SCHENKER, KANT, AND PLATO:

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL ROOTS OF MUSIC THEORY

by

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In his more explicit philosophical statements, Heinrich Schenker depicts musical analysis as an arcane art, accessible only to a gifted few who possess a mystical ability (impervious to rational investigation) to perceive the deep structure of a work. This outlook led Schenker to distance himself from theory itself, identifying himself not as a theorist but as an "artist." Some remnant of that perspective may survive in contemporary theory, where for some Schenkerian analysis retains an esoteric aura. This aspect of Schenker's thought (explored in Section I) reflects philosophical trends prevalent in the Vienna of his day, trends stemming from a Kantian (and ultimately Platonist) belief in a chasm between reality as perceived by the senses and understood by the intellect, and a deeper reality which can be apprehended only by a mystical "moral will."

The epistemology implied by Schenker's treatment of musical issues, however, is fundamentally opposite to the above viewpoint. Implicitly, Schenker regards music as subject to natural laws;

although he views the artist's basic method as intuitive, he nevertheless treats the objectives, techniques, and products of that method as valid areas for rational investigation. Moreover, the musical ear and intuition can themselves be developed by experience and reason. Music theory is not limited to narrow rules and categories; rather, legitimate theory should address the realities and artistic goals of actual "living" compositions. This implicit, decidedly non-Kantian epistemology will be illuminated in Section II by examining a number of facets of Schenker's thought: the sources and development of his theoretical ideas; his view of musical causality; the epistemological principles underlying his view of music perception; his understanding of the relationship between theory and musical practice; his conception of the connection between strict counterpoint and free composition; and, finally, his perspective on the theoretical tradition.

I. Surface Elements of Plato and Kant

Schenker and Plato

The conflict between Schenker's explicit philosophical outlook and his practical approach to musical issues can be better appreciated by first highlighting certain Platonist and Kantian elements in his thought. Plato's distinction between the perfect,

eternal world of Ideas and the illusory, transient world of the senses is brought to mind by Schenker's description of background and foreground:

> Whoever has once perceived the essence of a pure idea--whoever has fathomed its secrets--knows that such an idea remains ever the same, ever indestructible, as an element of an eternal order. Even if, after millenia, such an idea should finally desert mankind and vanish from the foreground of life--that foreground which we like to call chaos--it still partakes of God's cosmos, the background of all creation whence it originated.[1]

In Plato's view the world of the senses was but a pale shadow of a deeper reality, perceptible only by a special vision bequeathed upon a few, and hardly glimpsed by ordinary mortals. For Schenker the genius plays a role comparable to Plato's gifted philosopher-king: only the genius possesses a "clairvoyance which envisions a more distant level before the nearer one is clear in the consciousness" (FC, 68; see also FC, 159).[2] Most listeners remain oblivious to high-level structure and concealed repetitions; their only glimmer of musical form is provided by surface-level motivic repetitions. Consequently there is and always must be an

"unbridgeable chasm . . . between art and the people" (FC, 106; see also FC, 4). Because the mysterious "secrets" of great music lie beyond the grasp of the ordinary senses and intellect, they are "neither teachable nor learnable" and can be known only by those "blessed with special perception." This faculty eternally separates the genius from the ordinary man (FC, 27): "Never can there be a connection between them!"

In this Platonic separation lie the roots of Schenker's oft-remarked "elitism": the special innate faculty of higher-level musical perception is restricted to particular classes and nationalities. The greatest musical advances occurred within "ecclesiastical, royal, and aristocratic circles" (FC, 4), and the fall of aristocracy and rise of democracy must lead to the demise of that great culture (C, 2:xiii). Furthermore, the highest achievements have been attained "by the German genius of music--and, in fact, only by him" (C, 2:xix; see also FC, 106, 161). Italians, he declares, are innately incapable of composing absolute music (the highest form of the art, for Schenker) because a dependence of music on text is in their "blood" (FC, 94, 161); the musically "less sensitive" French, meanwhile, can produce only works of "mediocrity."[3]

Schenker and Kant

The Platonist separation between the world presented to our

senses and the more "real" world apprehended by special insight was revived in a modern form by Immanuel Kant. Kant distinguished between (1) "phenomena," things as perceived by our senses and filtered through our conceptual categories, and (2) "noumena," things as they are in themselves, beyond conceptual knowledge and accessible only by moral will. Kant's influence in early twentieth-century Vienna (and throughout the Germanic world) was pervasive, and such ideas were seriously contemplated and applied in all fields of intellectual life, including music.[4] Moreover, as Kevin Korsyn has demonstrated, Schenker was conversant with Kant's thought, citing him directly some fifteen times and repeatedly echoing him in his explanations, metaphors, and terminology.[5]

Ordinary reason, the phenomena/noumena dichotomy implies, is insufficient to penetrate the deepest secrets of reality, which can be apprehended only by a special instinct. On a "foreground" level, at least, this dichotomy manifests itself in Schenker's frequent contrasts between theory and art and his seeming demonization of the former. "So much talent is wasted," he laments, "immolated on the altar of theory, even of the most perverse theory."[6] The artist's "grasp is firmer by instinct than by reason," he declares (H, 21). Even the great J. S. Bach was occasionally led astray by theory, while Anton Bruckner's natural gift to write "the most beautiful,

original, and moving melodies" is nullified when he "slavishly follows" the dictates of harmonic theory (C, 1:34-39, 96, 99). Schenker regards himself, as Allen Forte points out, as an artist rather than a theorist;[7] on the original title page of his Harmonielehre, for example, he identifies himself anonymously as "an artist" (H, v).

