

NIETZSCHE'S
PHILOSOPHY OF
RELIGION

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Introduction

In his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche presents the tragic art of fourth-century Greece as a religious festival which gathered the community together as community in the presence of its divinities. And he further argues that without a religion which both unites a culture and provides answers to the fundamental existential questions faced by all individuals, society decays. So, he concludes, the hope for a redemption of modernity from the decadence – the dis-integration – into which it has fallen, lies in the rebirth of Greek tragedy promised by Richard Wagner’s projected Bayreuth Festival.

Two features distinguish this early thinking. First, it is *communitarian* thinking in the sense that the highest object of its concern is the flourishing of the community as a whole. And second, it is *religious* thinking in that it holds that without a festive, communal religion, a community – or, as Nietzsche frequently calls it, a ‘people’ – cannot flourish, indeed cannot properly be said to *be* a community.

This book originated in the question: what happened to this early religious communitarianism in Nietzsche’s later works? What happened to Nietzsche’s ‘Wagnerianism’?

In 1876 two people departed, as if in panic, midway through the first Bayreuth Festival. One was poor, ‘mad’ King Ludwig, Wagner’s patron, and the other was Friedrich Nietzsche. After his flight, Nietzsche turned from being Wagner’s ardent disciple to being his most virulent critic. But what was it that he rejected? Was it just the *music*, or did he also reject the *ideal* he had once taken the music to fulfil? Did he abandon his view of the relation between community and religion, or did he perhaps abandon his concern for community?

Realising I had no answer to these questions I undertook a systematic rereading of the texts for a graduate seminar at Auckland in the first semester of 2004. The – to me, at least – initially startling answer that emerged is

that Nietzsche in fact *never* abandoned his religious communitarianism. To the end – such is the argument of this book – Nietzsche's fundamental concern, his highest value, lies with the flourishing of community,¹ and to the end he believes that this can happen only through the flourishing of communal religion.

In two ways, this reading runs counter to nearly all Anglophone interpretations of Nietzsche. First, while most conclude from his scathing assaults on established religions in general and on Christianity in particular, as well as from the naturalistic tenor of his later thought, that Nietzsche was, *quite obviously*, an 'atheist',² I hold that he *never* was. Though atheistic with respect to the *Christian* God, Nietzsche, I hold, ought to be regarded as a religious *reformer* rather than an enemy of religion. Second, while most readings take Nietzsche to be an 'individual-individualistic' philosopher I take his concern to lie, first and foremost, with community.

Let me be more specific on this point. There are, it seems to me, at least two ways in which Nietzsche might be regarded as an 'individualist'. The first sees him as focused exclusively on individual psychic 'health'. On this view, like, in their various ways, Freud, Pilates (of Pilates callisthenics) or Atkins (of the Atkins diet), Nietzsche has nothing to say about communal life (save, perhaps, that psychic health requires a few, challenging friends), has nothing to say about it for the reason that it is just 'not his department'. This is the view set forth in Walter Kaufmann's enormously influential *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950) according to which 'the leitmotiv of Nietzsche's life and thought [was] the theme of the antipolitical individual who seeks self-perfection far from the modern

¹ It needs to be made clear that there is no *incompatibility* between this highest value and the flourishing of individuals, the reason being that, according to the kind of communitarianism I shall attribute to Nietzsche, the flourishing of individuals *presupposes* the flourishing of community. In greater detail, what Nietzsche holds, I shall suggest, is that individuals only truly flourish, *when their own highest commitment is to the flourishing of the community as a whole*, when, that is, their highest personal goal is the communal good. (This kind of communitarianism is, I suspect, what Lee Kuan Yew intended to affirm when he claimed that Asians have 'little doubt that a society with communitarian values where the interests of society take precedence over that of the individual suits them better than the individualism of America'.) It might be suggested that what follows from this is that Nietzsche's highest value actually turns out to be the flourishing of *individuals*, his point being merely that they can do this only by standing in a certain relation to community. But that would have the peculiar consequence of excluding *Nietzsche himself* from flourishing. The fact of the matter is, as we shall see, that Nietzsche is not a disengaged observer commenting on how individuals best flourish, but a thoroughly engaged individual who himself has community (in fact world-community) as his highest goal.

² See for example, Leiter (2002) p. 266, Wicks (2002) p. 75.

world' (p. 418). More recently it has found a celebrated embodiment in Alexander Nehamas' *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985). Concerned, as Nehamas is, to present Nietzsche's literary construction of himself as an exemplary model of self-creation (and hence of 'health'), it is revealing to note that such collectivist notions as 'politics', 'culture' and even 'society' achieve not a single entry in his index.

