

Subjectivity and Irreligion

Atheism and Agnosticism in Kant,
Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

Matthew Alun Ray

SUBJECTIVITY AND IRRELIGION

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

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

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

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

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Abbreviations

Works by Kant

- CJ *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951)
CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T.K. Abbott (New York: Prometheus, 1996)
CPR *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973)
Gr *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans H.J. Paton (London: Routledge, 1989)
LPT *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. A. Wood (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978)
P *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that can Qualify as a Science*, trans. P. Carus (Chicago: Open Court, 1994)
Rel *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T.M. Green and H.H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960)

Works by Schopenhauer

- BM *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965)
FW *On the Freedom of the Will*, trans. K. Kolenda (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985)
FFR *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Open Court, 1995)
PP I *Parerga and Paralipomena*, 2 vols, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) vol. 1
PP II *Parerga and Paralipomena*, 2 vols, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) vol. 2
W I *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) vol. 1
W II *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) vol. 2
WN *On the Will in Nature*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Berg, 1992)

Works by Nietzsche

- BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990)
BT *The Birth of Tragedy/The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. F. Golffing (New York: Anchor, 1957)

- D *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: University Press, 1985)
 EH *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)
 GS *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974)
 GM *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. C. Diethelme (Cambridge: University Press, 1994)
 HATH *Human, all too Human*, trans. M. Faber and S. Lehman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994)
 TI/AC *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)
 UM *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: University Press, 1991)
 WP *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968)
 Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

All citations to the writings on this and the previous pages will appear in the main text. All references are to page numbers except where preceded by §, which indicates a section number. As is customary, references to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* give the pagination of both the first (A) and the second (B) editions.

Chapter 1

Apologia

Man shows remarkable powers of mind and reason in the satisfaction of his aims, even though they may be unnecessary, or even dangerous and harmful; and those powers are evidence of the blessings he enjoys in his natural powers which enable him to discover, to learn, and to practice those arts. Think of the wonderful inventions of clothing and building, the astounding achievements of human industry! Think of man's progress in agriculture and navigation; of the variety, in conception and accomplishment, man has shown in pottery, in sculpture, in painting; the marvels in theatrical spectacles . . . Finally, the wit shown by philosophers and heretics in defending their very errors and falsehoods is something which beggars imagination! It must be remembered that we are now speaking of the natural abilities of the human mind, the chief ornament of this mortal life.

St Augustine, *City of God*

I Historical Background and Scope

Generations of humanists, historical materialists, psychoanalysts, feminists and (more recently) sociobiologists have all seemingly immeasurably cheapened the concerns of religion in modern times. Inspired, it appears, to free us from the supposed constraints of dogma, their results have more often than not never really engaged with religious concerns themselves (such interests are automatically screened off) but only their political or social effects: liberating us to enter a politically charged world only to now discover it framed within an existentially incomprehensible universe. It is arguable that, in the terms of the history of modern philosophy, the birth of this tendency has been most obviously observable in the influence – though not necessarily the substance – of Immanuel Kant's thought.

Kant's construal of the relationship between humanity and divinity is more complex and less assured than that to be found in the work of most of those of his major modern predecessors concerned with the same kind of questions in philosophy. Although René Descartes at least seemed to break with the medieval scholastic tradition in the *Meditations* when he consciously detached philosophy from theological postulates and from a scriptural base (preferring instead the autonomy of reason as authenticated by methodological doubt), the theistic conclusion of the initially sceptical *Meditations*, reached by means of an ontological argument for God and also a very specific kind of causal argument, turned out not only to be a venerable ontological conclusion largely in keeping with the previous scholastic framework but also an epistemological guarantee of truth; a divine guarantee that now made God central to what was no longer considered to be a religious philosophy and left the atheist – at least on one particular construal of