The supposed dichotomy between the world of the senses and the world of the spirit was widespread in Germanic thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, accepted not only by those (including Schenker) who embraced mysticism and denounced "materialism" (C, 2:xiii-iv), but also implicitly by those who took the opposite course, including Marx as well as various racial theorists. Although apparently opposing, these various viewpoints shared an antagonism toward Western liberalism,[8] which upheld the ability of the individual (including the common person) to achieve genuine progress by applying his or her mind to nature. Although Schenker's vehement denunciations of such Western ideas (e. g., C, 2:xiii-xvii) seem to run far afield of music theory, they nevertheless indicate the impact of the Kantian mind/reality dichotomy on his thought.

II. Schenker's Underlying Epistemology

The dichotomy just described, however, resides only on the "foreground" level, so to speak, of Schenker's writings. On a deeper level, Schenker's operative epistemology seeks to reconcile theory with art, and reason with intuition.

Roots and Development of Schenker's Musical Ideas

Schenker's ideas about music developed gradually over several decades of thoughtful examination of musical works. As William Rothstein points out, Schenker's theory evolved from analysis of real compositions; only after "studying music for a lifetime" did he bring his ideas to maturity in Der freie Satz (1935).[9] Allen Forte observes that Schenker's work derives from "aural experiences with actual musical compositions" and not from metaphysical speculations; moreover, Forte contends, even the relatively abstract Ursatz "can be justified on perceptual grounds."[10]

Schenker's ideas did not originate in a single flash of supernatural insight; rather (as Forte, Oswald Jonas, and Harald Krebs have all observed), they were developed and continually revised over a period of years.[11] For instance, Schenker initially doubted whether music could exhibit organic unity or causality, overcoming this skepticism only gradually through many years of

thoughtful analysis.[12] Similarly, Schenker's conception of musical form seems to have evolved gradually. In the early pages of his Harmonielehre (1906), he discusses form entirely in terms of surface motivic repetition and contrast (H, 12-13). Although he continues to describe such repetition as "the essential life-principle of free composition" in the first volume of Kontrapunkt (1910), here he acknowledges "both large and small" types of motivic recurrence (C, 1:101). In Der freie Satz (1935), however, musical form develops hierarchically from a composition's Ursatz, while the larger-scale "new types" of concealed repetition, beneath the surface of the music, are emphasized and illustrated. Schenker's original recognition of surface motives has not been displaced, but rather expanded by additional insights based on reflective examination; as he notes, surface repetition and concealed repetition coexist, and "each is, in its place, beneficial and advantageous" (FC, 99).

Of course, other theorists have displayed a pattern of continuous development and revision; for example, Jean-Philippe Rameau's thought passed through numerous stages from his Traité de l'harmonie (1722) to his late work Origine des sciences (1762). Rameau's theoretical evolution, however, seems to have stemmed largely from extra-musical influences. As Thomas Christensen's

recent study makes clear, the Traité sought to emulate Descartes's axiomatic method. Details of Rameau's application of Cartesian rationalism, of course, were determined in large part by his own musical intuition; however, subsequent revisions to this "system" were motivated by various intellectual currents within the Enlightenment. Christensen concludes that much of Rameau's influence arose from resulting resonances with those prevailing extra-musical trends of thought.[13] In contrast, Schenker, having no apparent desire to affiliate with cultural trends of his time, based his system, as well as revisions to that system, not on aprioristic assumptions, but on musical experience evidenced in a wealth of examples gleaned from actual works.

Although Schenker's thought does not depend on a priori axioms, two guiding epistemological principles can be discerned in the development of his ideas. First (as will be explored in detail in a later section), he refuses to dismiss troublesome musical cases as unexplained "licenses" or "exceptions" to his theory. On the contrary, he takes great pains to elucidate the artistic reasons for apparent deviations in masterworks, insisting repeatedly and adamantly that "a system must be strong enough to explain, without exception, all phenomena within its range" (H, 76).

Second, Schenker constantly seeks to eliminate gratuitous

assumptions and to simplify his explanations, retaining concepts that he finds indispensable in describing musical events. For instance, he rejects the conventional notion of three different minor scales, finding that a single major/minor system provides a more economical explanation for chromatic alterations, not only at $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{7}$, but also at $\hat{3}$ (*H*, 86-94).

