

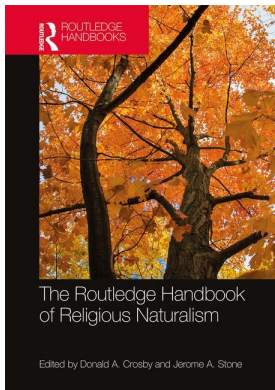
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THE SUBLIME AS SACRED

Reading Schopenhauer as a religious naturalist

Abigail T. Wernicki

In *Religious Naturalism Today: The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative*, Jerome Stone proposes a typology of religious naturalism that organizes its various iterations into three broadly construed groups. The first two incorporate a concept of God but in distinct ways: one as creative process (I view this as a kind of pantheism) and the other as equivalent to the whole of nature (I view this as pantheism). Naturalisms belonging to the third type do not employ a concept of God but are characterized as religious for one reason or another. To be sure, there is plenty of variation and discord among the philosophical perspectives that fall within this third group, which includes a broad range of thinkers from Donald Crosby to Ursula Goodenough to Stone himself. Some who fall into this category assign special value and meaning to the whole of nature itself. Crosby, for example, argues that nature is “religiously ultimate” (Crosby 2002). Others avoid ascribing ultimate value to nature, but instead identify certain processes or experiences within nature that contain religious traits such as sacredness or grace. I propose that Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophical perspective belongs within the latter niche. While Schopenhauer does not profess an explicit theory of religious naturalism, his metaphysical outlook combined with his theory of aesthetic value form something like a nascent version of religious naturalism. The initial aim of this essay is therefore to expose Schopenhauer’s worldview as wholly naturalistic through an analysis of his metaphysics of will. I will then establish the religious aspects of Schopenhauer’s system by offering a critical reading of his aesthetic theory. The latter will include a consideration of Schopenhauer’s concepts of aesthetic contemplation and the sublime through the lens of Donald Crosby’s theoretical criteria for religious ultimacy.

The suggestion that Arthur Schopenhauer’s philosophy resembles a kind of naturalism is neither original nor radical (Gardner 1999: 403–5; Corrington 2013: 38–41). Yet Schopenhauer remains on the margins of most discussions of historical antecedents to contemporary philosophical naturalism, although Robert Corrington has done his part to integrate Schopenhauer into the discourse (Corrington 2013). In fact, his Ecstatic Naturalism explicitly embraces Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory; additionally, Corrington’s discussion of the perennial fissuring of nature into *nature naturing* and *nature natured* closely parallels, by Corrington’s own admission, Schopenhauer’s conception of the world as both will-in-itself and objectified will.

Historical background

Born in 1788, Arthur Schopenhauer was a child when Immanuel Kant published his three groundbreaking *Critiques*. Schopenhauer would come to view Kant as the most important philosopher of the modern age and, perhaps even more so than any of his contemporaries, his philosophical system would be heavily influenced by Kant's transcendental idealism as well as his aesthetics (Cartwright 2010). This is especially evident in Schopenhauer's seminal two-volume work, *World as Will and Presentation*, which can generally be understood as a response to some of the problems Kant left unresolved in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Schopenhauer's high regard for Kantian philosophy was in contrast to his low opinion of much of the "professional" philosophy that came out of Germany leading up to and during his lifetime. His disregard for what he considered to be the "sophistry" of neo-Kantian idealists such as Fichte and Schelling was anything but subtle, but the most explicit object of his contempt was Hegel. Although Schopenhauer's distaste for Hegel stemmed in part from his association with the kind of self-important spirit of German nationalism that prevailed in the early part of the nineteenth century, he also claims in several of his publications that Hegel offered nothing of value to the field of philosophy (Schopenhauer 2014; Schopenhauer 2010). He calls Hegel a charlatan (more than once) and expresses his astonishment that despite his philosophy amounting to "folly and nonsense," Hegel manages to garner the admiration and allegiance of an impressionable generation of philosophers and theologians who would go on to spread his "pseudo-philosophy" (Schopenhauer 2014: 89). Although some scholars have speculated that Schopenhauer's distaste for Hegel was largely due to jealousy over his great success in the academy (Wicks 2008: 161), it is undeniable that Schopenhauer also finds Hegel's fundamental philosophical outlook utterly wrongheaded. Yet, despite their vast philosophical and personal differences, Hegel and Schopenhauer agree on one crucial point concerning metaphysical knowledge. In short, they both believe it is attainable. As Robert Wicks observes:

Against Kant, both argue that, since the same being that constitutes the rest of the universe constitutes us as well, when we know ourselves we simultaneously know the world's essence. Schopenhauer and Hegel drift apart because their introspections reveal different foundations at the core of human being: Schopenhauer discerns an ever-striving, blind, unintelligent, and meaningless Will; Hegel discerns the dialectical, rational, and reconciliatory structure of self-consciousness.

(Wicks 2008: 163)

When understood in the confines of Kant's epistemological system, the thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) would always remain in the noumenal realm, beyond the grasp of human cognition. Metaphysical knowledge was therefore ultimately unattainable for Kant. As the Kantian logic goes, we can know *that* the thing-in-itself exists; we just cannot know anything about *what* the thing-in-itself is (Kant 1999). As Wicks notes above, although Schopenhauer and Hegel both develop theories affirming the possibility of metaphysical knowledge—that is, knowledge of the thing-in-itself—their vastly different epistemologies give way to opposing conclusions. As I will argue in the following section, Schopenhauer's conclusion places him firmly within the realm of philosophical naturalism.

Schopenhauer's metaphysical standpoint as philosophical naturalism

To what extent does Schopenhauer's philosophy of will provide the foundation for a naturalistic worldview? To adequately answer this question, one must consider the historical roots of Schopenhauer's metaphysical orientation, which go back to his first publication, ambitiously

titled *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. It is here that Schopenhauer first wrestles with Kant's epistemological theory of transcendental idealism. Kant's view, simply put, is that the fundamental components of understanding are comprised of the forms of sensible intuition (space and time) and the pure concepts of understanding (quantity, quality, relation, and modality). The pure concepts of understanding can generally be understood as modes of causality and all fall within the umbrella of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). The PSR, as a broad philosophical concept, is the notion that everything that occurs in history has a reasonable explanation. In other words, everything that comes into existence and everything that happens is the next step in a chain of causation. According to this principle, no event that has ever occurred could have unfolded differently than it did. Furthermore, every particular fact of the universe—every event, entity, and physical law—is *necessary* in the sense that it could not have happened any other way.

Kant's epistemological position is that the application of the PSR to sensible intuitions provides us with cognitive content. In simpler terms, we apply the fundamental laws of causality to what we perceive, and this act results in knowledge. Kant's epistemological synthesis of rationalism and empiricism led to the realization that one cannot obtain knowledge from sense perception or reason alone. In *The Fourfold Root*, Schopenhauer probes deeper into the origin of human cognition than Kant previously had in *The Critique of Pure Reason* by establishing that the foundation for experience (and therefore knowledge) is not comprised *solely* of the faculties for perception and understanding, but is first rooted in the fundamental distinction between subject and object. In Schopenhauer's elucidation of this idea, he also exposes the paradox that to exist is to be both subject and object. Schopenhauer's revision of Kantian epistemology rests on the basic premise that the necessary and sufficient condition for an experience, and therefore cognition, is the presence of both an apprehending subject and an object to apprehend.

Schopenhauer refers to the PSR as a "principle of individuation" because it allows us to distinguish objects from one another, thus making them perceivable by consciousness in phenomenal reality. But Schopenhauer, like Kant, is most concerned with what Kant calls the noumenon, or that which eludes human reason. In other words, he wants to obtain knowledge that is beyond the confines of what is knowable through the PSR. As Wicks observes, *The World as Will and Presentation*¹ 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)

One might wonder, at this point in Schopenhauer's reasoning, whether he might employ a supernatural explanation for the realm of reality that escapes the grasp of human cognition. The following passage in Book Two of the first volume of *World as Will and Presentation* raises some ambiguity surrounding this question:

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, italics added)

Schopenhauer continues this line of inquiry in the following passage, which seems to suggest that he will soon be leaving the realm of nature in order to provide an answer to the question of what lies beyond the knowable realm of phenomenal existence:

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* ... And yet this is the path that all philosophers before me have walked.

