A THOMISTIC CRITIQUE OF SCHOPENHAUER'S AESTHETICS OF MUSIC

By

Mary Christine Ugobi-Onyemere, IHM (PhD)
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Dominican University, Ibadan
gigamugobi@gmail.com; ugobi-o@dui.edu.ng

&

Ewaensetin Joseph Ehimwenma, OP
Dominican Institute, Ibadan
ewaen.ehimwenma.444@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper offers a Thomistic critique of Arthur Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music, situating his thought within the broader dialogue between metaphysical pessimism and classical realism. Schopenhauer's twofold account of reality—of the world as representation and the world as will—grounds his conviction that music is a direct expression of the will—the inner essence of reality—rather than a mere imitation of appearances. Music, he argues, directly expresses rather than conceptually represents the dynamic striving of existence itself. Against this background, Thomas Aquinas' metaphysical and theological understanding of beauty and music provides a constructive critique. Aquinas understands beauty in terms that can be articulated through *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*, in which proportion and intelligibility contribute to an aesthetic apprehension of order and perfection. The study reveals that, while Schopenhauer's account rightly recognises music's metaphysical depth, it understates the rational and teleological dimensions essential to the Thomistic conception of beauty. The paper concludes that Aquinas' synthesis of intellect, order, and transcendence reorients the understanding of

music towards its ultimate purpose: not escape from the world's suffering, but participation in divine harmony.

Keywords: Aesthetics of music; Metaphysics of music; Schopenhauer; Thomas Aquinas; Thomistic aesthetics

Introduction

The philosophical discourse on music has long sought to interpret the complex connection between sound, emotion, and metaphysical reality. Few thinkers have articulated this connection as radically as Arthur Schopenhauer did. In his The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer conceives the world as grounded in a blind, restless, and unconscious "will" that objectifies itself in the world of appearances. Human experience, structured through the forms of cognition, constitutes the realm of representation—a phenomenal manifestation of the deeper reality of the will. Within this framework, music assumes a uniquely privileged status: it alone, Schopenhauer claims, expresses the will with an immediacy unavailable to the other arts, rather than through concepts or images.

Unlike other art forms that represent or imitate phenomena, such as painting, sculpture, or literature, music, for Schopenhauer, speaks the language of existence itself. It **expresses** the ceaseless striving of the will, evoking emotions that **resonate with** the metaphysical **structure** of life. In this way, music provides not only aesthetic pleasure but also a temporary relief from the suffering inherent in human desire. Yet, this exaltation of music as a metaphysical revelation raises profound philosophical questions. Does music, in its apparent bypassing of the intellect, truly reveal reality's essence, or does it risk detaching beauty from intelligibility and moral order?

Thomas Aquinas offers a contrasting metaphysical and theological framework that situates beauty within the order and intelligibility of

being and reason. In Aquinas' thought, art participates in divine order through order, proportion, and intelligibility, reflecting the rational structure of creation. Music, therefore, is not merely an unmediated outpouring of emotion but a harmonisation of the intellect and the spirit—a path leading from sensory delight to contemplation. This Thomistic perspective provides both a corrective and a deepening of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, reorienting the meaning of music from temporary release from suffering to metaphysical fulfilment.

This paper, therefore, examines Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music in light of Aquinas' metaphysics of beauty. It first elucidates the Schopenhauerian framework of the world as will and representation and explores his claim that music directly expresses the will. It then analyses the Thomistic conception of beauty, as expressed in the *Summa Theologiae*, and evaluates how Aquinas' account of *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* can be brought into dialogue with Schopenhauer's position. The study ultimately argues that while Schopenhauer captures music's capacity to transcend the empirical, Aquinas provides a teleological account of music that leads the soul from the temporal to the eternal, from the restless will to the radiance of divine reason.

The World as Will and Representation in Schopenhauer's Metaphysics: Foundations of His Aesthetics of Music

Schopenhauer's metaphysical vision distinguishes two fundamental aspects of reality: the world as representation and the world as will. The world as representation is the world that humans experience through their senses and cognitive faculties, a world of objects, space, time, and causal relations.[1] Schopenhauer argues that this

[1] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Books, 1969), §1, 3.

world is not reality in itself but rather the world as it is represented through the subject's cognitive faculties.[2] This bears a certain resemblance to Plato's allegory of the cave, in which the shadows on the wall are mistaken for reality.