Also motivated by this imperative of epistemological simplicity are many of the linear explanations of vertical simultaneities that we regard as characteristically Schenkerian. Schenker rejects the ninth chord as a harmonic entity because, he finds, all apparent occurrences of such a chord (in well-constructed works) can be explained by contrapuntal or harmonic factors already included within his theoretic perspective. Citing "our urge to hear a complex phenomenon as simply as possible," he eliminates eleventh and thirteenth chords in favor of other already sufficient explanations (*H*, 190-208). The seventh chord and augmented triad are accepted in the *Harmonielehre* (*H*, 183, 188-189) but later eliminated in *Der freie Satz* (*FC*, 63), a modification reflecting the same inexorable drive toward simplification and eradication of the superfluous.

Schenker's understanding of root progression undergoes a similar evolution. For example, in his *Harmonielehre* he explains the

stepwise progression in a manner reminiscent of Johann Philipp Kirnberger and Simon Sechter, as an implied double progression, usually by fifths (H, 236-240).[14] The assumption of an implicit intermediate root is abandoned in Der freie Satz, however, in favor of a simpler contrapuntal explanation (FC, 30-31).[15]

Schenker seeks to develop concepts and principles capable of embracing all of the musical materials under investigation, while eliminating any complexities or extra concepts not necessitated by those materials. These two tendencies can be subsumed under a single epistemological "razor" principle: namely, that concepts must be sufficient and necessary to describe the phenomena under investigation. If this guiding principle is followed, knowledge derives from actual experience of reality, without any admixture of the arbitrary or subjective. Deriving from the well-known "Ockham's razor," this principle was formerly understood in metaphysical terms but has recently been recognized as an epistemological requirement--that is, as an imperative of objective, reality-based cognition.[16] Hence Schenker's use of the epistemological razor indicates a viewpoint, opposite to that of Kant, that recognizes the possibility of the objective use of reason to achieve authentic knowledge of reality.

Schenker's View of Musical Causality

Any notion of objectivity presupposes a reality, external to the observer, which operates according to laws subject to rational inquiry. For Schenker, music is clearly subject to such natural laws. "Art," he writes, "is . . . a final and correct understanding of Nature," and music progresses "in the direction of art so defined" (H, 52-53).

Using the term "nature" in a narrower sense which excludes human nature, Schenker describes music as a synthesis of nature and art (H, 31, 44, 232). Nature provides the overtone series, including in particular the intervals of the major triad (H, 20-30; FC, 10, 34). Artificial elements include (among others) the minor triad, subdominant, intervals of the fourth and seventh, and stepwise motion, especially passing tones and suspensions (H, 24, 31, 38-40, 48, 50-52, 232). Even artificial elements, however, are subject to natural law or "causality." A "purely musical causality," according to Schenker, was first achieved during the polyphonic era by means of dissonant suspensions and passing tones; later composers obtained a more potent causality through the use of harmonic scale-degrees or Stufen (C, 1:291). Of course, a dissonant suspension or passing tone does not "compel" its resolution in a literal, physical sense. The "causality" that Schenker identifies is

not physical, but psychological: if the tones are properly integrated in the listener's mind and ear, then certain effects and expectations must occur.[17] For instance, the dissonant upbeat passing tone of second-species counterpoint "confirms the harmony of the [preceding] downbeat" and thereby "produces a curious intrusion of the imaginary [which] consists in the covert retention, by the ear, of the consonant point of departure" (C, 2:57).[18] To a considerable extent, the two volumes of Kontrapunkt are devoted to exploring such sometimes subtle psychological effects of tones in various contexts.

These tonal effects, in Schenker's view, operate according to objective and ineluctable laws. "Tones," he declares, "have lives of their own, . . . independent of the artist's pen" (H, xxv; see also H, 6).[19] These laws operate not only in works of the masters, but even in "poorly executed compositions," where they produce unintended aural consequences. "It is high time," Schenker concludes, "to do away with the nonsense that everything in music is good just as it is written, and therefore that only taste determines the effect" (C, 2:7). This notion of objective values implied by natural, verifiable musical laws is incongruent with Kant's rigid separation of value-judgments from the observable laws of nature. (Although Schenker is concerned here with aesthetic rather than ethical values, he

explicitly links the two domains in an accompanying note; see C, 2:275, note 7.) Schenker's belief in universal natural musical laws stands in stark contrast with the cultural relativism of his Viennese contemporary Arnold Schoenberg, who contends, for example, that dissonances "are merely more remote consonances in the series of overtones" and are potentially equally comprehensible, depending on the listener's musical conditioning.[20] Schenker, on the other hand, argues that "the human ear can follow Nature" only up to the fifth partial (H, 25).

