



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## A metaphysics of spiritual experience

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### Abstract

A discussion of the metaphysics of spiritual experience requires that we are clear about the nature of metaphysics, and I take as my starting point the ‘transcendent metaphysics’ described and supposedly eliminated by A. J. Ayer. Most analytic philosophers agree with Ayer (and Kant) that transcendent metaphysics in the relevant sense is deeply problematic, and they associate it with platonism, theism, and religious thinking more generally. Assuming then that spiritual experience takes us into religious territory, and this territory is forbidden, a metaphysics of spiritual experience is going to involve transcendent metaphysics, and it will be similarly problematic. Ayer’s conception of transcendent reality is itself deeply problematic, and I shall argue that his metaphysical framework helps to motivate atheistic spirituality by ruling out the possibility of an empirically grounded and hence defensible religious alternative. I shall challenge this framework, set out an alternative with the help of Arthur Schopenhauer, and spell out the implications for a metaphysics of spiritual experience.

**Keywords:** Spiritual experience; spirituality; atheistic spirituality; transcendent metaphysics; Schopenhauer

### Introduction

A discussion of the metaphysics of spiritual experience requires that we are clear about the nature of metaphysics, and I am going to take as my starting point the ‘transcendent metaphysics’ described and supposedly eliminated by A. J. Ayer in his *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936, ch. 1).<sup>1</sup> Most analytic philosophers agree with Ayer (and Kant) that transcendent metaphysics in the relevant sense is deeply problematic, and they associate it with platonism, theism, and religious thinking more generally. Assuming then that spiritual experience takes us into religious territory, and this territory is forbidden, a metaphysics of spiritual experience is going to involve transcendent metaphysics, and it will be similarly problematic. One response is to deny that spiritual experience involves reference to a transcendent reality; another is to claim that we can, after all, have experience of it. On either of these positions there can be a metaphysics of spiritual experience, and a defender of atheistic spirituality will favour the first response,<sup>2</sup> elucidating the relevant experiences in appropriately this-worldly terms.

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Ayer's conception of transcendent reality is itself deeply problematic, and I shall argue that his metaphysical framework helps to motivate atheistic spirituality by ruling out the possibility of an empirically grounded and hence defensible religious alternative. I shall challenge this framework, set out an alternative with the help of Arthur Schopenhauer, and spell out the implications for a metaphysics of spiritual experience. I am not suggesting that this alternative is mandatory, and many details will remain to be clarified. The point is simply that once we move beyond the contestable metaphysical framework, then new and exciting possibilities are revealed concerning the nature of the transcendent, our experience of the transcendent, and its role in shaping a viable metaphysics of spiritual experience.

### Ayer on transcendent metaphysics

I have noted already that the idea of a *transcendent* metaphysics tends to be associated with theism, platonism, and religious thought more generally, and that it is usually taken for granted – among atheistic analytic philosophers at least – that the relevant objections are sufficient to undermine its cogency and possibility.<sup>3</sup> It is important then that we are clear about what such an approach amounts to, and whether the relevant criticisms are justified.

Ayer (1936, 33) takes it to involve belief in a transcendent reality, and belief that it is possible to have knowledge of this reality. The relevant reality is transcendent in the sense that it 'transcend[s] the phenomenal world', is 'super-empirical', and 'transcends the limits of possible sense-experience' (*ibid.*, 32–33). These terms can be variously interpreted, but bearing in mind Ayer's insistence that there is nothing within experience to indicate the presence of a transcendent reality, we are to suppose that this reality stands dualistically opposed to anything we could experience, and hence, that the transcendent metaphysician is operating with a two-worlds ontology: on the one hand there is the world we experience, the 'phenomenal' or 'empirical' world; on the other hand there is a further transcendent world which *cannot* be experienced, the 'super-empirical' realm.