A second way in which Nietzsche is interpreted as an 'individualist' – an 'elitist' or 'aristocratic' individualist – admits, unlike the first, that Nietzsche is crucially concerned with culture, with 'cultural greatness'. But it reduces this to individualism by reading him as holding that cultural greatness consists, not in some characteristic of society as a whole, but simply in the existence of a few 'excellent persons' or 'higher types' such as Beethoven or Goethe.³ The proper role for the rest of society (which, if left to its own devices, is likely to prove a serious impediment to the appearance of such individuals) is simply to configure itself as a support-system for the production of these *übermenschlich* types.

This second version of the individualist reading is certainly more plausible than the first since it at least avoids suppressing Nietzsche's concern for 'culture', an unmistakable feature of the texts. But it is the aim of this book to argue that it is none the less mistaken. Though the 'higher types' are of unmistakably central importance to Nietzsche, the 'aristocratic individualist' reading, in my view, gets things precisely round the wrong way. On my reading, it is not the case that the social totality is valued for the sake of the higher types. Rather, the higher types are valued for the sake of the social totality.

Much of the recent attention paid to Nietzsche within the Anglophone world has treated him as a stimulating new contributor to discussions

³ Leiter (2002) pp. 206, 233, 299, 302. (Beethoven is actually a somewhat problematic example here, since Nietzsche often criticises him for being a 'romantic' (WP 106, 838, 842).) Another proponent of this reading is Keith Ansell-Pearson. Nietzsche, he asserts in his introduction to the Cambridge translation of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, is not a 'liberal' but an 'aristocratic individualist'. Nietzsche is committed to 'the "enhancement" of man' but this has nothing to do with the condition of the majority but only 'with the production of a few, striking, superlatively vital "highest exemplars" of the human species' (GM pp. ix–x). A further subscriber to the aristocratic individualist interpretation is Bruce Detweiler, who writes (sourly and, as we shall see, quite implausibly) that Nietzsche has 'an uncommon inability to affirm the life of this world except in those rare instances where its embodiments approach perfection' (Detweiler (1990) p. 194). The final subscriber to this interpretation I shall mention – one who gives it a political twist – is Frederick Appel, who holds that Nietzsche's concern is exclusively 'for the flourishing of those few whom he considers exemplary of the human species' and has as his highest aim 'a new, aristocratic political order in Europe in which the herdlike majority . . . are . . . under the control of a self-absorbed master caste whose only concern is for the cultivation of its own excellence' (Appel (1999) pp. 1–2).

within analytic moral philosophy. Hence his alleged 'elitism' has been taken to be a fundamental, and perhaps 'immoral', challenge to foundational assumptions concerning the equality of all persons before the moral law. Though this approach is legitimate up to a point, it tends, through decontextualisation, to disguise Nietzsche's central concerns.

For the fact is, of course, that Nietzsche is not a recent arrival on the Anglophone moral-philosophy scene. (*Zur Genealogie der Moral* is *not* an anonymous text, written in English, that washed up one day on a North American beach.) Rather, Nietzsche is a late nineteenth-century *German* thinker whose preoccupations were those of late nineteenth-century German thinkers. Specifically, the root of Nietzsche's thinking lies in the dismay that afflicted him, along with a great many other German thinkers, at the effects of modernisation, in particular of industrialisation, that took place in Germany during the nineteenth century. The starting-point of Nietzsche's thinking, that is to say, is 'cultural criticism', a sustained and still-relevant critique of the cultural world of industrial modernity.

The crucial fact about Nietzsche's critique of modernity is that it issues from the standpoint of the conservative, past-oriented right rather than from that of the socialist, future-oriented left. This places Nietzsche in proximity to the so-called 'Volkish'⁴ tradition in German thinking.

As I shall discuss in some detail in the Epilogue, Volkish thinking grew out of the response of romanticism to the Enlightenment in general and to the birth of its offspring, industrialised modernity, in particular. Receiving an initial impetus from romantic thinkers such as Herder, Hölderlin, Novalis, Schelling and Fichte, early figures of importance in the Volkish movement proper were Nietzsche's near contemporaries Heinrich Riehl, Paul de Lagarde and, crucially, Richard Wagner. Nietzsche's friends Franz Overbeck and Heinrich von Stein also thought along Volkish lines.