The Epistemology of Music Perception

Although Schenker declares (as cited above) that the highest musical secrets are "neither teachable nor learnable," he nevertheless labors earnestly to communicate those secrets and generally to de-mystify music perception. In his presentation of species counterpoint, for instance, he is not content to postulate rules, but consistently explores the practical reasons underlying them. In many cases, rules stem from the need to present an unambiguous, relatively simple, natural structure to the listener. For example, the rules by which dissonances are prepared and resolved in strict counterpoint derive from the listener's need to comprehend each dissonance as a clear prolongation of a consonant

sonority (C, 1:111).[21] If such principles are interpreted more broadly in free composition, then that additional freedom is made possible by the clarifying power of harmonic scale-degrees (Stufen), which provide a referential structure by means of which "dissonances become more understandable" to the listener (H, 308-309). The scale-degree, which may encompass multiple surface harmonies, assists "both the composer and the listener to find his bearings" even in passages of great harmonic complexity (H, 138-139). Clarity remains an important aesthetic concern, however, even in free composition; for instance, only one harmony may be implied at any one time (C, 2:183). Even the technique of "concealed repetition," in which foreground motives reappear at deeper levels (FC, 99-100), can be interpreted as a device of clarification rather than concealment, providing cues in the musical surface enabling the listener to achieve a clearer perception of middleground and background structure.

Despite his paeans to the special clairvoyant powers of genius, Schenker portrays musical perception as a normal, natural process. "The art of music," he assures us in Der freie Satz, "is much simpler than present-day teachings would have it appear." Moreover, through the device of the linear progression, music becomes "accessible to all races and creeds alike" (FC, xxiii).

Musical Theory and Practice

Schenker is insistent that music theory should be closely integrated with practice. Contrasting his approach with that of other theorists, he announces in the preface to his Harmonielehre that "the aim of this book is to build a real and practicable bridge from composition to theory" (H, xxv). Although he scorns "the paper systems of the theoretician" and excoriates the theorists of his day, his final pronouncement is not on theory itself, but on the false separation of theory and art. Ideally, he laments, these same theorists "should have become the best possible media for artistic achievement" (H, 88, 178). If there is often a gap between theory and music, then that gap can and should be bridged (H, 70): "It takes a considerable dose of perversion . . . to refuse to resolve the contradiction between theory and art!" Far from condemning theory per se, Schenker views it as a natural outgrowth of perception, citing Goethe: "Looking becomes considering, considering becomes reflecting, reflecting becomes connecting. Thus, one can say that with every intent glance at the world we theorize."[22]

If Kant regards knowledge as a reduction of perceived things to categories imposed by our minds (a reduction which separates us from any possibility of knowing those things as they are "in themselves"), Schenker on the contrary regards concepts and

principles as open-ended and contextual, based not on Procrustean categories, but on consideration of the features of the actual music. Regarding inferences of scale steps from a musical work, for example, he writes: "There are no rules which could be laid down once and for all; for, by virtue of their abstract nature, the rules flow, so to speak, from the spirit and intention of each individual composition" (H, 141). Legitimate theory cannot smugly assert rules to which it admits "unaccountable exceptions," not even if it attributes those exceptions to "licenses which men of genius take occasionally" (H, 75). A valid theoretical principle admits no exceptions: any apparent deviations in practice must be capable of being construed as extensions or contextual interpretations of the principles themselves. "May teachers finally stop speaking of 'rule' and 'exception,' then, or at least get accustomed to recognizing these phenomena as two branches--one of them younger than the other--that sprout from the same trunk" (C, 1:279). Schenker's arboreal metaphor suggests that ostensible exceptions to legitimate principles of counterpoint and harmony, such as one might encounter in a masterwork, should be understood as hierarchical elaborations of those principles, analogous to the "prolongations" in a musical foreground.

The theorist's concepts, then, must be open-ended, continually

integrating evidence drawn from new contexts; they cannot be formulated a priori to musical experience, but must be derived from and applied to that experience by an active, non-mechanistic, interpretative mental process.[23] Thus Schenker did not regard his theoretical system as "formal" in the mathematician's sense: that is, Schenkerian thought cannot be reduced to a finite set of axioms to be applied deterministically and algorithmically.[24] For the same reason Schenkerian analysis requires human intelligence and judgment, and is therefore unsuitable, for example, for realization by computer programs.

Strict Counterpoint and Free Composition

Schenker's belief in the close relationship between a proper theory and musical practice is also reflected in his approach to counterpoint. While he carefully distinguishes between strict counterpoint and free composition, Schenker emphasizes that the latter is an extension of the former and discusses the relationship and connections between the two in detail. The purpose of cantus firmus exercises, he explains, is pedagogical: such exercises present the "theory of voice leading" in its purest form, apart from Stufen and other free-compositional considerations (C, 1:xxx). Strict counterpoint serves specifically as a kind of aural training:

"The contrapuntal exercise, with its modest resources, is supposed to inform the ear for the first time about the manifold phenomena of the tonal world" (C, 1:182). In short, species counterpoint provides controlled conditions, analogous to those of a laboratory, where the effects of musical laws can be examined in isolation from complicating factors of the free-compositional environment.