(Schopenhauer 2008: 135–6)

The reader soon learns, however, that Schopenhauer does not wish to abandon nature in order to fully grasp the basic essence of reality. Instead, his departure is an epistemological one. In the passage above, we see Schopenhauer's turn away from an objective point of view toward a subjective one in his pursuit of something "utterly and in its entire essence fundamentally distinct from presentations." His revelation is 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 not a god or transcendence but is the *subject* in itself.

Following this perspectival revelation, Schopenhauer reflects on the ways in which we know the self as both subject and object. He observes that there are two distinct ways in which the body is "given" to the self. As object, the body is given as presentation, which is mediated through the subject's perception, as are all other empirical objects it encounters. As subject, the body is known *immediately* as will. Therefore, although the body is always represented as an object to the subjective self, 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 *unmediated* knowledge of the body *as will* (Schopenhauer 1974: 137).

Schopenhauer's "discovery" of the will reveals to him that the core of existence is a kind of blind principle of striving and desire, as well as repulsion and hostility. The only thing we can know about the will, Schopenhauer argues, is that it is aimed toward life. There is no grand teleology in Schopenhauer's theory of the "will-to-life," nor is there any transcendent logic or ethic. This is not to say, however, that Schopenhauer does not promote his own theory of value of human existence *in relation* to the will, which becomes apparent in his aesthetics.

Schopenhauer's epistemological turn therefore leads him to some grim metaphysical realizations, but it also lays the foundation for reading Schopenhauer as a philosophical naturalist. 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. Schopenhauer accomplishes a novel way of establishing the possibility for metaphysical knowledge without assuming a supernatural source of reality.

To bolster the case for reading Schopenhauer's philosophy as wholly naturalistic, one might also consider how Schopenhauer viewed his own philosophy relative to the discipline of philosophy.

Several years after publishing Volume Two of *World as Will and Presentation*, Schopenhauer reflects on his philosophy of will in *Parerga and Paralipomena* and articulates it in terms of the metaphysical categories *naturing nature* and *natured nature*. In the section titled “Fragments for the history of philosophy,” in which Schopenhauer scolds his contemporaries for resorting to theological arguments in their philosophy, he writes that “naturing nature is still far from being God,” and that instead “its concept contains the realization that behind the ever so fleeting and restlessly changing appearances of natured nature an everlasting and indefatigable power must be hidden” (Schopenhauer 2014: 104). He goes on to say that it is through metaphysics that we seek the source of this power and ultimately arrive at the realization that “we ourselves too belong to nature and, therefore, possess in ourselves not only the closest and most distinct specimen of natured nature as well as natured nature, but also the only one accessible from within” (Schopenhauer 2014: 104). In other words, Schopenhauer remains convinced that we are in fact made up of both the noumenal and phenomenal elements of reality, in the Kantian sense, but unlike Kant, Schopenhauer believes we can indeed know the noumenal realm through an exploration of ourselves from within.

Schopenhauer goes on to say more about whether the split between *naturing nature* and *natured nature* calls for a kind of theistic explanation, an idea he strictly rejects (Schopenhauer 2014: 105). He also clarifies for his reader that his philosophy of will ought not be conflated with any version of pantheism, for this would require that one equate God with the world itself and therefore assign properties such as “benevolence, wisdom” and “blessedness” to the world (Schopenhauer 2014: 105). Given Schopenhauer’s assessment of the world as quite a hostile place and totally indifferent to all living beings, he finds this proposition utterly ridiculous. Schopenhauer seems to revel in the idea that his philosophical view avoids practically any categorization during his lifetime. Perhaps this remains the most accurate way to view his philosophical legacy, as a totally unique contribution to the discipline so unlike anything offered by a Western thinker in the Modern age that it defies classification. It is noteworthy, however, that Schopenhauer proposes a name for his worldview in the section of *Parerga and Paralipomena* titled “Some remarks on my own philosophy,” that supports the argument that his philosophy belongs under the umbrella of naturalism. He writes, “[o]ne could call my system an *immanent dogmatism*, for its theorems are indeed dogmatic, yet do not go beyond the world given in experience, rather they explain *what this world is* by analyzing it into its ultimate components” (Schopenhauer 2014: 119). Later in the same section, he compares his philosophy to traditional theism and pantheism, concluding that he offers something utterly distinct from both.

