Religious Identity and Aesthetic Philosophy in Gustav Mahler's Second Symphony

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Religious Identity and Aesthetic Philosophy in Gustav Mahler’s Second Symphony

A Senior Honors Thesis
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I sit upright in my chair, eyes closed, hands tightly gripping the ends of the armrests. My whole body is tense as I hold my breath and listen, overwhelmed by the waves of music that surround me like a rip tide of sound. My body is in the first row balcony of Boston’s Symphony Hall, but my mind is a million miles away. It is only when the final chord finishes reverberating and the conductor lowers his baton that I am jolted back into reality by the thundering sound of applause. I open my eyes, release the death grip hold on my chair, and jump to my feet with my fellow audience members. I have just witnessed my first performance of Gustav Mahler’s Second Symphony.

Every time I recall that concert I am reminded why I chose Mahler as the topic for my senior thesis. As a musician from a young age, I have always felt a connection with the sound that I hear and create from my instrument. I know firsthand that when I play I am not only hitting the notes, but I am also interpreting them in a way that uniquely says something about myself, who I am and what I am doing. Mahler once wrote in a letter to his close friend and colleague, Bruno Walter, “When I hear music – even while I am conducting – I hear quite specific answers to all my questions – and am completely clear and certain. Or rather, I feel quite distinctly that they are not questions at all.”¹ How is this phenomenon possible? Music is not a literal language, there is no right or wrong interpretation of it, yet everyone who hears it innately feels some sort of response. My curiosity over this issue led me to the music of the late nineteenth century. During this time, composers began to address the ability of music to express metaphysical questions.

The result was the composition of some of the most emotionally stirring works of the western tradition.

The compositions of Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) are important to one’s understanding of this era because he stood at the crossroads of two great movements in music history. While the dramatically expressive nature of his works within conventional forms was inspired by his Romantic predecessors, he also paved the way for a modern era in his orchestral innovation. The way in which he expanded the size of the orchestra, manipulated motivic ideas, integrated the simplistic sounds of Lieder and folk tunes into his symphonies, and experimented with harmonic development, forever changed the genre of the symphony. For Mahler these new musical techniques served a distinct purpose: to reveal a philosophical message to his audience; one that was deeply reflective of his own personal crisis and that of the political and social turmoil in the world in which he lived.

Mahler’s Second Symphony, subtitled “Auferstehen” (“Resurrection”), is an epic work that addresses many of the key issues faced by those living at the turn of the century. The most obvious reference is to religion, a central point of crisis in light of the growing secularization of late nineteenth-century society. The fact that Mahler was Jewish and later converted to Christianity (a faith he never truly practiced) adds to the mystery behind the conception of this work.² Finally the fact that he read and revered the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner, two great atheist intellectuals of this era, evoke further questions as to the nature of Mahler’s spiritual identity when he composed this Symphony, as well as the message he was trying to convey to his listeners.

Mahler’s Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century was the scene of great social and political turmoil. His world stood at a crossroads between the old and the new; and although modernity offered the promise of prosperity, there was a degree of uncertainty at the cost of these developments. Political unrest, in the form of growing nationalist movements, threatened to divide the great multi-ethnic Austrian Empire, and the monarchy, which had once stood as a symbol of status and power throughout Europe, was in decay with the rise of democratic politics. The doctrines of liberalism and capitalism brought with them a focus on the importance of the individual over that of the group, therefore giving rise to issues of social inequality. As the middle class grew wealthier, benefiting from rapid industrialization, their pursuit of personal wealth and power came at the expense of the working man, who was struggling to survive in the new mechanized society.

Accompanying this transformation of society was a changing role for the church, which had once been the central force in European culture and politics. Now religion was seen as “superstitious” and many people began to abandon their belief in church dogma and doctrine in favor of a positivist, scientific view of life. Although this perspective was a triumph for the rational mind of man, it failed to provide a compassionate reason for man’s suffering or any hope for solace from life’s hardships. Coming to terms with this harsh reality of life as the mere interplay of cruel, natural forces, with death as an ultimate end, created a general feeling of pessimism.

With the world as they knew it slowly dissolving into chaos, those living at the turn of the century sought means of escape from these troubles. The initial reaction of most people was to turn either backward, to a romantic nostalgia for the past, or inward,
to an examination of their personal psyche. Those who indulged in the utopian vision of
days-gone-by were often members of the Austrian elite. Their wealth and social status
provided them with the security to enjoy a life of apparent decadence. Pleasurable
pursuits such as the waltz and the popular feuilleton papers, a frivolous journalistic genre,
allowed the upper class to indulge in “narcissism, introversion, and passive receptivity
toward outer reality.”3 Others rejected this idealism for a new interest in the workings of
the human mind. Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) method of psychoanalysis had a great
impact on the way people viewed human development and interaction. His work, The
Interpretation of Dreams (1900) revealed the ability of dreams to bridge the gap between
the conscious and unconscious states of mind by unveiling man’s innermost repressed
desires.4

Others chose to cope with their feelings of frustration and disillusionment by
finding an outlet in the world of art. According to historian Carl Schorske, “art became
almost a religion, the source of meaning and the food of the soul.”5 Modern artistic
creations reflected the dual nature of society: both the respect for beauty and nostalgia for
an idealized past, as well as the darker realities of the human psyche.

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was one of the talented artist intellectuals of this
generation who turned to the aesthetic mode of expression as a means of achieving his
goals for the regeneration of a corrupt society. Inspired by the writings of Arthur
Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Wagner used his own essays and the dramatic effect of his
operatic works to express the ideas of a metaphysical philosophy that revered art and, in
particular, music as the key to transcending a valueless, superficial world. Wagner, who

4 Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Politics and Culture*, p. 182.
came to have a cult following throughout Europe, voiced the ideas that organized
dogmatic religion was corrupt, that the power of a universal Will resided in all living
things, and that society had the ability to be regenerated in a spirit of mutual love and
compassion. This aesthetic philosophy offered a utopian spirit of hope for the
disillusioned generation of the fin-de-siècle.

At an early age, Gustav Mahler was forced to come to grips with many of the
issues facing his generation. A persistent theme throughout Mahler’s life was that of a
sense of isolation. He once stated, “I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in
Austria, an Austrian amongst Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world. Everywhere
an intruder, never welcomed.”6 This feeling of alienation and estrangement from oneself
and one’s peers, which Freud stated to be the result of the split between the conscious and
the unconscious parts of the mind7, was a common experience for the man of the fin-de-
siècle. It was a particular issue for those of Jewish heritage who were trying to assimilate
into modern society and encountering a constant battle with anti-Semitism. Mahler’s
questioning interest in the nature of life and death, also a persistent theme at this time,
was likely a result of his tragic childhood, marked by his parent’s unhappy marriage and
the loss of his favorite brother Ernst when Mahler was fifteen. As a university student he
became introduced to the ideas of Wagner through participation in an academic society
known as the Pernerstorfer Circle. During this period Mahler also made the acquaintance
of Siegfried Lipiner, one of the leaders of the circle; a close intellectual relationship
developed between these two men. Their mutual interest in Wagner’s use of Biblical

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6 LaGrange, Mahler, p. 5.
7 Richard Johnston, The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1939, (Berkeley:
University of California Press), 1972, pp. 221-261. Johnston provides a more expansive explanation of Freud’s theories and impact on fin-de-siècle Vienna in
this work.
symbolism to express metaphysical concepts could very well have been the beginning of Mahler’s interest in Christian mysticism.

Mahler’s decision to compose a symphony dealing with the questions of life, death, and transcendence has great significance within the context of his own spiritual and personal turmoil, mirroring that of the society in which he lived.

However, this work still poses a dilemma for the historian, one that lies within the interpretation of Mahler’s message. Although Mahler always had conflicting opinions on the value of publishing a written program for his works, nevertheless his explanation of the ideas he was trying to express paints a very clear picture of a spiritual struggle that was close to the composer’s heart. As we shall see, the way in which this narrative relates to the experience of the assimilating Jew, leads one to suspect that Mahler perhaps envisioned himself in the role of the “hero” character and wanted to use the symphony to work out his own answer to the questions of life and death. However, the fact that Mahler was exposed to Wagner’s aesthetic philosophy and penchant for Christian symbolism, also suggests that one could look at his work in the larger context as purely a musical expression of these metaphysical ideas.

In either case, the musical techniques that Mahler utilizes to paint a tonal picture of a resurrection were groundbreaking in his time. Few other compositions of such an expansive size display such a tightly knit thematic development. The work is also filled with distinctly Mahler elements, particularly the use of songs and folk tunes, progressive tonality, harmonic figures as leitmotifs, and thematic juxtaposition. With the use of these methods, Mahler is able to create a universe of sound for his audience.
This symphony is significant because it presents the beginning of a great quest in which Mahler tries to make sense of the chaotic world of which he was a part. Reflecting Mahler’s early optimism and hope for his generation, it contains a spirit of idealism that was to fade as he encountered greater tragedy in his personal life and discrimination while serving as the director of the Vienna Court Opera due to his Jewish heritage.

Today Mahler is important because his legacy embodies that of the heroic character he envisioned in this symphony. All who are touched or, even at the least, intrigued by the power of his symphonic works can attest that Mahler was able to achieve his goal in some sense, for the mere fact that we respond to his works illustrates their success in conveying universal truths of human experience-- ones that transcend the boundaries of time and space which divide us.

As I began to research this topic I found myself encountering many barriers. The first lay with the life and writings of Siegfried Lipiner. The multiple references to this man in Mahler’s letters and memoirs attest to their close relationship and the cross influences upon each other’s works, but there exist very few detailed studies of Lipiner. Even though I was able to finally secure a copy of his essay, Über die Elemente der Erneuerung die religiöser Ideen in der Gegenwart (1878)\(^8\), neither this work, nor any of his other poems or articles have been fully translated into English. I believe, however, that the recurrence of Christian themes in Lipiner’s works, and the fact that he and Mahler had planned to collaborate on a libretto entitled Christus, provide evidence that

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\(^8\) Siegfried Lipiner, Über die Elemente der Erneuerung die religiöser Ideen in der Gegenwart (Wien: Leseverein der deutschen Studenten Wiens, 1878). My access to this essay was made possible with the aid of Mahler historian Stephen Hefling.
much of Mahler’s fascination with Christianity came from this source. It is my hope that given more time and access to resources in Vienna, I might one day investigate the mystery behind the great intellectual relationship that blossomed between Mahler and this great poet and journalist.

In terms of Mahler’s philosophical influences, I refrained from going into an in-depth explanation of the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche. Although his ideas were also greatly admired by Lipiner and the Pernerstorfer Circle to which he and Mahler belonged, I felt that Wagner’s writings on religion were a more appropriate focal point for this study.  

The significant sources from which I gleaned much of my important research were Mahler’s letters, the memoirs of his wife, Alma, and close friends, Natalie Bauer-Lechner and Bruno Walter. His published programs were equally helpful in interpreting the ideas set forth in the first two symphonies. The biographies of Mahler by Henry-Louis de la Grange and Donald Mitchell were instrumental secondary sources. In the realm of philosophy, Bryan Magee’s explanation of the Schopenhauer-Wagner connection in his work, \textit{The Tristan Chord}, was helpful, as was William McGrath’s association of their ideas with the ideals of the Pernerstorfer Circle in \textit{Dionysian Art and Populist Politics}. In the realm of musical analysis and interpretation I relied on \textit{Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies} by Constantin Floros and Edward Reilly’s essay “\textit{Todtenfeier} and the Second Symphony.”

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9 The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche is featured most prominently in Mahler’s Third Symphony, in which he sets to music the text from this philosopher’s work, \textit{Also Sprach Zarathustra}. 
-Philosophy and the Formation of a Religious Identity-

Mahler was a mystic, a God-seeker. His imagination circled incessantly around these matters, around God and the world, around life and death, around spiritual matters and nature. Eternity and immortality were at the center of his thoughts. Death and eternity are the great theme in his art. He wanted to believe, belief at any price.

