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Schopenhauer and religion: Translating myth into metaphysics

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The article assesses Arthur Schopenhauer's reinterpretation of religious myths, particularly those of Christianity, in terms of his philosophical system, and applies his ideas to the mythical cosmology of shamanistic and animistic religions. Schopenhauer, a 19th-century Romantic philosopher, although an atheist himself, took religious myths very seriously, translating them into the terms of his metaphysical system. His view was that Roman Catholicism, for him the true form of Christianity, shared the pessimism and the focus on suffering of Hinduism and Buddhism, rather than the alleged optimism of Protestantism, Judaism and Islam, excepting the myth of the Fall. For Schopenhauer, this pessimism was evident in the central symbol of Christianity, the figure of the crucified Christ. Schopenhauer put forward his ethic of compassion (and asceticism), aligning him, despite his atheism, with the altruistic ethics of the major world religions. The article also explores the extent to which Schopenhauer's philosophy as, arguably, a form of panpsychism can be applied to shamanistic and animistic religions. While Schopenhauer translated religious myths into his metaphysical terms – based ultimately on Kant's distinction between phenomena (things as they appear) and noumena (things as they are) – his understanding of the noumenon as the universal will to life was itself an explanatory myth for an essentially unknowable reality. Therefore, the attempt of Schopenhauer's philosophy to translate myth into metaphysics in turn contained a myth at its very core. Nonetheless, the article argues that Schopenhauer's argument may satisfy those dissatisfied with materialism's shortcomings yet not willing to subscribe to a supernatural order.

Contribution: The article applies to shamanism and animism the neglected philosopher Schopenhauer's method of interpreting religious myths in terms of his metaphysical system, relating this very briefly to current philosophical debates on panpsychism.

Keywords: Schopenhauer; religion; metaphysics; myth; Christianity; shamanism; animism; panpsychism.

Introduction

Arthur Schopenhauer is one of the most neglected philosophers in the Western tradition, despite his profound influence on key thinkers like Nietzsche, Freud and Wittgenstein and on a host of artists, writers and musicians, most notably Wagner. The philosopher Bryan Magee's (1983) *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* was a rare voice arguing for the significance of this philosopher. Recently, however, there has been a renewed interest in Schopenhauer's work, and several collections of essays have been published, namely *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (ed. Janaway 2006), *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook* (ed. Shapshay 2017) and *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer* (ed. Wicks 2020), to mention just a few. As Shapshay (ed. 2017:3) points out in her introduction to *The Palgrave Schopenhauer Handbook*, special issues have been dedicated to his work in the *European Journal of Philosophy* (eds. Janaway & Neill 2008) and the *Kantian Review* (ed. Aquila 2012). These include several contributions to Schopenhauer's ideas on religion, although no one has applied Schopenhauer's ideas to shamanistic and animistic religions. This article assesses Schopenhauer's translation of central Judaic and Christian myths into the terms of his philosophy and asks to what degree his system can be fruitfully applied to the myths of shamanistic and animistic religions, with special reference to the mythical cosmology of Southern African San religions. Although the proposed 'translation' of religious terms into metaphysical terms may seem reductive, the article aimed to see what new light Schopenhauer's system may cast on forms of religious experience, as well as how his reinterpretation completes Bultmann's (1996) demythologisation of religious (cosmological) myth, problematised by Aldwinckle (1996) in the introduction to Segal's (ed. 1996) *Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Myth*.

Schopenhauer was the first openly atheist Western philosopher and the first Western philosopher to engage deeply and seriously with the Eastern religions of Hinduism (which he called Brahmanism) and Buddhism. Despite his professed atheism, Schopenhauer took religion seriously as answering humanity's metaphysical need for meaning, and his ethics remained Christian, both ideas which Nietzsche criticised as residuals of Christianity, as Janaway (2020:280–281) points out. Nonetheless, Schopenhauer believed that all 'true' religions were pessimistic and shared an ethic of compassion. He considered the differences in myths and rituals between religions as superficial, mere clothing or allegories, concealing deeper metaphysical and ethical truths. According to Schopenhauer's pessimistic interpretation of Roman Catholic Christianity, this form of Christianity has clear affinities with the apparent pessimism of Hinduism and Buddhism. He rejected the rationalism and optimism that, he alleged, Protestantism shares with Judaism and Islam, with the exception of the myth of the Fall. Indeed, Schopenhauer believed that the important difference between religions is not whether they are monotheistic, atheistic, pantheistic or polytheistic but whether they are pessimistic or optimistic (Janaway 2017:348).