Theism also has the world proceed from a *will* and has the planets guided by a will in their orbits and a nature generated by it on their surface. It is just that theism naively shifts this will to the outside and lets it affect things only in a mediate way, that it, by having cognition and matter come in between, in the human manner, while with me the will acts not so much on the things as within them; indeed the things are nothing but the will’s very visibleness ... *Pantheism* calls the will that acts in things a God, the absurdity of which I have often and strongly reprimanded. I call it the *will to life*, because this expresses what can ultimately be known in it.

(Schopenhauer 2014: 121)

Two things should be clear at this point. First, Schopenhauer derives his metaphysical view from a wholly naturalistic foundation. He establishes an ultimate principle of reality that can be known through nature or, more specifically, our own bodies. Second, Schopenhauer’s discovery of this ultimate principle, the “will-to-life,” leaves him with a rather morose philosophical

worldview: The core of existence is a blind life force that presses on without regard for the extent to which living things suffer as a result.

“Religious ultimacy” in Schopenhauer’s naturalism

Thus far, I have developed an argument for why Schopenhauer’s philosophy should be included under the umbrella of philosophical naturalism, but I have said very little about why he might be counted among the philosophers whose thought represents a kind of historical antecedent to *religious* naturalism. In what follows, I will argue that evidence for this proposition can be found in Schopenhauer’s aesthetic theory and in particular upon a reconsideration of his concepts of aesthetic contemplation and the sublime. A careful examination of these central concepts of Schopenhauer’s philosophy reveals at least a resemblance to the kinds of “religiously ultimate” concepts that are central to the religious naturalism of Donald Crosby.² However, unlike Crosby’s religious naturalism, Schopenhauer’s philosophy does not imply the religious ultimacy of *nature itself* or, as Schopenhauer would say, the world given in experience. Rather, for Schopenhauer, nature itself can be seen as the necessary result of the objectification of the will. My position is therefore that religious ultimacy, if possible in Schopenhauer’s system, emerges as a mode of attunement to the world by which we can achieve metaphysical knowledge (enlightenment) and liberation from the constant demands and inevitable suffering that result from existing as an object among objects in the phenomenal world.

In Book Three of *World as Will and Presentation*, Schopenhauer offers a comprehensive account of his aesthetic theory, which follows directly from his theory of the will. A key element of his aesthetics is his distinction between aesthetic cognition and conceptual cognition. He proposes that aesthetic cognition is the unique way in which we can apprehend objects that reside within the realm of pure objectivization (i.e. Platonic Ideas), while conceptual cognition is how we come to know the manifold indirect objectivizations of the will (everything else). While Schopenhauer concedes in Book One that all cognition is subject to the laws of causality, he explains in Book Three that aesthetic cognition of Platonic Ideas is only constrained by the form of objectivization and *not* by space, time or causality. This is because Platonic Ideas are abstract concepts that exist outside of the confines of space, time, and causality. Conceptual cognition, on the other hand, is the mode by which we apprehend all things that inhabit the realm of space, time, and causality. Aesthetic cognition is closer to what might be considered an intuitive act of cognition, whereas multiple layers of representation mediate conceptual cognition.