Schenker discusses in detail differences among those effects, not only between species counterpoint and free composition, but even among different stages of the former. For instance, in two-voice strict counterpoint, similar motion to the unison, octave, or fifth creates undesired effects (discussed at length) and is therefore prohibited in that context (C, 1:127-140). In three-voice strict counterpoint, the undesirable effect of such motion remains but "recedes into the background" in comparison with other factors, such as the need for melodic fluency and full sonorities. Although the effect is "always poor in itself," it must be interpreted in a context where these other factors are also weighed. Parallel unisons, fifths, and octaves are still prohibited in this environment (C, 1:140-141; see also 2:27-37). In four-voice strict counterpoint, similar (nonparallel) motion to these intervals is allowed in a still wider range of circumstances, "by reason of the really numerous and new difficulties attendant on the increased number of voices";

moreover, the negative effects of such motion are significantly masked by the improvement realized "in the purely sonic aspect" by this texture (C, 1:141, 2:133).

Finally, in free composition even parallel unisons, fifths, and octaves sometimes become acceptable, because this environment "counters them with new and stronger forces still unavailable in the exercises of strict counterpoint." Thus "free composition is, under certain circumstances, in a position to dispense entirely with the prohibition not only of nonparallel similar motion but even of parallels and antiparallels [i. e., consecutive fifths and octaves]" (C, 1:142). Even here, however, a limitation on such parallel motion remains, for its "bad effect" persists, at least latently, and "immediately impresses itself on our ear whenever the counterforces (contrary motion, melodic fluency, complete harmony, scale-degree, modulation, alteration of the character of the voice, and the like) fail to work sufficiently strongly against it" (C, 1:143). Also, in free composition the motions must be analyzed in proper context, taking structural hierarchy into account: tones do not constitute true parallel successions unless they "relate as unequivocally as in strict counterpoint" (FC, 56; see also C, 1:xxxi, 156, 200-205). Thus Schenker emphasizes that the limitations on similar and parallel motion must be interpreted in context and not

depicted merely as mechanical rules for students which master composers may disobey with impunity.

Schenker illustrates "the connection between counterpoint . . . and the actual work of art" by means of the metaphor of a well-crafted poetic work, in which the poet may, for artistic reasons, "alter the normal ordering of the sentence components" and other superficial linguistic features, while continuing to respect the basic rules of grammar. Examining a passage from Goethe's poetry, Schenker asks (C, 1:10-13): "Who can miss the fact that this sentence, in spite of all kinds of departures from normal organization, basically manifests only prolongations of the most ordinary grammatical laws?" Thus the rules of musical "grammar" apply fully to free composition but must be interpreted there in their appropriate artistic context. Schenker's metaphor[25] has important ramifications. First, it suggests that musical understanding may be closely related to our understanding of language (perhaps even drawing upon common mental faculties) and hence should be regarded as a normal, nonmystical ability. Furthermore, linguistic processing--encompassing not only the syntactical processing described by generative grammatical theory, but also semantic interpretation--is an extremely subtle and sophisticated process, not susceptible as a whole to algorithmic

formalization.[26]

While previous theorists such as Kirnberger and Sechter also regarded strict composition as the foundation of free composition,[27] Schenker explores the relationship between the two at greater length. Not only does he include frequent comparisons with free composition in his exposition of species counterpoint, but moreover he closes the second volume of Kontrapunkt with an extensive section entitled "Bridges to Free Composition." The stated purpose of this section is to show how the "voice leadings" of free composition are "prolongations of the fundamental laws" of strict counterpoint (C, 2:176); pedagogically, it prepares the student for Schenker's next and final volume, Der freie Satz.

Schenker and Traditional Theory

The importance to Schenker of integrating music theory with practice is vividly reflected in his views of his predecessors and contemporaries. As Robert Morgan has shown, key elements of Schenker's thought, including in particular the ideas of diminution and reduction, appeared in numerous previous treatises and were "deeply embedded within the Western musical tradition."[28] Nevertheless, Schenker regards two prior works as preeminent achievements of the theoretical tradition (C, 1:xxvii): Johann

Joseph Fux's Gradus ad Parnassum;[29] and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen (especially Part II, dealing with thoroughbass).[30] Schenker's species counterpoint closely follows Fux's model, and Fux's opinions and arguments are cited frequently, respectfully although often critically. Schenker also refers to C. P. E. Bach's Versuch numerous times, remarking, for example, that Bach seems to have glimpsed the true significance of diminution (FC, 98).

Even in these two esteemed figures, however, Schenker finds "errors that sully not only the method but also the content of the theory itself." Fux failed to comprehend that the rules he described for strict counterpoint did not constitute a complete theory of composition, particularly instrumental composition; specifically, Fux was "unable to show the most important aspect: the fact that all voice leading remains in the final analysis one and the same, even if it appears in a new guise" in free composition. If Fux failed to connect his theory to free-compositional practice, according to Schenker, then C. P. E. Bach succumbed to the opposite error, presenting only the "prolongations of archetypes . . ., without first having familiarized the reader with the latter in any way" (C, 1:xxvii-xxviii). Bach, in other words, presented a wealth of practical details, without the theoretical basis needed to

comprehend such detail. Schenker aspires to integrate Fux's understanding of higher-level theory with Bach's grasp of practice.