On the other hand, Schopenhauer posits an underlying reality that cannot be fully grasped through ordinary empirical cognition, which he calls the "will", a blind, unconscious, and dynamic force underlying existence.[3] The world as will constitutes the underlying reality of the phenomenal world. It is the essence of everything, from the movement of planets to human desires, and this "will" cannot be directly known as a thing-in-itself, although its character can be apprehended most immediately through human striving, desire, and willing. In Schopenhauer's account, the relation between will and representation is mediated by the subject's forms of cognition rather than by a "bridge" between two separate worlds; the intellect does not simply transform the will into perceptible objects but functions within the representational structure through which the world is experienced.[4]

Schopenhauer posits that the will objectifies itself in different grades or levels of complexity. This suggests a hierarchy of objectification, beginning with inorganic nature, in which the will manifests itself through basic physical forces. Ascending the scale, the objectification becomes more complex, with plants exhibiting vegetative forms of striving and animals displaying more complex forms of striving related to survival and reproduction.[5] Finally, humans represent a higher grade of objectification since they possess not only the capacity for conscious willing but also self-

[2] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* , 1: §4, 11.
[3] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* , 1: §27, 149.
[4] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* , 1: §4, 13.
[5] Schopenhauer, The *World as Will and Representation* , 1: §25, 128.

awareness, reason, and complex emotions. Consequently, this heightened awareness also exposes human beings more fully to an awareness of the will's insatiable nature and the inherent suffering that comes with it.[6] Because the will is endlessly striving and never satisfied, Schopenhauer holds that suffering is an inherent feature of embodied existence, arising from humanity's pursuit of desires that bring only fleeting pleasure.[7]

Wayne Bowman offers further insight into Schopenhauer's metaphysical worldview as follows:

> Beneath it all and without the mediation of human consciousness, the world is a blind, inanimate, impersonal force: Will. Consciousness affords phenomenal representations of Will, human striving and desire notable among them. Since human 'willing' is the representation which lies nearest to us, it affords us our most immediate sense of the unknowable essence of the universe. While the world exists as Will and its representations, strictly speaking, people can know only the latter. Human 'willing' is the representation of Will in which the thing-in-itself is manifested under the lightest of all veils.[8]

Bowman clarifies that whatever is perceived in the world of representation appears only under particular conditions, including function, relationships, causation, time, and space.[9] Bowman agrees

[6] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §28, 154.
[7] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §16, 88.
[8] Wayne Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 114-15.
[9] Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 115.

with Schopenhauer that these are not characteristics of the world-in-itself but features arising from the conditions of human apprehension.[10] This implies that, independently of its representations, the will is a pure, impersonal, universal, indestructible force. Bowman observes that if the will were utterly beyond human comprehension, it would not be significantly different from Kant's noumenon, since Schopenhauer would merely have given the noumenal reality a new name. Thus, Schopenhauer's position is that human striving and desire reveal characteristics analogous to those of the will, most notably its perpetual yearning. The will cannot be known in itself, but its character is most immediately disclosed through human willing, since the act of will is the nearest and clearest phenomenon of the thing-in-itself.[11]

Schopenhauer asserts that the will is constantly striving and is never truly satisfied. This perpetual striving is reflected most immediately in human willing and desire. Consequently, as noted above, suffering constitutes an inherent feature of human existence, stemming from the fact that humans continually pursue desires that ultimately bring only transient pleasure.[12]

Schopenhauer's first response to the suffering associated with willing is the denial of the will. This is achievable through practices such as asceticism, by which one can renounce attachment to the will's desires and achieve a state of detachment.[13] The second mode of liberation, and the one most directly relevant to this paper, is aesthetic contemplation.[14] Schopenhauer submits that art provides a temporary release from the demands of willing and its

[10] Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 115.
[11] Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 115.
[12] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §16, 88.
[13] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §68, 380.
[14] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §49, 233.

objectifications; by contemplating art—particularly music—one is temporarily freed from individual willing and the ordinary perspective of representation, thus achieving a brief moment of liberation. Through aesthetic contemplation, particularly of music, one can momentarily escape individual willing and the ordinary conditions of practical cognition and experience a form of insight into the metaphysical character of reality.[15] The next section turns to one particular mode of aesthetic contemplation—music—and examines how Schopenhauer conceives it as a direct expression of the will.