-Ferdinand Pfohl (1862-1949) on Mahler

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10 LeBrecht, Norman. *Mahler Remembered* (Boston: Faber and Faber) 1987
The Origins of Aesthetic Philosophy

Aesthetic philosophy emerged during a period of social and spiritual crisis that Europe was facing at the end of the nineteenth century. The rapid changes in political and economic life had altered not only the makeup of society but also the role of organized religion. For centuries previous, the Catholic Church had played a primary role in the political and social life of Europe. By providing a focus outside of the material world toward the heavenly reward for the suffering that men experienced on earth, the Church supplied answers to the great questions of the meaning of human life. However, if one were to reject this view of life as false or superstitious, what then was to replace it? The situation left philosophers and intellectuals to explain the nature of life and the mysteries of the human condition, thus to provide new answers to questions such as those posed by Mahler and his contemporaries.

The new secular era of the fin-de-siècle came to be defined by a rebirth of Humanism. The core of nineteenth-century Humanist philosophy was that man was the measure of all things and that the meaning of his life lay in his ability to use rational thought to acquire knowledge, without placing his fate in the hands of a higher power. Arthur Schopenhauer came to be a key figure in this movement. The view of life that he established in his epic work, The World as Will and Idea (1844), had an immeasurable impact upon young intellectuals of this time. Schopenhauer felt that his own works built off the questions posed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who was one of the first to challenge man’s view of the world and the power of his ability to reason. The new direction in which Schopenhauer took these philosophical ideas was to convey Kant’s vision of the world of human experience and portray it pessimistically as godless and
driven by an unseen natural force which he called the Will. Schopenhauer’s view provided a new lens for looking at the tragedies and triumphs of the human experience. His writings came to have a great influence on the writer, composer and opera director, Richard Wagner in particular. It is these two men, above all, who are the key figures in the development of Mahler’s Weltanschauung. In order to understand their views on the nature of life, however, one must first return to one of the earliest Enlightenment thinkers, who laid the groundwork for their philosophical ideas.11

Immanuel Kant made an incredible impact on Western thought in his attempt to use pure reason to discover the great truths of human existence. The basic idea summarized from his essay *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is that human beings are limited by their senses in their ability to perceive the existence of other things. Given this narrow view, the attempt to prove the existence of anything beyond our senses would be false, because we would have no way to detect whether or not it is truly there. From this basis, Kant went on to define human life in terms of two realms: that which we can experience through the senses, known as the *phenomenal*, and that which is beyond our perception, the *noumenal*. Furthermore, he established that the phenomenal world is confined by space and time, for we experience things by means of causality. That is why, according to Kant, the world is not just a comic heap of chaos. One event causes another and results in a patterned and interrelated state of affairs on which we base our civilization.12 In Kant’s view, the truth behind human life is that we always live under

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11 Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000). Magee provides an in-depth analysis of the intellectual development of Richard Wagner and the influence of Schopenhauer on his operatic and philosophical works. He does not, however, discuss Mahler in this work. The connection between the ideas of these two men and Mahler’s compositions are derived from my own analysis.
the illusion of realism, thinking that the objects whose existence we perceive can exist independently of us. For instance, we take for granted that a chair that we see before us exists for everyone as the same chair that we see. It is in human nature to objectify and base our reality upon these ideas, despite the fact that we have no rational basis for proving this to be true. For Kant this “unbridgeable gulf between reality as it is in itself and reality as it appears to us,”¹³ was a major intellectual obstacle for man. However, Kant’s steadfast belief that “science is the narrow gate that leads to the true doctrine of practical wisdom,”¹⁴ gave him confidence that man could use his ability to reason so as to come to a better understanding of himself and his place in the universe.

Arthur Schopenhauer took the ideas of Kant one step further in order to create a Weltanschauung that came to have a great impact on intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Like Kant, Schopenhauer believed in the existence of the noumenal and phenomenal realms, although he claimed that the two realms were not separate, but in essence the same reality apprehended in two different ways.¹⁵ In The World as Will and Idea, he wrote that we are in our physical existence merely temporary manifestations of the noumenal realm, which he described as “the inner significance, the true but hidden and inaccessible being, of what we perceive outwardly as the phenomenal world.”¹⁶ Because all men were a part of this one single universal realm, one had the ability to connect emotionally with others through feelings such as empathy and compassion. This claim also gave credence to the idea that there were inherent values, true for all human beings, that existed just beneath the surface of the material world in which man lived.

¹³ Magee, The Tristan Chord, p. 159.
¹⁵ Magee, The Tristan Chord, p. 163.
¹⁶ Magee, The Tristan Chord, p. 163.
Schopenhauer also agreed with Kant that the world as humans experience it is subjective and transitory. He described the nature of human life in these terms:

One ought to live with a due knowledge of the transitory nature of the things of the world. For as often as a man loses self-command, or is struck down by misfortune, or grows angry, or becomes faint-hearted, he shows that he finds things different from what he expected, consequently that he was caught in error and did not know…that the will of the individual is crossed at every step by the chance of inanimate nature [fate] and the antagonism of aims and the wickedness of other individuals.17

This view of the world as ever-changing and beyond man’s control was one that resonated with the disillusioned generation of the fin-de-siècle era. According to Schopenhauer, the weak and transient manifestation of man is at the mercy of a force existing both within and outside of himself. The Will, as this power came to be known, is the noumenal realm as we experience it in the material world of humans: “that which all idea, all object, is the phenomenal appearance, the visibility, and the objectification. It is the inmost nature, the kernel, of every particular and preconsidered action of man.”18

This Will is also the cause of all suffering in the phenomenal world because its nature is to always be striving for a sense of oneness that is denied when it exists within our individual bodies. In Schopenhauer’s view, our desires are a perfect example of the power of the Will, so as soon as we attain these goals, they “no longer appear the same, and therefore they soon grow stale, are forgotten and though not openly disowned, are yet always thrown aside as vanished illusions.”19

The sexual impulse is the strongest of these desires because it is the essence of the will-to-live and procreate; according to the ancient

17 Irwin Edman, ed., The Philosophy of Schopenhauer (New York: The Modern Library, 1928), p.50. Edman provides an abridged version of Schopenhauer’s great work, highlighting those passages that give the best examples of this philosopher’s ideas.
18 Edman, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, pp. 72-73.
19 Edman, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, p. 134.
Greeks, *eros* is the “principle from which all things emerge.” Since one can never be truly fulfilled in this manner, life in the phenomenal world will always be a tragic struggle for man as he attempts to overcome his Will as he is set back time and time again by his own inner nature.

Richard Wagner further developed the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and the interpretation of these ideas through his writings and dramatic works had a direct influence upon Mahler as a young student. Wagner became introduced to the works of Schopenhauer during his exile in Switzerland following his participation in the 1848 revolutions in Germany. As a young man, Wagner had been a revolutionary activist involved with intellectual pursuits as a member of the progressive literary and political movement “Junges Deutschland.” This group advocated the ideas of such humanist writers and thinkers as Ludwig Feuerbach. Wagner’s writings during this time also reflect the idealism of the Romantic philosophers that came before him, for similar to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wagner saw the human race as having once existed in a utopian natural state that had been corrupted by civilization. According to his view, through social revolution one could overthrow this current state of affairs and regenerate the human race. However, Wagner soon became disillusioned with political activism after the failure of the 1848 liberal revolutions in Europe. The turning point in his intellectual thinking came in 1854, when a fellow political refugee named Georg Harwegh introduced him to Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea*. The essential elements that Wagner derived from Schopenhauer were a view of the world in terms of both

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noumenal and phenomenal realms, and their corresponding relationship, as well as the idea of the striving Will. Many of Wagner’s operatic works reveal the impact that Schopenhauer had upon his creations. For example, a key theme in the opera *Tristan and Isolde*, is the idea of erotic longing. The two lovers in the story are united by a shared passion for one another, but driven apart by circumstances. Their unfulfilled desires and mutual compassion reveal key concepts of Schopenhauer’s view of eros as the driving force of Will.²²

The true crisis in this area of nineteenth century thought, however, concerned the existence of the spiritual or noumenal realm. Although Kant provided for the existence of God within his philosophy, Schopenhauer and Wagner renounced the belief in a higher Being. These contrasting viewpoints set the scene for the conflict that raged throughout Europe as to whether or not rationality and religion could co-exist. Mahler’s response to this debate, revealed in the Second Symphony, emerged out of their ideas.

Kant was a Christian and remained so throughout his life. In his writings, Kant was still able to justify the existence of God despite his inability to prove this idea rationally. His explanation was that the place for the existence of an all-powerful creator lay within that noumenal realm which man could not directly experience; therefore he could neither prove nor disprove its validity. According to Kant,

> Without a God and without a world invisible to us but hoped for, the magnificent ideas of morality are objects of acclaim and admiration but not motivating springs of resolve and execution because they do not fulfill the whole end that is natural to every being endowed with reason.²³

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²³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 246.
By denying knowledge in order to make room for faith, Kant provided for the coexistence of rational and religious man.

However, nineteenth-century secular Humanists tended to reject this point of view. Schopenhauer’s vision seem to have many similarities with the beliefs of Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism, in particular: the ideas that the world is temporary and unimportant, that it is full of false values, that we are all a part of a timeless being, which exists just beneath the surface of our apparent reality, and that we are all united by a sense of compassion. Although he saw religion in general as having taught many profound truths about humanity, the problem was that these different sects had strayed from their original purpose: to convey important metaphysical truths to man. By focusing so much on stories and symbols, religious believers had come to accept these myths as facts. Like many other humanists of his time, Schopenhauer did not trust religion because it was a man-made institution and therefore as fragile and transitory as man himself. In *The World as Will and Idea*, he writes: “it would be a bad business if the principle thing in a man’s life, his ethical worth that counts for eternity, depended on something whose attainment was so very much subject to chance as are dogmas, religious teachings, and philosophical arguments.”

Schopenhauer’s beliefs had a great influence upon the themes of religion and the corruption of Christianity explored in many of Wagner’s works. In addition to Schopenhauer, Wagner had also read the works of the humanist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach’s main thesis in his groundbreaking work, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), was that:

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24 Magee, *The Tristan Chord*, p. 158.
Religion arises from the needs, wishes and lacks in human life. Religious ideas embody emotional attitudes and real insights into what Man ought to be, which are expressed in fitting imagery, projected into the extramental world, and objectified. Statements about God are then regarded as truths about extramundane existence; in truth they are about man himself.27

In his view, religion was a creation of man, and God was invented in order for humans to have a place to objectify all of their idealized values. In his words: “you believe in love as a divine attribute because you yourself love, you believe that God is a wise benevolent being because you know nothing better in yourself than benevolence and wisdom, and you believe God exists…because you yourself exist…”28

Wagner’s writings show that he agreed wholeheartedly with the visions of religion presented by both of these philosophers. Like Schopenhauer, Wagner saw organized religion as having been corrupted by man. In his view, Christianity had been established for a noble purpose: to provide solace for the poor and suffering in the world. Unfortunately, the human intellect seized it in order to “rob the poor in spirit of their faith, to twist and model it anew to suit their own abstractions.”29 In this manner, the Church claimed temporal power on earth and ceased to provide its spiritual function for the people.

Although he disdained the literal interpretation of Biblical stories, Wagner did see the symbolic value of many Christian traditions. In particular he admired Jesus Christ and his death on the cross as a symbol of the ultimate denial of the will to live.30 Most Wagner scholars believe that his spirituality was tied more to philosophy rather than any

strict religious tradition, but the popularity of both his literary and theatrical works can be attributed to his ability to recall familiar symbols and cultural traditions to speak to his audience.

The place of music within the philosophical views of Schopenhauer and Wagner is the key to the union of their intellectual ideas and Mahler’s works. This aspect of their world views truly resonated with Mahler, for both philosophers believed in the power of music to assist man in transcending the triviality and senselessness of the phenomenal world, thus providing meaning and purpose for his existence on earth.