This article evaluates Schopenhauer's assertions about pessimism and optimism in religions and evaluates his reductive approach, that is, reducing myth to metaphysics, asking what can be gained from such an approach. It also investigates religions involving shamanism and animism that preceded the major world religions to see if Schopenhauer's philosophy can fruitfully be applied to these religions too. Finally, the article considers Schopenhauer's philosophy as a possibly preferable theory to materialism with which to approach religious and spiritual belief, relating his ideas to the tradition of panpsychism, arguably a philosophical form of animism and a contender to the materialism presupposed by modern science.

In terms of this article, myth is distinguished from legend, fable, folklore, story, fiction and narrative. If myth is considered a story, it is a particularly enduring and profound one concerned with the nature of the world and humanity's place in the world, usually but not necessarily involving God or gods. In this sense, the Bible has only a few myths (ed. Segal 2021:23). The Old Testament concerns those of Creation (of the cosmos), the creation of humans in the Garden of Eden, the Fall, Cain and Abel and the Flood. The New Testament involves the myth of Redemption and the Apocalypse. In San religions, the major myth concerns the creation of the world and the distinction between primal time and everyday experience. In addition, most religious mythical systems tend to share the belief in a three-tiered cosmos: this world of everyday experience (or empirical world), a spirit world above, and a spirit world below.

Modern materialist science recognises only the empirical or material world and dismisses the belief in a supernatural order or spiritual world. This materialism can be so hostile to spirituality that some cognitive neuroscientists, as Chalmers (2010:41), an important proponent of panpsychism, points out, attempt to reduce consciousness to brain states or deny consciousness any reality whatsoever. Panpsychism is the 'theory that holds that the world is made more comprehensible on the assumption that every object is invested with a soul or mind' (Flew 1979:261). This article explores whether Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism is not perhaps more amenable as an approach to spiritual beliefs, because it takes consciousness seriously and considers it to be a fundamental constituent of reality. Cartwright (2010:441–452, 2020) discusses Schopenhauer's interest in paranormal phenomena, but this is beyond the scope of this article. Nor did Schopenhauer oppose his metaphysics to the material sciences but rather saw his system as venturing where the physical sciences cannot go, limited as they are to explaining the phenomenal or empirical world. As Taylor (1964:370) points out, '… Schopenhauer's theory purports to be a metaphysical explanation of certain phenomena and not an etiological law connecting phenomena with each other'. Furthermore, as Janaway (2017:347) observes, 'For Schopenhauer, it is only metaphysics, and not science, that can provide the meaning of the world that humanity needs to seek'. An explanation of the metaphysical basis of Schopenhauer's system follows.

Basis of Schopenhauer's epistemology and metaphysics

True to transcendental idealism, Schopenhauer consistently applied the principle 'No subject without an object; no object without a subject'. By this he insisted on the mutual interdependence of minds and things. There are no 'pure' material objects but always objects as perceived by a subject. Although opposed to materialism as a theory of objects but no subjects, Schopenhauer's (1969:100) philosophy presupposes no supernatural order and is based solidly on one's body, which, for him, is objectified will. Schopenhauer takes Kant's distinction between the noumenal world (things as they are) and the phenomenal world (things as they appear) as the point of departure of his system. However, he departs from Kant, who argued that the will is rational and who believed that the noumenal world (which is unknowable) contains plurality. For Schopenhauer, plurality (of objects) applies not to the noumenal world but only to the phenomenal world, which presupposes the object–subject distinction, and in which objects are differentiated in the subject's consciousness according to time, space and causality (the *principium individuationis*). These basic categories of thought and the concepts that human minds form using language and abstraction, what Schopenhauer (1969:6, 51, 53, 431) called judgement, apply only to the phenomenal world, all concepts ultimately being abstractions of perceptions. Perceptual knowledge applies to humans' bodies as publicly viewable objects (outer sense), a form of knowledge Schopenhauer (1969:20–21, 1974:71) called understanding and which he believed all animals possess.