Music as a Direct Expression of the Underlying Reality or "Will" in Schopenhauer's Philosophy

In Schopenhauer's philosophy, music holds a significant and distinctive position as a direct expression of the underlying reality, or the "will". Schopenhauer maintains that music is a copy not of phenomena but of the will itself, and therefore reproduces all the emotions of our innermost nature.[16] An examination of Schopenhauer's position raises questions about how he arrives at this conclusion, and the answer lies in the role he assigns to the intellect in making representation possible. Schopenhauer affirms that the intellect serves as a bridge between the world as will and the world as representation, acting as a filter and also mediating the representation of the will in the world of objects and experiences perceptible to human beings; thus, the intellect serves as a medium through which the will is manifested in phenomenal experience.[17]

For Schopenhauer, art serves as a means of temporary release from the striving and suffering inherent in human existence, but some art

[15] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §52, 257.
[16] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: 257.
[17] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §4, 13.

forms rely on representation by depicting objects or realities within the phenomenal world. For instance, painting depicts objects and literature uses words, but music does not depict anything specific; thus, music appears to bypass the ordinary mediation of concepts and images and to speak more directly to the will and to human emotion.[18] Schopenhauer, in his magnum opus, further states that music is able to affect listeners in ways that other art forms are unable to, because the emotions and sensations it evokes resonate with the striving and yearning of the will itself. He maintains that:

> Because music does not, like all the other arts, exhibit the Ideas or grades of the will's objectification, but directly the will itself, we can also explain that it acts directly on the will, i.e., the feelings, passions and emotions of the hearer, so that it quickly raises these or even alters them. Far from being a mere aid to poetry, music is certainly an independent art; in fact, it is the most powerful of all the arts, and therefore, attains its ends entirely from its own resources. Just as certainly, it does not require the words of a song or the action of an opera. Music as such knows only the tones or notes, not the causes that produce them.[19]

Schopenhauer's argument therefore suggests that music directly expresses the ceaseless striving of the will, and the emotions evoked by music—joy, sadness, longing, and so forth—are related to the manifestations of the will's underlying force.[20] This, somewhat ambitiously, presents music as an art which, solely through the

[18] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §52, 257.

[19] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Books, 1969), 448.

[20] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2: 448.

impressions of its tones, affords a form of knowledge of what is otherwise unknowable.[21] By communicating what is otherwise incommunicable, music, in Schopenhauer's philosophy, thus occupies a very prominent place among the arts, to the extent that he sets it apart within his theory of art. This, for him, is because music differs radically from other art forms and cannot be fully accommodated within a system centred on the elucidation of the Ideas.[22]

(a) Schopenhauer's Aesthetics of Music

In his work, The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer argues that music occupies the highest position among the arts because it does not represent the Ideas in the manner of the other arts but directly expresses the will. According to him, the will is the underlying reality expressed through human desires and actions, making music a uniquely powerful and penetrating art form. While other arts represent the Ideas or phenomenal manifestations of reality, music expresses the metaphysical essence of reality.

Schopenhauer's philosophy of music also has a distinct aesthetic dimension. He understands music to be the highest and most powerful form of art. Schopenhauer's philosophy suggests that, in aesthetic contemplation, the profound relation between music and the true nature of things assumes greater significance.[23] Schopenhauer submits that:

> Music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, by a copy of the will itself, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason, the effect of music is so very much more powerful

[21] Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 119.
[22] Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 119.
[23] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §52, 262.

> and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence.[24]

This leads Schopenhauer to conclude that music is the purest form of art, because, as Bowman indicates, music must not be construed as a stimulus that induces or arouses feelings, for what it presents is the formal essence of the eternally striving will, in all its innumerable nuances and degrees of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.[25] Schopenhauer's account also permits a further distinction between music and the other fine arts by considering how those arts differ among themselves. First, the differences among the fine arts apart from music concern the medium in which Ideas are copied and through which they may be perceived by other subjects and transmitted.[26] But the fine arts also differ and can be arranged in a hierarchy based on the hierarchical) "ladder" of the Ideas that those art forms and, within them, particular genres are suited to express. Sandra Shapshay argues that climbing the ladder of the will's objectification in Ideas from lowest to highest involves increasing complexity and completeness in the phenomenal expression of the will. The same therefore holds for the fine arts—again, with the exception of music—whose primary aim, for Schopenhauer, is to copy the Ideas and thereby enable the genius to make them intuitively perceptible to others.[27]

---

[24] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: §52, 257.