A crucial missing piece in both earlier treatises, of course, is a theory of harmonic functions. As Schenker points out, such a theory was supplied by Fux's contemporary, Jean-Philippe Rameau. Schenker, however, argues in Kontrapunkt that Rameau's theory was premature: because Rameau was unfamiliar with the works of J. S. Bach and certainly could not foresee the achievements of future generations, he had a "paucity of . . . material from which he could draw experience." Consequently, his theory was insufficiently grounded in musical practice, a defect that led him to formulate "too limited" a concept of harmonic scale-degrees, as well as to overemphasize vertical relationships at the expense of voice-leading principles (C, 1:xxviii-xxix).[31]

As Harald Krebs has shown, Schenker's criticisms of Rameau became increasingly vehement over time, an evolution largely reflecting his growing awareness of the importance of "the horizontal dimension" in music. After Rameau, in Schenker's view, theory and composition parted course: while (initially, at least) composers intuitively followed the true laws of music, theorists in contrast came to regard music in exclusively vertical terms. Thus theory became profoundly alienated from compositional practice,

and Schenker (in Krebs's words) "holds Rameau responsible for the divorce." The full negative effect of this separation, according to Schenker, was realized only later, as false theory began to affect musical practice and even composers came to view their art in terms of chords and surface motives, rather than broader horizontal connections.[32]

Schenker's position can be better appreciated by comparing his approach with those of nineteenth-century theorists. Undoubtedly his ideas show greatest affinity to those of his Viennese predecessors, particularly Sechter. Outside of the Viennese school, as Robert Wason observes, virtually all theorists emphasized Rameau-based vertical explanations of sonorities, chord quality, and harmonic dualism. Viennese theorists, on the other hand, tended to attach greater importance to linear derivations; moreover, they generally regarded chromatic structures as reducible to an underlying diatonic foundation (also an important notion in Schenkerian thought).[33] Simon Sechter was the leading theorist of this school; his most eminent pupil, Anton Bruckner, transmitted most of Sechter's ideas faithfully in his own teaching. Schenker, in turn, studied harmony and counterpoint for three years (1887-1890) under Bruckner at the Vienna Conservatory.[34]

Sechter was best known for his theory of _Stufen_ (scale-

degrees), which in Schenker later became the basis for the "composing-out" process of free composition. Although even Sechter tended to explain vertical simultaneities in dubious harmonic terms, he also recognized various embellishments within the scale-degree which created new "apparent" harmonies, such as bass arpeggiations, passing tones, suspensions, neighbor tones, and voice exchanges.[35] One may even discern here the embryonic beginnings of Schenkerian hierarchical differentiation, although Sechter recognized only two hierarchical levels.[36]

Despite these achievements, however, Sechter's theory suffered, in Wason's opinion, from the fundamental defect that it was based on "rationalism" and included "no empirical checks"; Sechter made little effort "to relate his theory of [pure composition] to the musical practice of his day."[37] This rationalistic isolation was manifested not only in Sechter's questionable imputations of chordal roots, but also in his highly restrictive approach to chromaticism. Unlike Schenker, Sechter rigidly avoided chromatic alteration to the diatonic chordal roots and did not recognize modal mixture; for both reasons, his system could not easily accommodate the emerging chromatic harmonies of his day.[38]

The teachings of Bruckner, Wason finds, further exemplified

"the ever-widening gap between theory and compositional practice which extended throughout the nineteenth century." In his analytical lectures Bruckner never cited examples from his own works or troublesome passages from contemporaries such as Liszt and Wagner; indeed, any connection between his teachings and his own compositions was highly questionable.[39] Schenker harshly criticizes Bruckner for teaching strict rules that he professed not to follow in his own compositions; Bruckner failed to comprehend the innumerable possibilities to which such rules give rise when imaginatively applied in free composition (H, 177-178).[40]

Compared with Sechter, Bruckner emphasized harmonic relationships to the detriment of counterpoint, granting independent status to the ninth chord and possibly even eleventh and thirteenth chords. Almost eliminating the category of "nonessential" chords which Kirnberger and Sechter had developed, he anticipated the harmonic system of Schoenberg (who was strongly influenced by Bruckner).[41] Perhaps alluding to Schoenberg's system, Schenker complains that theorists now sought to explain every vertical simultaneity in terms of remote overtones.[42]

In the early twentieth century, Schenker perceives a "flight from music," stemming from the separation of theory from art (FC, xxi). Theorists no longer confirm the principles of their textbooks

using real "works of art"; the student, meanwhile, waits in vain "for a time to come when he might meet art in theory" (H, 177-178). In Hugo Riemann, for instance, Schenker finds a "descriptive superfluity" masking his "lack of artistic perception and knowledge" (C, 1:348). In particular, Schenker harshly criticizes harmonic function theory: scale-degrees II, III, VI, and VII have their own unique characteristics and should not be "assimilated by I, IV, and V," even if the latter are recognized as primary degrees (C, 1:23-27). Riemann's theories, Schenker concludes, are "fatally divergent from art" (C, 1:278; see also 1:281-282).