In *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer described the arts as the means for man to escape his individualism as a result of living in the phenomenal world. In his words, the artwork of a genius, “repeats or reproduces the eternal ideas grasped through pure contemplation.” In his mind, music was the highest of the arts, because, unlike painting or sculpture or literature, music was not a representation of anything else; rather it was “as direct an

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objectification of the whole world will as the will itself.” 33 Through listening to music, Schopenhauer believed that man could understand the great truths of human existence. Music was the voice of the Will itself, speaking to each human soul, illustrating the inner nature of things without outside interpretation or motives. Schopenhauer was a great admirer of opera, for he believed that music, when applied to a scene or event, “discloses to us its most secret meaning and appears as the most accurate and distinct commentary on it.” 34 The experience of transcendence which man underwent when listening to a piece of music was, for Schopenhauer, akin to a sexual experience, in that it was “the ultimate experience, a quasi-mystical one that carries us to the very center of life’s mystery.” 35

Wagner, as well, wrote extensively about the role of music in helping man to transcend the phenomenal world. In fact, he saw music as being inextricably linked to his hope of redeeming the human race. Magee describes Wagner’s views by stating that in his mind, “the role of art was to confront people with the deepest inner truths about themselves and their society, thereby enabling them to achieve a deeper self-understanding and social understanding; that the ideal art form was one that…should affirm and celebrate human life and human feeling.” 36 Like Schopenhauer, Wagner saw the ability of music to express that which was innately human; for this reason, the performance of a piece of music was able to evoke a deeply emotional response. According to these philosophers, music was a mimic of the scream, the expression of the anguished Will, the most primal sound that a body can make. In his essay, Beethoven (1870), Wagner wrote: “the world speaks to us in terms intelligible beyond compare,

33 Edman, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, p. 201.
34 Edman, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, p. 208.
36 Magee, The Tristan Chord, p. 177.
since its sounding message to our ear is of the selfsame nature as the cry sent forth to it from the depths of the inner heart.”

Music was also a privileged art form because its dual nature of harmony and rhythm bridged the gap between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. In Wagner’s words: “Whilst harmony, belonging to neither Space nor Time, remains the most inalienable element of Music, through the rhythmic sequence of tones in point of time the musician reaches forth a plastic hand, so to speak, to strike a compact with the waking world of semblances.”

Finally, Wagner also integrated art into his conception of religion, stating that music “brings to our consciousness the inmost essence of Religion free from all dogmatic fictions.” For him, music was a medium through which he could recreate the experience of transcendence, much in the way that religious rites were a mode of acting out one’s faith in God. Just as the saint sought to emulate Christ and strive for union with God, the artist fulfilled a similar goal, by striving for a connection with the noumenal world that he expressed through his creations.

Wagner and those who supported his aesthetic philosophy, had a vision for their future world in which the theater would supercede the Church as conveyor of the world’s great metaphysical truths. In his vision, “As Christianity stepped forth amid the Roman civilization of the universe, so Music breaks forth from the chaos of modern civilization. Both say aloud: ‘our kingdom is not of this world.’ And that means: we come from

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38 Wagner, “Beethoven,” p. 75.
within, ye from without; we spring from the Essence of things, ye from their show.”

The one who would lead this movement was a heroic character known as the poet-priest. Like Christ, this figure would take on the sufferings of humanity and use his creation to try to overcome the phenomenal world of man’s suffering, leading one to ultimate redemption in the noumenal world of meaning. This “artistic teller of the great world tragedy” and the “mediator of the crushingly sublime,”

was driven to accomplish his mission by powers beyond his comprehension. The aesthetic philosophers compared composition to a dream-like state, in which “the musician is controlled, as it were, by an urgent impulse to impart the vision of his inmost dream.”

Mahler, as we shall see, envisioned himself as this poet-priest, and saw the creation of music as his mission to help bring about the transcendent experience.

Both Schopenhauer and Wagner, therefore, saw music as the means for man to transcend his valueless, material world of suffering and come to a better understanding of himself and his purpose by reuniting, momentarily, with his fellow man and the essential oneness of his inner being. These ideas made a crucial impact on the fin-de-siècle because they provided a sense of hope and purpose in an otherwise meaningless existence. The way in which these popular philosophers raised the art of music to a higher spiritual realm ignited the imagination of many a composer during this time. Music was no longer just a source of entertainment, it was now the bearer of a great message of humanity and the composer who took up this cause would now have to confront these great issues. It was through this artistic medium that Gustav Mahler would make his impact upon the fin-de-siècle world.

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40 Wagner, “Beethoven,” p. 120.
42 Wagner, “Beethoven,” p. 75.
Mahler’s Educational Background and Religious Upbringing

In order to understand the emotional range of Mahler’s work, one must take into consideration the many elements from his development that would later come to be expressed through his music, particularly his tragic childhood and ability to escape this sorrow through the world of literature, philosophy, and religion. These early experiences and influences came to play an intricate role in the formation of both his Weltanschauung and his style of composition.

In 1860, Gustav Mahler was born in Kalischt, a small community in Bohemia, a region of the present day Czech Republic. Mahler’s family belonged to the large assimilated Jewish population that had settled within the Austrian empire. Unlike Orthodox Jews, the assimilated population was largely non-practicing and saw themselves as a part of the German cultural community. Therefore, after the loosening of restrictive racial laws, just months after his birth, the family moved to the larger town of Iglau in Moravia, where Mahler spent his childhood.

Mahler’s childhood was one marked by particular hardship and tragedy. To his close friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner he described the unhappy relationship of his parents, Bernard and Maria Mahler, stating that their personalities were as: “unlike as fire and water. He was harshness and she, sweetness personified…” Their unhappy marriage caused great tension in the family, for Bernard’s brutality towards his wife and children resulted in much built-up resentment in the young Mahler. Home life was also disrupted by the death of many of his brothers and sisters during childhood. In twenty-one years

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Marie Mahler gave birth to fourteen children, yet seven of them died in infancy and five later during the course of the composer’s life. The death of Mahler’s younger brother Ernst in 1875 was a particularly difficult experience because of the close relationship between the two siblings.

These tragic childhood reminiscences were to come back to Mahler in his later years as a composer. In making the connection between music and experience, he once stated that memory signified “the principle of polyphony, with each voice going its own way, while the artist unites and controls the whole.”

Often times these visions of the past inspired certain themes within his compositions. In 1910, Mahler met with the noted psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and revealed that once, after witnessing a particularly brutal quarrel between his parents, he fled the house and ran into a wandering musician playing a street song on the barrel organ. This experience united for Mahler the close connection in life of the tragic and the trite, a disparity that clearly transfers to his compositions; for example when he used the children’s song “Brüder Martin,” as the basis for the funeral march of his First Symphony.

An examination of Mahler’s educational history reveals that he showed an aptitude for music at a young age while also demonstrating an interest in philosophy and religion, the subjects that were to become his passions throughout his entire life. Theodore Fischer, a neighbor in Iglau, wrote that Mahler’s “musical talent developed early on. Even in his earliest boyhood he had learned to play all kinds of tunes with astonishing skill.” His memoirs also indicate that the young musician was exposed to many different musical genres as a child, for according to Fischer, there were frequent

45 LaGrange, Mahler, p. 55.
46 LaGrange, Mahler, p. 21.
oratorios in St. James’s Church in town as well as concerts by the local orchestra and theater performances.\textsuperscript{48} Thus we can see that the seeds of inspiration for the religious and dramatic in Mahler’s symphonic works could well have been planted when he was still a young boy.

In 1875, Mahler convinced his parents to send him to the Conservatory in Vienna and it was there that he received the majority of his technical musical training. During his studies there, Mahler was able to walk in the footsteps of many great late-Romantic composers such as Anton Bruckner and Johannes Brahms. He also made the acquaintance of another student named Hugo Wolf. The two roomed together for several years in Vienna and were to become a part of the same musical and intellectual circles among their young contemporaries.

In 1876, after finishing his studies with some success, Mahler began to take classes in philosophy and art history at the University. It was here in 1878 that he made the acquaintance of a Polish-born journalist and poet named Siegfried Lipiner (1856-1911) through his childhood friend, Albert Spiegler.\textsuperscript{49} Lipiner introduced Mahler to the Pernerstorfer Circle, a group of young intellectuals at the University who met together once a week to critique liberal politics, advocate socialism, and discuss the writings of their idol, Richard Wagner. Mahler was greatly inspired by Wagner’s philosophy, particularly his views on music, and its ability to call for a regeneration of the human race by recreating for man the transcendent experience.

The years 1878-1880 mark a period of crisis in Mahler’s life. On leave from his university studies, he took a conducting job at the summer resort of Bad Hall. Mahler’s

\textsuperscript{48} Blaukopf, \textit{Mahler: A Documentary Study}, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{49} LaGrange, \textit{Mahler}, p. 61.
correspondence at this time reveals that he entered a period of depression, spurned in love by Josephine Poisl, the daughter of the Iglau postmaster, and driven to near poverty by the meager allowance from his parents. LaGrange refers to Mahler’s state of mind at this time as Sehnsucht, a German term meaning “a vague sadness, abstract desire, sorrowful days of dreaming,” an attitude that reveals him to be a typical child of the Romantic era. His letters to childhood friend Joseph Steiner reveal Mahler was beginning to confront the essential crisis of this view of life:

Wildly I wrench at the bonds that chain me to the loathsome, insipid swamp of this life, and with all the strength of despair I cling to sorrow, my only consolation. – Then all at once the sun smiles upon me – and gone is the ice that encased my heart, again I see the blue sky and the flowers swaying in the wind, and my mocking laughter dissolves in tears of love. Then I must love this world with all its deceit and frivolity and its eternal laughter.”

This sense of communion with nature, while at the same time yearning for death, was one that would return later as a consistent theme throughout his music.

Mahler’s association with the Pernerstorfer Circle ended in 1883, most likely due to the growing Anti-Semitism within the group; however, the philosophical ideas that he was immersed in at this point in his education were to remain a part of his Weltanschauung.

In other regards, Mahler’s spiritual development was multi-faceted and reflects the influence of both traditional religious teachings and Romantic philosophy. Although the Mahlers were not Orthodox Jews, they were members of the temple in Iglau and it is likely that Mahler attended services as a child and was aware of many of the fundamental aspects of this belief system. The memoirs of one of Mahler’s close friends in Iglau,

50 LaGrange, Mahler, p. 61.
51 LaGrange, Mahler, p. 59.
52 Mahler, Gustav, Selected Letters, p.55.
Guido Adler, reveal the extent of religious toleration in their town and the importance placed upon education when he writes: “Catholic priests and the rabbi, Dr. J.J. Unger, uniformly supported religious education in family life, and tolerance was the highest principle of the humanistic education which was taught in secondary schools…” 53

Mahler’s first school report at the Imperial Royal State High School in 1869/1870 shows that he took full advantage of these opportunities and made excellent marks both terms in the subject of religion. 54

Mahler did not continue to practice this faith into adulthood; however, many aspects of Judaism remained a part of his worldview. Richard Johnston, in his book, The Austrian Mind, quotes the Jewish historian, Hermann Broch who suggests that one of these values might have been a reverence for life. According to Broch, this concept is a central pillar of the Jewish law because: “for a Jew, whatever enhances life is just, and that which curtails it, unjust.” 55 This question of justice in terms of final judgment is addressed by Mahler in his Second Symphony. Broch goes on to state, however, that “despite a thirst for earthly justice, Jews torment themselves by conceiving God as an infinitely distant being, who can be approached, but never reached. It becomes incumbent upon the Jew…to pursue God without respite, yet without the hope of attainment because no earthly deed can influence the deity.” 56 One can also see how this statement would support Mahler’s intense obsession with religion and his struggle to find a sense of peace with his faith.