This dualistic framework is borne out by Ayer's response to the metaphysician's claim to have knowledge of transcendent reality: what could justify such a claim? Surely she must begin with the evidence of her senses, but if so, what valid process of reasoning could lead to the conception of a transcendent reality (*ibid.*, 33)? He then draws a comparison with Kant's condemnation of transcendent metaphysics, objecting that Kant was in no position to assert nonetheless that a super-empirical reality exists. Ayer concludes – as against the Kantian claim that the impossibility of metaphysics is a mere matter of fact (the human understanding is so constituted that it loses itself in contradictions when it ventures out beyond the limits of experience) – that what is at stake here is a matter of logic: 'our minds could not conceivably have had the power of penetrating beyond the phenomenal world' (*ibid.*, 34). It follows that metaphysical claims about transcendent reality are meaningless. They count as such because there is nothing to which we could appeal to verify their truth – the relevant reality *cannot* be experienced – and verifiability in this sense is the criterion of meaningfulness (*ibid.*, 35). So, there are significant similarities between Ayer and Kant. However, Ayer's reasons for rejecting transcendent metaphysics (and metaphysics more generally) are logical rather than epistemological, and the undermining effect is appropriately magnified. That is to say that metaphysics, having been subjected to the test of verifiability, is shown to be meaningless rather than simply futile or false, and there is no room for granting – with Kant – that such a quest can be of any significance.<sup>4</sup>

These objections to transcendent metaphysics have immediate implications for a metaphysics of spiritual experience if such experience involves reference to the offending

super-empirical realm, and I have noted already that one response is to reject this assumption, and to reject it as an atheist. I want now to consider this response in more detail.

### Atheistic spirituality as an antidote to transcendent metaphysics

The defender of atheistic spirituality seeks a conception of the spiritual life and spiritual experience which does away with any reference to a second, super-empirical, realm. So transcendent metaphysics in Ayer's sense is out of the picture, and it is agreed also that we must avoid reference to any religious or philosophical framework that transcends the imposed empirical limits. Robert Solomon (2007, 5) spells out the relevant constraint by exhorting us to 'naturalize spirituality, and to get away from "other-worldly" religions and philosophies'. Martin Hägglund (2019, 187) insists that we must 'avoid any form of supernaturalism', and, in place of a religious faith, he defends a secular analogue in which attachment to the here and now is paramount (*ibid.*, 30). He talks in this context of being animated by care and concern (*ibid.*, 13), and distinguishes this from the religious position according to which 'my ultimate concern is to have no concern' (*ibid.*, 77). Solomon's way of making these points is to defend 'a passion-based conception of the spiritual life . . . the spiritual life is a passionate life' (Solomon (2007), 28–29). He distinguishes this approach from a long tradition of religious and philosophical thinking in which the passions are downplayed (*ibid.*, 28), conceding that there are significant lines of dissent among religious thinkers on this score (*ibid.*, 28–29). He makes clear also that not any passion or emotion will do (*ibid.*, 31), lends emphasis to love, reverence, wisdom, and trust (*ibid.*, 28–30), and insists that the spirituality at issue here – which is 'neither exotic nor unfamiliar' – 'has the power to transform our lives' (*ibid.*, 31). This is not to deny or to ignore the defects and difficulties of human existence, and Solomon offers his own 'naturalized' version of the problem of evil, reminding us of the contingency of our good fortune, the inevitability of misfortune, and the finitude of our lives (*ibid.*, 84).

We have a conception of the spiritual life that promises to take us away from the super-natural or the super-empirical, and it seems far removed from a religious position, assuming that a religiously spiritual life is 'still and luminous, turned to the future and far from our daily lives' as Janet Soskice (2008, 12) describes the offending approach. What about spiritual *experience*? The defender of atheistic spirituality is anxious to deny that it has anything to do with being in touch with a super-empirical reality, and would no doubt insist that spiritually edifying experiences are to be found at the level of the everyday, when, for example, we fall in love, care for an ageing parent, become uplifted by a piece of music, or find the courage to go on in the face of adversity. Such examples bear witness to the kind of phenomenon that Solomon seems to have in mind when he talks of a spiritually transformative power – a power that works within the self, and can presumably also be discerned from without, when, say, one experiences the love or courage or hope or joy of another human being, and perhaps becomes spiritually transformed in the process.

Thus far, the picture seems pleasingly straightforward. The theist – or, more generally, anyone who takes seriously the idea of the transcendent – postulates a second, super-empirical realm, this realm is dualistically opposed to anything we could experience or know, and it is unclear how it could be relevant to the task of comprehending what it means to be spiritual and to have spiritual experiences. The atheist responds to this difficulty by rejecting the first term of this dualism – the super-empirical or supernatural realm. He takes this rejection to be sufficient to undermine theism and any other framework which involves reference to the transcendent, and then falls back on what we have – and what we are – at the level of the immanent, which latter is taken to be equivalent to the empirical and the natural. It is an implication of this dualistic framework that the

theist is working at the wrong level of explanation, and that she cannot accommodate the ingredients which figure in the atheist's conception of spirituality and spiritual experience.