[25] Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 122.

[26] Sandra Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2023 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, accessed 15 April, 2024, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/schopenhauer - aesthetics/>.

[27] Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's aesthetics"

Schopenhauer's argument that music has a truly exceptional status among the arts and uniquely reveals the essence of the "in-itself" of the world refers to a particular kind of music. For Schopenhauer, music with such characteristics is classical or Romantic, non-programmatic music without a text, corresponding to what came to be termed in the nineteenth century "absolute music".[28] Music's prestige as the purest form of art in Schopenhauer's philosophy stems from his view that music expresses or copies the will qua thing in itself, bypassing the Ideas altogether, thus placing music and the Ideas on a par with respect to the directness with which they express the thing in itself,[29] unlike all other arts, which express or copy the Ideas (as the essential features or grades of objectification within the phenomenal world).

(b) The Metaphysical Significance of Music and Human Experience

Schopenhauer's metaphysical conception of music extends beyond mere aesthetic pleasure; it reveals a profound philosophical insight into human existence. Since music is understood by Schopenhauer as a direct expression of the will, listening to or engaging with music becomes a metaphysical act—an encounter with the inner reality of the world. Music, in his account, bypasses conceptual mediation and speaks directly to human willing, which itself provides the closest phenomenal manifestation of the will. Hence, it does not merely imitate emotions or portray external objects but expresses what Schopenhauer regards as the universal essence underlying phenomena.[30]

[28] Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's aesthetics;"
[29] Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's aesthetics;"
[30] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: 257.

In this sense, music functions as both a mirror and a metaphysical language expressing the world's inner being. It musically articulates the ceaseless striving, conflict, and temporary resolution inherent in existence itself. The dynamic progression of tones, harmonies, and dissonances can be understood as symbolising the incessant tension and temporary appeasement that characterise the will's operations. Schopenhauer thus identifies in musical composition and experience a unique opportunity for human beings to intuitively apprehend the essence of life's striving, without recourse to discursive reasoning or conceptual thought.[31]

Moreover, Schopenhauer attributes to music a temporary redemptive quality. In moments of musical contemplation, individuals momentarily rise above the ordinary perspective governed by the principle of sufficient reason and enter a state of will-less contemplation. This temporary relief from the tyranny of desire and suffering aligns with his broader aesthetic theory, wherein art offers a temporary respite from the pain of existence.[32] Yet music, unlike other forms of art, provides the most immediate and profound access to this aesthetic experience because it does not require the mediation of visual images or representational Ideas.[33]

Schopenhauer's insight can be seen as anticipating certain later existential and phenomenological interpretations of art. His emphasis on music's immediacy as an expression of the will resonates with later thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, who accorded music a central role in his conception of the Dionysian

[31] Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1987), 115–17.
[32] Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 212.
[33] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* , 1: 258.

affirmation of tragic existence.[34] Similarly, some modern phenomenological approaches to music return, albeit in different terms, to the idea of sound as an ontological revelation—a disclosure of being through the movement of tones.[35]

Ultimately, Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music offers not only a theory of art but also a form of metaphysical anthropology. It presents the human subject as a microcosmic expression of the world's inner essence and music as the privileged medium through which that essence is disclosed and through which the subject experiences temporary release from willing. In this light, Schopenhauer's philosophy transforms the experience of music from mere aesthetic enjoyment into a form of contemplative engagement with the world's fundamental reality—the will as the thing-in-itself.

Evaluating Schopenhauer's Aesthetics of Music in the Light of Thomas Aquinas

(a) Music, Beauty, and Order in Thomistic Metaphysics

The predominant conception of music among philosophers of the medieval era, within which Thomas Aquinas' thought is situated, revolves around the notion of *musica mundana*—the music of the cosmos. This concept reflected a worldview in which music's highest function was not merely to provide pleasure or amusement but to manifest the order and harmony of the universe, from the celestial spheres to the human soul.[36] This order was understood

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 76-78.

