

# **Philosophy's Betrayal of Wagner to Schopenhauer**

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At the end of Victor Hugo's first book, "Hans of Iceland," the old and dispossessed Count Schumacker finds himself in a prison cell with Hans, a notorious and brutal murderer. Advancing toward him, Schumacker extends his hand and says, "Hans of Iceland, I like you because you hate mankind... I abhor men because they are false, ungrateful, cruel. I owe to them all the misery of my life." However, after Hans describes his true, thoroughly evil nature, Hugo describes Schumacker's reaction in the following way.

Pierced with shame, he hid his wrinkled face in his hands; for his eyes were full of tears of anger, not against mankind, but against himself. His great and noble heart began to revolt at the hatred he had so long cherished when he saw it reflected in Hans of Iceland's heart as in a fearful mirror.

"Well," said the monster with a sneer---"well, enemy of man, dare you boast your likeness to me?"

The old man shuddered. "Oh, God! Rather than hate mankind as you do, let me love them."<sup>1</sup>

When Wagner first read Schopenhauer, it was the equivalent of Schumacker extending his hand to Hans. The difference is that while Hans displayed a thorough hatred for man, Schopenhauer displayed a thorough hatred for existence. According to Schopenhauer "existence is certainly to be regarded as an error or mistake, to return from which is salvation."<sup>2</sup> As far as what should be done about this, he states "nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist."<sup>3</sup> After reading such sentiments, rather than imitating Schumacker and reversing his current ideological course, Wagner instead embraced Schopenhauer's hatred and pessimism as his long intended goal. As such, what began in Wagner as an

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Hugo, *Hans of Iceland*, (Amsterdam: Fredonia Books, 2001), 316-317.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 605.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

attempt to remedy within himself and society certain hated actions and desires resulted in the rejection of existence.

Wagner was very much an intellectual and continually looked to the philosophies of his time for understanding. Before reading Schopenhauer, Wagner was already familiar with Kant, Hegel, and Feuerbach. He was also part of an intellectual culture that buzzed with the current ideas in philosophy, and treated these ideas with a kind of seriousness and importance that is almost inconceivable in today's western culture. Additionally, since Wagner saw art as being capable of expressing these ideas in a dramatic and life-changing way, he was most interested to make sure that his art expressed the right ideas. To Wagner, individual lives and the future of civilization could be changed with a great art that communicates great ideas.

In this sense then, Schumacker's and Wagner's choices are not comparable. Schumacker, not being a 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual, was free in the story to recognize the anti-man mentality of Hans, feel revulsion, and reject it. Wagner, however, would never be able to reject Schopenhauer on his feelings alone (if he should happen to feel the same revulsion). Consciously rejecting Schopenhauer's philosophical arguments was the only means by which Wagner could ultimately decide that life is worthwhile and valuable in itself, that the universe is a generally benevolent place, and that individual happiness can and should be achieved. This conscious philosophical rejection would have been the only way he could compose the world's greatest life-affirming music. However, without becoming a groundbreaking philosopher himself, Wagner had no hope of achieving this. The possibility of Wagner rejecting Schopenhauer in a significant way was cut-off by philosophy.

The primary purposes of philosophy are to show the fundamental nature of reality, the means to knowing it, and the best way to act within it. By Wagner's and Schopenhauer's time, philosophy had concluded that reality as we see it is an illusion, man's conscious mind can say nothing about true reality, and that facts (if we could ever determine them) could tell us nothing about how we should live. The philosophers of the past few hundred years not only had no answer for Schopenhauer, their premises are what gave rise to the possibility of Schopenhauer. Philosophy, the field of study to help man understand and flourish within reality, became a field of study counseling Wagner to see flourishing as an impossibility and to choose oblivion instead.

The main development that led the history of philosophy and Wagner to Schopenhauer's pessimism was a distrust of, and attack upon, reason. It may seem an odd claim that the major philosophers during the times known as the "Enlightenment" and "The Age of Reason" are rejecters of reason since most of these philosophers claim to be staunch advocates of reason. However, reason as a method that identifies the world in which we live and breathe in a non-contradictory way in order to provide guidance in action, the reason of Aristotle and Aquinas, is not the reason leading up to Wagner. A quick survey of ideas from Descartes through Hegel will illustrate this point.