III. Conclusions

On the surface, many of Schenker's pronouncements seem to suggest a Platonist or Kantian separation, characteristic of the intellectual culture where he developed his ideas, in which the mystical essence of a musical work cannot be apprehended by ordinary reason, but only by some supernatural faculty. Beneath this illusory surface, however, one finds a very different fundamental structure in Schenker's thought: music is subject to natural, intelligible laws, and the workings of artistic intuition are a proper object of rational inquiry. Schenker's implicit epistemology closely integrates theory with practice: artistic masterworks cannot be properly grasped without reference to theoretical archetypes, while

a proper theory must derive from examination of those works and must fully embrace them. This epistemology requires an active, non-mechanistic mental process, in which principles and concepts are thoughtfully applied to each new work, in a manner intractable to formal algorithms.

Because Schenker's musical ideas were developed in this manner, his system should be regarded as "organic" (to use one of Schenker's favorite terms): his theory should be treated, not as a closed system of predetermined axioms, but as a living, developing set of principles. Thus it is entirely appropriate to Schenker's own method that his ideas should continue to be tested by musical analysis and amplified or revised where necessary.

ABSTRACT

This article examines a conflict between Schenker's explicit philosophical outlook, influenced by Platonic and Kantian dualism, and the epistemological perspective implicit in his practical approach to musical analysis. Although outwardly Schenker depicts musical essence as impervious to ordinary reason and accessible only to those gifted with mystical insight, the development and content of his musical ideas and his views of other theorists suggest an opposite viewpoint, according to which music obeys natural laws subject to rational inquiry.

NOTES

1. Heinrich Schenker, Free Composition [Neue musikalische Theorien und Phantasien, III: Der freie Satz], trans. and ed. Ernst Oster, 2 vols., first published in 1935 (New York: Schirmer Books, 1979), 161. (Page references are to first volume; this translation will henceforth be cited as FC.) The Platonist influence on Schenker's thought may be indirect, for Plato's dualism has had a pervasive impact on both medieval and modern Western thought. See Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 303, 567-568.

2. See also Heinrich Schenker, Counterpoint [Neue musikalische Theorien und Phantasien, II: Kontrapunkt], trans. John Rothgeb and Jürgen Thym, 2 vols., first published in 1910-1922 (New York: Schirmer Books, 1987), 1:22. (This translation will henceforth be cited as C.)

3. Cited in Harald Krebs, "Schenker's Changing Views of Rameau: A Comparison of Remarks in Harmony, Counterpoint, and 'Rameau or Beethoven?'" Theoria 3 (1988): 69.

4. Kevin Korsyn, "Schenker and Kantian Epistemology," Theoria 3

(1988): 4-5, 8-9.

5. Korsyn, 5-6, 8-55.

6. Heinrich Schenker, Harmony [Neue musikalische Theorien und Phantasien, I: Harmonielehre], trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese, ed. and annotated by Oswald Jonas, first published in 1906 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), 59. (This translation will henceforth be cited as H.)

7. Allen Forte, "Schenker's Conception of Musical Structure," in Readings in Schenker Analysis and Other Approaches, ed. Maury Yeston (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 34.

8. The term "Western," in the Germanic world before World War II, distinguished the ideas and culture of countries west of the Rhine, especially Great Britain and France (and, by extension, the United States). The term "liberalism" is used here in its European sense, associated with concepts of individual freedom, representative government, free-market capitalism, and free trade.

9. William Rothstein, "The Americanization of Schenker Pedagogy?" Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy 4:2 (Fall 1990): 297.

10. Forte, 7, 19.

11. Allen Forte, "Schenker, Heinrich," in Stanley Sadie, ed., The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (London: Macmillan, 1980), 16:627-628; H, v-vi; Krebs, 70.

12. See William A. Pastille, "Heinrich Schenker, Anti-Organicist," 19th-Century Music 8:1 (Summer 1984): 29-36.

13. Thomas Christensen, Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 11-15, 302-306.

14. On the use by Kirnberger and Sechter of intermediate implied fundamental basses to explain stepwise motion, see Robert W. Wason, Viennese Harmonic Theory from Albrechtsberger to Schenker and Schoenberg (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 38-39.

15. Carl Schachter comments that Schenker's contrapuntal explanation of the movement from IV to V finally solves the "problem that has vexed theorists since Rameau." See Carl Schachter, "A Commentary on Schenker's Free Composition," Journal of Music Theory 25:1 (Spring 1981): 131.

16. Ockham's razor was regarded by early writers as an indication of metaphysical parsimony (i. e., a frugality inherent in nature) but has more recently been shown to be epistemological in origin. The epistemological approach recognizes that any mixture of the arbitrary (the objectively unsupported) is incompatible with an integrated awareness of reality (that is, knowledge). Because any admission of the arbitrary or superfluous is precluded on epistemological grounds alone, an assumption of metaphysical

parsimony is unnecessary - and thus (ironically) itself violates the razor principle. For a detailed discussion of the epistemological razor, see Ayn Rand, Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology (New York: New American Library, 1979), 82-99.

