SELF-REVELATION AND THE LAW: ARNOLD SCHOENBERG IN HIS RELIGIOUS WORKS

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To Eric Werner, spiritus rector of my theological explorations

"Art and life are indivisible"
Mendelssohn

Nearing his death, Arnold Schoenberg wrote to Josef Rufer on June 13, 1951: "In *Grove's Dictionary of Music* there is quite a good article that includes a discussion of *Moses and Aaron.* Partly nonsensical, in that it brings the artist in. That's late-19th-century stuff, but not me. The subject-matter and the treatment of it are purely of a religious-philosophical kind".[1]

So categorical a statement would seem, on the face of it, to rule out any consideration of possible autobiographical elements in *Moses and Aaron* — or, indeed, in any of Schoenberg's other works of religious and philosophical cast. But such a conclusion would be premature. We know, from Schoenberg's own utterances, that a number of his seemingly "abstract" instrumental works were in reality autobiographical in character. Many times he used to speak of the "secret program" of the First String Quartet (though he never, to my knowledge, revealed it to anyone). And it is rather widely known that his String Trio of 1946 partially depicts the course of his near-fatal illness of that year — even his resuscitation from apparent death by an injection into the heart is described in striking musical language. Why, then, should self-revelation be rigorously excluded from precisely those works — I am thinking particularly of *Die Jakobsleiter* and *Moses and Aaron* — which preoccupied him during so many years of his life? Does not the "dying statement" to Rufer, in a strange way, conceal more than it reveals?

It is my firm belief that, far from dealing with purely abstract concepts, Schoenberg's major religious works present his spiritual autobiography in a vivid and unambiguous language. Further, I believe that only on this supposition can certain anomalies in the history of these works be explained. And,

[1] *Letters*, pp. 287–288.

Abbreviations used in this paper:

Briefe = A. Schoenberg, *Briefe*, ed. E. Stein, Mainz, 1958; translations quoted, by D. Newlin.

Letters = A. Schoenberg, *Letters*, ed. E. Stein, tr. E. Wilkinson - E. Kaiser, London, 1964.

J. Rufer, *Works* = J. Rufer, *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg* (tr. D.Newlin). London, 1962.

L. Stein, *Die Jakobsleiter* = L. Stein, *The Music*, BBC Third Programme Booklet for the British Première of *Die Jakobsleiter*, London, 1965 (texts translated by Leo Black).

more strongly yet, I am convinced that Schoenberg's religious and philosophical ideas are inextricably interwoven with the genesis of the technical innovations with which his name is unforgettably associated. Indeed, rather than concentrating too exclusively (as has, alas, so often been done) on sterile row-analysis of Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions, we might better ask ourselves what *idea* the composer was trying to express. No one was more aware of this than Schoenberg himself. In a letter of 1932 which cannot be too often cited, he gently upbraided his disciple Rudolf Kolisch:

> I cannot warn often enough against the over-valuation of these analyses, since they lead only to what I have always fought against — the recognition of how the piece is *made*; whereas I have always helped my students to recognize — what it *is*! I have tried and tried to make that comprehensible to Wiesengrund and also to Berg and Webern. But they do not believe me. I cannot say it often enough: my works are twelve-tone *compositions*, not *twelve-tone* compositions![2]

Thus, an investigation of the spiritual import of Schoenberg's compositional methods might ultimately prove more rewarding than one more study of the combinatoriality of his row-forms — and, it may be, a little more in the spirit of the composer.

Let our story begin on December 11, 1912. On that day, Richard Dehmel listened for the first time to Schoenberg's sextet based on his poem *Verklärte Nacht*. Deeply moved, he hastened to write words of warmest appreciation to the composer. The letter arrived at exactly the right moment for Schoenberg. For a long time, he had admired Dehmel's poetry — an admiration attested to, not only by the passionate phrases of *Verklärte Nacht* but also by many deeply-felt songs. Now, he realized that Dehmel might be the man who could help him with a project very close to his heart. His reply of December 13 merits extended quotation:

> ...for a long time I have been wanting to write an oratorio on the following theme: how the man of today, who has passed through materialism, socialism, and anarchy, who was an atheist but has still preserved a remnant of ancient beliefs (in the form of superstition) — how this modern man struggles with God (see also *Jakob ringt* by Strindberg) and finally arrives at the point of finding God and becoming religious. How to learn to pray! This change should *not* be caused by any actions, by blows of fate, or by a love-affair. Or, at least, such things should be merely hinted at, kept in the background as motivations. And above all: the text must mirror the speech, thought and expression of the man of today; it should deal with the problems which press upon us. For those who struggle with God in the Bible also express themselves as men of their time, speak of their own concerns and remain at their own social and spiritual

[2] *Briefe*, p. 179; J. Rufer, *Works*, pp. 141–142.

> level. Therefore, they are artistically strong, but cannot be put into music by a composer of today who fulfills his obligations.
> At first I had intended to write this myself. Now, I do not trust my own capacity to do so. Then I thought of arranging Strindberg's *Jakob ringt* for my purposes. Finally, I decided to begin with positive religiosity, and I plan to rework the final chapter ("Journey to Heaven") of Balzac's *Seraphita.* But I could not get rid of the idea of "The Prayer of the Man of Today"; and I often thought: "If only Dehmel...!"[3]

We prick up our ears when we read of the modern man who has still preserved a remnant of ancient beliefs in the form of superstition. This sounds suspiciously like a description of Schoenberg himself. We know that he was dogged throughout his life by number-superstitions pertaining to his birthdate, September 13. Many of his manuscripts show how often he avoided the fateful number 13, preferring to number a thirteenth page or measure "12 a". When he failed to do this, dire consequences were apt to ensue — according to him, at least. A typical instance, which he took the trouble to note at the bottom of page 13 of the manuscript of his Violin Concerto:

> Nobody will believe me — but when I numbered measure 222 in the score, I thought to myself, "Up till now I haven't made any mistakes in the measure-numbering this time". And then I thought at once, "But it couldn't last". And a minute later, I discovered that I left out the number in measure 223 — and on *page 13,* where I interrupted my work [because of a three-week illness which had set in at that critical point].[4]

Somehow, it seems that Schoenberg, throughout the various stages of his spiritual development, never quite found the way to overcome these remnants of superstition. Or perhaps he did not really wish to dispose of these relics of childhood?