Another sense in which Schopenhauer’s concept of aesthetic cognition is distinct from conceptual cognition is that it facilitates one’s detachment from the desires of the will. Although Schopenhauer suggests in *World as Will and Presentation* that cognition in general is always in “service of the will,” he allows for an exception with respect to aesthetic cognition (Schopenhauer 1974: 219). For example, in the case of conceptual knowledge, the cognizing subject views the body as objectified will, and therefore seeks to know things 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). For example, when I get out of the shower, I am aware that my feet are wet and will make the floor slippery when I step onto it. Therefore, I modify my posture to brace myself for this possibility. We are all familiar with this sort of existence in the world. A less trivial example would be someone who prepares for the loss of a loved one. Her attitude about the world, her interaction with her colleagues, her appetite for food and

her ability to simply enjoy life is hindered by her awareness of the impending threat to her relationship with this person. As existing things, Schopenhauer argues, we are rarely free from these kinds of concerns, however mundane or heartbreaking. Yet, through aesthetic cognition, we are able to temporarily free ourselves from these concerns, and we become focused on the Ideas instead. We move away from the pressures and pain that result from concern over our particular existence to contemplation of existence in general. The transition from conceptual cognition to aesthetic cognition is therefore an act of liberation. 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.

(Schopenhauer 1974: 221)

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.

At this point I want to pause and reflect on the ways in which Schopenhauer’s concept of aesthetic contemplation might be considered religious in any respect. As a guideline, I find it useful to employ Crosby’s six “role-functional” categories of religious objects, which include Uniqueness, Primacy, Pervasiveness, Rightness, Permanence, and Hiddenness. Together, they offer a set of criteria by which one might determine the religious ultimacy of an object. As Crosby explains, each one is “intended to identify an aspect of the distinctly religious function performed, or role played, by religious objects in the life of the religious person and in the cosmos as the religious person views it” (Crosby 2002: 118). By analyzing some of Schopenhauer’s philosophical concepts using these criteria, I am not suggesting that Crosby’s is the best or only way to determine whether an object has religious status. Rather, my aim is to reveal a strong resemblance between Schopenhauer’s ideas and those of a prominent contemporary religious naturalist in order to underscore my position that Schopenhauer’s philosophy is closely affiliated with religious naturalism as a school of thought.

It seems clear enough that Schopenhauer’s concept of aesthetic cognition satisfies three of Crosby’s six role-functional categories for religious ultimacy. These include Uniqueness, Primacy, and Hiddenness. As for Uniqueness, Schopenhauer’s position is unambiguous: aesthetic contemplation has the unique ability to enable contemplation of the Ideas. This is in direct contrast to the way in which we experience cognition of all other objects. Aesthetic cognition can be understood as satisfying the category of Primacy insofar as human beings strive to achieve aesthetic contemplation as a superior mode of attunement to the world, one that is not entirely veiled by phenomenal existence. Hiddenness, Crosby observes, “brings to mind the overpowering sense of mystery and awe” that we experience when we engage with the religious object (Crosby 2002: 120). When aesthetic contemplation is experienced, one comes face to face with the Platonic Ideas, which in their eternal nature defy reason and inspire wonder.

The categories of Pervasiveness, Rightness, and Permanence are less obviously present in aesthetic contemplation. With regard to Pervasiveness, Schopenhauer certainly does not claim

that all individuals can or will ever experience aesthetic contemplation. Although, I would argue that this speaks to its deep Hiddenness as a mode of attunement and does not necessarily suggest the property of exclusivity. Perhaps it is sufficient that aesthetic contemplation in theory exists as a possibility for all individuals. There is little to be said about the category of Permanence with regard to aesthetic contemplation. This largely stems from the fact that I am attempting to apply categories that were established as criteria for religious *objects* to aesthetic cognition, which is not really an object but rather a way of being in the world. Aesthetic contemplation, by definition, is impermanent. However, the Platonic Ideas, which become accessible through aesthetic contemplation, are indeed permanent and unchanging.