17. As Pastille has shown (Pastille, 29-33), this understanding of musical causality developed over a period of almost three decades.

18. For further discussion of the significance of the dissonant passing tone in Schenker's theory, see Schachter, 119.

19. The importance of this idea to Schenker is also indicated by the title of his periodical, Der Tonwille. For a recent pedagogical application of this concept of the "will of tones," see Steve Larson, "Scale-Degree Function: A Theory of Expressive Meaning and Its Application to Aural-Skills Pedagogy," Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy 7 (1993): 69-84.

20. Arnold Schoenberg, Structural Functions of Harmony, ed. Leonard Stein, rev. ed., first published in 1954 (New York: Norton, 1969), 193.

21. For additional illustrations of the same epistemological preference, see C, 1:112-124, 207, 263-268, 271, 2:183.

22. Goethe, Farbenlehre, cited in FC, 3.

23. A theory of epistemology consistent with Schenker's view would need to transcend both the rationalism of Descartes and the

sensationalism of Locke; moreover, it would need to present a theory of concepts which overcomes Kant's analytic/synthetic dichotomy. Such a theory has been presented in Rand, 1-164.

24. In a famous theorem familiar to mathematicians and logicians, Kurt Gödel showed that even certain branches of mathematics, including arithmetic (theory of numbers), are not reducible to finite formal systems in this sense.

25. The explanation of musical practice by analogies to language (especially poetry) has a long and rich theoretical history. (See Robert P. Morgan, "Schenker and the Theoretical Tradition: The Concept of Musical Reduction," College Music Symposium 18:1 (Spring 1978): 79-86.) Schenker's use of this analogy strikingly resembles Christoph Bernhard's view in Tractatus compositionis augmentatus (ca. 1657-1664; English translation in Walter Hilse, "The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard," The Music Forum 3 (1973), 31-196). Bernhard used analogies to rhetorical figures to reveal the strict counterpoint underlying the supposedly "free" dissonances of seconda prattica, thus providing a clear defense for the latter which had been absent from the writings of Claudio Monteverdi. Similarly, Schenker regards the notion that masterworks of free composition do not obey contrapuntal principles as an impudent criticism of those works (see C, 1:1) and

uses the rhetorical analogy to defend them against such a charge.

26. The hypothesis that music uses mental processing similar to that of language might also explain why we sense music as having "meaning," in some ineffable sense.

27. Kirnberger regarded "pure composition" as the basis for the less strict "lighter style"; in contrast to Schenker, however, he described the latter in terms of "exceptions and deviations" from the rules of strict composition. See Johann Philipp Kirnberger, The Art of Strict Musical Composition [Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik], trans. David Beach and Jürgen Thym, first published in 1771-1779 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 99-108. Sechter also believed that free composition should be grounded in strict composition (see Morgan, 91).

28. Morgan, 95. Allen Forte and Steven Gilbert also relate Schenker's ideas, not only to previous expositions of diminution technique, but also to the treatises of Fux and of thoroughbass theory. See Allen Forte and Steven E. Gilbert, Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis (New York: Norton, 1982), 8-9, 41-66.

29. Johann Joseph Fux, Gradus ad Parnassum, first published in 1725, partly trans. and ed. Alfred Mann as The Study of Counterpoint, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1965), 1-156.

30. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Essay on the True Art of Playing

Keyboard Instruments [Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen], trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell, first published in 1753-1762 (New York: Norton, 1949), 1-449.

31. See also Krebs, 60.

32. Krebs, 61-62, 70.

33. Wason, xi-xii, 23, 33, 53, 123-124.

34. Wason, 67, 115, 178 (note 3).

35. Wason, 45-48, 59.

36. Just as Schenker regards passing tones, suspensions, and the like as products of "art" rather than "nature," Sechter similarly distinguished between natürlich and gekünstelt sonorities, thus further developing Kirnberger's distinction between wesentlich and zufällig. See Wason, 46-47.

37. Wason, 43, 61; see also Wason, 160 (note 1).

38. Wason, 53-54. Sechter also assumed just intonation and was therefore reluctant to recognize enharmonic relationships (see Wason, 34, 58); Schenker, in contrast, embraces equal temperament and enharmonic relationships as products of art (H, 82-83, 332-335).

39. Wason, 68, 78. Schenker, in contrast to Bruckner, cites and sometimes praises passages even from more recent composers whom he regards as symptomatic of musical decline, such as

Wagner, Liszt, and Richard Strauss. Wagner, he writes, "employs scale-steps and voice-leading with a most beautiful instinct" (H, 174), while a Strauss example is described as "masterful" (C, 1:192).

40. See also Wason, 119.

41. Wason, 71-74, 84, 115.

42. Cited in Krebs, 61.