53 Blaukopf, Mahler: A Documentary Study, p. 149.
54 Blaukopf, Mahler: A Documentary Study, p. 150.
Mahler’s interest in literature and philosophy also came to have an important bearing on his religious views. Although his relationship with his father was strained, Mahler did benefit from the fact that Bernard placed an important emphasis on education. The large library of the Mahler family was where Mahler first became immersed in the world of literature and he was to remain an avid reader throughout his life. He once wrote to his friend Friedrich Löhr:

“I have achieved a kind of fatalism, which finally makes me regard my own life, whatever turn it may take, with a certain ‘interest’ – and even enjoy it. I have come to like the world more and more! I am ‘devouring’ an increasing number of books! They are, afterall, the only friends I keep by me! And what friends! Heavens, if I had no books! I forget everything round about me whenever a voice from ‘one of us’ reaches me! They become ever more familiar and more of a consolation to me, my real brothers and fathers and lovers…”

The bridge between literature and religious views became crossed early on for Mahler through the discovery of the works of writers such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky. LaGrange states that he “knew almost by heart the famous conversation between Ivan and Alyosha and the allegory of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*. He considered that both passages essentially symbolized his *Weltschmerz*…” The main idea that is addressed in this literary work is the question of how one person can be happy while a single being on this earth is unhappy. This idea ties into the constant torment that Mahler experienced when torn between happiness and despair in his life.

Mahler’s wife Alma was to write later of her husband that: “He had a strong leaning toward Catholic mysticism whereas the Jewish ritual had never meant anything to him. He could never pass a church without going in; he loved the smell of incense and

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Gregorian chants. The question inevitably raised by this statement is what then drew Mahler to identify with the Christian faith? Although we can see that the framework for his interest in Christianity was laid at a young age by his exposure to the church in Iglau and early educational experience, the answer very likely lies again in the writings of Richard Wagner, for his extensive use of traditional religious images in both literary and musical genres came to have a great impact on Mahler.

Mahler’s introduction to these ideas was made possibly by his relationship with Siegfried Lipiner. Through this friendship one can see the great influence that the fruitful exchange of their intellectual thoughts and philosophical beliefs came to play in each others’ works. Lipiner was born in Jaroslaw, Poland in 1856, came to Vienna as a student, and later became librarian at the Vienna Parliament. By the age of twenty he had written his first great work, the epic poem, *Unbound Prometheus*, for which he was considered by literary circles to be the “new Goethe.” Englebert Pernerstorfer, founder of the intellectual group with whom both Lipiner and Mahler would be associated, described him as “the finest intellect I have ever come across,” a man who “immediately gripped the attention of the audience by the power of his words.” Unfortunately, many of Lipiner’s literary works were never published and after his initial literary successes his writings faded into obscurity. However, from the records of Mahler’s correspondence as well as the sources of their contemporaries in the Pernerstorfer Circle, we can draw some picture of the common views that they shared and issues that they frequently discussed.

The main link between the two friends was ideological. Lipiner tried to create through his literary works a consistent theoretical framework out of the religious, philosophical, and aesthetic theories of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner, a task that Mahler sought to accomplish in the world of music. Lipiner’s poems and essays, much like the writings of Wagner before him, are imbued with religious parallels and Biblical images. In *Unbound Prometheus*, Lipiner elaborates on the idea of salvation through human suffering that was one of the many pillars of the philosophy of the aesthetic. Lipiner’s *Adam*, the prologue and only finished part of the *Christus* theatrical trilogy that Mahler and Lipiner had discussed working on together, illustrates many of the concepts laid out in Wagner’s essay *Religion and Art*. The themes of a lost paradise, the relationship between intellect and passion, the idea of man’s individualism as being the source of his misery, and Christ as the crucial figure in the unity of the fragmented Wills, drew directly on the ideas of aesthetic philosophy. According to music historian Stephen Hefling, a constant theme in Lipiner’s essays and dramatic works was the idea that “tragedy is religion and in tragic art man becomes religious…through its power of release from transitory human nature, man feels his resurrection as a deity.” Here one can make a direct parallel with the ideas that Mahler was trying to express with his Second Symphony, a topic that will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

The letters from Mahler to Lipiner are filled with words of admiration for his mentor and illustrate that the two artists saw their works as both reaching for a common goal. In reaction to having read Lipiner’s work, *Hippolytos*, Mahler wrote: “there is

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63 McGrath, *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*, p. 105.
something else that has become grandly clear to me about your essential nature: a new and deep connection between your creativeness and the musical side of your being…no one will ever be able to understand you better than a musician, and I may specifically add: than *myself.* It sometimes seems to me quite a joke how closely my ‘music’ is related to yours…”  

Despite their close ties, however, Mahler’s marriage to Alma Schindler, the much younger daughter of a famous Viennese painter, Emil Schindler, caused a rift in the friendship between the two men and they were estranged for many years before reconciling in the years just prior to Mahler’s death.

Mahler’s religious development was therefore one of great complexity. In 1897 he converted to Catholicism, a pragmatic move that made possible his appointment as head of the Vienna court opera. But did he ever truly consider himself Catholic? A great many Jewish people were baptized during the fin-de-siècle period for a number of reasons, most often to facilitate their advancement in society. Yet the fact that anti-Semitism remained strong throughout Europe during this time, particularly in Vienna, suggests that perhaps the question is not merely what Mahler wanted to believe, but what he felt that he was allowed to believe. The social stigma placed on him for his Jewish heritage no doubt played a great role in how he viewed his spiritual life and may have contributed to the patchwork of religious views that he came to see as his own spiritual identity.

In the Second Symphony we will see how he uses his own compositions to recreate this internal spiritual and philosophical conflict for his listeners.

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My two symphonies contain the inner aspect of my whole life; I have written into them everything that I have experienced and endured – Truth and poetry in music. To understand these works properly would be to see my life transparently revealed in them.

-Mahler to Natalie Bauer-Lechner, July 1893⁶⁸

The effect is so great that one cannot describe it! If I were to say what I think of this great work it would sound too arrogant in a letter. But for me there is no doubt whatsoever that it enlarges the fundus instructus of mankind.

-Mahler to Arnold Berliner, 31 January 1895⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Mahler, Selected Letters, p. 158.
Mahler’s Second Symphony is one of the most daring, innovative, and programmatically complex works in the symphonic repertoire. Composed over a six-year period, (1888-1894), this work addresses through the medium of sound, the great philosophical questions of the fin-de-siècle era: the meaning of life, death, and transcendence.

In this chapter, I will address first the basic organization of the symphony, the historical background of its composition, and the basic musical themes and harmonic ideas that Mahler used to create his symphonic world. I will also provide a history of Mahler’s programs for the symphony: the published version for the Dresden performance in 1901, as well as the explanations he gave to his friends Natalie Bauer-Lechner and Max Marschalk. An analysis of how these programs can be related to Mahler’s own spiritual journey will be discussed in chapter 4. These documents indicate that Mahler had a narrative concept in mind which he identified with a hero character, perhaps not at the time of composition, but later when he was trying to come to terms with his own creation. Because Mahler later expressed disdain for presenting such an explicit storyline and withdrew his programs, they have become a source of controversy for music scholars as to their validity in interpreting the meaning of the symphony. Despite the composer’s change of heart, however, their existence does provide an indication of Mahler’s feelings and beliefs at one point in his life and shed an interesting light on the way in which he used music to work through his own emotions and experiences.

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- The Music -

Mahler’s Second Symphony is an epic work, composed of five movements that begin with a funeral march and conclude with a full choral cantata combining word and tone within the symphonic realm, a feat that had rarely been attempted since the “Ode to Joy” in Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. The movements are as follows:

I. Allegro Maestoso
II. Andante Moderato
III. In ruhig, fließender Bewegung
IV. “Urlicht”: sehr feierlich, aber schlicht
V. In Tempo des Scherzos – Kräftig-Langsam; Misterioso

My analysis of this piece will consist primarily of an interpretation of major themes, rather than an in-depth harmonic analysis, based my own observations as well as those suggested by Constantin Floros in *Gustav Mahler: the Symphonies* and Edward Reilly in “Todtenfeier and the Second Symphony.” Because of the large scale of the first and last movements, the majority of my focus will be on the development of themes introduced in the beginning and their recurrences and resetting in the finale, as well as an interpretation of the meaning behind Mahler’s chosen text and the music that accompanies it. I will refer to locations in the score by cue numbers, illustrated in brackets [] and measure numbers.

The first movement was composed by Mahler in the late summer of 1888 and came to be subtitled *Todtenfeier* (Funeral Rites). There has been much speculation by music historians as to the origin of this programmatic heading, particularly amongst those who wish to link it to the Polish writer Adam Mickiewicz’s poem *Dziady*, translated into German by Mahler’s good friend Siegfried Lipiner. Although the actually translation of the Polish title should be “Forefather’s Eve,” Lipiner renamed it *Todtenfeier*. Despite the
fact that Mahler makes no direct mention of the poem in his letters, it is very likely that he was aware of the work’s existence and possibly read it.\textsuperscript{71} An even more curious element of the symphonic movement is its structure. While the movement follows the essence of the classical sonata form in presenting two contrasting kinds of material, Mahler’s formation of the sections (exposition, development and recapitulation) are anything but traditional. His method is to present a number of thematic ideas in juxtaposition which build off one another contrapuntally and harmonically, reaching toward dramatic climaxes which define the different segments. Some of the themes were named by Mahler in his originally score, such as the “Haupthema,” “Gesang” and “Meerenstille.” The others I have titled myself or taken from the analysis by Constantin Floros.

In the exposition, Mahler lays the groundwork for both thematic juxtaposition and harmonic contrast. The opening, in the key of C minor, is marked by the “death motive” (my title) which begins in the celli and bass, and is based on a recurring pattern of rising sixteenth notes followed by syncopated eighth notes and a triplet motive (see figure 1).\textsuperscript{72} With this initial theme Mahler sets the underlying march-like pattern for the movement and creates an aura of tension and struggle from the outset with its frustrated motion and awkward, jolting rhythms.

The “Haupthema,” (Mahler’s title) or main theme (see figure 2), which is introduced by the oboe and English horn at measure 18, emerges from the continuous pulse of the “death motive” in an ascending leaping motion towards its goal an octave

\textsuperscript{71} Hefling, “Todtenfeier and the Problem of Program Music,” p. 27-53. The connection that Hefling makes between Mickiewicz’s poem and Mahler’s symphony lies primarily in way both works reflect similar romantic ideas, rather than the religious and philosophical issues that will be discussed here.

\textsuperscript{72} See Appendix I for references to the musical score.
higher (C¹ to C³). This melody provides a lyric juxtaposition to the driving rhythmic line of the accompaniment.

The “Gesang,” or “song” theme (Mahler’s title), introduced for the first time at [3], is another rising melodic line, however it is established by the strings in the key of E major (see figure 3). The optimistic contrast to the melancholy march of the opening is brief, however, and by 5 measures before [4], Mahler has already begun the harmonic shift to E-flat minor, which precipitates the abrupt conclusion of this section and return to the opening theme in C minor. It is important to note the significance of this final key in regards to the development of Mahler’s progressive tonality. It recurs more prominently at a significant location in the development at [16]. By emphasizing this harmonic idea early on, he is foreshadowing the symphony’s sonic journey to the key of E flat, however in the finale the tonality will be major and not minor as it is in this funeral march movement.

The second part of the exposition begins again with the “death motive” in C minor and develops into a trumpet fanfare in A-flat major at [5] (see figure 4). This “heroic theme” (my title) marks the climactic point of this section, as 7 measures later the music transforms into a contrapuntal “battle” in G minor between the rising syncopated line in winds and low strings and the descending quarter notes in the upper strings. The dénouement of this section is marked by a gradual fade out of the “death motive” and the closing of the exposition with the decisive beat of the tam tam.