Another interesting point: in this phase of his development, Schoenberg was by no means ready to accept Biblical heroes as mouthpieces for his ideas. Categorically he states: "those who struggle with God in the Bible... cannot be put into music by a composer of today who fulfills his obligations". The mighty concept of *Moses and Aaron* was still a long way from realization.

Dehmel, meanwhile, was overjoyed at Schoenberg's request, but was unable to fill the composer's "order" in quite the form envisioned. He did send Schoenberg an oratorio text (*Schöpfungsfeier, Oratorium natale*) written the previous year; and Schoenberg did try to utilize it, along with textual material of his own (*Totentanz der Prinzipien*), verses of Rabindranath Tagore, and Biblical texts (Psalm 100, citations from Isaiah and Jeremiah). But the diversity of texts did not, after all, satisfy Schoenberg. He had to create his own unified

3 *Briefe,* p. 31; J. Rufer, *Works,* p. 117.
4 J. Rufer, *Works,* p. 61.

text-concept; and it was this idea that was to become the basis of *Die Jakobsleiter.*

Something equally important was happening to Schoenberg's *musical* concept at this time. He tells of it in a letter written to Nicolas Slonimsky in 1937:

> The "method of composing with twelve tones" had many "first steps" (*Vorversuche*). The first step happened about December 1914 or at the beginning of 1915 when I sketched a symphony, the last part of which became later the *Jakobsleiter*, but which never has been continued. The scherzo of this symphony was based on a theme consisting of the twelve tones. But this was only one of the themes. I was still far away from the idea to use such a basic theme as a unifying means for a whole work.[5]

Not yet, in *Die Jakobsleiter*, does the twelve-tone row present itself to Schoenberg (or to us) with the force of a decree, of the law — a role which it definitely comes to play in *Moses and Aaron.* But we see how Schoenberg begins to manipulate tonal groups in a quasi-serial manner. Leonard Stein, in his brief analysis of the music of *Die Jakobsleiter*, shows how the initial *basso ostinato* figure of six different tones generates a variety of themes wherein these same six tones are differently ordered.[6] Example 1a shows the initial figure; (b) through (f), some of its transformations.

Now, the technical device which Schoenberg is using here proves to have a most intimate relationship to the (expressed and latent) *content* of the work. I speak of certain key-ideas of that visionary mystic, Swedenborg, which are essential to the understanding of *Die Jakobsleiter.* Schoenberg drew these ideas in great part from Balzac's philosophical novel *Seraphita*, much of which is devoted to an extensive exposition of Swedenborgian concepts. Even the title of Schoenberg's oratorio occurs in Balzac's words:

> Does the Spirit crush matter at the foot of the mystical ladder of the seven spiritual worlds hung one above another in space, and seen by the floods of light that fall in cascades down the steps of the heavenly floor? ...None but the loftier spirits open to faith can discern Jacob's mystical ladder.[7]

The climactic scene of *Seraphita* — that episode which both Schoenberg and Berg thought of composing — presents a truly grandiose vision of the Swedenborgian heaven. This heaven is both directionless and timeless; everything is homogeneous. Balzac vividly describes the imagined scene:

> Light gave birth to melody, and melody to light; colors were both light and melody; motion was number endowed by the Word; in short, everything was at once sonorous, diaphanous, and mobile; so that, everything existing in every-

[5] N. Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900* (New York, 1937), pp. 574–575.

[6] L. Stein, *Die Jakobsleiter*, p. 9.

[7] H. Balzac, *Seraphita*, tr. C. Bell (Philadelphia, 1901), p. 112.

> thing else, extension knew no limits, and the angels could traverse it everywhere to the utmost depths of the infinite.[8]

The concept of "color as light and melody" was brilliantly used by Schoenberg as early as 1910, in *Die glückliche Hand.* His stage directions for this too-seldom-performed work include effects which, even today, have rarely been brought to complete realization. Witness, for example, this spectacular scene:

> Every trace of the workshop disappears behind the dark curtain. As it darkens, a wind springs up. At first it murmurs softly, then steadily swells louder (along with the music). Conjoined with this wind-crescendo is a light-crescendo. It begins with dull red light (from above) that turns to brown and then a dirty green. Next it changes to a dark blue-gray, followed by violet. This grows, in turn, into an intense dark red which becomes ever brighter and more glaring until, after reaching a blood-red, it is mixed more and more with orange and then bright yellow; finally a glaring yellow light alone remains and from all sides inundates the second grotto. This grotto was already visible at the beginning of the light-crescendo and underwent the same gamut of color-changes without and within (although less brightly than the rest of the stage). Now it, too, streams with yellow light.[9]