Descartes, often considered to be the father of modern philosophy, said that we can know objects through reason, but not through the senses.<sup>4</sup> In doing so he took all the evidence of the senses (seeing, smelling, touching, and hearing) outside the realm of understanding through reason. Thomas Hobbes, a contemporary of Descartes, thought that reason employed by an individual was unlikely to correspond to either the reasoned conclusions of another or the facts of reality. As such, he proposed that an all powerful

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<sup>4</sup> Rene Descartes, *Discourse on a Method and Meditations*, (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 112.

sovereign was necessary to arbitrarily declare not just what was lawful, but also what was true.<sup>5</sup> Later, David Hume declared that the perceptions in one's mind cannot possibly be related to any connection with an outside object. "The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning."<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant saw reason as our means of synthesizing data, but the synthesis includes features like causality, substance, and quantity, which do not exist in reality-in-itself.<sup>7</sup> The result, according to Kant, is a sharp distinction between the reality we experience and reason about (phenomenal reality) and reality as it is in itself (noumenal reality). Finally, while Hegel sees the universe as rational and thinks that truth can be attained through reason, he sees every truth as simultaneously partially true and partially false. So, while one can be assured of reason correctly identifying reality under Hegel's system, one can also be assured that the same identification will simultaneously be incorrect.<sup>8</sup>

The attack on reason by the philosophers above (and many others) may not have been purposeful, but their efforts to explain reason left it with less and less efficacy regarding an understandable identification of reality. Subsequent philosophers and intellectuals convinced by any of their arguments would naturally be inclined to look for methods other than reason to produce the answers they desired.

The idea of philosophy somehow betraying or letting down Wagner may also need explaining since analyses of Wagner's earlier works often lead to the conclusion that he was an unconscious Schopenhauerian long before he ever read Schopenhauer.<sup>9</sup> While it is

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<sup>5</sup> W.T. Jones, *Hobbes to Hume*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 136.

<sup>6</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 105.

<sup>7</sup> W.T. Jones, *Kant and the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), 50-51.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 109-113.

<sup>9</sup> Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord*, (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 128.

true that Wagner's Schopenhauerian metaphysical values often shine through in his earlier works, for Wagner these values were not fully conscious and explicit. Seeing these ideas exposed to the light of day in philosophical prose by Schopenhauer would have provided Wagner with an opportunity to reflect consciously on his metaphysical values. He would have then been able to consciously accept or reject these previously unconscious views on the benevolence of existence, the nature of the individual, and the possibility for achievement of values and happiness during life. This is an important opportunity because while much of his previous work does point to Schopenhauer's views on these matters, many elements in his work show that he was not yet completely in tune with Schopenhauer. If Wagner could have found philosophical backing for these elements that did not coincide with Schopenhauer, the greatest operas of all time could have also been the most life affirming and inspirational art of all time. It is in this respect that philosophy betrayed Wagner (and all future humanity). Not only did it prevent the possibility of great life-enhancing art, it helped create great life-denying art. "This sword, / which a traitor bestowed on the true; / this sword / that fails me when faced with a fight: / since it must fail on my foe, / I'll use it instead on a friend!"<sup>10</sup>

Wagner implies in *The Ring of the Nibelung* that different kinds of knowledge are at odds with one another and that conscious knowledge (i.e. reason) comes with a price. Wotan gives an eye for knowledge of the world, and without this eye he is left without knowledge of his inner self. According to Paul Heise, Alberich's forging of the ring is a metaphor for the birth of conscious human thought, which is done only by sacrificing

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Wagner, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, (New York, W.W. Norton, 1977), 121.

love.<sup>11</sup> Heise also points out that Wotan sees redemption as only attainable by renouncing conscious thought for the sake of subliminal knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Wagner does, however, imply that conscious knowledge is useful. Wotan's knowledge leading to the creation of the spear is portrayed positively in its ability to reduce the use of force to resolve disputes. This is illustrated when Wotan stops Donner from using force to resolve the dispute with the giants. "Stop, you wild one! / Nothing through force! / Contracts are guarded / by the shaft of my spear."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Wotan has conscious knowledge from Erda about the need to give back the ring to the Rhinemaidens, but simply refuses to act on it. In this sense his conscious knowledge holds a solution to his problems, but it is his lack of integrity that prevents its application. Finally, Wagner is not convincing in his treatment that Wotan does not have knowledge of his inner self. His display of inner torment in his scene with Brunnhilde at the end of *The Valkyrie* before he puts her to sleep, and Waltruate's description of Wotan's sadness in act 1, scene 3, of *Twilight of the Gods* imply a being who is not without inner knowledge, or at least conscious of his inner feelings.

