less a method and more of a medium through which the traits of the human process are understood in terms of the dialectic between consciousness and the unconscious. (Corrington 2013, 28)

Thus, he establishes the parallel between *nature naturing* and the unconscious on one side and *nature natured* and consciousness on the other side. Furthermore, just as metaphysics must remain open to *nature naturing* as ontologically prior to *nature natured*, this perspective holds that a careful analysis of the selving process “begins and ends with the vast infinite unconscious of nature from out of which the differently infinite unconscious of the human self emerges” (Corrington 2013, 29). Corrington goes on to say that:

> Put differently, ordinal psychoanalysis moves beyond the hidden narcissism of classical Freudian drive theory, with its obsession with the intra-individual erogenous fixations frozen in oral or anal expression, and relocates psychoanalysis in the much larger domain of the human/nature interaction of the selving process. Selving is the ongoing process of self-formation within the

> encompassing sweep of the innumerable orders of the human and extra-human orders of *nature natured.* If existential psychoanalysis quite rightly speaks of the given totality of the self as being-in-the-world, ordinal psychoanalysis, as a part of the Aesthetic Naturalism, equally affirms that the selving process is fully embedded in a vast natural world not of its own making (Corrington 2013, 29)

Corrington reconstitutes the experience of birth trauma from the perspective of ordinal psychoanalysis and argues that it functions as an ongoing event that is both psychological and ontological. From the perspective of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, birth trauma is viewed as the physical experience of being violently ejected from the mother's womb into an existence in which space, time and causality become suddenly and ruthlessly restrictive. Freudian theory, in this sense, is largely influenced by Schopenhauer's theory of will, where will is reconfigured as 'drive' and has mostly to do with human sexual impulse.[10] Otto Rank and Wilhelm Reich's work on birth trauma have contributed to a more ontological understanding of the phenomenon. From this broader perspective, Corrington argues, one can see that birth trauma "emerges from the fact of the natural difference that propels the self outward into the endless involvements of the innumerable orders of *nature natured*" (Corrington 2013, 50). The birth trauma event thus defines the human condition as one in which the self has been permanently severed from his or her place of origin. The initial stages of selving are thus often characterized by the quest for conditions of origin. Evidence of this quest abounds. Consider, for instance, infants who

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[10] This is not to say that Freud misinterpreted Schopenhauer's theory of the will-to-life, but rather than he perhaps focuses too exclusively on Schopenhauer's comment in the fourth book of *World as Will and Presentation* that "the genitals are the real *focus* of the will and consequently the opposite pole from the brain, the representation of cognizance, i.e. the other side of the world, the world as presentation. They are the lif-maintaining principle, assuring endless life to time" (Schopenhauer 2008, 386)

are best able to fall asleep in the fetal position or are comforted by the simulated sound of the churning womb. One's longing for conditions of origin does not lessen as the self physically and psychologically develops. Indeed, Rank argues, all human anxiety is caused by our inability to return to what he calls the "primal situation," in other words, the womb (Corrington 2013, 51).

Thus, Aesthetic Naturalism holds that the experience of the birth trauma, in the physical and metaphysical senses, launches the human quest for union with *nature naturing*. The whole human trajectory is cloaked in tragedy insofar as each instance of particular human existence begins with the loss of what is most fundamental. On this view, then, most basic primal human experience can be understood as the experience of loss. Furthermore, ordinal psychoanalysis reveals that the confrontation with the natural difference exposes this fundamental condition of loss to human consciousness.

The Ontological Sublime and the **Lost Object**

Ordinal psychoanalysis broadly embraces object-relations theory, which was first conceived by Otto Rank but has been further developed and modified by psychoanalytic thinkers including Melanie Klein and Heinz Kohut. Corrington is most heavily influenced by Kohut's version of object-relations theory, which he notes "serves pragmatically to show how the self evolves" through interaction with "three kinds of 'things' in the inventory of the world: (1) objects, (2) selves, and (3) self-objects" (Corrington 2013, 59). In the context of object-relations theory, an object is anything that is distinct from the self and a self-object is a special kind of object that "straddles the difference between

objectness, as thing like, and consciousness, as self like" (Corrington 2013, 59). For both Kohut and Corrington, self-objects function as helpful tools in the selving process. On Kohut's view, parents or other 'grown-ups' who function as parent-like figures in a child's life operate as self-objects. The philosophical perspective of Aesthetic Naturalism embraces but also expands upon Kohut's theory:

> The self-object is rich in meaning because it has the unique quality of reaching into the depths of the various layers of the unconscious… Traditional self-object theory confines this ontological category to the human parents, while ordinal psychoanalysis opens out the deeper and broader ordinal locations in which the pre-human forms of the self-object also appear to phenomenological insight. Ordinal psychoanalysis refuses to rest in the narrow realm of the intra-psychic or even the inter-subjective, but moves into the fuller domain where psyche and world inter-connect on all ontological levels and all relevant ordinal locations… The discipline of ontological parity keeps phenomenology open to all varieties of self-objects regardless of their whence or whither, while the focus on traits rather than essences prevents query from a premature collapse into the fixed and falsely certain. (Corrington 2013: 61)

Therefore, Aesthetic Naturalism holds that an object such as a sacred text or a work of art can operate as a self-object. Indeed, *any* object can operate as such if it illuminates the natural difference for the evolving self through its semiotic richness.[11]

In the context of ordinal psychoanalysis and Aesthetic Naturalism, the ontological sublime can therefore be understood as a kind of self-object in the sense that through it we confront an experience of loss/absence but ultimately arrive at a more complete metaphysical understanding of ourselves. The experience is simultaneously frightful and empowering, painful and pleasurable. This is in keeping with Corrington's own view of

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[11] For a full account of Corrington's semiotic theory and an explanation of how the self is connected to nature through a complex process of sign-reading and processing, see his *A Semiotic Theory of Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

the sublime in general (especially the dynamical sublime), but advances it further by more clearly defining the "cognitive content," to which Shapshay refers, that is to be gained from an encounter with the *ontological* sublime. This is illuminated in the following passage in which Corrington rightly characterizes the difference between the Kant and the Schopenhauer's accounts of the sublime encounter. He frames the difference in terms of the self's ability to encounter the "infinite" and in the end, takes Schopenhauer's view as a more capacious account of the phenomenology of the sublime encounter:

> Both Kant and Schopenhauer stress our littleness in the face of those forces of nature that we encounter with the sublime. And for both a kind of metaphysical courage is required to withstand the ferocity of nature. The aesthetic moment involves the still-point where the finite meets the infinite, whereas in the encounter with beauty it is more like an encounter with the finite and the finite. For Kant the infinite is not a true infinity as consciousness cannot really encounter something trans-finite given its internal finite structures tied to the schematism and the transcendental imagination. Thus the sublime is experienced on the edges of the finite, not as something that actually transcends it. For Schopenhauer the infinite can be encountered *as* infinite because the finite self can experience the metaphysical Will through its body and since the sublime is infinite in its own way, the self can have a direct experience of it through a heightened bodily awareness filled with anxiety and vertigo. The dynamic sublime speaks from the Will that courses through the heart of nature and its potencies. (Corrington 2013, 168)

While Corrington does not explicitly refer to the sublime as a self-object, his description of the role the sublime plays in the selving process matches his criteria for self-object in that the sublime reveals the natural difference to the self through its semiotic richness. Put differently, "[t]he encounter with the sublime transforms he self by illuminating the edge of its horizon of meaning and lifts that edge from its attachment to the world" (Corrington 2013, 172). Therefore, my concept of the ontological sublime is consistent

with Corrington's view but also advances it in the following ways. First, it enables a view of the sublime that goes beyond the dynamical power of the Will, which is entrenched in the faculty of reason (i.e. causality) and allows a framing of the sublime experience that is in terms of the subject's pure encounter with the natural difference, which I have argued is equivalent to the subject-object divide. Second, the concept of the ontological sublime further illuminates the fundamental condition of the self as seeking wholeness through union with the *nature naturing*. The ontological sublime, which is triggered by the experience of loss or the perception of a profound absence, can serve as a self-object that reveals the ontological condition of loss to the human self in a way that is not tragic but ultimately uplifting in that it enables a felt union with the infinite side of nature or *nature naturing*.