The development section can be divided into two parts, or, as Richard Specht, a Mahler historian suggests, they can also be seen as two separate developments, because
of their dramatically different arrangements.\footnote{Constantin Floros, \textit{Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies}, trans. Vernon Wicker, (Portland: Amadeus Press. 1993), p. 58.} This first development, beginning at [7], opens with the “Gesang” theme in C major and quickly transitions into a theme that Mahler termed “Meerenstille,” or “calm of the sea” (see figure 5) in E major at [8]. This last title was most likely taken from a poem by the great German writer Johann von Goethe. In his analysis of the symphony, Floros recalls key verses of Goethe’s work which seem to closely relate to the concept of death that Mahler was trying to express:

\begin{quote}
Terrible silence of death!
In the dreadful vastness
Not a wave is moving.\footnote{Floros, \textit{Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies}, p. 59.}
\end{quote}

The motive’s wave-like melody emerges first in the English horn and then is echoed by the viola and cello a few bars later.

The final two themes to be prominently introduced in this movement are the “Dies Irae” (see figure 6) and the “Eternity” (see figure 7). The “Dies Irae,” eight measures before [17] is a reference to the Gregorian chant used in the Catholic funeral mass. Its inclusion at this point in the piece highlights the religious component of the work. The “Eternity” theme (Floros’ term), which follows at 5 measures before [18] is a triumphant fanfare line set in the key of E-flat major, Mahler’s goal harmonic idea. It also presents the melody for the important line in the text of the resurrection chorus of the finale: “Sterben werd’ ich um zu leben!” (“I shall die in order to live!”) found at [47] in the fifth movement. This line is Mahler’s solution to the problem of death posed in the \textit{Todtenfeier}, and its initial statement in the instruments here in the first movement demonstrates the limitations of abstract music, for the true meaning of this theme is not clearly defined until it is paired with the voice of the chorus in the finale. The placement
of both of these motives in the second development section, at the beginning of the great mid-movement climax, provides a preview for the glorious finale of the piece. However, the way in which Mahler counteracts these motives with a stormy reaction at [18], the triplet \textit{col legno} in the strings at five measures after [19] and finally, a dramatic plunging line at 7 measures before [20] negates this spirit of hope. In the \textit{Todtenfeier} movement it is the “death motive” that will be victorious.

\textit{Todtenfeier} existed as an independent work for nearly five years without Mahler having a sense of how it could form a part of a larger work. During that time, Mahler was affected by a number of major issues that could have influenced this compositional hiatus. The first was the death of his father, mother, and sister Leopoldine all just months apart in the year 1889. This trauma to the family left the composer as guardian for his younger brothers and sister. Furthermore, Mahler had spent that year very unhappy in his position as director of the Hungarian National Opera in Budapest, and his discontent was likely exacerbated by the unsuccessful premiere of his First Symphony in that city in November of the same year. In 1891 he made the move to Hamburg to become the chief conductor of their company, but it wasn’t until two years later that he was able to successfully conclude the musical journey begun with the funeral march movement.

In 1893 Mahler spent his summer vacation at a cottage at Steinbach am Attersee with his family and good friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner. There, in the space of just a few weeks, he was able to finish the composition of the middle three movements of the symphony. The chronology is as follows:

\begin{itemize}
\item 8 July – voice and piano version of the song “Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt” (the basis for the third movement)
\item 16 July – full score of the third movement
\item 19 July – fair copy of the full score of “Urlicht”
\end{itemize}
30 July – draft full score of the second movement.\textsuperscript{75}

The structure of the second movement, the Andante, is a rondo in A-flat major. The piece presents such a striking contrast to the Todtenfeier that Mahler suggested there be a pause of five minutes between the two movements. The A theme has the character of a Ländler, an Austrian folk dance. Mahler sets his Ländler in a number of different variations with a lyric countermelody (see figure 7). The B section at [6], however, is marked by a frantic triplet pattern that harkens back to the dramatic frenzy of the first movement.

The Scherzo of the third movement derives from a song that Mahler had composed based on the poem, “Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt” (St. Anthony of Padua’s Sermon to the Fishes”). The original text came from a collection of folk verses entitled Des Knaben Wunderhorn (Youth’s Magic Horn), compiled by two German writers, Clemens Bretano and Achim von Arnim. In the story, St. Anthony goes to church to preach, but upon finding this building empty, he turns instead to the river to speak to the fishes. The ironic conclusion is that although the fish are attentive to his message at first, they return afterward to living their ordinary fish lives, for as the final words of the poem reveal:

\begin{align*}
\text{Die Predigt hat g’fallen} & \quad \text{The sermon has pleased} \\
\text{Sie bleiben wie Allen} & \quad \text{They remain like everyone!} \textsuperscript{76}
\end{align*}

The saint’s message passes by unheeded.

Mahler borrowed several sections of this Lied for the A theme of his third movement: the opening (up to measure 138), a middle passage (measures 380-404), and

\textsuperscript{76} Knapp, Raymond. Symphonic Metamorphosis. (Middletown, CT: Weslyan University Press, 2003), p. 79.
the conclusion (measure 553 to the end). The significant motives that Mahler uses in this first section are a restless sixteenth-note rhythm (beginning in measure 13 with the violins) which establishes a feeling of mechanized perpetual motion and a grace note motive in the clarinets at measure 8 (see figure 9) that creates a sinister and humorous musical atmosphere.

The B section, which begins at [36], presents both a harmonic contrast (a shift from C minor to C major) and a stylistic contrast to the first section. This section is filled with radical shifts in musical coloration, transitioning abruptly from calm “chamber music” moments such as that with the solo violin at 12 after [38] and climactic buildups answered by sharp chromatic descents, as seen in the passage one measure before [44]. The turbulence of the section builds up to an instrumental “outcry” that occurs at 9 measures after [50], and is the dramatic apex of this chaotic movement. After the outbreak of this dissonant chord, the perpetual motion from the A part returns and gradually fades out in the same manner that the movement began.

The fourth movement is the setting of another Wunderhorn poem, entitled “Urlicht” (“Primeval Light”), and arranged for alto solo and orchestra. This movement marks the entrance of the human voice into the Mahler’s symphonic journey and the text of this piece is central to one’s understanding of the questions that the composer was trying to pose in his work. The text (see Appendix II) present the situation of humanity: “man lies in deepest need, man lies in deepest pain,” and offers a voice of hope for a mystical reunion in heaven: “I am from God and will return to God.” Although this movement is but a brief interlude before the grand finale, Mahler is able include a complex harmonic development within the simple A B A\textsuperscript{1} format. The beginning and

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end are in D-flat major, however, the middle section is marked by several key changes that add to the dramatic intensity of the words that the music accompanies. In addition, Mahler’s setting of the “conversation” between alto and solo violin is, as we shall see, an interesting component of the piece in light of ideas that he is trying to express.

The finale was the most difficult section of the piece for Mahler to compose; therefore the story of its inception is particularly interesting. Mahler was attending the funeral of his musical mentor, the conductor Hans von Bülow on 29 March 1894 in Hamburg where at one point in the service a boy’s choir sang the “Auferstehen” chorale from *Messias* by the German Romantic poet, Friedrich Klopstock (1724-1803). J.B. Foerster, a close friend of Mahler’s recalls the impact of this performance:

> The children’s voices! They rang out like the voices of angels, like a prayer holding with it a sweet sense of hope and on their wings they bore wonderous power, solace, enchantment and unspoken grief… 78

Klopstock’s chorale therefore became the inspiration and foundation of the final movement. While his words comprise the first two verses, Mahler chose to compose the rest of the text himself, thus the final work provides a vision of redemption that has a perspective that is distinctly Mahler.

The fifth movement is another sonata form, presenting as the two sections an orchestral prelude (exposition and development) and a choral cantata (recapitulation). Mahler’s compositional layout in this case is evolutionary in character. Rather than just presenting and restating themes, he is continually adding new ideas so that the main themes develop gradually to form the transcendent experience toward which the music is taking the listener.

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In keeping with the idea of an evolutionary symphonic development, Mahler opens the last movement with an instrumental introduction, similar to that used by Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony. Throughout this opening section, the listener is reminded of a number of themes from earlier movements and is introduced to various symbolic motives that will appear in the Resurrection chorale of the second half. The effect of this setup is to synthesize the many disparate parts of this grand symphony, forming a dramatic conclusion that answers the harmonic and motivic “questions” posed in the earlier movements.

The first measures of the fifth movement recreate the chaos and fury of the Scherzo with a dramatic outcry of sound and blaring horns which Floros calls the “fright fanfare.” Coming after the peaceful interlude of the “Urlicht” song, this frenetic energy creates a feeling of uncertainty and tension for the movement, recalling the reality of death and setting up the listener for the coming tonal picture of the Last Judgment. As the instruments gradually fade out, however, Mahler introduces the “Eternity” motif again, at 3 measures after [2], as if to remind his listeners again of the hope of resolution.

The exposition, which begins at [3], starts off with the fanfare of offstage trumpets, referred to as “Der Rufer in der Wüste” (“The One Calling Out in the Wilderness”). The idea immediately following is a descending triplet motive in the oboe which relates to material from the “death motive” of the first movement. At 8 measures before [5] Mahler again introduces the “Dies Irae” theme. Unlike its appearance in the first movement, however, which anticipates a dramatic negation, the

80 Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, p. 69. This programmatic heading, as well as “Der grosse Appel” (“The Great Roll-call”) which marks the second half of the piece, are found in the autograph and in the vocal score by Hermann Behn, but were left out by Mahler in the published full score.
theme here leads into a major key section. Finally, the appearance of two more themes provide the necessary introduction for the finale chorale: the “Resurrection” motive at [5] (see figure 10) which presents the melodic line for the opening text and the “Entreaty” theme (Floros’ term) at [7] (see figure 11) that is an instrumental presentation in the English horn of the alto solo that will appear later.

Mahler creates a broad tonal picture of the Final Judgment, which he reveals to be frightening and chaotic as well as hopeful and glorious. In this opening segment he has set the stage for the message of redemption that will be revealed through his words of his chorus.

The recapitulation, beginning at [29], is titled by Mahler, “Der grosse Appell,” or “The Great Roll-call.” In this second half of the movement, Mahler uses the musical ideas introduced in the exposition to create a transcendent experience for his listeners. By adding a vocal text to these themes he finally reveals his answer to the problem of death in the triumphant “Resurrection” chorale, which is the climactic conclusion of the symphonic journey begun in the Todtenfeier movement.

This section of the piece opens with a trumpet fanfare at [30] recalling the opening of the exposition. This introduction soon fades out so that the entrance of the chorale at [31] seems to emerge from complete silence. The text that they sing is set to the “Resurrection theme” that Mahler introduced earlier in the piece, finally giving full meaning to the symbolic melody:

Aufersteh’n, ja aufersteh’n wirst du,  Rise again, yea, thou shalt rise again,
Mein Staub, nach kurzer Ruh!  My dust, after short rest!
Unsterblich Leben! Unsterblich Leben  Immortal life! Immortal life
Wird der dich rief dir geben  He who called thee will grant thee.
Another example of Mahler’s thematic development is the “Entreaty” motive, which is vocalized by the alto solo at [39]. Set in B-flat minor, this stanza is a moment of tension in contrast to the jubilant opening. Here the yearning melody is set with just the voice and the English horn above a pedal tremolo in the violas, accompanying the words, “O glaube, mein Herz, O glaube,” (“O believe, my heart, O believe”). The effect of this setting is to place a great focus on these words of desire for faith.

Finally, the “Eternity” theme that made its first appearance in the Todtenfeier movement reveals the powerful central message of the Second Symphony. This climax moment of the movement comes after a great fugue amongst the different voices of the chorus to which Mahler sets the words of his text:

Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,
In heissem Liebesstreben,
Werd’ ich entschweben
Zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug’ gedrungen!

With wings which I have won me,
In love’s fierce striving,
I shall soar upwards
To the light to which no eye has soared.