[35] Sandra Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art." *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 1 (2012): 11-22.

[36] Boethius, *De Institutione Musica*, trans. Calvin M. Bower (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 14–16.

primarily in mathematical and moral terms—the harmonious proportion of sounds being understood as mirroring the rational and ethical order of creation itself.

Aquinas situates music within this metaphysical and theological vision in the Summa Theologiae, suggesting that music can contribute to human devotion and contemplation of God. In the Secunda Secundae, question 91, article 2, Aquinas asks, "Whether God should be praised with song?" His response reveals how highly he esteems music—not merely as a form of religious embellishment, but as a complementary, though not identical, medium alongside sacred language in directing the soul towards God.[37] Following St Augustine's reflections on sacred song, Aquinas argues that singing in divine praise is a salutary practice, stirring the soul to greater devotion and interior joy.[38] Thus, Aquinas situates music within a broader theological anthropology, in which beauty and order can contribute to the human orientation towards the beatific vision.[39]

Aquinas' analysis of beauty (Summa Theologiae, I, q. 39, a. 8) further illuminates his understanding of beauty and its relevance to art and music. He is traditionally understood as associating beauty with three essential elements: integritas (wholeness), consonantia (proportion), and claritas (radiance).[40] According to Aquinas, a thing is beautiful when it possesses integrity (completeness), due proportion, and a form of clarity or radiance that makes it pleasing

[37] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q. 91, a. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947)

[38] Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 228–30.

[39] Leo Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 214.

[40] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 39, a. 8.

to apprehension. Basil Cole, O.P., argues that these three characteristics remain applicable to contemporary discourse on aesthetics and music, for they express not rigid rules governing artistic production but metaphysical conditions relevant to the apprehension of beauty.[41] Cole adds that Aquinas' reflections can be understood as supporting the existence of a moral virtue regulating the pleasure derived from the arts. He terms this the "virtue of music appreciation", which moderates one's engagement with music, helping to ensure that such engagement remains ordered towards appropriate ends, including contemplation and virtue.[42] In this way, Aquinas' account of music and beauty extends beyond technical harmony to include questions of spiritual formation, orienting the listener towards God and towards rightly ordered enjoyment through cultivated discernment.

From this Thomistic perspective, music can be understood as possessing both aesthetic and spiritual value: it is to be valued for its beauty as an art form and may contribute to the elevation of the human soul towards divine contemplation. Aquinas' discussion of music and beauty consequently provides a framework for assessing Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music. The question arises as to whether the Thomistic account of beauty, traditionally articulated through *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*, can be discerned or meaningfully applied in Schopenhauer's philosophy.

In Schopenhauer's system, music can be interpreted as embodying *integritas*. For him, music is self-sufficient and does not depend upon the representation of particular phenomena for its artistic efficacy, for it directly expresses what Schopenhauer regards as the

---

[41] Basil Cole, "*Music and Spirituality*," accessed 1 March, 2024. *https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/music-and-spirituality-11168*.
[42] Basil Cole, "*Music and Spirituality*,"

essence of reality—the "will"—rather than mere phenomena.[43] This can be related to Aquinas' notion that wholeness implies the fulfilment of a thing's essential nature. Similarly, *consonantia*, or proportion, finds resonance in Schopenhauer's claim that music expresses or corresponds to the metaphysical character underlying the phenomenal world. The structural harmony within music—its internal relations of tension and resolution—can be interpreted, in Schopenhauer's view, as symbolising the patterned striving of the will itself, suggesting a correspondence between musical form and metaphysical reality.[44]

However, it is in the question of *claritas* that Schopenhauer's aesthetics diverge most sharply from Aquinas. While Aquinas associates beauty with intelligibility and the apprehension of form, Schopenhauer argues that music does not depend upon conceptual cognition for its distinctive metaphysical significance. In his view, music communicates directly with the will and emotions, speaking not primarily through conceptual understanding but through a mode of intuitive apprehension.[45] As he writes, painting and poetry represent the Ideas through phenomenal forms, while music expresses what he regards as the essence of things without the same representational mediation.[46] Thus, where Aquinas associates beauty with the intelligibility of form and being, Schopenhauer understands musical experience as an intuitive apprehension of the metaphysical ground of existence, which he identifies with the will.