Soskice's talk of the theist's 'still and luminous' conception of the spiritual life might be thought to lend justice to this complaint. Yet she registers her objection to this conception as a theist and a theologian, and offers a theistic alternative which promises not merely to redress the relevant balance, but to identify a similar disparity in versions of atheistic spirituality in which the particularities and repetitions of everyday life are denigrated in favour of something higher.<sup>5</sup> Another notable example is John Cottingham, who, in the context of defending a theistic conception of spirituality, avails himself of similar ingredients to those taken seriously by our atheist, with no suggestion that a theistic framework poses any kind of difficulty and an implicit question of whether the atheist can accommodate the relevant phenomena. Hence:

[e]ven the most convinced atheist may be prepared to avow an interest in the 'spiritual' dimension of human existence, if that dimension is taken to cover forms of life that put a premium on certain kinds of intensely focused moral and aesthetic response, or on the search for deeper reflective awareness of the meaning of our lives and of our relationship to others and to the natural world. (Cottingham (2005), 3)

There is agreement on both sides concerning the moral, aesthetic, and meaning-involving nature of life's spiritual dimension, and the dispute concerns whether this dimension requires reference to the transcendent. Our atheist assumes that the transcendent is equivalent to the other-worldly or the supernatural, and that it must be rejected. This rejection is unambiguously expressed in the negative constraint that defines her research programme ('avoid all forms of the supernatural'), and the assumption that we can explain what needs to be explained without moving in this direction suggests that what is to be rejected is a level of reality that has no bearing upon spiritual life or experience. So, supernaturalism in the relevant sense is neither necessary nor sufficient for explaining life's spiritual dimension, and this suggests that the offending level of reality is transcendent in Ayer's dualistic sense.

This approach begs the question in two related ways. First, it assumes that the transcendent has no bearing upon the nature of spirituality and spiritual experience; and second, that it is to be modelled on a second, super-empirical realm. The second assumption justifies the first in the sense that *if* the transcendent is to be modelled on a second, super-empirical realm, then it is ruled out that it could have any bearing upon spiritual life and experience, assuming that spiritual life and experience involve the aforementioned 'worldly' ingredients. What little I have said suggests that one can defend a theistic conception of spirituality without being a transcendent metaphysician in Ayer's pejorative sense, and that there are significant convergences with atheistic spirituality. I want now to spell out some of the details of this alternative position and make a case for taking it seriously.

### Rethinking the transcendent and transcendent metaphysics

Ayer's transcendent metaphysician defends what we can call a dualistic supernaturalism. Such a position involves the imposition of a rigid opposition between the transcendent and the immanent, and this opposition is taken to be equivalent to that between, on the one hand, the supernatural/super-empirical/other-worldly, and on the other hand, the natural/empirical/worldly. It is a prevalent assumption in contemporary analytic philosophy that theism and platonism involve transcendent metaphysics in this sense,

and that such positions are to be rejected on the ground that we can explain what needs to be explained in their absence. As James Griffin puts it in the context of rejecting the idea of an other-worldly realm of values, such a position ‘just produces unnecessary problems concerning what [the other-worldly realm] could possibly be and how we could learn about it’. Hence: ‘[v]alues do not need any world except the ordinary world around us – mainly the world of humans and animals and happenings in their lives’ (Griffin (1996), 44).