But even more important than the synthesis of color and tone was the unitary conception of space. Schoenberg was now to realize this visionary conception in a strikingly practical manner. For the method of composition with twelve tones — adumbrated, as we have seen, in the preliminary sketches for *Die Jakobsleiter* as well as in the portion of that score which Schoenberg was able to complete — is inconceivable without this kind of space-perception. Schoenberg made this quite clear in his essay of 1941, *Composition with Twelve Tones*:

> *...the unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception.* In this space, as in Swedenborg's heaven (described in Balzac's *Seraphita*), there is no absolute down, no right or left, no forward or backward. Every musical configuration, every movement of tones has to be comprehended primarily as a mutual relation of sounds, of oscillatory vibrations, appearing at different places and times. To the imaginative and creative faculty, relations in the material sphere are as independent from directions or planes as material objects are, in their sphere, to our perceptive faculties. Just as our mind always recognizes, for instance, a knife, a bottle or a watch, regardless of its position, and can reproduce it in the imagination in every possible position, even so a musical creator's mind can operate subconsciously with a row of tones, regardless of their direction, regardless of the way in which a mirror might show the mutual relations, which remain a given quantity.[10]

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Scene III. Translation by D. Johnson, in program notes to *The Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, I (Columbia Records M2S 679), p. [27].

[10] A. Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, tr. D. Newlin (New York, 1950), p. 113.

Thus wrote Schoenberg — now past-master of the wellnigh Netherlandish arts of row-composition — in the 1940's. But, in 1912, he was at the beginning of the long road which was to lead him to that lofty height of achievement. He did not know where this road would lead him; but he knew that he had to follow his destiny. The opening words of *Die Jakobsleiter*, spoken by Gabriel — here clearly a spokesman for the author — express this dominant leitmotif of Schoenberg's thought:

> Whether to right or to left, forward or backward, uphill or downhill — you must go on, without asking what lies before or behind you.
> It shall be hidden; you were allowed to forget it, you had to, in order to fulfill your task.[11]

Later, Gabriel puts into words still another key idea of Schoenberg's — one which we have already met in the letter to Dehmel: "how this modern man... finally arrives at the point of finding God and becoming religious. How to learn to pray?" Balzac's mysterious Seraphita had much to say concerning the power of prayer:

> ...he who is on the frontier of the divine worlds prays, and his prayer is expression, meditation, and action all in one... Prayer is the fair and radiant daughter of all the human virtues, ...prayer will give you the key of heaven... The universe belongs to him who will, who can, who knows how to pray; but he must will, he must be able, and he must know how — in one word, he must have power, faith, and wisdom. ...When you possess the gift of praying without weariness, with love, assurance, force, and intelligence, your spiritualized nature soon attains to power. It passes beyond everything, like the whirlwind or the thunder, and partakes of the nature of God.[12]

Schoenberg's Gabriel reflects these ideas (and even quotes *Seraphita* directly):

> Learn to pray: for "he who prays has become one with God" [*Seraphita*]. Only his wishes separate him still from his goal. But this union must not cease, and will not be invalidated by your faults. The Eternal One, your God, is no jealous God of revenge, but a God who reckons with your imperfections, to whom your inadequacy is known, who realizes that you must falter and that your road is long.
> He listens to you, protects you on your way; you are eternally in His hand, guided, watched over and protected in spite of your free will, bound to Him in spite of your evil desire for sin, loved by Him — if you know how to pray. Learn to pray: Knock, and the door will be opened unto you![13]

[11] L. Stein, *Die Jakobsleiter*, p. 15.
[12] *Seraphita, ed. cit.*, pp. 130–131.
[13] Cf. D. Newlin, *Bruckner, Mahler, Schoenberg* (New York, 1947), p. 259.

And it is the united response of the souls — remarkably paralleling an old Hebrew text which can be traced back to well before the tenth century[14] — which closes the work:

> Lord God in Heaven,
> Hark to our weeping,
> Pardon our trespass,
> Have pity on us,
> Attend to our prayers,
> Fulfill all our wishes,
> Give ear to our lamentations,
> Grant us love and bliss in eternity.
> Amen![15]

It is not Gabriel alone who is the standard-bearer of Schoenberg's ideas in *Die Jakobsleiter.* Karl H. Wörner, in his valuable essay "Musik zwischen Theologie und Weltanschauung: Textliche Interpretation des Oratoriums *Die Jakobsleiter* von Arnold Schönberg",[16] rightly points out the similarity between the personality of Schoenberg and that of the Chosen One (*Der Auserwählte*) in the *Jakobsleiter*-text. In his *Harmonielehre* (1911) Schoenberg had written forcefully concerning the role of the artist: "For the artist, it is enough that he has expressed himself according to the laws of this nature. But the laws of a genius's nature are the laws of future humanity".[17] This idea is elaborated poetically in the dramatic utterances of The Chosen One — a leader against his will, as Schoenberg himself was, and as he was later to portray his image of Moses:

> I should not approach, for I lose thereby;
> But I must, so it seems, plunge into their midst,
> Though my word will then remain uncomprehended.
> Is it they who wish it, am I driven to it —
> To be bound to them, because they resemble me?
> . . . .
> They are the theme, I the variation.
> Yet I am driven by a different motive.
> I am driven toward a goal.
> What goal? I must know that! Away!
> My word I leave here — make what you can of it!
> My form I take with me! — in any case, it must remain beyond you,

[14] Paraphrase from two prayers of the Day of Atonement: אבינו מלכנו; סלח נא (information furnished by Professor E. Werner).

[15] D. Newlin, *Bruckner, Mahler, Schoenberg*, p. 259.

[16] K. H. Wörner, unpublished paper delivered at UNESCO International Music Congress, Jyväskylä, Finland, 1965.