At [47] the final line of this verse, set to the “Eternity” theme is sung by all of these voices in unison: “Sterben werd’ ich um zu leben!” (“I shall die in order to live!”). These words and this melody occur in E-flat minor, the harmonic goal of the symphony; thus Mahler presents the dramatic solution to his work: an answer to both the philosophical and harmonic conflict posed in the beginning of the piece.

-The Background to Mahler's Program-

One of the characteristic aspects of the Romantic Movement was to view art as a means of self-expression. The compositions of the late nineteenth century were often accompanied by programs that revealed to the audience the message that the artist was trying to impart. Gustav Mahler was heir to this tradition and, in a manner similar to his
contemporaries, he also chose to provide an explanation of his work in a series of documents. These can be seen as the composer’s attempt to the process for himself the impact and message of his creation, and to make the ideas expressed within it more accessible to his listeners.

There are three main sources from which musicologists and scholars of Mahler’s music have looked to interpret the meaning of the Second Symphony.\(^{81}\) The first is from the memoirs of his close friend and companion, Natalie Bauer-Lechner. According to her records, Mahler explained to her a distinct tonal picture that he was trying to create soon after finishing the composition in January 1896. The second source is in a letter from Mahler to the music critic Max Marschalk, written just a few months later. From this correspondence we can see that Mahler believed in the importance of program notes for the listener in order to provide “signposts and milestones on his journey.”\(^{82}\) The final source is an actual published program, written by Mahler for a performance of the Second Symphony in Dresden on 20 January 1901. Each of these sources shed a distinct light on the main ideas that Mahler was trying to convey through his epic work. Many of these programmatic ideas will be addressed in the following chapter as being closely related to Mahler’s own spiritual journey.

A similarity that links all three programs is the reference to a tragic, suffering hero figure. The idea of one archetype who personified the experiences of humanity had already been addressed by Mahler in his First Symphony, entitled “Titan.” This work, which was also originally accompanied by a descriptive program, revealed Mahler’s musical depiction of “a strong heroic man, his life and sufferings, his battles and defeat at

\(^{81}\) The text for all three of these programs comes from Reilly, “Todtenfeier and the Second Symphony,” p. 123-125 and can be found in Appendix III.

the hands of fate.” Like the Second Symphony, the First illustrates a life journey in which a character must come to grips with his own individual insignificance and impotence at the hands of the great forces of the universe before coming to a greater understanding of himself. As his letter to Marschalk reveals, it is the hero of this first symphony that Mahler “bears to the grave” in the “Todtenfeier” movement and “on whose life I reflect, from a higher vantage point, in a clear mirror.” The identity of the hero is a question that has been debated amongst musicologists and Mahler scholars for years. While it is very possible to see this character as the “everyman” of the fin-de-siècle period, one cannot deny that there are many similarities between the details of this character’s life experience and those of the composer himself.

One of the major facts supporting this assumption lies in the idea that Mahler saw himself as Wagner’s poet-priest, the archetype of the struggling hero in the world of aesthetic philosophy. Mahler felt that as a composer he had a mission to carry the burdens of humanity and to use his talents to reveal the great metaphysical truths that he was able to grasp and express through a musical composition. Natalie Bauer-Lechnner recalls several instances in her memoirs where Mahler used the same religious images as Wagner in the context of the experience of symphonic creation. In one case, Mahler asked her, “Why do I have to suffer all this? Why must I take this fearful martyrdom upon myself? I was overwhelmed with boundless grief, not only for myself, but for all those who were nailed to the cross before me, because they wanted to give their best to the world, and for all those who will suffer the same fate after me.”

This question of the purpose of suffering is also one that the hero asks, as revealed in the Marschalk.

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83 LaGrange, Mahler, p. 748.
84 Bauer-Lechner, Recollections of Gustav Mahler, p. 54.
program: “What did you live for? Why did you suffer? Is it all just a vast and terrifying joke?” Therefore it is not beyond the stretch of the imagination to assume that Mahler at least identified with this hero character, even if he did not intend it to be a literal depiction of himself.

Mahler once wrote to his friend Arthur Seidl: “only when I experience something do I compose, and only when I compose do I experience!”85 a statement which suggests a close parallel between Mahler’s own life experience and the symphonic world he was creating. Given the fact that Mahler was living in an era of increased secularization and disbelief in traditional religious dogmas, the decision to entitle his symphony “Resurrection” provokes the question of how closely the work parallels Mahler’s own spiritual questioning and whether an interpretation of the piece in this light can provide some clues to the complexity of his own religious identity. The question of how closely these ideas relate to Mahler’s own life experience will be explored in the next chapter.

Although the program provides an interesting context for Mahler’s work, one must also be aware of the composer’s own reservations about relying too closely on a narrative explanation for his work. Despite the success of the Symphony, Mahler chose to withdraw the program that he published for Dresden for fear that the concert audience would become too absorbed with trying to find literal interpretations within the music. In a letter to Otto Lessmann, as he was completing the work in 1894, Mahler expressed his initial concerns with presenting thematic description to his listeners, writing:

It is…scarcely my intention to confuse a concert audience with musicological remarks – for it seems to me that that is just what would be achieved by giving them ‘programme notes’, forcing them to read instead of listening. Certainly I think it necessary that the thematic patterns should be clear to every listener. But do you really believe that, with a modern

85 Mahler, Selected Letters, p. 212.
work, making them acquainted with a few themes will suffice? – One can only know and appreciate a piece of music by making a *thorough* study of it, and the profounder the work, the harder this is and the longer it takes. At a first performance, on the other hand, it is important for the listener to surrender himself to the work unreservedly, allowing its general human and poetic quality to make an impression on him; and if he then feels attracted by it, he should then go into it in more detail…

Years later, in a conversation with his wife, Alma, recorded in her memoirs, his view of program music is one of complete disgust:

> I’m quite sure that if God were asked to draw up a program of the world he had created he could never do it. At best it would say as little about the nature of God and life as my analysis says about my C minor Symphony. In fact, as all religious dogmas do, it leads directly to misunderstanding, to a flattening and coarsening, and in the long run to such distortion that the work, and still more its creator, is utterly unrecognizable.  

Therefore the listener is left with a great conundrum when confronting the interpretation of this piece.

The Second Symphony remains an important work above all, today because of the emotional impact it imparts upon the listener. From the melancholy funeral march of the opening movement, to the chaotic tonal picture of Judgment Day and the grand Resurrection chorale in the finale, Mahler’s symphony is groundbreaking in its symphonic structure and orchestration. Moreover, no matter if one is looking at the symphony for a personal spiritual confession or for a broad philosophical worldview, the fact that Mahler was trying to impart a message to his listeners through these musical techniques is equally significant.

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The Symphony as a Spiritual and Philosophical Journey

The Second Symphony, “Resurrection,” is Mahler’s attempt to come to an understanding of the meaning of man’s existence. In one sense, we can read the piece programmatically as an indication of Mahler’s own journey to find personal answers to the fundamental questions expressed in his work. The idea of a heroic character caught up in the sorrows and struggles of the world and seeking salvation was a concept that the composer identified with due to his feelings of alienation in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Moreover, the work can be seen to express broader metaphysical concepts that reflect the general disillusion and malaise of this era in history and the Weltanschauung of some of his greatest influences, the aesthetic philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner.

In order to reveal the ability of the Second Symphony to express both of these viewpoints, I will discuss the first four movements, first in light of their programmatic implications for Mahler’s own spiritual journey and then in terms of the ideals of aesthetic philosophy. Then I will turn to the final movement to demonstrate how Mahler fused both the traditional religious ideas reflected in the program and text with philosophical concepts illustrated in the pure music in order to come up with his answer to the questions of life and death. For the fact remains that the transcendent experience that Mahler creates in this piece bridges both of these interpretations. Through his work he is able to create a glorious connection with a realm of sound that speaks to human emotion and draws the listener into a common aesthetic experience with his fellow man. The Second Symphony professes a spirit of hope that rang true in Mahler’s day and continues to impact audiences today.
If one looks through the lens of Mahler’s programs and commentaries, the Second Symphony is a spiritual journey that focuses on the themes of alienation, disillusionment, and a yearning for unity and acceptance. The programs provide particular insight into this interpretation of the work, as the “hero” that is introduced in these descriptions and who speaks through the text of the “Urlicht” poem and “Resurrection” chorale encounters many of the issues that were typically identified with fin-de-siècle society.

The first movement, “Todtenfeier,” begins with the death of the heroic character and sets the stage for his attempt to come to terms with his own impotence and mortality. In the Bauer-Lechner program Mahler suggests that the movement “depicts the struggles of a mighty being still caught in the toils of this world: grappling with life and with the fate to which he must succumb, his death.” The “death motive,” an unsettling idea, provides this foreboding image of approaching doom as it recurs throughout the movement. Emerging from this frantic march is the “Haupthema,” which offers a questioning voice of hope that there is an escape from this “deafening bustle of everyday life,” perhaps “an existence beyond it,” as Mahler suggests in his Dresden program. With the entrance of the strings at [1] this main theme gains momentum and almost seems to reach its goal, yet the layering of musical textures that ensue in the following measures gradually overwhelms the “Haupthema.” The first climax at 6 measures before [2] is reached when all the instruments respond to the building tension with a collapsing, stumbling line in a dotted rhythm. The result of this first musical “battle” is that the “death motive” has succeeded in drowning out the optimistic melody. In this opening statement Mahler has presented a goal for the piece: a resolution for the melodic line that
will mirror an answer to these metaphysical questions of “What did you live for?” that he poses in his program. However he has also revealed that the journey to realizing this objective will be one of great difficulty and conflict.

The next theme which illustrates the ideas of Mahler’s programs is the “heroic theme.” Introduced for the first time at [5], this jubilant trumpet fanfare in A-flat major suggests a feeling of boisterous confidence. However, like the “Haupthema” before it, the “heroic theme” is also beaten down by rhythmic force. The ascending triplets in the horns are answered by an emphatic negation in the low notes of the trumpets, an idea that reflects the voice of fate to which, as Mahler suggested to Bauer-Lechner, the hero must succumb. The return of the collapsing death motive in the brass in contrast to the rising theme in the celli, bass and bassoons at 8 measures before [6], illustrates Mahler’s use of counterpoint in order to create the vision of a conflict within the orchestra that mirrors the conflict within the soul of the hero character.

The “Pastorale” section of the Todtenfeier development (Floros’s term) at [8] provides a stark contrast within the piece and a brief interlude from the building rhythmic tension of the movement. The lyric “Meerenstille” theme, mentioned earlier, is the key motive of this section, as it suggests an uneasy calmness. Its setting, first in the solo voice of the English horn and later in the viola and cello makes the theme appear timid and dwarfed by the vast orchestration of the rest of the piece. The feeling evoked by this motive could therefore be the “passions and aspirations” of the hero that Mahler describes in his program, yet in the context of the movement one can see the futility of these hopes in the face of human mortality.
The final theme to be prominently featured in this movement is the “Dies Irae.” This motive’s decidedly Catholic reference was inserted at this point (8 measures before [17]) initially as a clear and specific reference to death and the day of judgment. However, it also provides a foreshadowing to the triumphant conclusion of the piece where it will be paired with the melody of the “Resurrection” chorus. However, the fact that Mahler thought to use it in the Todtenfeier, years before the idea for the finale was conceived, further relates to his own concept of pessimism, and suggests that he was well aware of its symbolic interpretations. Introduced in the horns against the backdrop of the syncopated eighth/thirty-second note pulse in the strings (another variation on the death motive), the “Dies Irae” theme can be seen as both the requiem for the lost hero and the hint toward a conclusion which will reflect at least some ideas from the Christian view of death.

By the conclusion of the opening movement, Mahler has set the stage for the spiritual journey of his hero. The first battle has been fought and lost; the hero has succumbed to the fate of his own mortality. This scenario is a curious one for the beginning of a symphony, for we are starting, in a sense, at the end. However, the point that Mahler makes here is that our existence in the material world is really insignificant in light of that which comes after. It is the revelation of this life beyond death that will be approached in the following movements.