We can agree that transcendent metaphysics in this sense is to be rejected. However, this is sufficient to reject the transcendent only if it is to be modelled on the offending dualistic framework, and this is open to challenge. Such a model is challenged by philosophers such as Hegel and Spinoza,<sup>6</sup> and it is a familiar enough point in theology that God is not a part or component of reality to be conceived ‘as part of, alongside, or in competition with, the natural world’<sup>7</sup> – as if God’s transcendence requires that one establishes ‘a “superworld” of divine objects’, as Paul Tillich (1975, 8) expresses the point in the context of challenging such a position. This would be to put God on a level with anything else – it would turn God into something immanent rather than transcendent – and it would be the easiest thing in the world to reject this other-worldly something else.<sup>8</sup>

How does one break this oppositional thinking to maintain a genuine distinction between the transcendent and the immanent? Tillich’s solution is structurally equivalent to what Griffin does for the case of value, for instead of treating the Divine as inhabiting a world *above* nature, he reconnects it with *this* world, but in such a way that the God/world distinction is maintained. According to this position, God is manifested in the world (God does not need any world except the ordinary world around us) but, qua infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being (including our own human being) – exceeds any worldly manifestation, and resists reduction to the finite or the immanent. As John Robinson sums up this ‘ecstatic’ naturalism, we have:

the reinterpretation of transcendence in a way which preserves its reality while detaching it from the projection of supranaturalism [dualistic supernaturalism]. ‘The Divine’, as [Tillich] sees it, does not inhabit a transcendent world *above nature*; it is to be found in the ‘ecstatic’ character of *this* world, as its transcendent Depth and Ground. (Robinson (1963), 34)

The details of this proposal raise some interesting and difficult questions – more on this below – but *if* what we have here is a viable alternative to Ayer’s model of transcendence, then there are important implications for an understanding and assessment of the task of transcendent metaphysics. First, we can agree with Ayer that it involves belief in a transcendent reality, and that this reality ‘transcends the phenomenal world’. However, this is no longer to be interpreted in the offending dualistic terms, for according to the position under present consideration, the transcendent is intimated in the here and now and available to experience in this respect, although what we have at this level is not exhaustive of its reality. So, there is more to it than what is manifested at the level of experience, but what does not follow is that experience *falls short* of the relevant reality – as would be the case if the disputed dualistic framework were in place. The implication in all of this – given that God is not revealed as one thing alongside anything else – is that revelation must proceed in and through experience of the world, where this involves understanding its ‘ecstatic’ character or depth.

We can begin to get a clearer sense of this rival framework by looking at Schopenhauer’s exploration and defence of a structurally similar conception of metaphysics. Schopenhauer is an interesting figure for my purposes, for he rejects dualistic supernaturalism, and agrees with our atheist that this is sufficient to reject God and the

transcendent. The difference, however, is that he articulates a non-dualistic alternative which takes us into explicitly religious territory. At one level then, we have an interesting bridge between atheism and theism. Yet we also have a clear example of the shape of a non-dualistic conception of transcendence, and the question – again – of the limits of such a position and its relation to theism.

Schopenhauer's target is the Kantian claim that the source of metaphysics cannot be empirical – that its fundamental principles and concepts can never be taken from experience – and that the task of metaphysics is to soar beyond the limits of experience and world. Schopenhauer objects that Kant does not justify this claim, and he sets out his alternative as follows:

In truth, however, the matter stands thus: The world and our own existence present themselves to us necessarily as a riddle. It is now assumed, without more ado, that the solution of this riddle cannot result from a thorough understanding of the world itself, but must be looked for in something quite different from the world (for this is the meaning of 'beyond the possibility of all experience') . . . But so long as this is not proved, we have no ground for shutting ourselves off from the richest sources of knowledge, inner and outer experience in order to operate with empty forms alone. Therefore, I say that the solution to the riddle of the world must come from an understanding of the world itself, and hence, that the task of metaphysics is not to pass over experience in which the world exists, but to understand it thoroughly, since inner and outer experience are certainly the principle source of all knowledge . . . Yet this is so only within certain limits inseparable from our finite nature, consequently so that we arrive at a correct understanding of the world itself without reaching an explanation of its existence which is conclusive and does away with all further problems. (Schopenhauer (1966), I, 427–428)

On this 'new (modern) definition of metaphysics', as Iris Murdoch (1992, 79) approvingly describes it, we tread a middle ground between 'dogmatic omniscience and Kantian despair' (Schopenhauer (1966), I, 428). As finite beings, our knowledge is neither complete nor conclusive, but we question the assumption that experience is irrelevant to metaphysics, and endeavour instead to 'understand it thoroughly'.