[17] A. Schoenberg, *Harmonielehre* (Leipzig–Wien, 1911), p. 364.

> Until it reappears in your midst with new words — the old ones over again —
> To be newly misunderstood.[18]

We remember with a smile the little conversation that took place during Schoenberg's military service in World War I:

> CAPTAIN: Are you really the famous composer Arnold Schoenberg?
> SCHOENBERG: Well, no one else wanted to be, so I had to take on the job![19]

Or, as Schoenberg put it with typical wry humor in his message of May 22, 1947, to the National Institute of Arts and Letters:

> Personally I had the feeling as if I had fallen into an ocean of boiling water, and not knowing how to swim or to get out in another manner, I tried with my legs and arms as best I could. I did not know what saved me; why I was not drowned or cooked alive... I have perhaps only one merit; I never gave up.[20]

That persistency had led Schoenberg — whether he liked it or not — across a new frontier. Josef Rufer recounts how, during a stroll in Traunkirchen towards the end of July, 1921, Schoenberg told him, "Today I have discovered something which will assure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years".[21] It was the method of composition with twelve tones related only to one another. It was not long before Schoenberg began to apply this method to the forceful expression of those religious and philosophical ideas closest to his heart. A case in point is the second of his *Four Pieces for Mixed Chorus*, Op. 27 (1925): "Du sollst nicht, du musst". Schoenberg's text expresses in unmistakable terms the ideas which were to reach their fullest fruition in *Moses and Aaron*:

> Thou shalt make for thyself no image!
> For an image creates limitations,
> Places bounds on what should be limitless and inconceivable.
> An image must have a name;
> Thou canst take a name only from the petty everyday —
>
> Thou shalt not honor that which is petty!
> Thou must believe in the Spirit!
> Immediate, emotionless, and selfless.
> Thou must, Chosen One, must, wilt thou remain The Chosen!

At the very beginning of the piece, Schoenberg states the twelve tones — and his basic proposition — with the lapidary force of a Decree, a Commandment (see Example 2).

18 L. Stein, *Die Jakobsleiter*, pp. 18–19.

19 *Briefe*, p. 301; D. Newlin, "*Die Jakobsleiter*, Its History and Significance", in BBC Third Programme Booklet..., (see n. 1) p. 8.

20 *Letters*, p. 245.

21 J. Rufer, *Das Werk Arnold Schoenbergs* (Kassel, 1959), p. 26; idem, *Works*, p. 45.

Throughout, this basic set is treated with the strictest of row-technique, in a fashion unusually impersonal for Schoenberg — as if to emphasize the imageless purity of the Law. That very Law is visioned, as it were, in its pristine form, in the row's final wide-flung statement (see Example 3).

Or, see "Das Gesetz", No. 2 of *Six Pieces for Male Chorus*, Op. 35 (1930), wherein Schoenberg bids us see the true miracle of life in this: "That there should be one Law which all things on earth obey, as thou obeyest thy Lord; which commandeth all things as thy Lord commandeth thee." Once again the miracle of the Law is expressed in the purest twelve-tone row (see Example 4).

But little choruses — no matter how beautifully conceived and constructed — could not suffice Schoenberg for the expression of such fundamental and far-reaching ideas. Once more he sought a wider stage — and, this time, turned to the Biblical figures whom in 1912 he had held to be unsuitable subjects for "a composer of today who fulfills his obligations". Already in 1928 we find him jotting down textual material related to the subject of *Moses and Aaron.* (He told Alban Berg, in a letter which I shall later quote more extensively, that he had concerned himself with the subject at least five years before that.) A happy chance has preserved for us the very first *musical* sketch of the opera. The row was drafted and the first sketch was penned on May 7, 1930; the work began in earnest on July 16, 1930. The end of the second-act score is dated at Barcelona, March 10, 1932. And then...

Strange indeed is the history of this work, which, seemingly, Schoenberg longed to complete practically to the day of his death, yet which was to remain unfinished. It is fascinating to follow, in his letters to friends, the history of the work's genesis and growth. These letters afford us precious documentation — yet still must leave certain questions unanswered.

In contrast to the letter to Rufer which served as springboard for our discussion, a letter to Berg written on August 5, 1930, gives unmistakable testimony as to the autobiographical nature of *Moses and Aaron.* Berg, it seems, was anxious lest Schoenberg's drama be too similar to Strindberg's play *Moses* (the first part of his posthumous *Cosmic Trilogy*). Schoenberg admitted a superficial similarity, but discounted its importance:

> There is, in fact, a certain similarity, insofar as we both go in for somewhat Biblical language and even use many outright quotations. As a matter of fact, I am now, among other revisions, removing these Biblical echoes. Not because of the likeness to Strindberg — that wouldn't matter; but because I am of the opinion that the language of the Bible is medieval German, which, being obscure to us, should be used at most to give color. And that is something I don't need. I don't at the moment remember what idea Strindberg was presenting. But mine, both my main idea and the many, many subsidiary ideas literally and symbolically presented, is all so much tied up with my own personality that it is impossible for Strindberg to have presented anything that could have

> even an external similarity. ...Today I can really scarcely remember what belongs to me. But one thing must be granted me (I won't let myself be deprived of it): *everything I have written has a certain inner likeness to myself.*[22]

Indeed we may perceive the inner likeness of Schoenberg's Moses to his own personality. Nowhere is this more vividly seen than in the shattering final scene of the second act. Moses stands amid the wreckage of all his hopes and ideals. He is surrounded by the human débris of the orgy around the Golden Calf. Smashed at his feet lie the Tables of the Law — that Law for whose coming he had spiritually prepared himself for so long. (This spiritual preparation was beautifully expressed in the one passage which he is permitted to *sing*; after the previously cited passages, it is no surprise that he proclaims his principles in a twelve-tone row; see Example 5).