Volkish thinkers were appalled by the alienated, materialistic, mechanistic, secular, urban, creepingly democratic, mass culture of modernity which they saw as the product of Enlightenment rationalism. In the quest for a more spiritual, less alienated society they looked to an idealised

⁴ From '*Volk*', meaning 'people' or 'folk'. The term is coined in George Mosse's classic study of the tradition (Mosse (1964)). Its nearest German equivalent is '*völkisch*'. In today's German, however, this term has come to be a near synonym for 'Nazi'. Since Mosse's interest as an historian is in showing how Nazism *grew out of* the Volkish tradition he evidently does not want it to be true by definition that Volkish thinkers are Nazis. The term is therefore, in some degree, a term of art.

image of the pre-Enlightenment past. What they found in that past was the spiritual unity of a Volk.

A Volk was conceived as a quasi-personal entity with a particular 'will', 'mission' or 'destiny'. It was thought of as prior to the state: as the vehicle of the Volk, the state's laws are justified to, but only to, the extent they reflect the ethos of the Volk. And it was thought of as prior to the individual: as an organic totality, its well-being takes precedence over – or, better put, constitutes – the well-being of individuals, so that the meaning and highest value of individual lives lie in their contribution to the well-being of the whole. As the First World War approached, Volkish thinkers were thus disposed to contrast Germany as a nation of '*Helden* (heroes)' with England – which they saw as epitomising the degeneracy of atomised, materialistic modernity – as a nation of '*Händler* (traders)'. As an organism such as the human body is made up of different organs, some subservient to others, so Volkish thinkers wished to preserve social differences, more specifically social hierarchy. Many saw the medieval estates as a social ideal.

Nietzsche's proximity to the Volkish tradition, in his later as much as his early work, is something I shall be concerned to argue at length in the later chapters of this book. An initial clue as to this proximity, however, I shall mention now: the interesting linguistic fact that though Nietzsche has, for reasons I shall investigate in some detail, a number of highly abusive terms for social collectivities – '*Pöbel* (mob or rabble)', '*Gesinde* (mob or rabble)' and to a lesser degree '*Herde* (herd)' – there is *nowhere* in the published works where he uses '*Volk*' (in the sense of ethnic unity) except as a term of utmost respect.

As the Volkish movement progressed many of its adherents became viciously nationalistic, militaristic and anti-Semitic. A great many (conspicuously Martin Heidegger) became Nazis. And a great deal of the vocabulary of Nazism – '*Volksgemeinschaft*', '*Volksgenossenschaft*', '*Volkskörper*', '*Volk-in-seinem-Staat*' and so on – was drawn from the Volkish tradition.

An unavoidable consequence of my reading is, therefore, to reraise the hoary suspicion that Nietzsche stands in too close a relation to Nazism, that those Nazi Nietzsche-scholars like Ernst Bertram and Alfred Bäumler who appropriated Nietzsche to the Nazi cause understood him, in fact, all too correctly. Fortunately, however, as I shall argue in the Epilogue, though there is a genuine and significant overlap between Nietzsche and the Volkish tradition, at the same time deeply

embedded aspects of his thinking make it, in reality, a radical opponent of Nazism.

By no means all who, in the 1920s and 1930s, thought in Volkish ways became Nazis. Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger and Stefan George did not. And, moreover, many Volkish thinkers who had initially supported Hitler became appalled when it became clear just *what* they had supported. I have argued elsewhere that Martin Heidegger falls, in the end, into this category.⁵ A clearer and less controversial case is Claus von Stauffenberg, a member of Stefan George's 'Circle' of disciples, who was hanged for trying to assassinate Hitler in July 1944. There is, I think, a moral to be drawn in the case both of Nietzsche's philosophy and of von Stauffenberg's heroism, a moral I shall be concerned to substantiate by the end of this book: there is no *essential* connexion between Volkish thinking as such and Nazism, no essential connexion, that is to say, between German communitarianism on the one hand and nationalism or fascism or totalitarianism or anti-Semitism on the other.

A word about the focus of this work. The most salient aspect of Nietzsche's thinking about religion is, of course, his critique of Christianity: of its metaphysics, but more particularly of its morality. Yet Nietzsche also holds that 'only as creators can we destroy' (GS 58), that, for the genuine philosopher, critique must always be a prelude to construction. Since Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality has been discussed in countless works, I shall attend to it only peripherally, only in so far as it is necessary to understanding his *constructive* thinking about religion. My focus is on the positive rather than the destructive aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy of religion.