Furthermore, expanding on object-relations theory, *nature naturing* functions as a kind of 'lost-object,' which is a psychological term that originated in Freud psychology. Freud thought of the mother's breast as the primary lost object for the individual; the infant's break with the breast as its primary source of nourishment is the first step away from what Kristeva later referred to as the 'material maternal.' The life-giving 'object,' once continuous with the self, becomes lost as the self begins to individuate. In Corrington's language, human beings are ejected from *nature naturing,* irreversibly propelled into *nature natured,* and thus long to return to a state of undifferentiated being, full of potency, free from suffering. Loss can therefore be understood as the experience of the *absence* of the 'lost object,' the material maternal, or *nature naturing*. Corrington reminds us that:

> …the concepts of Will, *nature naturing*, the material maternal, the lost object, and the unconscious of nature, are roughly equivalent. One usage is preferred over another only when a shift of emphasis is desired, say, one focusing on the *dynamism* of Will, or a focus on the *fecundity* of naturing, the *nurturing* of the womb/*chora*, the *melancholy* of the no longer, or the *darkness* of nature. Taken together these five concepts reinforce and enrich each other and belong in the Same (*das Selbst*), as Heidegger would put it. In the Same they all gather around the self-giving core of meaning that stands at the point of origin for what is located in the depths. (Corrington 2013, 67)

If one agrees with this account, and I do, then the statement that the ontological sublime is fundamentally about the confrontation with loss/absence within the context of the subject-object divide can be restated as follows: the feeling of the ontological sublime is triggered by the confrontation with the natural difference within the context of selving. Furthermore, if *nature naturing* is to Schopenhauer's will-to-life as *nature natured* is to individuated will, then confronting the natural difference is comparable to the confrontation with the subject-object divide within the context of the ontological sublime. The natural difference represents the fissure between the potencies of nature and the innumerable orders of nature. The subject-object divide, as Schopenhauer frames it, reveals to us our most basic form of existence: that of *being-an-object-for-a-subject*. On Schopenhauer's account, while we can look inward and discover the will-to-life and the eternal subject, so far as we exist as individuals, we exist as objects-for-subjects. This brings to light another common theme among Aesthetic Naturalism and Schopenhauer's philosophy, which is the significance of paradox. For Schopenhauer, the paradoxical nature of existence is exhibited in the fact that to be human is to simultaneously exist as a finite object of perception and participate in the pure, timeless subject that is the bearer of

all presentation. We are at once utterly insignificant and the bearer of all significance. Schopenhauer articulates this in the fourth book of *World as Will and Presentation:*

> …with cognizant beings, the individual is bearer of the cognizant subject and the latter bearer of the world, i.e., that the whole of nature beyond him, thus also all other individuals, exist only in presentation to him, he is always conscious of them only as presentation to him, thus merely indirectly and as something dependent on his own essence and existence; for with the loss of his consciousness the world is necessarily lost for him as well, i.e., their being and non-being become equivalent and indistinguishable. Every cognizant individual is thus in truth, and finds himself to be, the entire will for life, or the very in-itself of the world, and also the complementary condition of the world as presentation, consequently a microcosm to be esteemed on a par with the macrocosm. Always and everywhere truthful, nature itself provides him with simple and immediately certain recognition of this fact, originally and independently of all reflection. On the basis of the two necessary features cited, it is then explicable that every individual, utterly vanishing and diminished to nothing in the boundless world, nonetheless makes himself the center of the world. (Schopenhauer 2008, 387-88)

For Schopenhauer, the paradox of individuality originates in the subject-object distinction and culminates in the fact that we are equally as much the “center of the world” as we are “diminished to nothing in the boundless world.” For Corrington, the paradox of the human process becomes apparent when selving is understood as a kind of quest for communion with the unconscious of nature or *nature naturing*. This is paradoxical insofar as the return ‘home’ to *nature naturing* symbolizes a fantasy for a union that can only be achieved by confronting the natural difference. Again, we see *nature naturing* functioning as the lost-object. The self, when it is in earnest pursuit of the lost-object, must look directly into the abyss of the ‘natural difference’, nature’s fundamental ontological wound. The quest for union and meaning is always entangled with difference and mystery. An honest confrontation with the paradoxical, even ironic nature of human existence is a prerequisite for wholeness of being. Moreover, the theme of paradox

culminates for both Schopenhauer and Corrington in the sublime, which is paradoxical in its very structure insofar as it arouses the deepest feelings of fear and restlessness only to bring about the highest form of exaltation and elation.