Consequently, Schopenhauer places music on a distinctive metaphysical plane that extends beyond Aquinas' rational synthesis

---

[43] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* , 1: 257.

[44] Julian Young, Schopenhauer (London: Routledge, 2005), 141.

[45] Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 209–10.

[46] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* , 1: 258.

of order, clarity, and proportion. For Aquinas, beauty is closely associated with the intelligibility of being and can orient the intellect towards divine truth; for Schopenhauer, beauty—especially musical beauty—offers a fleeting release from the restless striving of the will.[47] In this contrast lies the core of their philosophical divergence: Aquinas situates music within an intelligible order that can participate in the orientation of the human person towards the good, while Schopenhauer understands music as a distinctive expression of the world's inner essence. Yet, both accord music a distinctive capacity to mediate between sensible experience and what transcends ordinary phenomenal representation, inviting the listener into a deeper awareness of reality.

(b) Music as Metaphysical Revelation and the Question of Intelligibility

Schopenhauer's view of music as a metaphysical revelation constitutes one of the most distinctive and controversial features of his aesthetics. For him, music does not imitate appearances, as other representational arts do, but directly expresses what he regards as the very essence of the world as will. In The World as Will and Representation, he asserts that music "is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself."[48] Unlike representational art, which operates through Ideas, representation, and analogy, music does not depend upon the same conceptual and representational mediation and, for Schopenhauer, communicates directly with the will. Its power lies in its capacity to express the inner character of the will—desire, striving, and suffering—without recourse to conceptual representation.

[47] Sandra Shapshay, "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art." 11-22.
[48] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 1: 257.

However, while Schopenhauer recognises music's unique capacity to transcend ordinary phenomenal representation, his interpretation understates the rational and teleological dimensions of beauty. For Thomas Aquinas, beauty (*pulchrum*) is closely related to truth (*verum*) and goodness (*bonum*), grounded in the intelligibility and order of being.[49] On this account, the apprehension of beauty involves perceiving form, order, and proportion, which ultimately reflect the intelligibility of creation and its divine source. Thus, music's value lies not merely in its capacity to evoke affective experience but in its ability to engage and elevate the intellect through ordered harmony.[50] Aquinas' traditionally attributed triadic account of beauty—*integritas* (wholeness), *consonantia* (proportion), and *claritas* (radiance)—suggests that aesthetic experience involves a synthesis of sensible apprehension and intellectual understanding, where form discloses the intelligibility of being.[51]

In this Thomistic framework, music becomes a medium through which human reason can apprehend and participate in the divine order. Its harmonies are not arbitrary but can be understood as reflecting aspects of the structure of creation, thereby orienting the soul towards contemplation rather than resignation.[52] Hence, where Schopenhauer sees music as a temporary release from the suffering associated with willing, Aquinas provides a framework in which music can be understood as participating in the intelligible beauty of being—a movement from affect to understanding, from sensible

[49] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 4.

[50] Etienne Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 36.

[51] Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 4144.

[52] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 28–29.

experience towards divine order. This shift transforms aesthetic experience from Schopenhauerian tragic transcendence towards Thomistic metaphysical fulfilment, integrating emotion, reason, and faith in the contemplation of the beautiful.

Conclusion

Schopenhauer's aesthetics of music arises from a profound metaphysical vision in which the world of appearances conceals a deeper metaphysical reality: the will. His conviction that music uniquely reveals this hidden reality gives music a uniquely philosophical and existential significance. Music, in his view, becomes the purest form of artistic expression because it does not depend upon conceptual mediation in the way the other arts do and communicates the primordial striving that underlies all existence. In doing so, Schopenhauer offers a compelling yet tragic understanding of art—tragic because its consolation is transient, providing only temporary respite from the suffering arising from the ceaseless striving of the will.

In contrast to this metaphysical pessimism, a Thomistic critique reveals certain limitations in Schopenhauer's vision. As Aquinas' discussion of beauty in the *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 39, a. 8) indicates, beauty is associated with clarity and intelligibility. Aquinas' understanding of music and beauty situates aesthetic experience within a rational and teleological order that can be understood in relation to the rational and teleological order of creation. Beauty, traditionally understood in Thomistic aesthetics through *integritas* (wholeness), *consonantia* (proportion), and *claritas* (radiance), engages not only the emotions but also the intellect, orienting the human person towards truth and goodness. In this light, music's value does not lie merely in its immediacy or affective power, but also in its capacity to disclose intelligible order and contribute to the soul's contemplation of the divine.