Schopenhauer expresses serious reservations about theism, and one might suppose that his position is more properly aligned with atheism. After all, the atheist agrees that we must remain within the limits of experience and world, but she denies that the relevant experiences have any theistic significance and expresses this negative constraint with the claim that we must avoid all forms of the supernatural. Murdoch (1992, 64) herself describes Schopenhauer as someone who attempts 'to think the spiritual without the supernatural', and it is certainly standard to view him as an atheistic immanentist.<sup>9</sup> As 'Cornelio Fabio (1968, 873) puts it, 'the conscious and professed destination of this radical immanentism is atheism', to which Robert A. Gonzales (1993, 153) adds that his system, as 'totally immanent and self-contained', seems to leave 'no room for the question of a Transcendent Being'. Gonzales cites Schopenhauer's insistence, in a letter, that we should be looking for the thing-in-itself, not in cloud cuckoo land, but in the things of this world, to which Schopenhauer adds that his philosophy 'never concerns itself with cloud cuckoo land, but with *this* world; which is to say, that it is *immanent*, not transcendent' (*ibid.*, 154).<sup>10</sup>

It has been central to my argument that we must raise the question of how best to model the idea of transcendence. There has been a tendency – especially among philosophers – to model it in dualistic supernaturalist terms, but these terms are open to challenge. Schopenhauer's objection to the idea that the thing-in-itself is to be found in



cloud cuckoo land is a clear rejection of the offending conception of transcendence, and his insistence that we operate at the level of this world and the immanent *can* be interpreted as a commitment to atheism. Yet he makes abundantly clear elsewhere that this world is deeply mysterious and religiously significant, and that it is simply a prejudice to deny that it – and our experience of it – has ineffable depths.<sup>11</sup> It is true, of course, that Schopenhauer takes issue with theism, but his objections are more properly targeted at the idea of God as a super-empirical object or subject, and do not pose a challenge to the alternative model of transcendence under exploration here.<sup>12</sup> If this is right, then his rejection of the transcendent is more plausibly interpreted as a rejection of a dualistic conception thereof, and his immanentism, to the extent that it exceeds the terms of the offending dualism, promises to be a more plausible candidate for being truly radical. There are radical implications here for an understanding of the nature of Schopenhauer's will and the scope of his pessimistic vision.<sup>13</sup>

### Spiritual experience, the transcendent, and God

According to the position under consideration, the task of metaphysics is to understand our experience of the world rather than to soar beyond it, and the world in which we are immersed has transcendent depths. Inner experience is a key point of revelation for Schopenhauer, and what it reveals for him is a kind of will or power or spirit that penetrates us through and through, and whose operations are to be discerned at every level of reality.

The question of Schopenhauer's conception of the nature and scope of this power is contentious, and I have noted already that the picture becomes more complex once we take account of the religious dimension of his position. He certainly lends emphasis to its dark and seemingly hellish aspect in much of what he says about self and world. The focus here is our grasping, predatory nature, the desires which give expression to it, and the sense in which we are victims in this context of a blind, relentless, and all-pervasive will. It is familiar from before that acknowledging such defects and difficulties is part and parcel of any realistic spirituality, and although Schopenhauer's approach can seem unduly bleak, it is central to his anthropology that egoism is not inevitable, and that there are contexts in which the craving will is held in abeyance. Virtue and holiness are significant indicators of such a change, these qualities are said to proceed 'from the inner depth of the will' (Schopenhauer (1966), I, 58), and their possibility and presence must be factored into an understanding of the nature of the power or spirit we discern in inner and outer experience. Schopenhauer takes the figure of the saint to offer a clear expression of this inner depth, whilst conceding that such figures are relatively rare.<sup>14</sup> We are to suppose that experience of another person's holiness and virtue can itself be spiritually transformative, and that such effects occur on a lesser scale when we witness ordinary examples of human decency and find ourselves similarly motivated.<sup>15</sup>

The theist takes these inner depths to be a matter of God working through the human spirit, and such a position is familiar from mystical theologians like Eckhart, who is cited approvingly by Schopenhauer in the context of criticising theism's objectifying approach. Hence:

Theism, calculated with reference to the capacity of the crowd, places the primary source of existence outside us, as an object. All mysticism . . . at the various stages of its initiation, draw this source gradually back into ourselves as the subject, and the adept at last recognises with wonder and delight that he himself is it. We find this course of events expressed by Meister Eckhart, the father of German mysticism . . . in the form of a precept for the perfect ascetic 'that he seek not God outside himself' (*Eckhart's Works*, edited by Pfeiffer, Vol. 1, p. 626). (Schopenhauer (1966), II, 612)

Schopenhauer's overly narrow understanding of theism leads him to distinguish it from mysticism. Robinson, by contrast, takes this mystical approach to be an antidote to dualistic supernaturalism insofar as it depicts God at the 'frontier of human existence' rather than at the periphery of experience' (Robinson (1967), 72). He argues that a shift along these lines – God as the 'within of things' rather than a Being external to them – is essential to the task of validating the idea of transcendence in our secular times (Robinson (1963), 25).