However, Schopenhauer (1969:100), in contrast to Kant, believed in addition that humans also preconceptually and

intuitively know their own bodies uniquely as will (inner sense). If the author raises his hand in company, he and everyone else see it as an object but only he knows it, in addition, as being willed by him. Schopenhauer (1969:110) concludes that what applies to one's own body must apply to every other body, which means that will is the essence of everything and not just living things. Therefore, reality consists of the undifferentiated, universal will, which is what he understood the (necessarily singular) noumenon to be and which is how the term is used in this article. This may seem to be a conception of deity. However, according to Schopenhauer (1969), the universal will is neither conscious nor rational; indeed, it is a blind striving or will to life, with no greater purpose:

> The will, considered purely in itself, is devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind irresistible urge, as we see it appear in inorganic and vegetable nature and in their laws, and also in the vegetative part of our own life. (p. 275)

Furthermore, life is purposeless and consists of countless beings competing among each other to survive, a *bellum omnium*:

> This world is the battle-ground of tormented and agonized beings who continue to exist only by each devouring the other. Therefore, every beast of prey in it is the living grave of thousands of others, and its self-maintenance is a chain of torturing deaths. (Schopenhauer 1966:581)

Schopenhauer's pessimism lies not only in his bleak view of life, but also in his belief that the intellect is slave to the will (thereby pre-empting Freud) and that language and reason are servants to the will's needs and desires. For Schopenhauer, being born is a fall into sinful existence for which one has to pay with one's life, enduring suffering that only ends with death. Therefore, the best path is to deny the will to life. Despite this pessimism, Schopenhauer does consider the possibility of hope and salvation in three circumstances: the disinterested contemplation of art (Schopenhauer 1969:233, 267), acts of compassion (Schopenhauer 1969:374, 379) and intellectual reflection (Schopenhauer 1969:383, 404). This article first considers Schopenhauer's reinterpretation of Christianity in terms of his metaphysical system, before going on to apply his ideas to shamanistic and animistic religions.

Schopenhauer's reinterpretation of Christianity

Schopenhauer (1966:628) believed that the pessimistic truth at the heart of all 'true' religions required mythical clothing, because 'all that can be thought only generally and in the abstract is quite inaccessible to the great majority of people'. Schopenhauer's pessimism, and his association of this with the 'true' religions, is very clear when he writes in Volume 2 of *The World as Will and Representation* that people expect to be happy and, when happiness is invariably denied them, feel as though they are victims of a great injustice. However, according to Schopenhauer (1966):

> [*I*]f man is regarded as a being whose existence is a punishment and an atonement, then he is already seen in a more correct light. The myth of the Fall of man …, is the only thing in the Old Testament to which I can conceive a metaphysical, although only allegorical truth; indeed it is this alone that reconciles me with the Old Testament. (p. 580)

He continues:

> [*I*]t is far more correct to regard work, privation, misery, and suffering, crowned by death, as the aim and object of our life (as is done by Brahmanism and Buddhism, and also by genuine Christianity), since it is these that lead to the denial of the will-to-live. In the New Testament, the world is presented as a vale of tears, life as a process of purification, and the symbol of Christianity is an instrument of torture. (Schopenhauer 1966:584)

His main evidence for the optimism of Judaism is its assumption of a monotheistic God, who, on creating the world in the opening verses of Genesis, declares that it is good. However, the myth of Cain and Abel, which narrates the fratricide on which agricultural civilisation is built, represented by the murder of the hunter Abel by his cultivator brother Cain, is arguably pessimistic too, although it can be seen as an allegory of an anthropological rather than a metaphysical truth. The myth of Noah also seems quite pessimistic, considering that God felt it necessary to destroy his creation because of the wickedness of people. In fact, even after the waters of the Flood have subsided and God allows Noah, after sacrificing animals to him, to reclaim the Earth, God states that 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth' (Gn 8.21). This is an essentially pessimistic comment on human nature, although God goes on to bless Noah and his sons, exhorting them twice to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gn 9), precisely what Schopenhauer disapproved.