The final role-functional category proposed by Crosby is Rightness, which “makes explicit the valuative function of the religious object” and in so doing reveals the purpose of each individual’s life along with the broader purpose of human life itself as being both relevant to and at home in the world (Crosby 2002: 119). The distinction between the two aspects of the category of Rightness—the personal and the cosmic—is important when considering whether or not Schopenhauer’s concept of aesthetic contemplation functions in this way. Let’s consider the personal aspect of Rightness first. For Crosby, this is the aspect in which the religious object helps to facilitate personal development by defining “the goal of human existence, laying out a path of spiritual progress toward that goal” (Crosby 2002: 119). It is true that Schopenhauer strictly denies any kind of teleological view of human existence. The notion of “spiritual progress toward a goal” simply does not fit into his system. It would be inaccurate to suggest that Rightness, in this sense, could be ascribed to the experience of aesthetic contemplation. However, Crosby goes on to say that the religious object, in its Rightness, functions as the “most profound healing, transforming, saving force in the life of the religious person,” which more closely resembles the role that aesthetic contemplation plays in Schopenhauer’s system (Crosby 2002: 120). Aesthetic experience transforms our perspective and liberates us, albeit temporarily, from suffering. I would offer the following response to this: while the concept of aesthetic contemplation does not imply the possibility for spiritual growth, it leads to metaphysical knowledge and in so doing, also relieves us from the inevitable suffering of our existence. Aesthetic contemplation is therefore uniquely equipped to diminish the suffering of human existence, if not able to provide the framework for spiritual development. It can therefore be understood as a mode of attunement by which the value of human life is enhanced. Thus, there is a sense in which the personal aspect of Rightness can be seen in Schopenhauer’s concept of aesthetic contemplation, although it does not entirely match Crosby’s definition.

The cosmic aspect of Crosby’s role-functional category of Rightness inspires hope in the individual by, in Crosby’s words,

pointing to a goodness or fitness that the religious person regards as lying at the heart of the world. It means that human beings are not simply left to their own resources but reside in a universe that, due to cosmic Rightness (as well as Primacy) of the religious object, is in its depth responsive—not indifferent or inimical—to their yearnings and strivings for the triumph of the salvific ideal in themselves and the world.

(Crosby 2002: 120)

Here, it becomes increasingly difficult to find the resonance between cosmic Rightness and the role that aesthetic contemplation plays in Schopenhauer’s system. While aesthetic experience reveals certain truths to the individual subject, it does not suggest that a fundamental “goodness” or “fitness” lies at the core of things. Rather, it allows us to feel a familiarity—indeed, a kind of formal sameness—with the world, but not within a valuative construct.

Based on the above analysis, I would offer the following assessment: Schopenhauer's concept of aesthetic contemplation meets five of Crosby's six categories that are required in order for religious ultimacy to be established, Rightness being the sixth and not entirely satisfied category. Aesthetic contemplation, to a certain extent, carries out the personal aspect of the role-functional category of Rightness, but cosmic Rightness is not present in Schopenhauer's concept of aesthetic experience.

Schopenhauer's theory of aesthetic cognition is integrally tied to the aesthetic categories, namely the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful, for Schopenhauer, has primarily to do with the Platonic Ideas. The beautiful becomes manifest in objects when they *accommodate* the Ideas (Schopenhauer 1974: 246). For Schopenhauer, recognition of the Ideas in objects, i.e. aesthetic experience of the beautiful, transports consciousness into a state of "pure perception," thus freeing it from service of the will (Schopenhauer 1974: 246). On the subject of the sublime, Schopenhauer agrees with Kant that it has primarily to do with the confrontation of one's insignificance relative to the world or the whole of nature. For both philosophers, the *feeling* of the sublime is a precarious balance between the pleasure of peaceful detachment and the pain of a particularly threatening environment or situation. 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's view is that certain kinds of manifestations of will in nature evoke the feeling of the sublime in us more than others. He notes that whereas light or lightness can be correlated to the beautiful, darkness and emptiness are often characteristics of the sublime. Darkness and emptiness, he observes, 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 one feels alienated from one's surroundings. Schopenhauer alludes to this mood in the following passage, in which he suggests that one element of the feeling of the sublime can be the feeling of being 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 (Schopenhauer 1974: 250).

I will now return to Crosby's six role-functional categories for religious ultimacy and pose the following question: does Schopenhauer's concept of the sublime meet enough of Crosby's criteria for religious ultimacy so as to deem it a religiously ultimate mode of experience (while not exactly a religious *object* of engagement)? An affirmative answer would further support my position that Schopenhauer's perspective can be read as a kind of religious naturalism. Similar to my analysis of the concept of aesthetic contemplation, the sublime initially seems to satisfy some, if not all, of Crosby's categories for religious ultimacy.