Wagner also portrays Brunnhilde's conscious knowledge as necessary for Siegfried to undertake further heroic adventures. Just as important as it was for Siegfried to not have conscious knowledge, Brunnhilde must have it for him. Even for Siegfried conscious knowledge is important. In fact, Siegfried's troubles start when he loses consciousness of what little he knows after drinking the potion in *Twilight of the Gods*. Lastly, Loge, perhaps intended to be the embodiment of reason (Loge is the Greek vocative form of the word for reason), while presented as a master of cunning and deceit, he uses his cunning

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Heise, "Paul Heise's Interpretation of *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung*" Pamphlet , 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Magee, 116.

to successfully arbitrate the dispute between the gods and giants, and frees Alberich's enslaved Nibelungs. His original motives may not be especially virtuous, but the practical value of his cunning could easily be imagined to successfully achieve nobler intentions.

In short, Wagner didn't seem convinced that conscious knowledge necessarily leads to doom before his reading of Schopenhauer. However, in order for Wagner to find a justification of the compatibility of conscious and subconscious knowledge in philosophy, there would have to be an explanation showing that the subconscious is dependent upon the conscious. If philosophy could show that one's subconscious premises are taken from the world of experience, either as regulated by the individual's consciously focused mind, or (in as much as the person is not regulating his conscious mind) by some chance stimulus, then Wagner would have a justification and reason to celebrate conscious thought without reservation. He could then see the individual's application of reasoned conscious thought as a means instead of a barrier to knowledge of his inner self, subliminal knowledge, and love. It is interesting to note that there were people at the time that thought science would eventually be able to explain all such things. Philosophers were generally not part of this group.

Kant, in order to explain God, freedom, and immortality, found it necessary "to remove knowledge, in order to make room for belief."<sup>14</sup> This importance of belief rather than conscious knowledge being declared the method necessary to explain God, freedom, and immortality, rests on Kant's view that God, freedom, and immortality are found in the noumenal world. Since Kant's view is that only the noumenal world is true reality (reality as it is in itself) the knowledge produced by reason is confined to identifying the illusion of the phenomenal world. Part of Kant's aim was to give an account for certainty

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<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), xxxix.

and necessity for science, but his solution was to relegate science and reason to a world that is not real.

Descartes on the other hand believed that objective knowledge is possible; however, all such knowledge is dependent upon the sole knowledge of the true God, and without knowledge of Him it is not possible to perfectly know anything.<sup>15</sup> In both Kant and Descartes' case, any benefit reason and objective knowledge may bring is dependent upon belief and non-objective reality. Feuerbach's idea that religion does not identify an outside source, but rather reveals fundamental truths about our inner selves serves to then connect the dots for Wagner.<sup>16</sup> Kant and Descartes help show that true reality involves religion and is not knowable through science and objective knowledge, and Feuerbach shows that religion is a process that identifies our inner selves.

It is only left for Schopenhauer to show that Kant was right in seeing that true reality is not obtained by reason, and that Feuerbach discovered the key to true reality when he pointed out that Kant's methodology for determining true reality pointed to our inner selves and not a separate noumenal realm. Given these premises, it was logical for Wagner to conclude that our inner self both revealed true reality and was not accessible through reason. Conversely, reason and conscious thought revealed only illusion.

According to Schopenhauer, "Nothing stands between the animal and the external world; but between us and that world there are always our thoughts and ideas about it, and these often make us inaccessible to it, and it to us."<sup>17</sup> Schopenhauer then confirms Wagner's treatment of Siegfried and especially Siegfried's death. Siegfried is amazingly unaware for a hero ("amazingly stupid" according to Anna Russell) and his death is

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<sup>15</sup> Descartes, 149.