For Schopenhauer (1969), sexual procreation is the strongest desire and the gravest sin of humans, as it is the strongest affirmation of the will to life, perpetuating the cycle of birth, suffering and death:

> Here is the profound reason for the shame connected to the business of procreation. This view is mythically expressed in the dogma of the Christian teaching that we all share the sin of Adam (which is obviously only the satisfaction of sexual passion), and through it are guilty of suffering and death. (p. 328)

He reinterprets the myth of Adam's Fall in terms of his metaphysical and ethical system:

> According to this, religious teaching regards every individual, on the one hand, as identical with Adam, with the representative of the affirmation of life, and to this extent fallen into sin (original sin), suffering and death. On the other hand, knowledge of the Idea also shows it every individual as identical with the Saviour, with the representative of the denial of the will-to-live, and to this extent as partaking of his self-sacrifice, redeemed by his merit, and rescued from the bonds of sin and death. (Schopenhauer 1969:329)

Again:

> The sexual impulse is proved to be the decided and strongest affirmation of life by the fact that for man in the natural state, as for the animal, it is his life's final end and highest goal. Self-preservation and maintenance are his first aim, and as soon as he has provided for that, he aims only at the propagation of the race; as a merely natural being, he cannot aspire to anything more. (Schopenhauer 1969:329)

He specifically reinterprets the doctrines of nature and grace, sin and salvation in terms of his metaphysical system:

> Considering not the individuals according to the principle of sufficient reason, the Idea of man in its unity, the Christian teaching symbolizes *nature*, the *affirmation of the will-to-live*, in *Adam*. His sin bequeathed to us, in other words, our unity with him in the Idea, which manifests itself in time through the bond of generation, causes us all to partake of suffering and eternal death. On the other hand, the Christian teaching symbolizes *grace*, the *denial of the will*, *salvation*, in the God become man. (Schopenhauer 1969:405; italics in the original)

Of course, this reinterpretation of grace seems perverse, because Christianity's promise of an eternal afterlife becomes an eternal nothingness after death. Elaborating further, Schopenhauer (1969) writes that:

> The doctrine of original sin (affirmation of the will) and of salvation (denial of the will) is really the great truth which constitutes the kernel of Christianity, while the rest is in the main only clothing and covering, or something accessory. (p. 405)

Again, referring to the myth of the Fall, which he strangely describes as the Christian myth, and arguing that the moral virtues serve the further end of denial of the will, Schopenhauer (1966) writes:

> In the Christian myth, this step is expressed by the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and with this moral responsibility appears simultaneously with original sin. This original sin itself is in fact the affirmation of the will-to-live; on the other hand, the denial of this will, in consequence of the dawning of better knowledge, is salvation. (p. 608)

Schopenhauer (1966:605) asserts that 'nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist'. Indeed, this makes sense of Freud's death drive, defined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as '*a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state*' (Freud 2003:77, italics in original), in which he (Freud 2003:89) acknowledges Schopenhauer. This is also evident in the following quotation:

> Awakened to life out of the night of unconsciousness, the will finds itself as an individual in an endless and boundless world, among innumerable individuals, all striving, suffering, and erring; and as if through a troubled dream, it hurries back to the old unconsciousness. (Schopenhauer 1966:573)

Janaway (2017:352–354, 2020:353–355) has questioned the legitimacy of Schopenhauer's use of theological terms such as grace to justify his metaphysical system, when the thrust of Schopenhauer's argument was to explain religious beliefs in terms of his metaphysics. Janaway also points out the incompatibility of two sets of ethics in Schopenhauer – the ascetic, world-denying ethic and the ethics of compassion. In fact, this tension is evident even in Buddhism in the different approaches of the asceticism of Theravada Buddhism and the practical compassion of Mahayana Buddhism (Smart 1969:135–136). Nonetheless, Janaway's first criticism can be taken further, because while Schopenhauer reduces religious myth to his metaphysical system, he cannot avoid resorting to myth when trying to characterise the noumenon, as it is, strictly speaking, unrepresentable in literal terms. In fact, Schopenhauer does acknowledge this difficulty, and Magee (1983:140–144) discusses some alternatives he could have chosen when trying to characterise the noumenon, all of them necessarily being inadequate, although some of them perhaps preferable to 'will'.