The Andante movement is Mahler’s interlude of Romantic nostalgia. As he stated in his letter to Marschalk, the second movement was intended to be the depiction of “a memory, a ray of sunlight, pure and cloudless, out of the hero’s life.” The use of the popular Austrian folk dance, known as the Ländler, serves this purpose by recreating the
image of an idyllic past. Years later, in an interview with the magazine, *Etude*, Mahler described the importance of the use of folk tunes within his symphonies, stating:

“composers realized that in order to make their work understandable and more readily received, it behooved them to employ folk themes as the basis for some of their more complicated works, so that the public that heard them could…grasp the significance of the work more readily.”

The Ländler, therefore, would undoubtedly have been recognizable to members of Mahler’s audience in the late-nineteenth century and helped them to identify with this nostalgic experience.

Again, it is Mahler’s setting of the theme which reveals the ideas he was trying to express to his listeners. The rondo form (ABABA) of the movement provides for the recurrence of this main theme several times throughout the piece. The first appearance of the theme is in the united voices of the strings in the opening bars. This confident statement fixes in the listener’s mind the image of “a happy moment from the life of his beloved departed one [the hero].” After a brief, scherzo-like interlude, the theme returns 8 measures after [5]. In this setting, the violins carry the dance theme, while the celli present a soaring melodic line over the top. The Ländler theme has begun to shrink in significance, providing merely a rhythmic backdrop for the dominating instrumental line. An extended development of the B material ensues at [6] with building tension and momentum, recalling the angry atmosphere of the first movement.

In response to this interlude, we see the dance return at [12], this time as a mere shadow of its former self in the barely audible pizzicato of the string instruments. Mahler’s constant resetting of the Ländler theme seems to illustrate throughout the work the idea that this simplistic image

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89 Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, p. 56.
of the past is one that is fading into obscurity in the modern world. Perhaps this is his attempt to evoke the “lost innocence” he speaks of in the Dresden program. Mahler concludes, however, with a strong finish that unites both the Ländler theme and the cello melody, providing a voice of optimism for the future.

The Scherzo of movement three manages to dash these hopes with a mood of bitter irony and the depiction of a world that is not idyllic, but alienating. It is in this movement that one can make a close comparison between Mahler’s own personal experience and that of the hero character. Raymond Knapp suggests that Mahler’s use of the “Des Antonious von Paduas Fischpredigt” Lied indicates that he wished to reveal his own personal experience through this movement. According to his thesis, the German Lied was widely understood to represent the composer’s subjectivity through the persona in question.90 If we look closely at the correspondence from Mahler’s school years, these letters reveal that he often experienced feelings of isolation and hopelessness similar to those of his hero character. He once wrote to his friend Anton Krisper, “I have really come to suffer most of the time…I no longer wish either to sigh or smile. In my inner self battalions of curses are held back, and I want to let them out. ‘May the devil take this worthless existence!’”91 These emotions are mirrored in his Dresden program, in which the hero “despairs of himself and God,” for “the world and life become for him a disorderly apparition: disgust for all being and becoming lays hold of him with an iron grip.”

The effect of the perpetual motion motif in the strings throughout the Scherzo helps to emphasize the vision of a chaotic universe and one’s own alienation by the

mechanical motion of life. In his program Mahler tries to describe this feeling by presenting the image of “dancing figures in a brightly-lit ballroom that you gaze into from the outside in the dark- and from a distance so great that you can no longer hear the music! Life then becomes meaningless…” This idea of being an outsider was common to many members of society, particularly Jews, at the end of the nineteenth century. Jews living in the multi-ethnic empire of Austria confronted a difficult situation as they tried to retain a sense of identity while assimilating into a hedonist culture that simultaneously rejected the doctrines of the Christian religion and yet looked down upon those who were not culturally a part of this belief system. Therefore it is quite possible that the whirling dance-like motive of the Scherzo was intended to present what Knapp terms as “a perspective that is indelibly Jewish, in which a resisting outsider fights against the ride of absorption into the dominant flow of a hostile culture.”

Musically Mahler is able to express this idea of a world that he describes in the Bauer-Lechner program as “distorted and crazy, as if reflected in a concave mirror,” by creating a thematic atmosphere that is both tragically frightening and light and humorous. Again, a number of motives juxtaposed against one another contribute to this mood. First there is the underlying sixteenth-note motive beginning at measure 13 that sets up the idea of a mechanized movement like the “dancing figures” he discusses in the program. The gradual build-up of this theme to the dramatic climax at 9 measures after [50] gives the impression of a world spinning out of control. However, the curly melodic line of the clarinets, marked “mit Humor” (“with humor”) by Mahler at 7 after [31] and the contrasting, vamping pizzicato motive in the low strings are frivolous and playful in comparison.

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The fourth and fifth movements of the Second Symphony provide the clearest explanation for Mahler’s beliefs because it is here that he uses text to articulate his message.\textsuperscript{93}

Mahler’s choice of the \textit{Wunderhorn} poem “Urlicht” to represent “the soul’s striving and questioning attitude towards God and its own immortality” indicate that the composer saw something within these texts that resonated with his own belief system, or the one which he was trying to reveal to his listeners. The opening words of the text evoke the vision of a red rose, to which the singer will address its entreaty of hope for humanity. The rose provides an image of duality that will continue as a theme throughout the movement. The visible beauty of a rose first comes to mind, as if to symbolize the promise of heaven or redemption; however, a rose’s sharp thorns also invokes the idea of pain or suffering. It is this dual vision of human life that the singer struggles to come to terms with at the opening of the poem.

Mahler expresses these two ideas conveyed in the verses by using contrasting musical themes. The first is a slow entreaty that is expressed first by the sound of a distant horn chorale (measure 3) and then sung by the voice at [1]. The interplay of the voice and horns is one that defines the opening stanza of the poem in which the voice expresses the sorrows of humanity and hope for salvation. The second theme that enters at [3] is marked by an increase in tempo and harmonic tension. In this section of the poem, the singer describes the difficulties of entering the heavenly paradise, for as the text states: “an angel came and wanted to send me away.” The oboe and clarinet combine with the vocal melody in order to emphasize the following lines “Ah no! I would not be sent away.”

\textsuperscript{93} Text for the “Urlicht” and “Resurrection” chorale can be found in Appendix II.
The image of the angel’s rejection is interesting in light of Mahler’s own spiritual struggle. Natalie Bauer-Lechner recalls the composer once making reference to a Biblical story that relates to this idea. According to her, Mahler said:

A magnificent symbol of the creator is Jacob, wrestling with God until He blesses him. If the Jews had been responsible for nothing but this image, they would still inevitably have grown to be a formidable people – God similarly withholds his blessings from me. I can only extort it from him in my terrible struggles to bring my works into being.94

Like the singer of the poem, Mahler felt a great inner conflict with the prospect of being saved.

Mahler’s reference to the story of Jacob appears to be somewhat misinterpreted, for while the in the poem it is the angel who rejects the penitent one; it is Jacob who resists the angel in the Biblical version. However the commonality lies in the idea that the road to salvation is a struggle. This experience can be related to Mahler on a personal level for it was one that many Jewish people felt in their external associations, as they attempted to find their place in society. However, it was also representative of an inner battle within the converted Jew to justify his new belief system in light of his heritage. Although Mahler had not yet converted to Christianity when this movement was written, his identification with the words of the poem indicates that he was already struggling with his own faith and spiritual identity.

The final lines of the poem are as follows:

Ich bin von Gott und will wieder zu Gott! I am from God and will return to God.
Der liebe Gott wird mir ein Lichtchen geben, The dear God will give me a light, Wird leuchten mir bis in das ewig selig Leben! Will light me to eternal blessed life!

These words reflect the “moving voice of naïve faith” that Mahler refers to in his Dresden program, as the melody return to the original key of D flat major and after a climactic build up, mirroring the gentle, lyric line of the opening. In the words and setting of the “Urlicht” poem, therefore, Mahler is finally able to voice the plea of his hero, longing for an explanation for the purpose of his life and death.

Before one can look at the conclusion of this journey, however, one must first realize the importance of aesthetic philosophy to Mahler’s world view and see how the same four movements can be seen to illustrate broader philosophical ideas.

**The Philosophical Journey to the Transcendent**

Mahler’s Resurrection Symphony can also be seen as a reflection of the ideas of the great thinkers of the late-Romantic and Modern eras, Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner. The fundamental aspects of their schools of thought, which I have outlined in chapter 1, concerned a *Weltanschauung* of a transitory and subjective human experience, full of suffering, from which the only escape was transcendence through the artistic experience. This “aesthetic philosophy” was one which became very popular in the fin-de-siècle era, for although many wanted to believe in a higher order and meaning to the universe, they were confronted everyday with the chaos and uncertainty of a rapidly changing world, which made the idea of metaphysical absolutes seem preposterous. As more people began to look to the aesthetic experience as a refuge from the everyday world, the artist, particularly the musician or composer, came to have a new role in society. For some it was their duty now to create an escapist realm for the ordinary man and to use artistic creation to convey a message to this disillusioned generation.
Mahler’s Second Symphony responded to this era of insecurity by attempting to create for the listener the transcendent experience referred to in the writings of these philosophers. To use Schopenhauer’s terminology, this piece can be interpreted as a journey from the phenomenal realm to that of the noumenal. In other words, the first three movements are tonal pictures of man’s life and struggles with the harsh realities of the material world while in the fourth movement and the finale we are lead to a transcendent realm in which Mahler uses word as well as tone to express the clear and unfettered truths of human experience.

The “death motive,” which defines the opening movement is a symbol of that ever present reality in human life: mortality. It can also be seen to serve another purpose, however, as Mahler’s sonic depiction of the struggling Will, which Schopenhauer describes in The World as Will and Representation, as both the essence of human life and the cause of all suffering. Just as the “death motive” is the driving force of the movement, the Will is the motivating force of all life forms. Therefore, the continuous upward striving motion of the notes within this element of the piece create for the listener the same experience of unrelieved tension that is mirrored by the frustration due to the Will’s unfulfilled desires. Within just the first few measures of the piece, Mahler has already achieved through his composition the depiction of an existence that is described by Schopenhauer as “a constant suffering…partly woeful, partly fearful.”

Another aspect of Schopenhauer and Wagner’s Weltanschauung that Mahler can be seen to illustrate is the idea that man can glimpse the noumenal realm through brief transcendent moments when contemplating the beautiful. The “Gesang” (Song) and the

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95 See Chapter 1 for a more detailed analysis of Schopenhauer’s view of the nature of life.
96 Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, p. 267.
“Meerenstille” (Calm of the Sea) themes present for the listener a momentary voice of hope within the chaotic tumult of the rest of the piece. The gradual transition into these themes from a period of silence immediately transports the listener into another world with its sharp contrast to the dominating “death motive” of the exposition, creating the ephemeral effect of a dream-like vision. This idea relates to yet another important concept of the aesthetic philosophy, namely that the comparison between the ability of music to reveal great truths about the essence of our existence and the role of dreams in disclosing the activities of the subconscious. As Wagner writes in his essay, *Beethoven*, “as the dream of the deepest sleep can only be conveyed to the waking consciousness through the translation into the language of a second, an allegoric dream, which immediately precedes our waking, so for the direct vision of itself the Will creates a second organ or transmission…that of tone.”

According to his correspondence with his protégé and good friend, Bruno Walter, Mahler often felt this experience of succumbing to a transcendent dream world when he was composing. While these were his greatest moments of inspiration, this dual life experience was also the cause of great suffering for him. In one letter he wrote, “This strange reality of visions, which instantly dissolves into mist like the things that happen in dreams, is the deepest cause of the life of conflict an artist leads.”