In short, my position is that the ontological sublime resonates with Aesthetic Naturalism so distinctly because it affirms the view that the experience of loss is not only a fundamental part of the human experience, but that loss is built into the ontological structure of the human self. I have argued thus far that the ontological sublime is triggered by the experience of loss or absence either in nature or through art. I have also suggested that death is the most violent of natural events that tends to evoke the feeling of the ontological sublime. Through the lens of Aesthetic Naturalism and guided by the practice of ordinal psychoanalysis, the experience of loss in nature (or by proxy through art) can be understood as never being a 'new' experience but one that is always already intimately familiar to us, because it is built into the structure of our being.

The Ontological Sublime and the Courage to Be

I have yet to address an important aspect of Corrington's account of the selving process, which is his explanation of negative pathology. Corrington's view is that when "affirmation is not present" in the form of "healthy" self-objects, i.e. those that enable "its sense of self-worth and value," the self can regress into a "fragmented sense of being partitioned and not whole," among other things (Corrington 2013, 62). He identifies two forms of negative pathology that can occur in the early stages of the selving process. The first being the least common:

> At one extreme you have the situation where nothing, human or not, can emerge as a self-object. That is, there is a flattening of affect and ideation such that the individual cannot distinguish between a human complex, say, a face, and a non-human complex. This is seen in some forms of autism. There are no specially marked orders that do what the self-object is supposed to do; namely, to open out the unconscious of nature while at the same time holding the nascent selving process secure in its openness to the abyss beneath consciousness. (Corrington 2013, 63)

Again, we see the self-object taking a central role in the selving process. This first example of negative pathology is extreme in the sense that the individual self cannot relate to self-objects in any sense. The self is left in semiotic isolation. While self-objects are semiotically available to the self in the second form of negative pathology identified by Corrington, there is marked a resistance to their potency:

> More common is the recoil from the abyss of nature's unconscious that shuts down the opening potency of the self-object and flattens out the ontology of the self-object so that it sinks back down into the status of being just a 'safe' object among others. There is an anxiety of being that the self will do almost anything to wash away by stripping the self-object of its depth-dimension. In essence, the self settles for less being in order to avoid the demands of more being, a heightening of being that is a gift to the self from the self-object. (Corrington 2013, 63)

Thus, when the self is unable to withstand the sheer ontological force of self-objects, selving tends to assume pathological tendencies that silence some or most of their semiotic content.

Corrington's account of pathological selving can be reframed, in one sense, as a pathological aversion to the sublime, according to my position that the sublime functions as a crucial self-object. In what follows, I will develop the argument that the key element missing when the self develops an aversion to the sublime is a kind of 'courage' to face the sublime, despite the fact that it exposes the tragic fact that loss is built into the

structure of our being. I will rely on the concept of courage developed by Paul Tillich in *The Courage to Be* (1952), which is specifically a kind of courage "in spite of," and will argue that this is a companion concept to the ontological sublime in that one must have the "courage to be" in order to face the sublime, *in spite of* ontological loss that is revealed to us through the confrontation with natural difference.

Tillich defines courage as way of affirming the self 'in spite of nonbeing.' As Nicholas Wernicki notes, Tillich's view is that when the self becomes aware of the "ever-present threat of nonbeing, which is contained in being," the existential response is a state of anxiety. However, Wernicki notes:

> Anxiety and courage are ontologically interdependent in the sense that courage is essential for the self-affirmation of being in spite of the threat of nonbeing. Tillich argues that the Ground of Being is the ultimate source of the courage to be over against the threat of nonbeing, a courage that requires transcendence beyond theism. (Wernicki qtd. in *The Contiuum Companion to Existentialism* 2011, 369)

Thus, for Tillich, nonbeing is actually *contained within* being. In this sense, nonbeing can be felt or experienced as having ontological weight. This is reminiscent of the notion discussed earlier that certain *absences* can actually be perceived in art. Recall Joyaux's photographs of abandoned lots, where only the absent home's stairs and foundation remain. The home, while no longer present, is perceived through its absence and evokes a profound sense of loss. Similarly, for Tillich, nonbeing "is the negation of every concept; but as such it is an inescapable content of thought and, as the history of thought has shown, the most important one after being-itself" (Tillich 1952, 34). Therefore, insofar as nonbeing is the negation of every concept, it is unlike any other concept but also 'appears' in all concepts because it actually built into the concept of being itself. As

Tillich notes:

> Being has nonbeing "within" itself as that which is eternally present and eternally overcome in the process of divine life. The ground of everything that is is not dead identity without movement and becoming; it is living creativity. Creatively it affirms itself, eternally conquering its own nonbeing. As such it is the pattern of the self-affirmation of every finite being and the source of the courage to be. (Tillich 1952, 34)