Offering a solution to this problem, Shapshay (2020) cites Welchman (2017) who discerns two senses of 'metaphysics' in Schopenhauer, namely a transcendental one following Kant's *synthetic a priori* and a transcendent one being his metaphysics of the will. The latter departs radically from Kant's transcendental idealism, because Kant argued that the noumenal world was unknowable. According to Shapshay (2020), Schopenhauer's identification of the noumenon with will:

> [S]hould be understood as metonymic, and the *second sense of metaphysics* at work in his system should be understood as *hermeneutic*. That is, he is not giving a transcendent metaphysical doctrine so much as an immanent 'interpretation' of the inner meaning of the world – along the lines of the interpretation of the meaning of a work of art. (p. 112, italics in original)

It is questionable that even 'true' Christianity is as pessimistic as Schopenhauer portrays it, because it allows moments of grace. Nor is Judaism quite as optimistic as he saw it, because the Torah contains many stories of war, destruction, murder, rape, adultery and greed. Nonetheless, his philosophy has a basic plausibility and evades the problem of theodicy with which people who subscribe to 'optimistic' religions are saddled. In his system, there is no need to attempt to justify natural and man-made catastrophes as part of a divine plan. In fact, humanity is also decentred in his philosophy, being just one more form of life trying to survive in an indifferent universe. This also seems to apply to shamanistic and animistic religions, to which this article now turns.

Schopenhauer applied to shamanism and animism

In *Cave Paintings and the Human Spirit: The Origin of Creativity and Belief*, Whitley (2009) compares the concept of grace to the concept of supernatural potency that shamans, ritual specialists of hunter-gatherer societies, sought to obtain in forays into the spirit world during trance states:

> [S]upernatural power was considered the ultimate causative agent in the universe. But power itself was ambivalent and, in this crucial sense, it differs markedly from potentially related Judeo-Christian concepts, such as 'grace' (which we might use

for comparative understanding. Although we think of a state of grace as a kind of enhanced spiritual condition, there is (by that fact) a positive value judgment attached to it. A state of grace is, in our minds, an intrinsically beneficial condition. Shamanistic power has no such implications. (p. 180)

Whitley goes on to compare this power to nuclear energy that can be used either for good or for evil. Indeed, shamans used supernatural potency to heal or to harm. Whitley (2009) discusses his Native American colleague's description of this potency as a 'fierce power':

[*H*]is emphasis on the former fierceness of supernatural power underscored what I also understood about the shamanistic worldview and the shaman's place in it. Partly like our culture, traditional shamanistic cultures conceptualized life as a kind of struggle between good and evil. (p. 181)

However, unlike modern Western cultures, shamanistic ones saw no inevitable triumph of good over evil: 'Life, and especially the shaman's place in it, was always a balance between the dark and the light, death and life, hope and despair, and success and ruin' (Whitley 2009:181). Furthermore:

The shaman's worldview was marked then by an inherent understanding of uncertainty along with an acknowledgment, perhaps a mature (maybe even a wise) resignation, that things simply are the way that they are … There is … a constant and continuous uncertainty held partly in check, hopefully by the shaman. (Whitley 2009:182)

This description of shamanistic cultures, particularly Whitley's use of the word 'resignation', aligns with Schopenhauer's pessimism. Indeed, it also accords with his reinterpretation of Christian grace, because even for Schopenhauer (1969:610), grace was a momentary occurrence, and there was no permanent salvation except the nothingness that follows death, which precludes the continuation of individual consciousness after death. According to Whitley (2009:179–195), this understanding of potency as a fierce power also questions Mircea Eliade's understanding of the ecstasy experienced by shamans, which was frightening and painful rather than euphoric or ecstatic.

Whitley (2009:197) problematises the search for the origin of religious beliefs, acknowledging two main approaches, namely that of archaeologists who try to locate this moment in history and that of evolutionary psychologists, who locate it in humans' evolutionary make-up and consider the search for a historical origin to be a pointless endeavour. Whitley takes both approaches seriously. According to him (2009:205), following evolutionary psychology (and departing from Tylor's dream theory), humans' hyper-alert perceptual states as a prey species led them to create an imagined world of spirits based on the mechanism of minimally counterintuitive concepts. Altered states of consciousness fed into this mechanism:

Trance was critical to the emergence of religious practice not because it necessarily resulted in transcendence or promoted religiosity (reverence for the divine) but because it activated, and explained, the ethereal half reality created by our perception.