Finally, some words about methodology. In my *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (1992) I read through all the Nietzsche texts in chronological order, attending specifically to what each had to say about art. I propose to do the same here, attending, this time, to what they have to say about community and religion. For several reasons, I take this chronological approach to be good 'philological' practice. First, because it is how Nietzsche reads himself (in *Ecce Homo* in particular). Second, because the discovery of what are, as we shall see, surprisingly strong continuities in his thinking enables one to interpret with confidence passages that are unclear or whose meaning is in dispute. Induction, that is to say, is a

⁵ Young (1997).

useful philological tool: if on many occasions Nietzsche clearly affirms X then on the unclear occasion one can infer with some confidence that he probably means X. A third and connected reason for favouring the chronological approach is that it strongly discourages the ‘ink-blot’ technique of interpretation – picking a single text, or part of a text, or a fragment of an unpublished note, and projecting onto it one’s most (or least) favourite philosophy.⁶ A final reason in favour of the comprehensively chronological approach is that it is fascinating: to watch the birth, growth and refinement of a great thinker’s thought is, to my mind, much more exciting than receiving the finished product in one neatly packaged lump. And, as Hegel points out, living with the development of a philosophy enables one to understand it better.

As in *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art*, my focus is strongly on the works Nietzsche himself chose to publish; I dip only very discretely into the *Nachlass* (which includes that portion collected by his sister and published as *The Will to Power*). Nietzsche wanted the *Nachlass* destroyed at his death – understandably since it contains a great deal of weak material. As he says of Beethoven, a glance into his notebooks reveals that real artistry consists not in sudden and perfect inspiration but in the production of a great deal of material, most of it of indifferent quality, so that what is really important is a high work rate together with good critical taste (HH I 155). Nietzsche exercised his critical taste in deciding what, and what not, to publish.

Finally, again as in *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Art*, I devote my first chapter to Arthur Schopenhauer, and centrally to a work called ‘On Man’s Need for Metaphysics’. Since Nietzsche calls Schopenhauer his ‘first and only educator’ (HH II Preface 1) and refers continually to ‘the metaphysical need’, Schopenhauer’s views on religion can be guaranteed to provide an important background to the development of his own views.

6 Steven Aschheim’s fascinating account of Nietzsche’s German legacy after 1890 (Aschheim (1992)) shows how, using the ink-blot technique, just about *everyone* – Nazis, Zionists, Volkists, socialists, communists, feminists, nudists, eroticists, vegetarians, dancers, Protestants, Catholics, deconstructionists, and so on – discovered Nietzsche to have pronounced precisely *their* message.

CHAPTER I

Schopenhauer and 'Man's Need for Metaphysics'

Nietzsche describes Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), which he discovered in a second-hand book shop in Leipzig in 1869, as a book written especially for him (UM III 2). *The Birth of Tragedy* he describes as written 'in his [Schopenhauer's] spirit and to his honour' (BT 5). Even after his break with decadent 'romanticism' represented, as he saw it, by both Schopenhauer and Wagner, he continued to regard the former, his 'first and only educator', as both a 'great thinker' and a great human being (HH II Preface 1). Even in the middle of attacking everything Schopenhauer stands for, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche still pauses to call him 'a genuine *philosopher* . . . a man and a knight with a brazen countenance who has the courage to be himself, knows how to stand alone and does not wait for the men in front and a nod from on high' (GM III 5).

In this chapter I shall very briefly sketch Schopenhauer's general philosophy, acquaintance with which is necessary, *inter alia*, to understanding the development of Nietzsche's metaphysics, before turning to what Schopenhauer has to say specifically about religion.

IDEALISM AND PESSIMISM

The basis of all Schopenhauer's thinking is, as he understands it, Kantian idealism. The everyday world of space and time, a product of the way in which the human mind processes the raw material it has received from external reality, is, he holds, mere 'appearance' or 'representation', in the final analysis a 'dream'. Beyond it lies 'noumenal' or 'intelligible' reality, the 'thing in itself'. Kant held that the thing in itself was unknowable by us and, some of the time, Schopenhauer agrees with this. One thing, however, he is quite certain we do know about it: that it is 'beyond plurality', in some sense 'One'. This is because individuality, and hence plurality, is dependent on space and time which together constitute the

'*principium individuationis*'. But these, as Kant proved, are nothing but 'forms' which the mind imposes on experience – as it were, irremovable, tinted glasses through which it perceives the world – and are not features of reality in itself. So plurality is merely 'ideal' and reality in some sense 'One'.