Courage therefore arises out of self-affirmation "in spite of" nonbeing. Courage involves the honest affirmation that the self is both being and nonbeing. In the context of the sublime, the "courage to be" entails self-affirmation in spite of the irreparable rupture between *nature natured* and *nature naturing.* As we learned from Corrington, failing to have this sort of courage leads to negative pathology and semiotic isolation. The same sentiment is conveyed by Tillich: "The self-affirmation of being without nonbeing would not even be self-affirmation but an immovable self-identity. Nothing would be manifest, nothing expressed, nothing revealed. But nonbeing drives being out of its seclusion, it forces it to affirm itself dynamically" (Tillich 1952, 180). Tillich's concept of courage therefore facilitates a more complete concept of the self in relation to the sublime. The self must have the courage to be "in spite of" the loss or absence (i.e. nonbeing) that is built into our being. Without courage, the self becomes closed off to the transformative power of the sublime.

Concluding Remarks

The concept of the ontological sublime that I have put forth advances the interpretation of Schopenhauer's sublime in two significant ways. First, it fills in what I see as a gap in

Schopenhauer's thinking. The gap results from his failure to extend his discovery of the 'root' of the Principle of Sufficient Reason into his furthering of the Kantian concept of the sublime. While the fundamental forms of sense perception (space and time) correlate to the mathematical sublime and the rules of causality correlate to the dynamical sublime, the subject-object relation, on Schopenhauer's account, is left without a correlate in the realm of the sublime. The ontological sublime fills this gap.

Second, and perhaps most significantly, my rendering of the ontological sublime resists the urge to reduce Schopenhauer's philosophy of the sublime to being ultimately about the fundamental fear our own mortality. Much attention has been paid in recent years to Schopenhauer's furthering of Kant's theory of the sublime. One perspective that is gaining traction is that the sublime, for both Kant and Schopenhauer, has fundamentally to do with mortality and the confrontation with the inevitability of one's inevitable demise. Julian Young's is one of the more prominent voices in this conversation. In his view, one of Schopenhauer's most significant contributions in *World as Will and Presentation* is that he "makes explicit what was only implicit in Kant; that the 'topic' of the feeling of the sublime is death" (Young 2005, 137). The context for his discussion is of course Schopenhauer's treatment of the mathematical and dynamical sublime and so, to a certain extent, I would agree with his point that the sublime has to do with facing the threat of one's annihilation. Threat is the operative word here, for one's own annihilation is never actually experienced. It would be impossible to experience one's own death insofar as once an individual has died, he or she no longer as the ability to experience anything. The point I wish to make is that when understood in terms of the

ontological sublime, where the *threat* is against the subject-object relation and the associated displeasure can arise from the loss of an *other* person (not one's self), the experience of the sublime moves beyond existential concerns about one's own mortality into the very real experience of loss. Furthermore, aided by Aesthetic Naturalism, we learn that the loss experienced through the sublime is always ultimately more than a particular instance of loss insofar as *nature naturing* is revealed to consciousness as a kind of 'lost object.' Thus, while concerns over personal annihilation can be understood in terms of the mathematical and dynamical sublime, the more fundamental 'topic' of the sublime is actually loss (not personal mortality) and transcendence of loss through the "courage to be." Death of the self always remains hypothetical while loss, especially in the most ultimate sense illuminated by the natural difference, is built into the structure of being. I maintain that my view is more in keeping with the spirit of Schopenhauer's overarching philosophy in that the discovery of ontological loss, like the discovery of the will, is something that we can turn inward and feel in the core of our being, whereas our own death remains outside the scope of our experience.

Philosophy as a discipline is often maligned for its inability to translate theory into meaningful practice. This is especially true in the subfields of metaphysics and aesthetics. While the argument holds true that studying these fields and producing scholarship have inherent value in themselves, this does not stand up as a sufficient defense against the criticism that they have no practical value in the world. Bridging the gap between metaphysics/aesthetics and psychoanalysis, as Corrington has done, is at least a step in the right direction toward the objective of bringing the theoretical into the

realm of the practical. My concept of the ontological sublime reinforces the connection between the two fields because it offers loss as the practical touchstone through which one can better understand the self. If considered in the context of psychotherapy, my hope is that the concept of the ontological sublime might lead to innovation in psychotherapeutic approaches to dealing with the inextinguishable pain of loss.

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