Once Moses had hoped that this ideal might be achieved. Now he despairs: "So all was but madness that I believed before — and can and must not be given voice". A wide-flung violin melody strains upward to express this Inexpressible: "O Word, Thou Word that I lack!" The restless music finally comes to a point of repose as the strings sound an F-sharp in unison. Is not this strangely penetrating tone — whose inner resonance vibrates in us long after it has ceased to sound — a symbol of the abiding Word, the *Logos?* (See Example 6.)

In a letter to Walter Eidlitz, on March 15, 1933, Schoenberg — in words strangely contradicting his letter to Berg (again these contradictions!) — wrote, "My Moses... is not human at all".[23] But his words and music in this scene speak a far different language. Here is not only an abstract, imponderable, superpersonal idea; here is the genuine stuff of personal tragedy as well. Did not Moses feel a personal sorrow when his ideas were distorted in Aaron's "pragmatic" presentation, well-meaning in intent but ultimately disastrous in effect? Did not Schoenberg, too, suffer from the misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and even betrayals (albeit often unwitting ones) of certain disciples? Half-humorously, we might even compare Moses' visible annoyance at Aaron's rather childish "miracles" with Schoenberg's rejection of the naïve and self-serving propaganda of, say, a René Leibowitz (vide *Schoenberg and his School*). Even a Berg and a Webern were not always guiltless of misinterpreting their master's ideas, as we have seen in the above-cited letter to Kolisch.

All this is but the embodiment of the age-old conflict between Priest and Prophet. This antithesis was already known to the Talmud. In modern times, the difference between the two types was first described by Ahad Ha'am in his *Moses* essay (1904): "...the Prophet is an *extremist*. He concentrates his

[22] *Letters*, p. 143 (italics mine).

[23] *Letters*, p. 172.

whole heart and mind on his ideal, in which he finds the goal of life, and to which he is determined to make the whole world do service without the smallest exception." The Priests, on the other hand, incapable of rising to the Prophet's height, "stand between the Prophet and the world, and transmit his influence by devious ways, adapting their methods to the needs of each particular time, and not insisting that the message shall descend on the workaday world in all its pristine purity".[24]

Even more forceful — and even closer to the interpretation of Schoenberg — is the statement of Martin Buber in his address, *Jüdische Religiosität:*

> Already here, we see the juxtaposition and opposition of the two principal types of humanity, the conflict between which is basic to the history of Judaism: the Prophet and the Priest. Moses is the demanding one, who listens to nothing but *The Voice* and who acknowledges nothing but The Deed. Aaron is the mediator, who is just as accessible to a multitude of voices as to *The Voice* and who corrupts the people with his all-too-flexible service to outward forms. The Prophet desires Truth and the Word; the Priest desires power. These are eternal types in the history of Judaism.[24*]

We cannot but be deeply moved at the strength and clarity with which Schoenberg has expressed these ideas in his libretto. Equally impressive is the care with which every technical detail of the music is placed at the service of the Idea. We have already seen two small examples of this; still another deserves citation. In the first scene the Voice of God from the Burning Bush is represented by a *double* chorus — six choral *Sprechstimme* parts, six solo singing parts. Some may regard this as mere "sound-effect" — but, in view of the immense conceptual importance of each functional detail in Schoenberg's writing, is it not more plausible to suppose that the composer is presenting here in most plastic form the traditional Rabbinic concept of "God's double voice"? He was assuredly a careful enough student of the Biblical text to be well aware of the contradictions between the two different statements of the Decalogue (though I doubt that he knew of the Masoretic *double accentuation* of the text).

Indeed, we are aware of another instance wherein a Biblical contradiction delayed Schoenberg in preparing the text for the third act. In the previously quoted letter to Walter Eidlitz he indicated that the discrepancies between two Biblical passages (Ex 17: 6 and Num 20: 8) disturbed him to the extent that he could not resolve them. In Exodus, we read:

> And the Lord said unto Moses, go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb;

24 Ahad Ha-'Am, *Selected Essays*, tr. L. Simon (Cleveland–New York, 1962), pp. 312, 314.
24* In his *Vom Geist des Judentums* (Leipzig, 1916), p. 64 (tr. D. Newlin).

> and thou shalt *smite the rock*, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

On the other hand, the following description of the event is given in Numbers:

> And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, *thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock* before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and with his rod he *smote the rock* twice; and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

As we note, the contradictions (italicized above) involve the question of whether the Lord commanded Moses to *speak* to the rock (thereby glorifying the power of the Word, i.e., the Idea) or to *smite* it (thereby admitting that forceful action is the only language which the populace understands). Furthermore, Aaron's presence is referred to in Numbers only. Schoenberg eventually solved the contradiction in a personal way, providing his own version of the story — a version quite consistent with his total concept of the personalities of Moses and Aaron. Aaron, the man of superficial action, becomes the one to strike the rock, instead of speaking to it as he was commanded to do. For this, he is sternly condemned by Moses:

> The Word alone was to have struck forth refreshment from the naked rock... the rock is, like the wasteland and the burning bush, an image of the soul, whose very renunciation is sufficient for eternal life. And the rock, even as all images, obeys the Word, from whence it came to be manifested. Thus, you won the people not for the Eternal One, but for yourself... You have betrayed God to the gods, the idea to images, this chosen folk to others, the extraordinary to the commonplace...[25]