Shamans used trance to call the primordial spirits from this half reality, spirits whose existence was perceived by all humans in daily experience. (Whitley 2009:210)

This predisposition to believe in spirits is therefore hard-wired both in human perception and cognition. However, the author argues that something is missing in this grounding of spiritual belief in conscious states, as well-founded as this account might be. Following Schopenhauer's ideas, the author seeks to consider the origin of religious belief not simply in consciousness but in volition. After all, notions of power and potency are related to volition rather than cognition. Following Schopenhauer's strict distinction between will and representation, the author argues that the idea of spiritual force or supernatural power is an extension of one's intuitive understanding of volition in relation to one's own body. Furthermore, for Schopenhauer (1969:101), pain and affect are part of will, not perception and conception. However, both cognition and volition are necessary to explain a shamanistic worldview. The article turns now to consider the myth structure of Southern African San religions in relation to the three-tiered cosmology and dual notion of time common to most religions.

What applies to shamanistic religions applies to Southern African San religions too, which are part of nomadic, hunter-gatherer cultures. Pessimism is a feature of shamanism. While the myths tell of temporary resolutions of crises, there is never final salvation. Instead, all beings are involved in perpetual conflict. As an initial epistemological observation, in the 1830s the San informant of the missionaries Arbousset and Daumas said of the god /Kaggen that: 'one does not see him with the eyes, but knows him with the heart' (Lewis-Williams 2004:207). This can be compared to Schopenhauer's inner and outer sense, that is, perceptual versus intuitive knowledge, or knowledge of the phenomenal world ('one does not see him with the eyes') versus intuitive understanding of the will to life ('knows him with the heart').

Concerning the cosmological basis of San mythology, Guenther (1999), an anthropologist specialising in Southern African San peoples, writes that:

Bushman cosmology posits two orders of existence, a primal one and the present order, which succeeded the First Order and, according to some account, reversed it … Because the Second Order is both a continuation and an inversion of the First Order, the mythological past and primal time pervade the historical present and contemporary reality. This confounding of past and present, and myth and reality, confers on the present order and abiding aura of ambiguity. (p. 66)

Schopenhauer's metaphysics can help to understand this temporal ambiguity, because in his system, the categories of time, space and causality apply to the phenomenal world, analogous to the Second Order of Existence, but not to the noumenal, analogous to the First Order of Existence. The phenomenological world is considered illusory in Schopenhauer's system. In a sense, the noumenal world

'precedes' the phenomenal, in that all the multifarious objects of the phenomenal world are individual manifestations of the single reality of the noumenon. Therefore, the eternal noumenal reality manifests itself in the transitory events of the phenomenal world. Guenther (1999) continues:

> It was in the First Order, however, that ambiguity reigned supreme. Beings and states were in flux and boundaries were fluid; moreover flaws attached to everything, rendering things of the First Order incomplete and inchoate. The primal humans and animal-humans behaved 'without customs,' violating in particular the norms and laws to eating, sharing, marriage, proper kin relations, and menarcheal proscriptions. … in many of these moral transgressions the trickster had a hand; as the First Order's most prominent citizen, he roamed its landscape in many guises, well suited, by his ambiguous nature, to its unformed makeup. (p. 66)

The chaotic nature of the First Order of Existence resides in the unknowability of the noumenal world, which is amoral, 'without customs' and, as the will to life, the ultimate and indifferent source of all existence and existing things. Schopenhauer (1969:114, 118, 312) described the noumenal reality as blind, a description that also accords with San conceptions of the First Order of Existence. Of course, the First Order does contain mythical human and human–animal (therianthropic) beings, because it is impossible otherwise to describe the noumenal reality, but the confusion of animals with humans is typical of its primordial nature. If anything, the First Race, when animals were people and people were animals, suggests that the noumenon is a general, undifferentiated animating force. The 'impersonal force' that Guenther (1999) describes in the following extract also suggests the noumenal will to life:

> Another transgressor, in /Xam folklore, was the 'first maiden,' whose violation of menarcheal taboos was especially dangerous, as it was likely to incur the wrath, in /Xam mythology, of the ineffable and ambiguous rain-, thunder-, and lightening-divinity [*sic*] !Khwa, an impersonal force that sometimes manifested itself in mist or a whirlwind, and that was associated with certain animals, especially reptiles. (p. 66)