The other important idea in Schopenhauer's general philosophy is 'the will to life'. Sometimes, particularly in the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation*, he seems, while claiming to be a good Kantian, also to want to deny that the thing in itself is unknowable. On the contrary, he seems to want to say, the thing in itself is the will to life. In later editions, however, recognising the contradictory nature of his earlier position, he withdraws the will to the appearance side of the appearance/reality dichotomy. 'Will' provides a deeper account of the world than is provided either by everyday experience or by science, but it still does not get to the absolute heart of things.¹

Whatever its exact metaphysical status, will is the human essence. Unless something very extraordinary happens – so extraordinary that it can be described as a transcendence of human nature – we are incapable (save when asleep, and sometimes not even then) of not willing, incapable of inaction. And this means that life is, on balance, a miserable affair. For if the will is unsatisfied then we suffer. Hunger for example is the unsatisfied will to eat. But if the will is satisfied we suffer something even worse: boredom, a state in which the essential vanity and futility of life become inescapably present to us.² Schopenhauer's solution to the problem – somewhat reminiscent of Stoicism – is asceticism, 'denial of the will', the cessation of willing, which implies, in the end, of course, death.

RELIGION

It is against this background of pessimism that Schopenhauer expounds his mainly sympathetic account of religion. This occurs principally in chapter 17 of the second volume of his great work, a chapter entitled 'On Man's Need for Metaphysics'. That Nietzsche refers constantly to 'the metaphysical need' (in HH I 26 he actually places the phrase in quotation marks) shows the importance of this chapter as a background to understanding his own philosophy of religion.

¹ For a detailed discussion of these matters see Young (2005) chapter 4.

² This is almost a parody of an argument which in fact contains, as Iris Murdoch puts it, a 'depth of humane wisdom'. For a detailed discussion see Young (2005) chapter 8.

Another reason, however, for prefacing my discussion of Nietzsche's philosophy of religion with a discussion of 'On Man's Need' is that Schopenhauer's account of what it is that constitutes the essence of religion is, in my view, in broad outline, *correct*. The chapter is, in fact, one of the great classics of philosophy, not only in style and wit but in insight into its subject matter. If I am right about its essential correctness it follows that the chapter provides us with a standard for assessing whether there is anything in Nietzsche's positive thinking that counts as genuinely *religious* thinking.

Schopenhauer asks us to be amazed – as if we were alien historians, surveying earth from a distant galaxy – at all 'the temples and churches, pagodas and mosques, in all countries and ages, in their splendour and spaciousness' (WR II p. 162). Why should such buildings be so universal and so dominant? What on earth could be their function?

His answer is that religion is 'popular metaphysics', that it is an expression *in sensu allegorico* of what philosophy or metaphysics proper expresses in *sensu stricto et proprio* for the benefit of that 'great majority of people who are not capable of thinking but only of believing, and are susceptible not to arguments, but only to authority'. It is, in other words, metaphysics for 'children' rather than for 'adults'. By 'metaphysics', Schopenhauer explains, he means the attempt at knowledge of that which is 'beyond nature or the given phenomenal appearance of things, in order to give information about that by which, in some sense or other, this nature is conditioned, or in popular language, about that which is hidden behind nature and renders nature possible'; about, in other words, the thing in itself (WR II pp. 162–6). 'Metaphysics', then, whether popular or strict, whether for intellectual 'children' or for 'adults', is the study of the supra-natural. But why should this be of such universal interest?

Because, Schopenhauer answers (sounding like Heidegger), unlike the non-human animals, the human being, at a certain point in its growth to adulthood, ceases to take itself 'as a matter of course' and instead 'asks itself what it is. And its wonder is the more serious, as here, for the first time, it stands consciously face to face with *death*' (WR II p. 160). Only human beings, that is, are condemned to live in the light of mortality, in the light of that 'dark . . . nothingness' which we must one day become and which (here Schopenhauer plagiarises Francis Bacon's famous simile) 'we fear as children fear darkness' (WR I p. 411).

Schopenhauer takes it, then, that the need for a 'solution' to the 'riddle' of death, some kind of denial of its finality, is an inescapable part of the human condition.³ From which it follows that it is the promise of immortality rather than the existence of gods that constitutes the true heart of any fully fledged religion. Usually, of course, gods and immortality go together. But were they to be shown to be somehow incompatible, men 'would soon sacrifice the gods to their own immortality and be eager for atheism'. (In a witty parody of scholastic metaphysics, Schopenhauer even suggests an argument for their incompatibility: immortality, the argument might run, presupposes 'originality'. But this would be incompatible with God's status as the first cause (WR II p. 161).)