The atheist will protest that Robinson has simply moved the bump around the carpet in this shift to the idea that God is to be found within rather than without, that the question now is whether the development of the human spirit requires reference to God and/or the transcendent, and that the answer is no. Robinson can respond that this objection presupposes the offending dualistic supernaturalist framework, and that the immanent and the transcendent are intertwined rather than dualistically opposed. The atheist will say that they are not.

There is no knock-down argument to prove that life and experience have no transcendent dimension, and there was never a question of proving that the rival viewpoint is true. Schopenhauer gets it right when he lends emphasis to our finitary predicament, builds this limitation into his definition of metaphysics, and makes it clear that we are operating here at the blurry limits of our capacity to comprehend. The sensible theologian will insist likewise upon these limitations, and both would agree that there would be no difficulty at all if, *per impossibile*, it was simply a matter of identifying an object within one's field of experience, inner or outer.

But doesn't this mean that transcendent reality remains shrouded in mystery? And if this is so, why doesn't it invite a new version of Ayer's original objection? After all, if the mystery is ineliminable, then there are serious doubts about how we can talk meaningfully about it, and the difficulty is not solved by locating that mystery in the within of things rather than in a separable, supernatural realm. The implication here is that there cannot, after all, be a genuine dispute with the atheist.<sup>16</sup>

It should be clear from all that has been said that we are not in the position of Ayer's transcendent metaphysician. First, it is denied that experience is sealed off from the transcendent; second, we have been given enough of a sense of its character to take seriously the idea that it involves a predisposition towards the good, the holy, the virtuous, the loving, and so forth. Now the atheist does not deny the reality of these phenomena, and there is agreement about their spiritual significance. However, she denies that they have their source in God, and might even try to explain them in terms that compromise their reality. A perfect example of this latter move is to be found in Schopenhauer's account of the way in which the sexual drive, which is aimed at reproduction, leads us to pursue lovers by creating the illusion that we are in love with them (Schopenhauer (1966), II, 540).<sup>17</sup> The scope for question-begging in this kind of explanatory context is huge,<sup>18</sup> and it often conceals an unjustified scientism.<sup>19</sup> As for the atheist's denial that the relevant spiritual phenomena have their source in God, the question of what this really means becomes much murkier once we move away from dualistic supernaturalism, and make clear that it was never a matter of identifying some super-empirical object. I suspect that once this unhelpful but prevalent model has been put to rest, then our sceptic might be encouraged to throw some of her caution to the wind and acknowledge that the issue is infinitely more complex than the typical empiricist philosopher would have us believe, *and* that there is a genuine dispute here with fascinating and significant ramifications.