These powerful words cried out for the powerful music to match them — music which would, if possible, even surpass what Schoenberg had already created in the first two acts. And yet, the music would not come. We see Schoenberg constantly returning to the opera, saying he will finish it soon, yet never managing to do so for one reason or another. A psychologist might even see in his abortive efforts the expression of an unconscious will to fail. In 1931 he wrote: "I would like to do everything necessary in order to have the opera complete before I return to Berlin".[26] In 1949 — a world away from the conditions under which *Moses and Aaron* had been conceived — he was still optimistic: "But I have already conceived to a great extent the music for the third act, and believe that I would be able to write it in only a few

[25] *Moses und Aron*, piano-vocal score (Mainz, 1957), p. [303], tr. Allen Forte.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. [301].

months..."[27] But in 1950, things looked darker: "...since then I have found neither time nor mood for the composing of the third act... All of that depends upon my nervous eye affliction".[28] Later in 1950, he could still say, "It is not entirely impossible that I should finish the third act within a year".[29] Finally, nearing his death, he conceded: "Agreed that it is possible for the third act simply to be spoken, in case I cannot complete the composition".[30]

Can we solve the riddle of the work's non-completion? One answer might be found in a well-known passage from Schoenberg's essay on Mahler in *Style and Idea.* Schoenberg was deeply concerned with the mystery of why so many composers have died after completing a Ninth Symphony. He, the mystic, could not dismiss this as a mere coincidence. "It seems", he wrote, "that the Ninth is a limit. He who wants to go beyond it must pass away. It seems as if something might be imparted to us in the Tenth which we ought not yet to know, for which we are not yet ready. Those who have written a Ninth stood too near to the hereafter. Perhaps the riddles of this world would be solved, if one of those who knew them were to write a Tenth. And that probably is not to take place."[31]

Even so, Schoenberg might have come to believe that the Supreme Commander would not grant him the completion of his greatest artistic testament — or, for that matter, of *Die Jakobsleiter* or of the *Modern Psalms.* As he says of Mahler, he himself "was allowed to reveal just so much of the future; when he wanted to say more, he was called away". Yes, even a Schoenberg dared not approach too near, in his conversations with God: "...let not God speak with us, lest we die!"

It was not given to Moses to enter the Promised Land; nor was it given to Schoenberg fully to experience (though he might have foreseen) the incalculable impact that his life-work was to have in unexpected ways and places. But Moses was allowed to behold a vision. And Schoenberg was allowed to formulate in words (though no longer in music) his lofty ideal of the wilderness. Like the Rechabites dwelling in tents all their days, like Elijah gaining renewed strength through pilgrimage to the desert abode of his God, like John the Baptist crying in the wilderness — Schoenberg, in inner and outer exile, sought purification in "the wasteland". In truth, the third act of *Moses and Aaron* becomes an apotheosis of the Law and the Desert. And yet, like Moses before him, Schoenberg had to realize that his ideal was not attainable in life. Rather, it stood against life. There could be no reconciliation, no solution of the

[27] *Ibid.*
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Style and Idea, ed. cit.*, p. 34.

problem — hence, no completion of the opera. As Schiller put it in *Das Ideal und das Leben*:

> Wenn ihr in der Menschheit traur'ger Blösse
> Steht vor des Gesetzes Grösse,
> Wenn dem Heiligen die Schuld sich naht,
> Da erblasse vor der Wahrheit Strahle
> Eure Tugend, vor dem Ideale
> Fliehe mutlos die beschämte Tat.
> Kein Erschaffner hat dies Ziel erflogen,
> Über diesen grauenvollen Schlund
> Trägt kein Nachen, keiner Brücke Bogen,
> Und kein Anker findet Grund.

Yet even in seeming defeat the final words of Schoenberg's libretto express ultimate triumph:

> But in the wilderness ye shall be unconquerable and achieve the goal:
> United with God.

No survey of Schoenberg's religious thought would be complete without at least a brief examination of his greatest specifically *liturgical* work: the *Kol Nidrê* (1938) to a text prepared by Jacob Sonderling of Los Angeles in close collaboration with the composer. A useful introduction to the work is found in the important letter of Schoenberg to Paul Dessau (November 22, 1941), cited by Josef Rufer. It is worth quoting extensively here:

> When I first saw the traditional text I was shocked by the "traditional" conception that all obligations which one has undertaken during the year should be dissolved on the Day of Atonement. I consider this conception false, for it is truly unmoral. It contradicts the high ethical quality of all Jewish commandments.
> From the very first moment that I began to read it, I was convinced that the "Kol Nidre" comes from Spain; it later came out that I was right. This made it clear to me that the meaning was simply as follows: all who had, willingly or unwillingly (apparently) gone over to Christianity — and who, therefore, were supposedly excluded from the Jewish community — might, on this day, once more become reconciled with their God; all other vows and promises were to be dissolved. This has nothing to do with commercial "deals"!
> There are two difficulties connected with the use of the traditional melody:
> 1. Actually there is no "melody" as such, but only a number of melismas which resemble each other up to a point without, however, being identical; also, they do not always appear in the same order.
> 2. This melody is monodic and is not based on harmony in our sense — perhaps not even on polyphony.
> I selected the phrases which a number of versions have in common and put them together in a reasonable order. One of my principal tasks was to "vitriolize away" the 'cello-sentimentality of the Bruchs, etc., and to give this DECREE the dignity of a law, of an edict. I think that I have succeeded in this. These measures 58 to 63 are at least not in sentimental minor key... I am sure, too,

> that you will see much of what I have added to the total effect by providing a motivic basis.[32]