So dealing with death is the first, and most essential, function of any authentic religion. Historically speaking, he suggests, it is usually only the most primitive societies that lack a religion in this sense. Judaism and (Graeco-Roman) 'paganism' he regards as failed religions since they lack a properly developed doctrine of immortality. This is the reason they were supplanted by or absorbed into Christianity (WR II p. 170). Schopenhauer adds that finding a 'consolation' for, an 'antidote' to, the certainty of death is also the principal task of philosophy. As Socrates remarks in the *Phaedo*, at bottom, authentic philosophy is a 'preparation for death' (WR II p. 463).

As observed, Schopenhauer is a pessimist. Happiness – that brief pause between the two forms of suffering – is the exception, suffering the rule of life. It follows that the second aspect of 'the unfathomable and ever-disquieting riddle of life' (WR II p. 171) is pain. Its dominating presence threatens us with 'nausea' and 'despair', something from which we desperately need 'redemption' (WR II p. 170). This constitutes the second major function of any properly developed religion. Over and above the 'physical', that is to say, we need to believe in a 'metaphysical' domain, the character of which will reconcile us to at least the *grand* narrative

3 He would therefore have been entirely unsurprised at Jacques Derrida's confession to *Le Monde* during the final days of his last illness that 'I have not yet learnt to accept death', given Derrida's earlier remark that 'learning to live should also mean learning to die, taking into account and accepting the absolute nature of mortality with neither resurrection nor redemption' (quoted in an obituary for Derrida in the *Jerusalem Post* of 10 October 2004). *Of course*, Schopenhauer would say, Derrida could not accept death since the conditions he sets up for doing so – accepting the 'absolute' nature of mortality yet facing death without fear – are impossible for human beings to fulfil.

of our existence by reducing the painful part to but a brief chapter. Again, Schopenhauer thinks of Judaism and 'paganism' as, in this respect, inadequate religions.

The third essential function a religion is required to fulfil concerns society as a whole rather than the existential predicament of the individual. A religion provides social cohesion, creates community, by supporting morality.⁴ There are two aspects to this.

First, it provides 'sanctions' for moral injunctions. Without sanctions, morality has neither sense nor force. The idea of a 'categorical' imperative is, Schopenhauer believes, a conceptual absurdity. Instilling moral rules and embedding them in a framework of sanctions is, he observes, a major part of childhood training.

The second aspect is that of showing what morality is. Religions have the essential function of providing 'a guiding star for . . . [people's] actions, as the public standard of integrity and virtue' (WR II p. 167). Obviously, the exemplary status of the life of, for instance, Jesus and the saints is an important part of what Schopenhauer has in mind here.

The final feature Schopenhauer sees as essential to any religion is *mystery*. Part of the reason for the allegorical nature of religious language – as opposed to the literalness aimed at by philosophy – is, as we have seen, that the latter would be beyond the comprehension of the uneducated masses. But part of the reason that religion needs mysteries, even contradictions, is to show that it is dealing with an order of things so profound as inevitably to distort the language that tries to talk about it. So, for example, Augustine's and Luther's mysteries are greatly to be preferred to the 'trite and dull comprehensibility' of Pelagianism. This, Schopenhauer observes, is what Tertullian was getting at when he wrote 'It is thoroughly credible because it is absurd . . . it is certain because it is impossible' (WR II pp. 166–7). In a word, Schopenhauer is against the 'demythologising' of religion – a theme which, as we will see, reappears in Nietzsche's critique of David Strauss in the first of the *Untimely Meditations*.

What Schopenhauer is really getting at, here, is – as Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor observes – that, unlike temporal power, religion needs mystery to provide it with authority. Mystery creates authority by utilising our awe before the unknown.

4 Emile Durkheim defines religion *solely* in terms of the use of the sacred to create 'one single moral community' (Durkheim (1995) p. 47). This failure to recognise the essential role played by the task of overcoming death in all world-religions makes his account inferior, I think, to Schopenhauer's.

In sum then, according to Schopenhauer's paradigm, a religion is something with four central and interconnected features: it provides a 'solution' to the problem of death, a solution to the problem of pain, an exposition and sanctioning of the morality of the community of believers, and, finally, it is pervaded by a sense of mystery. I want to turn now to Nietzsche, and to the question of the degree to which we can discover this same paradigm in his thinking about religion.