<sup>16</sup> Magee, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Schopenhauer, 61.

immediately preceded by his looking toward Wotan's ravens representing memory and thought. But it is this lack of conscious awareness (i.e. possession of a more animal-like orientation to reality) that is the essence of Siegfried the hero. According to Heise, "Siegfried could only sustain his role as an unconsciously inspired hero if he remained unconscious of his true identity and fate."<sup>18</sup> If Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal is correct, then Siegfried is only a hero in as much as he is unlike a man, and his assent to man's distinctive rational self awareness is the cause of his death. This makes sense in the Schopenhauerian system since any rational thought only provides a barrier to true reality. Hence Hagen's comment after killing Siegfried is apt if he is referring to Siegfried's rational awareness, "Falsehood is punished."<sup>19</sup>

In addition to conscious knowledge, Wagner portrays conscious values (especially love) as similarly coming with a price. In *The Valkyrie* Siegmund and Sieglinde's love for each other is no otherworldly desire, but a real "here and now" selfish desire and value. Siegmund's choice to risk death fighting in the name of his love instead of leaving Sieglinde for Valhalla shows that the selfish value he gives this love outweighs any other alternative. But this value, as well as the similar love between Brunnhilde and Siegfried, is portrayed as doomed in life by Wagner. Siegmund and Sieglinde are necessarily betrayed thanks to the clash of Wotan's contracts, and Siegfried and Brunnhilde are betrayed due to Siegfried's contract made under a potion.

However, Wagner does not make a good case for the price of both relationships (in these cases the price being betrayal and death) as being a necessary consequence of their being valued. In the case of Siegmund and Sieglinde, it is Wotan's betrayal that spells

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<sup>18</sup> Heise, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, 319.

their end and in this way Wagner is probably trying to show that contracts lead to problems of this sort. But Fricka is obviously mistaken when she complains to Wotan that the couple has broken Sieglinde's marriage contract with Hunding. The fact that Sieglinde was forced to marry Hunding contradicts the essential voluntary element that makes up the force of a contract. In the case of Siegfried and Brunnhilde, their doom is dependent upon Siegfried unknowingly ingesting a potion of forgetfulness, and then entering into a contract against what would have been his will if he were not under the potion. Interestingly, Wagner implies that love comes at the price of intuitive knowledge when Siegfried tells Hagen "Since women have sung their songs to me, / I've cared for the birdsong no more."<sup>20</sup> However, it could be that Wagner is linking this to Siegfried's potion induced love for Gutrune and not his truer love for Brunnhilde.

One senses that before his reading of Schopenhauer Wagner did not see this-worldly love as an evil thing. Indeed, the dramatic force of both pairs of lovers' doom in *The Ring of the Nibelung* is that they are portrayed as couples who *should* be able to sustain their values in life, but are tragically doomed to failure. It is as if Wagner would like to see that their happiness is possible, that they actually deserve happiness, but existence unfortunately won't allow it.

Here then is another opportunity for philosophy to give Wagner an opportunity to turn away from Schopenhauer by showing that values and love in life are possible. In a letter to Rockel, Wagner states that he had started to write *The Ring of the Nibelung* "at a time when, with my ideas, I had built up an optimistic world, on Hellenistic principles;

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<sup>20</sup> Wagner, 315.

believing that in order to realize such a world it was only necessary for men to wish it.”<sup>21</sup>  
 Unfortunately, philosophy would only push Wagner away from this Hellenistic optimism.