Guenther (2017, 2020a, b) has recently argued that South African anthropologists and archaeologists should take heed of the Southern American New Animist paradigm, because South Africans have tended to focus on the San as rational, practical hunter-gatherers and emphasised their material culture, ignoring their supposedly irrational spiritual beliefs, myths and rituals. Yet without taking the San's spiritual beliefs into account, only a very partial understanding of their culture can be obtained. Guenther describes New Animism as 'relational ontology' involving radical ontological flux, best exemplified in the trance and transformation of San myth and ritual. Animism entails the belief in (animal) spirits and a spirit world that intersects with the world of everyday experience. Guenther (2020b:6) cautions against investing New Animism with new baggage even as it sheds 'the Old Animisms baggage – of racism, evolutionism, Cartesianism, neglect of the indigenous perspective', seeing the strength of the New Animism as 'a

new and novel concern with hunter-gatherer cosmology and ontology (including hunting) from a relational, phenomenological, as well as a posthumanist perspective' (2020b:6) that takes seriously 'the indigenous perspective'.

The work of Lewis-Williams, a Marxist and materialist archaeologist who makes use of cognitive neuroscience to explain prehistoric rock art and myth, maps the three-tiered cosmos to a spectrum of consciousness, the alert state associated with everyday waking life, and altered states of consciousness associated with shamans' forays into the spirit world above or below. The spirit world is therefore reduced to altered states of consciousness, although in the context of religious rituals, like the trance dance and communal myths. Indeed, mythical time is identified with the First Order of Existence of Primal Time: 'One of the best-known San beliefs concerns a mythic time, long before the present – perhaps one should say a time outside of time' (2004:164). According to Lewis-Williams (2004:109), shamans visited the spirit world to obtain spiritual potency for various purposes, including healing, rainmaking, protection from evil spirits and assistance with the hunt. This is expressed in many of the myths by what Lewis-Williams calls 'punctuated normality'. The myths mostly concern humanised animals that can talk and that behave in humanlike ways. The myths often depict talking animals engaged in everyday activities common to San life, involving social conflict leading to a crisis, followed by a sudden otherworldly event, typically a trance-induced foray into the spirit world. The trance dance is therefore often used to resolve social conflict. Indeed, Lewis-Williams shows how many San myths and images, presumably produced by shamans, involve aspects of the trance dance in metaphorical and metonymic forms. By invoking the findings of cognitive neuroscience to understand San myths, Lewis-Williams thereby continues Bultmann's demythologisation of religious myths, in this case those of the San.

However, the author argues that Schopenhauer's metaphysics are needed for a complete demythologisation. The author also argues that while the three-tiered cosmos requires the theoretical underpinnings of the spectrum of consciousness, the idea of potency depends on will. For beneath the phenomena of consciousness and altered states of consciousness is the deeper, less accessible level of the will, the workings of which are mostly unconscious. This suggests that 'potency' is an imaginatively extended form of willpower or volition. In fact, Nietzsche's will to power becomes relevant here, as do notions of political power and performativity.

Setting aside the political for now, certain aspects of San belief can be reduced to Schopenhauer's metaphysics. For one, the Creator god, who is the source of all life, can be seen as a personification of the noumenon, and the trickster deity, namely Kaggen, the phenomenal world, or, better, the *principium individuationis* or principle of sufficient reason (the view that for every fact there is a reason). Similar to the Hindu goddess Maya, whom Schopenhauer (1969:8, 17, 153,

274, 284, 352, 365, 379, 397) often mentions, the trickster god is an embodiment or personification of the phenomenal world, the illusory world of appearance, that is, the everyday world subject to time, space and causality. Lewis-Williams (2015:63) writes: '… in his person /Kaggen held together ambiguities and contradictions in a way that the San accepted as true and indicative of the essence of life'. Nor is there a causal relationship between the Creator god and the Creation, causality being limited to the phenomenal world; rather, Creation is the multifarious manifestation of the will to life in its innumerable phenomenal forms. Schopenhauer (1969: 113, 128) denied that there can be a causal relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, because causality only applies to the phenomenal world. Primal or mythical time is, in fact, the timelessness of the noumenal realm, which is always immanent in ordinary life. This aligns with the San belief that the spirit world is immanent rather than transcendent, that the borders between everyday life and the spirit world are permeable and fluid. Nonetheless, the spirit world can only be explained in terms of ordinary life, albeit on an imaginatively magnified scale in the form of myth. Therefore, San shamans 'hunt' for potency in the spirit world and 'battle' with spirit beings, often imagined to be spirit animals.