Schoenberg did not know that the *Kol Nidrê* text in reality far antedated the Spanish Inquisition. But his interpretation of its meaning — i.e., that it applies to vows made to *God* and not to those made to *one's fellow-man* — is totally correct; and its special significance during the Inquisition, when its pronunciation made it possible for the Marranos to return to the Jewish community, had a profound message for him. He had strayed from Judaism in his youth, had become an agnostic (as his 1912 letter to Dehmel hints) and had for a time affiliated himself with Lutheranism. But his formal reaffiliation with Judaism, which took place in the fall of 1933 in Paris, was far more than a mere lip-service to the faith of his fathers. As he wrote to Berg in October, 1933:

> As you have doubtless realized, my return to the Jewish religion took place long ago and is indeed demonstrated in some of my published work (*Du sollst nicht, du musst*) and in *Moses and Aaron*, of which you have known since 1928, but which dates from at least five years earlier; but especially in my drama *Der biblische Weg* which was also conceived in 1922 or 1923 at the latest, though finished only in 1926–1927.[33]

In view of the history of Schoenberg's religious life, we can easily understand why the text of the *Kol Nidrê* made a profound appeal to him. As Eric Werner so beautifully pointed out in reviewing the work's first European performance (November, 1957, in Paris), "That he selected such a text indicates his personal concern, and, what is more, his personal sacrifice of atonement, an offer of expiation".[34] Now on the Day of Atonement ("at-one-ment", being *at one* with his people) he and others like him could be reconciled once more with their God.

Schoenberg's stern statement of the opening phrase of the traditional melody (see Example 7) is indeed miles removed in spirit from Bruch's "cello-sentimentality". It hardly needs to be stated that the motivic unification throughout the work differs in no way quantitatively or qualitatively from that to be found in Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions of this period. That this music is tonal should not surprise us; for Schoenberg often had the habit, in his post-1933 works, of returning to tonality. This was in no sense (as some of his enemies tried to interpret it) a confession of the "bankruptcy" of the twelve-tone method, but rather a recognition that twelve-tone and tonal techniques could and should exist side by side, mutually enriching each other.

[32] *Briefe*, p. 228; J. Rufer, *Works*, pp. 66–67.

[33] *Briefe*, pp. 200–201; *Letters*, p. 184.

[34] E. Werner, "Current Chronicle: France", in *MQ*, 44 (1958): 243.

Schoenberg used to enjoy thoroughly these occasional returns to an older style. The stylistic differences thus engendered were not of great importance to him. As he wrote with delightful naïveté and frankness in his essay "On revient toujours": "I do not know which of my compositions are better; I like them all, because I liked them when I wrote them".[35] Seeking a more rationalistic explanation of his "stylistic deviations", he had this to say:

> The classic masters, educated in admiration of the works of great masters of counterpoint, from Palestrina to Bach, must have been tempted to return often to the art of their predecessors, which they considered superior to their own. Such is the modesty of people who could venture to act haughtily; they appreciate achievements of others, though they themselves are not devoid of pride. Only a man who himself deserves respect is capable of paying respect to another man. Only one who knows merits can recognize the merits of other men. Such feelings might have developed in them a longing once again to try to achieve, in the older style, what they were sure they could achieve in their own more advanced style.[36]

To this excellent statement, one more item must be added in the case of the *Kol Nidrê*: even as the assertion of tonality and the use of the traditional melodic phrases establish a link with musical tradition, the choice of text-material links Schoenberg even more firmly with the age-old religious tradition, with which he now felt so deep an inner bond.

Most welcome to Schoenberg was Chemjo Vinaver's suggestion to compose Psalm 130 (in Hebrew) as a contribution to the *Anthology of Jewish Music*. To stimulate the composer's imagination, Vinaver sent along the melody of a Hasidic recitation of this psalm, which he had transcribed in Poland in 1910. Schoenberg liked the idea; while he did not, as in the *Kol Nidrê*, actually *quote* the traditional chant, he wrote to Vinaver, "I... profited from the liturgical motif you sent me, in writing approximately a similar expression".[37] A comparison of the opening phrases of the two settings might show this "inner likeness" (though Schoenberg's melody is, of course, far more wide-ranging than the original; see Example 8).

Vinaver's description of the manner of performance of the Hasidic chant (sung during the morning service of *Rosh Hashanah*) projects something of the intensity which Schoenberg, in turn, captures in his half-sung, half-spoken setting of the text:

> The Leader of the Prayer (Ba'al tefillah) used to exclaim each verse with mystic fervor. The congregation repeated it with the same power and profound emotion —

[35] *Style and Idea, ed. cit.*, p. 213.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 212.
[37] Ch. Vinaver, *Anthology of Jewish Music* (New York, 1955), p. 203.

> but with minor changes and in a faster tempo. This congregational response shifted key-centers frequently, unconsciously creating an atmosphere of unbridled, almost primeval, religious fervor.[38]

In this particular instance, Schoenberg did not choose his own text. But the heart-cry "Out of the Depths" must have spoken deeply to him at this period of his life. He sensed that he was nearing death; he knew that some of his greatest works would have to remain unfinished. In this knowledge he began to write the texts of his *Moderne Psalmen*, "conversations with and about God". Sometimes the aging and embittered man lashed out angrily at what he considered his fate. Almost Job-like is the mood of such a passage as this: "I will never understand that these criminals, who steal from me and rob me, lead a comfortable life protected by good fortune, while I have spent many years of my life in need and care. Is this just?"[39] (Compare Job 10, 2–3: "I will say unto God, do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee that thou shouldst oppress, that thou shouldst despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?")