I will begin with Pervasiveness, for that seems to be the most obvious one captured by the feeling of the sublime. While Schopenhauer cites specific examples in the passages above of types of experiences that can give way to the feeling of the sublime, he is also careful to say that the feeling of sublimity is applicable to any object of perception. Sublimity is not limited to particular things in nature, but instead is a mode of experience that can come about at any time, so long as the right cognitive conditions are met. Thus, sublimity is not exclusive to any one thing, and in this sense, it pervades all things. The feeling of the sublime is without a doubt uniquely equipped to evoke a paradoxical balance of pleasure and pain in the individual who experiences it. There is no other kind of experience that enables this special mix of humility and significance, fear and courage, or powerlessness and potency. In this sense, it can be understood as not only having the quality of Uniqueness, but also Primacy, at least in Schopenhauer's personal view, because he places the sublime above even the beautiful for its ability to facilitate our understanding of our paradoxical relation to the world as will. We are at once utterly dependent on the world as will and subject to the laws of causality—we could be annihilated at any moment—but, insofar as we are also in part the will in itself, we have an immediate connection to its magnitude. The Primacy of the feeling of the sublime is therefore evident in that through the sublime we intuit the fundamental fact that we are at once the source of the world and utterly dependent upon it. Furthermore, like aesthetic contemplation, the feeling of the sublime is both mysterious and rare and, ultimately, words fail to adequately describe it. Thus, it would be fair to say that the sublime fulfills the requirement of Crosby's category of Hiddenness.

The final two categories in Crosby's schematic are Rightness and Permanence. Again, as with my analysis of aesthetic contemplation, it is most difficult to find resonance with these in Schopenhauer's concept of the sublime, primarily because the sublime itself is not an object and therefore a consideration of its permanency (or lack thereof) is almost nonsensical. Furthermore, any stretch beyond this view would be a misconstrual of Schopenhauer's philosophy. It is also dubious that Rightness is applicable to the concept of the sublime, at least in the sense that Crosby defines it. While the feeling of the sublime, like aesthetic contemplation, reveals specific cognitive content to the individual, it does not promote any overarching purpose of human existence in the sense of "spiritual progress." There is a sense in which the experience of the sublime influences character development in Schopenhauer's philosophy that is similar to a kind of spiritual progress, but even this does not suggest that there is a kind of goodness in the world with which the individual ought to seek alignment. However, since Schopenhauer's philosophical perspective is just that: a *perspective* and not so much a robustly positive metaphysical view, I would suggest that one focus on the way in which the feeling of the sublime affects the individual's quality of existence.

Concluding remarks

While Schopenhauer's metaphysical outlook is somewhat grim, his philosophy expresses a passionate reverence for the character of the world, which is sometimes manifest in sheer terror, sometimes in ecstasy, and other times in peaceful detachment. Despite this erratic relationship to the world, Schopenhauer never resorts to total indifference, nor does he adopt a merely pragmatic attitude about things. Throughout his philosophical project, he is committed to "getting to the bottom of things," not in order to prove his system logically consistent or *right*, but rather out of an earnest desire to know and understand the meaning of the world and our place in it (Schopenhauer 2014: 120). That Schopenhauer characterizes the conditions of the world as largely hostile to existence does not make his worldview anti-religious. If the pursuit of ultimate truth coupled with the practice of cultivating meaningful experiences can broadly be construed as a kind of religious project, then a close examination of Schopenhauer's philosophy can, at least, be understood as having a religious flavor. Moreover, a generous reading of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory in relation to Crosby's concept of religious ultimacy provides a possible foundation for an interpretation of Schopenhauer's philosophy as not merely vaguely religious, but also as belonging to a school of religious naturalism that incorporates religious concepts without reliance upon theism of any sort.

Notes

- 1 Alternative translations of Schopenhauer'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).
- 2 See Crosby's *A Religion of Nature*, especially pages 159–170.

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