Schopenhauer and panpsychism

Flew (1979:261) places Schopenhauer in the tradition of panpsychism: '[i]n various forms, panpsychical views are evident in the philosophy of Leibniz and Schopenhauer'. Sjöstedt-Hughes (2018) argues that Schopenhauer's metaphysics is a version of panpsychism, a philosophy aligned with animism, although he differentiates the two in his blog, whereas Welchman (2017:131) denies that Schopenhauer's philosophy can be identified as panpsychism, even though the arguments Schopenhauer uses bear a structural similarity to panpsychist arguments directed against materialism. Welchman's (2017:140) reason for this view is that, for Schopenhauer, 'consciousness is not an intrinsic property of the will; in itself the will is "blind" … As a result, Schopenhauer is not a panpsychist, in contemporary terminology'. However, this claim appears to be contradicted by Cartwright's (2010:306) comment on Schopenhauer's idea of the noumenon, that 'The world, therefore, displays a super form of animism that exhibits constant conflict and strife'. Instead, Cartwright appears to support Sjöstedt-Hughes' understanding that Schopenhauer is a pansychist, because consciousness is not critical, at least human-like consciousness. Referring to the philosophies of Bergson and Whitehead, Sjöstedt-Hughes (2015) writes:

> *Panpsychism*, that all is mind, is accepted (to an extent) by Bergson, Whitehead and an increasing number of Western thinkers. Bergson thinks consciousness, or subjectivity to be more precise, exists throughout *life*, organisms, whereas Whitehead argues that subjectivity is ubiquitous, including crystals and molecules. *Not* that they believe, say, the table *per se* to be conscious: Bergson confines subjectivity then to organisms, and Whitehead confines it to 'actual entities' and 'societies' (self-organising systems: the molecules that make up the table have subjectivity in themselves, basic but there). (p. 29; italics in the original)

According to Sjöstedt-Hughes (2015:43), '… the panpsychism of the philosophy of organism is more inclined towards the worship of nature and nature spirits which exist in the animism of non-Christianized pagan cultures'. Sjöstedt-Hughes (2018) argues persuasively against materialism and for panpsychism. He mentions both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, whose philosophies he (2015:99) sees as a continuous development from Kant, through Schopenhauer and culminating in Nietzsche. He (2015:110, 125) convincingly argues that Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer's (Christian) ethics but kept his metaphysics, except for reinterpreting his will to life as the will to power. For Sjöstedt-Hughes, the will to life is merely the most basic grade, shared by all things, of the will to power, which manifests itself in all forms of life and with increasing complexity in higher organisms, culminating in human art and politics at the highest levels.

The shamanistic concept of potency, despite its allegorical forms in San ritual, myth and rock art, involves notions of volition and power at all these levels, from sexual reproduction, finding food and hunting at the lower levels to communal and political strivings and religious myth and rituals at the higher levels. Accessing potency for rainmaking involves both the need for food (for rain produces the plant growth that feeds the prey animals) and the political power of the rainmaking shaman. The depiction of shamanistic activities in forms of art (dancing, painting and narrating) is also an expression of the will to power. Therefore, volition and will complete the picture of San cosmology that is only partly explained by the three-tiered cosmology that cognitive neuroscience reduces to a spectrum of consciousness involving trance and (imagined) transformation.

Conclusion

The author argued that Schopenhauer's metaphysical and ethical system provides an illuminating way of looking at religion, not just the major world religions, which he discussed, but also those shamanistic and animistic religions with a more ancient lineage, which he did not. This was not an attempt to reduce the complexities of religious experience to Schopenhauer's system but to see how his philosophy could illuminate aspects of various religious myths. The pessimism that Schopenhauer saw in Hinduism, Buddhism and Catholic Christianity applies to shamanistic religions too. This pessimism relates to the blind striving at the heart of all things, what Schopenhauer named the will to life and Nietzsche named the will to power. Whereas cognitive science can explain the psychological basis of the three-tiered cosmos common to myth, a theory of volition is required to explain the motivation for myth-creation and the imaginative attempts to dress in allegorical clothing, through myth, the otherwise unrepresentable universal will to life. The embodied will as

the basis of Schopenhauer's system, however, provides no justification for the belief in a supernatural order, even though it challenges the currently dominant paradigm of scientific materialism.

Acknowledgements

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