And yet — in spite of all, Schoenberg could and did retain faith in the God of his fathers. In the text of that part of *Moderne Psalmen*, No. 1, which he was still able to compose, we see how his spiritual Odyssey has come full circle. In 1912 he had longed to know: "How to learn to pray?" Now, at long last, perhaps he had learned. Let us close this brief examination of his spiritual life with the words of that final prayer, the last words he ever composed:

> Oh Thou my God, all people praise Thee
> And assure Thee of their devotion.
> But what does it mean to Thee
> Whether I do this or not?
> Who am I, that I should believe my prayers are necessary?
> When I say "God," I know that I speak of the Only, Eternal,
>   Omnipotent, All-Knowing and Inconceivable One,
> Of Whom I neither can nor should make for myself an image;
> On Whom I neither may nor can make any demand;
> Who will fulfill my most fervent prayer, or ignore it;
> And yet I pray...

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 201.
[39] *Moderne Psalmen* (Mainz, 1950), Psalm 3, tr. D. Newlin.

Dika Newlin

SELF-REVELATION AND THE LAW — ARNOLD SCHOENBERG IN HIS RELIGIOUS WORKS

1. Die Jakobsleiter

a (repeated)

b c

d e

f

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2. Four Pieces for Mixed Chorus, op. 27, no. 2

DU SOLLST DIR KEIN BILD MA – CHEN!

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3. Four Pieces for Mixed Chorus, op. 27, no. 2

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4. Six Pieces for Male Chorus, op. 35 no. 2

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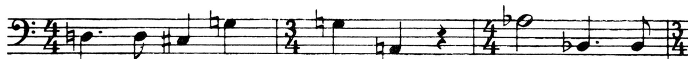
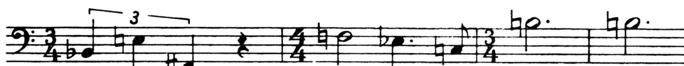
5. Moses and Aaron





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6. Moses and Aaron

Moses
O
Slower
Str
p cresc. *fp*
fp

Moses

word, thou word that I lack!

Str

p < f > pp

p < f > pp

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7. *Kol Nidrê*

measures 58 to 63, woodwinds

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8. Psalm 130

A. Hassidic melody

p f

SHIR HA - MA - A - LOIS MI - MA - MA - KIM ________ K' - RO - SI - CHO A - DO - NOI

B. Schoenberg's melody

p

SHIR HA - MA - A - LOT MI - MA'A - MA - KIM, MI - MA'A - MA - KIM KE - RA - TI - CHA A - DO - NAI ________

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YUVAL

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ISRAËL ADLER

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ABBREVIATIONS

(N.B.: The special abbreviations and sigla used by N. Allony are listed at the end of his article.)

AHw	W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, Wiesbaden, 1959 →
AL	M. Steinschneider, *Die arabische Literatur der Juden*, Frankfurt a.M., 1902
AMl	*Acta Musicologica*
b	Babylonian Talmud
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Chicago, 1956 →
CB	M. Steinschneider, *Catalogus librorum Hebraeorum in bibliotheca Bodleiana*, Berlin, 1852–1860
CS	E. de Coussemaker, ed., *Scriptores de musica medii aevi...*, Paris, 1864–1876
DTO	*Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*
Eissfeldt	O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament — An Introduction* (tr. from the 3rd German edition by P. R. Ackroyd), Oxford, 1965
Enc. Mus. Fasquelle	*Encyclopédie de la musique*, Paris, Fasquelle, 1958–1961
Erlanger	R. d'Erlanger, *La musique arabe*, Paris, 1930–1949
Farmer, *Gen. Fragm.*	H. G. Farmer, *The Oriental Musical Influence and Jewish Genizah Fragments on Music*, London, 1964; repr. of two art. from *Glasgow University Oriental Society, Transactions*, 19 (1963): 1–15 ("The Oriental Musical Influence" = pp. 7–21 of repr.); 52–62 ("Jewish Genizah Fragments on Music" = pp. 22–32 of repr.)
GS	M. Gerbert, ed., *Scriptores ecclesiastici de musica...*, Sankt Blasien, 1784
HOM	A. Z. Idelsohn, *Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz*, Leipzig–Berlin–Jerusalem, 1914–1932
HU	M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*, Berlin, 1893
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IMS	International Musicological Society
IQ	*Islamic Quarterly*
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
JAMS	*Journal of the American Musicological Society*
JIFMC	*Journal of the International Folk Music Council*
JMT	*Journal of Musical Theory*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
KS	*Kirjath Sepher*
m	Mishnah

MD	*Musica Disciplina*
MGG	*Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Kassel, 1949 →
MGWJ	*Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*
MQ	*Musical Quarterly*
NOHM	*New Oxford History of Music*, London, 1955 →
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*
PL	*Patrologia Latina* (ed. Migne)
1Q	Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran Cave 1
1QH	"Thanksgiving Scroll"
1QM	"War Scroll"
1QS	"Manual of Discipline"
REI	*Revue des Etudes Islamiques*
REJ	*Revue des Etudes Juives*
Riemann, *Hbd. Mg.*	H. Riemann, *Handbuch der Musikgeschichte*, Leipzig, 1919–1922
Riemann, *ML*	H. Riemann, *Musik-Lexikon* (quoted edition indicated by exponent)
RM	*Revue de Musicologie*
RQ	*Revue de Qumran*
SIMG	*Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*
Steinschneider, *Cat. Berlin*	M. Steinschneider, *Verzeichnis der hebräischen Handschriften* [*der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*], Berlin, 1878–1897
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
y	Jerusalem Talmud
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZfMW	*Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*
ZGJD	*Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*