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## Notes

1. Ayer is concerned more generally with the task of eliminating any metaphysics whatsoever, but he takes as his starting point the (transcendent) metaphysician who believes that it is possible to have knowledge of a transcendent reality, and claims that the arguments used 'to refute them will subsequently be found to apply to the whole of metaphysics' (Ayer (1936), 33). Ayer's example of a metaphysician in this more general sense is someone who claims that the world of sense-experience is unreal (*ibid.*, 39).
2. See, for example, Solomon (2007). Other notable examples are Comte-Sponville (2009) and Harris (2014).
3. One might object that embrace of the super-empirical is hardly rare in contemporary analytic metaphysics – think of platonism about numbers and propositions – and that it is misguided therefore to claim that there is a general antipathy towards transcendent metaphysics in contemporary analytic philosophy. The issues here are complex, but several points are worth making. First, recent philosophy of mathematics has been heavily influenced by analytic philosophy. However, this has not led invariably to platonism, and, in line with analytic philosophy's preference for a scientific naturalist framework, one option has been to treat mathematical objects in the same way as the theoretical entities of natural science. Such a position is billed as a non-platonist form of realism, and mathematical knowledge is taken to be on a par with empirical knowledge. See, for example, Colyvan (2001). Some further non-platonist alternatives are spelled out by Tait (1986). Tait makes clear that the question of how platonism is to be interpreted is unclear, and that it is not ruled out that its supposed difficulties are premised upon a faulty conception thereof – when, for example, it is assumed to involve reference to a second, supernatural realm which sits apart from anything to which we could relate at the level of our mathematical practices. He refers in this context to 'the myth of the model-in-the-sky'. I shall be suggesting that some standard objections to religious and/or theistic conceptions of spiritual reality presuppose a similarly contestable metaphysical framework, and I have argued in Ellis (2014) that this dualistic supernaturalist framework tends to be taken for granted by the scientific naturalist. I thank one of the external referees for encouraging me to clarify these points.
4. MacKinnon (1991) offers a rich discussion of some relevant similarities and differences between Ayer and Kant.
5. Soskice is eager to defend the spiritual significance of activities like cooking, changing nappies, etc., and her target is the kind of person who takes those activities to be spiritually inferior to, say, following one's calling as an artist or pursuing one's philosophical or theological studies.
6. Hegel's rejection of a dualistic conception of the God/world relation is clearly articulated and justified in his *Encyclopaedia Logic*:

Dualism, which makes the opposite of finite and infinite insuperable, fails to make the simple observation that in this way the infinite itself is just *one of the two*, [and] that it is therefore reduced to one *particular*, in addition to which the finite is the other one. Such an infinite, which is just one particular, *beside* the finite, so that it has precisely its restriction, its limit, in the latter, is *not* what it ought to be. It is not the Infinite, but is only *finite*. (Hegel (1991), §95, 151)

Spinoza's similarly non-dualistic conception of the God/world relation is laid out in his *Ethics*. Hegel takes himself to have advanced beyond Spinoza's position, and this seems plausible if Spinoza's pantheism is interpreted in the typically atheistic terms that have been assumed in much philosophical scholarship until more recently. For a defence of Spinoza's theism see Carlisle (2021).

7. This is spelled out in the clearest terms by Gregory (2008), 502.
8. Again, this dialectic is spelled out in the clearest terms by Hegel.
9. Compare the tendency to view Spinoza and Hegel as atheists. My diagnosis: the relevant interpreters are wedded to the disputed conception of transcendence. Schopenhauer himself sometimes seems to be wedded to this conception, as the letter cited below illustrates.
10. The letter is from 21 August 1852, and to be found in Hübscher (1971), 290–291.
11. This is made abundantly clear in the closing pages of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, where Schopenhauer takes inspiration from the Buddhist perspective that there is more to reality than 'this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies' (Schopenhauer (1966), I, 412, cf. *ibid.*, II, 198). For a persuasive religious interpretation of Schopenhauer's position, see Mannion (2003).
12. He says of theism that it involves treating God as a separable cause of the world 'with the addition of personality' (Schopenhauer (2012), 17). In chapter 5 of the same book he describes God as 'creator and ruler of the world, as a personal, and consequently individual being' (117).
13. For more on this see Salter (1911), Gonzales (1990), and Mannion (2003).
14. See Gonzales (1993), 165.

15. Patrick Sherry talks about the significance of this kind of experience in a brilliant discussion of Von Hügel's conception of spirituality and experience. The context here is the nature of religious experience and a rejection of the idea that the paradigm should take us beyond the realm of ordinary experience to the level of visions and the like. Hence: 'If, as he thinks, we only experience God on the occasion of some sensible apprehension, then the most important such apprehension is God's presence and grace in human lives' (Sherry (1981), 5).
16. Compare Hume's taunt in the *Dialogues on Natural Religion* that theists who stress the mystery of God are no different from atheists or agnostics. I thank John Cottingham for pressing me on these points.
17. See Ellis (2021) for some objections to Schopenhauer's conception of sexual love.
18. Hence Katsafanas in a discussion of Schopenhauer's account of the sexual drive: 'Why think that sexual attraction and love merit the label "illusions", whereas reproduction is the reality?' (Katsafanas (2015), 192, n. 9).
19. See Griffin (1996), 42.

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