In an effort to be in tune with the new science, Benedict Spinoza saw all events and entities as necessary.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, he technically denied free will to man. Not being deterred by man having no free will he went on to prescribe an ethics nonetheless. He saw mankind as creatures in bondage to what they love and want. In trying to get security for the things they hold dear, they are in constant anxiety. They may shut and lock themselves in, but anxiety waits on the step, waiting for them to come out. Spinoza’s solution is to simply regulate the anxiety as best you can by realizing your hopelessness in attaining what you may want, but can’t have.<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Kant made an attempt to salvage free will, by regulating its source to the noumenal world (the real world). The faculty that is responsible for free will according to Kant is even referred to as reason. However, according to W.T. Jones Kant argues that the function of reason “cannot be the preservation of life or the acquisition of happiness, for both these functions could be better performed, as with insects, by instinct.”<sup>24</sup> So according to Kant, the will is free and its source is reason in the real world, but it is an end in itself and not a means to achieving value in the world of experience. Hegel’s system is no better at giving Wagner an explanation of how individual values can be attained in life. Hegel’s view of the individual merely being a cog in the Absolute’s inevitable march toward self-knowledge

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<sup>21</sup> Magee, 188.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, (New York: Hafner Publishers, 1949), 67.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, xxvii.

<sup>24</sup> W.T. Jones, 71.

implies an individual helplessness to fate no less than the norms weaving the fate of the drama in *Twilight of the Gods*.<sup>25</sup>

These and other philosophers offered nothing to bolster Wagner's previous self-described optimism. The ideas above instead justified Schopenhauer's comment that "the ancients... laboured in vain to prove that virtue is enough to make life happy; experience loudly cried out against this."<sup>26</sup> Philosophy had no explicit justification through reason that a value-driven flourishing life was at least possible and desirable. Instead, philosophy defaulted to the prescriptive ethics in Schopenhauer based on suffering and renunciation in the name of destroying the will, which Schopenhauer describes as simultaneously the drive to values and reality itself.

Therefore, whoever, by renouncing every accidental advantage, desires for himself no other lot than that of mankind in general, can no longer desire even this for any length of time. Clinging to life and its pleasures must now soon yield, and make way for a universal renunciation; consequently, there will come about the denial of the will.<sup>27</sup>

The result for Wagner is a change from a search to value and love in the world of experience to a focus on what Heise calls man's unhealing wound, or man's bid for transcendent value.<sup>28</sup> Wagner ultimately finds this value in a kind of love, but not in a love that is life-furthering in any way. Instead this love is a value precisely because its attainment prevents any other will to value-achievement. According to Tanner, in *Tristan and Isolde* "the experience of love at its most intense becomes an intuition that its fulfillment can only be found in a renunciation of the self, undertaken all the more

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>26</sup> Schopenhauer, 603.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 607.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Heise, "Introduction To The Wound That Will Never Heal" Pamphlet, 5.

willingly because the tortures of being a self are so intolerable.”<sup>29</sup> This experience is the result of the search for value outside the world of experience, which according to Isolde’s last words point to oblivion, “Unconscious, highest bliss!”<sup>30</sup>

As strange as values outside of living may sound, philosophy paves the way with a long history of artificially dividing reality into parts and ascribing some parts to be more real than others. Importantly, the everyday world of experience is almost always considered the reality that is somehow less real. This practice of dividing of reality into a more and less real part goes back in philosophy at least as far as Plato. In an effort to give both change and permanence their due, Plato posited an unchanging immaterial world of forms which was the true reality, and a corresponding ever-changing world of appearances which was considered a mere reflection of true reality. For essentially similar reasons Kant posited a real noumenal world which was unknowable, and an unreal phenomenal world which was the appearance of the noumenal world after it was distorted by the unconscious synthesizing mechanism in our minds. Feuerbach tries to give both religion and materialism their due by stating that religion doesn’t refer to an outside reality, but instead tells truths about man’s inner mind. By doing this Feuerbach merely paves the way to change one’s metaphysics from an other-worldly outer world to an other-worldly inner world. Thus Feuerbach in a way reinforces Hegel’s view that “spirit alone is reality.”<sup>31</sup> After being exposed to this context, Schopenhauer’s view that a single Will is alone reality and our everyday world of experience is merely how the Will appears, does not seem so strange.

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Tanner, *Wagner*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 152.

<sup>30</sup> Tanner, 150.

<sup>31</sup> Jones, 120.