Thus, where Schopenhauer's metaphysics situates music within the restless dynamic of will and representation, a Thomistic framework opens music to participation in the intelligible order of being. Within a Thomistic context, music can be understood as a microcosm of creation—ordered, intelligible, and oriented towards its Creator. It can both delight and instruct, harmonising sensory experience with intellectual apprehension and directing human longing towards praise. The Thomistic synthesis, therefore, recasts Schopenhauer's tragic metaphysics of sound within a metaphysics of hope—one in which art is no longer understood primarily as offering respite from the futility of desire, but as revealing the splendour of divine order that grounds beauty in divine order and meaning.

In bringing Schopenhauer's metaphysical insight into dialogue with Aquinas' theological and metaphysical perspective, music emerges not merely as an art of sound but as an echo of being itself—where beauty is understood in relation to truth and goodness in the praise of the divine.

Bibliography

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947.

Augustine. *Confessions*. Book X. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Boethius. *De Institutione Musica*. Translated by Calvin M. Bower. Leiden: Brill, 1989.

Bowman, Wayne. *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Carmichael, Amy. "The Not So Silent Planets: The Medieval and Renaissance Concept of *Musica Mundana*." *Music and Worship Student Presentations*, no. 13 (2013). Accessed April 15, 2024. https://cedarville.tind.io/collection/Cedarville%20Institutional%20Repository?ln=en.

Cole, Basil. "Music and Spirituality." Accessed March 1, 2024. https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/music-and-spirituality-11168.

Dolan, Frederick. "What Is the Distinction between Will and Representation According to Schopenhauer?" *Quora*. Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-distinction-between-will-and-representation-according-to-Schopenhauer.

Eco, Umberto. *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by Hugh Bredin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Elders, Leo J. *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*. Leiden: Brill, 1993.

Ferrara, Lawrence. "Schopenhauer on Music as the Embodiment of Will." In *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, edited by Dale Jacquette, 183–99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Gilson, Étienne. *The Arts of the Beautiful*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Kayukov, V.A. and A.B. Lebedev. "Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Music as Breakthrough from the World of Rationality."

International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies 1, (2016): 725–30. https://dspace.kpfu.ru/xmlui/handle/net/104562.

Magee, Bryan. *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Online ed., Oxford Academic, November 1, 2003. https://doi.org/10.1093/0198237227.001.0001. Accessed May 15, 2024.

Maritain, Jacques. *Art and Scholasticism*. Translated by J. F. Scanlan. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930.

McCormick, Matt. "Immanuel Kant: Metaphysics." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed May 10, 2024. https://iep.utm.edu/kantmeta/.

McGann, Dominic. "Nobilior Modus Est: The Importance of Music in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas." *European Journal for the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 41, no. 1 (2023): 62–79. https://doi.org/10.2478/ejsta-2023-0004.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Ravasio, Matteo. "History of Western Philosophy of Music: Since 1800." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Fall 2021 ed. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed April 10, 2024. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/hist-westphilmusic-since-1800.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Studies in Pessimism: A Series of Essays*. Translated by Thomas Bailey Saunders. London: George Allen & Company, 1913.

———. *The World as Will and Representation*. 2 vols. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. New York: Dover Publications, 1969.

Shapshay, Sandra. "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art." *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 1 (2012): 11–22.

———. "Schopenhauer's Aesthetics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Fall 2023 ed. Edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman. Accessed April 1, 2024. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/schopenhauer-aesthetics/.

Troxell, Mary. "Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860)." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed April 10, 2024. https://iep.utm.edu/schopenh/.

Wang, Yuhwen. "The Ethical Power of Music: Ancient Greek and Chinese Thoughts." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 89–104. https://doi.org/10.2307/3527365.

Whitfield, Sarah. "Music: Its Expressive Power and Moral Significance." *Musical Offerings* 1, no. 1 (2010): 11–19. https://doi.org/10.15385/jmo.2010.1.1.2.

Young, Julian. *Schopenhauer*. London: Routledge, 2005.

———. *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*. Dordrecht: Springer, 1987.