An unconscious oblivion may seem like pure nothingness to the man on the street, but to Wagner this status had metaphysical import after reading Schopenhauer. Since the Will is simultaneously the cause of man's state of perfect discontent (since man can never be cured of willing for what he does not have), the Will, or existence itself, is evil. An existence of an evil, however, implies that there is some kind of alternative existence that is good (or at least, not evil). So, non-existence becomes the good, and since something being good usually refers to some *thing* being good, non-existence achieves a positive metaphysical standing. Schopenhauer and his predecessors in this way set the stage for Wagner treating unconsciousness and oblivion as some *thing* that can be blissful.

Bryan Magee states that, according to Nietzsche "Schopenhauer's view of music had been the hook that attached Wagner and drew him in to the rest of the philosophy."<sup>32</sup> It should be no surprise that music would be the hook to Schopenhauer considering Wagner's view of the prominence and power of music and art. Magee rightly points out that Wagner thought "the role of art was to confront people with the deepest inner truths about themselves and their society, thereby enabling them to achieve a deeper self-understanding and social understanding."<sup>33</sup> Ultimately Wagner would agree with Schopenhauer that due to the non-representational nature of music, it must be an expression of true reality (i.e. the metaphysical Will).

Music as a direct expression of the Will naturally forbids it from being governed by conscious thought. Paul Heise also points out in his Feuerbachian interpretation that Wagner seized on the non-conceptual (i.e. non-conscious) nature of art. "Art, in which the power of conceptual thought and its contradictions is suppressed in favor of feeling,

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<sup>32</sup> Magee, 176.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 177.

music, the language of the heart, which is non-conceptual and therefore free from the debate between religion and science over truth and falsehood.”<sup>34</sup> However, before Wagner read Schopenhauer (and even after) he was all concerned to be consciously aware of what it was he was presenting with his art. He seemed to constantly be in a process of trying to consciously understand the meaning in his art, and to consciously create his art according to his conscious convictions. This seems to imply that Wagner considered either the quality of the art, the content of the art, or both, are affected in a fundamental way by the conscious convictions of the artist. That much of art’s production is done through the artist’s unconscious and expresses the artist’s unconscious convictions and sense of life is not especially controversial. The trouble is finding out how this is done and where the artists unconscious convictions come from. If Wagner could have had an explanation in the history of philosophy of how the conscious and unconscious convictions of the artist affect one another in the creation of art without reference to an alternate consciously unknowable reality, perhaps Schopenhauer’s hook would not have taken hold.

Once again, philosophy was no help. Since the process of the creation of a work of art cannot usually be explained in recipe form by the artist, Kant’s explanation of the artist’s ability is that it is not consciously learned, but rather an “innate mental predisposition.”<sup>35</sup> Probably more damaging was Kant’s influential view of the experience of the beautiful. He saw the experience of pure beauty in man as being universal because it is not conceptual. The process of experiencing beauty is an act of cognition which involves the interplay of the imaginative and understanding features of man’s unconscious

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<sup>34</sup> Heise, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 174.

synthesizing mechanism, but without any representative concept. For Kant, the experience of beauty becomes a non-conceptual mental state that we all share because we all share the same conceptual hardware.<sup>36</sup>

The non-conceptual idea of music was kept from Kant, but Kant's rather meaningless mental state that one is supposed to be in while experiencing beauty is switched out for a direct tie to true reality by Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's view of music would naturally be more attractive to Wagner due to its important epistemological role. Wagner thought music was a means to teach important truths to people, and Schopenhauer responds by saying that music is the only means by which people can know true reality. A philosopher giving a similar importance to art, but declaring that art is primarily fuel for living, valuing, and achieving happiness in life was not available to Wagner.

According to Bryan Magee, "Without Schopenhauer the creation of *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal* is unthinkable."<sup>37</sup> These operas are deservedly considered masterpieces, but before thanking Schopenhauer, it is important to ask, if not *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*, then what? Surely Wagner would have still written operas if he had not found Schopenhauer. Better yet, he surely would have written operas if he would have found and rejected Schopenhauer. What would have been written if Aristotle's injunction that art expressed life as it could and should be were interpreted by Wagner to celebrate man's ability to achieve values (in spite of his occasional failures) live and flourish? What would *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal* have been if the surety and musical genius of a Wagner had been accompanied by the sense of life of a Beethoven? Until philosophy

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Magee, 193.

provides answers to the questions Wagner and other artists struggle with, the world may never know.

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