The subtle color shifts in Mahler’s orchestration, achieved by the march theme fading out in the low strings into the gentle descending line of the strumming harp before [7], and the gradual return of the “death motive” at 5 measures after [9], present the audible effect of the experience of slipping in and out of one’s subconscious. With the continuous interplay between the dramatic climaxes of the

97 Wagner, “Beethoven,” p. 73.
“death motive” and the peaceful interludes of the “Gesang” and “Meerenstille” themes, Mahler is able to reveal through his “Todtenfeier” movement the idea of man’s struggle to come to grips with his own mortality.

The next two movements are further depictions of life in the phenomenal world. In the Andante and the Scherzo, Mahler uses significantly different dance-like movements to represent the experiences of unity and isolation, by contrasting a gentle, simple melody with the driving force of perpetual motion.

In the analysis of musicologist Deryck Cooke, the Ländler symbolizes for Mahler the “dance of life.” 99 This use of melodic line to express an emotional concept held great significance through the lens of aesthetic philosophy. According to Schopenhauer, “in the melody, in the high singing principle voice, leading the whole and progressing with unrestrained freedom in the uninterrupted significant connection of one thing from beginning to end, and expressing a whole, I recognize the highest grade of the Will’s objection.” 100 The goal of the Will, in his view, was to achieve union with its disparate parts, divided within the temporal existence of individual bodies. Bryan Magee further explains this parallel between the human experience of longing for a connection with others with the development of a musical line when he writes: “Even the most simple melody, considered as a succession of single notes, makes us want to close it eventually on the tonic…and it provokes in us a baffled dissatisfaction if it ends on any note other than that.” 101 This idea of using a beautiful, unending melody to express desire for resolution and completion was a typical characteristic of Romantic music often employed by Mahler and his contemporaries.

100 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, p. 259.
The first appearance of Mahler’s lyric theme occurs with the entrance of the celli at 8 measures after [5]. Here Mahler uses the dramatic tool of counterpoint by layering this broad, sweeping melody in the low strings over the Ländler theme in the violins. The effect of this contrast is of a seamless tune that appears to float over the “dance of life,” yet that is also intimately connected to it, for the two themes harmonically compliment each other. After the B theme and its interlude of tension that seems to recall the struggling motifs of the first movement, the A theme returns again at the conclusion of the piece at 10 measures after [13], this time set in the part of the upper strings. The predominance of the lingering melody within this movement creates the image of the noumenal realm, in which the voice of each individuated human Will is united as one whole, like one continuous melodic line.

In the abrupt transition to the next movement, Mahler is able to depict a sense of transience by responding to the Andante’s message of hope with the heartless mechanical activity of the third movement, the Scherzo. The third movement of Mahler’s piece is also dominated by a dance-like theme, but instead of being defined by one expansive tune, he uses a constant perpetual motion, emphasized by the sixteenth-note figure in the violins and the vamping pizzicato of the low strings. The opening strokes of the timpani mark a sharp transition from the dream-world of the second movement into a whirling commotion. The nagging voice of the clarinet’s grace-note motive (see figure 5) over the top of this layer of sound creates a mood of sardonic humor that is unsettling after the tranquility of the Andante. The primary technique that Mahler utilizes in this movement is that of the fugue. By layering the voices of the instruments one on top of the other in an imitation of the same theme, he is able to generate a mechanical motion that holds the
movement together. As each instrument picks up the theme and develops it, the rhythmic activity produces a feeling of building tension.

The effect of the Scherzo’s tune, unlike the peaceful unity of the Andante, is the evocation of a sense of alienation from the music. The emotionless consistent movement of notes provides not solace, but the sense of being steadily pushed along toward an imminent climax. By creating this atmosphere, Mahler is able to musically illustrate the feeling of the individuated Will in the phenomenal world. According to Schopenhauer and Wagner, the cause of man’s suffering is his separation from fellow man and the inability to communicate with others because of the subjectivity of his own life experience. Mahler clearly identified with this experience of isolation, for as he wrote to Joseph Steiner in 1878, the “abominable tyranny of our modern hypocrisy and mendacity fills my heart with disgust for all that is sacred to me-art, love, and religion.”

The fact that Mahler used his setting of the poem “Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt” (St. Anthony Preaching to the Fishes) provides further evidence that the idea of alienation was central to Mahler’s thought when composing this movement. Although Mahler chose not to include the text, the symphonic descendent of this song, particularly with the message that the song text was meant to impart, provides great insight into the satire he was trying to make about mankind. In the third movement we see the human experience as mechanical, subjective and essentially meaningless because of the inability of individuals to connect or communicate effectively with those around them.

The climactic point of the third movement is also essential to one’s understanding of the phenomenal world, for it is at this point, 9 measures after [50], that Mahler creates

102 Mahler, Selected Letters, p. 55.
a great shrieking outcry of sound. This is his musical representation of a scream, which Schopenhauer and Wagner saw as the primal vocalization of the Will. In his *Beethoven* essay, Wagner describes the effect of this sound in communicating the ultimate, instinctual voice of our being when he writes: “without any reasoning go-between we understand the cry for help…if the scream…in our own mouths is the most direct utterance of the Will’s emotion, so we understand it as utterance of the same emotion.”

The screaming outcry of all the instruments of the orchestra at this climactic point recreates this connection for the listener. In the midst of the chaotic movement of sound throughout the movement, the outcry speaks to the soul and relays to us that feeling of tortured isolation that we experience when we are caught up in the senseless flow of the material world. The dénouement of this movement is perhaps even more disturbing to the listener than the climax, for despite the initial break of tension, the fugal pattern returns at [51]. Raymond Knapp, in his work, *Symphonic Metamorphosis*, suggests that the preeminence of this theme is a central concept of the work, for according to his analysis, “the more pressing question is not why the return of the scherzo is followed by mounting hysteria and a culminating scream, but whether even that can have any effect against the absolutist machinery” of the fugue. Just as the “death motive” becomes a recurring theme in the first movement as a consistent reminder of human mortality, so too does the Scherzo’s fugue become a symbol for the futility of true human connection within the subjective phenomenal world.

In movements four and five, however, Mahler presents the culmination of the goal of his work, in keeping with the aspirations of aesthetic philosophy: to provide a

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transcendent experience for the listener and a message of hope by revealing the meaning of man’s existence.

Mahler is able to achieve this aim by uniting the effects of his dramatic orchestration with the power of the human voice in order to articulate his vision of harmonic unity. Both Schopenhauer and Wagner were great advocates of uniting word and tone in order to present more clearly the image of the noumenal world. In *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer writes that the origin of the song with words came from the fact that “our imagination is so easily stirred by music, and tries to shape that invisible yet vividly aroused spirit world that speaks to us directly, to clothe it with flesh and bone, and thus to embody it in an analogous example.” 105 Wagner picked up on this idea in his *Beethoven* essay, in which he suggests that the “mighty aid” of music offers to give “poetic aim a more precise expression and more searching operation.” 106 Mahler’s agreement with these ideas is indicated in a letter that he wrote to Richard Batka, the editor of the *Prager Neue Musikalische Rundschau*, stating that the use of text was “in order to provide pointers to where feeling is meant to change into imagining. If words are needed, than we have the articulate human voice, which can realize the most daring intentions – simply by combining with the illuminating word!” 107

In the fourth movement, Mahler implements this technique by using the text of “Urlicht” (Primeval Light). This song provides the transition between the commotional activity of the third movement and the dramatic resurrection of the finale, but it also contains the essential message of hope that Mahler intends to express in the conclusion of his symphony. The introduction of the human voice in the alto solo, set against the

backdrop of a hopeful melodic line in the horns, serves the important role of voicing the situation of humanity. In the opening verse of the poem, the text declares “man lies is deepest need, man lies in deepest pain.” This is the concrete image of the phenomenal world that Mahler abstractly illustrated in the previous three movements. The second stanza is accompanied by an increase in tempo and a building of tension in which the vocal solo “converses” with a solo violin at [3], as if to illustrate the communication that was noticeably absent in the third movement. In this manner Mahler sets his message of hope for the redemption of humanity, one that will climax at the lines “I am from God and will return to God” [5]. The words of the poem are those of simple faith with its expectation that there is a direction to life, if one can only transcend this world of pain and suffering. The vision of this “eternal blessed life” as it is called in the poem, is depicted in Mahler’s orchestral setting by the rising line of the harp at 3 measures after [6] to compliment the vocal line. Thus word and tone are united in a common entreaty for the salvation of humanity.

- The Finale: The Meeting Point of Spiritual Identity and Aesthetic Philosophy -

In the final movement of his Second Symphony, Mahler creates the transcendent experience that illustrates his own vision of life beyond the experience of the material world. For the hero of his program, this is the entrance into heaven and the reunion with God, while in the view of aesthetic philosophy this is the depiction of the noumenal world. For Mahler this is his answer to the spiritual journey and the questions posed in the opening movements: a combination of both religious and philosophical ideas which reflect a spirit of love and compassion that find expression in his musical ideas and the words he added to the Resurrection chorale.
The first half of the final movement illustrates Mahler’s genius as a composer for integrating the many themes of his diverse movements into the final concept of one symphonic whole. The effect of Mahler’s music is a broad tonal picture of the world as we experience it and the dramatic build-up to our escape as the music lifts the listener to a higher plane of understanding. The choralecantata of the recapitulation therefore becomes the mode through which Mahler is able to finally verbalize the questions and concerns that he raises in the previous sections of the piece and provide his own answer.

The fact that Mahler himself wrote the text for the final verses of his Resurrection chorale suggests that these words can be viewed as his own spiritual confession. The first two stanzas of the text (see Appendix II) come from the poem by Klopstock that Mahler heard at the funeral of his mentor Hans von Bülow. In a letter to his friend Arthur Seidl, however, Mahler reveals that “in the last movement of my Second I simply had to go through the whole of world literature, including the Bible, in search of the right word, the ‘Open Sesame’ – and in the end I had no choice but to find my own words for my thoughts and feelings.” Therefore the text undoubtedly reveals something about Mahler’s own experience and spiritual beliefs, one that may have had roots in other philosophical or religious dogmas, but that was in some way uniquely his own ideas.

The text of Mahler’s chorale first provides an affirmative answer to the voice of hope from the “Urlicht” movement. In stanzas three and four the solo voice from the “Urlicht” claims “rather would I be in heaven” and seeks to “return to God”; Mahler’s text provides this answer:

Oh believe, my heart, Oh believe
Nothing is lost with thee!
Thine is what thougth has desired

108 Mahler, Selected Letters, p. 212.
What thou hast lived for
What thou hast fought for!

Oh believe,
Thou wert not born in vain
Hast not lived in vain,
Suffered in vain

These words are accompanied by the “Entreaty” theme that was introduced earlier in the development by the English horn ([7]). Mahler uses a similar vocal and instrumental setting in this movement to that used in the “Urlicht;” in both situations the words are sung by solo voices (in this case, first an alto and then a soprano) and at the end of the second stanza, (6 measures before [42]), we hear a dialogue with the solo violin. Here Mahler establishes the lone voice of the individual, being called to belief. As the rest of the choir enters at 1 measure before [42], leading into the grand finale, we are brought closer to this idea of transcending one’s individuality to a union with the whole. This goal, according to aesthetic philosophy, is the ultimate purpose of our lives, one that rises beyond the suffering of the material world.

While the text of the choral cantata can at first glance be seen to illustrate distinctly Judeo-Christian beliefs, one can see it as expressing the broader themes of love and compassion that were central to the philosophy of the aesthetic. The metaphors of rising again from dust and the Lord of the Harvest gathering in his followers are common Biblical images. However, the explanation he gives in his Dresden program raises speculation as to whether this symphony can be viewed purely as an affirmation of Christian dogma. According to the program text, this is the image that the finale is meant to depict:

A wonderful gentle light permeates us to our very heart, all is quiet and blissful! And behold, there is no judgment, there is no sinner, no righteous
man, no great and no small. There is no punishment and no reward! An almighty feeling of love illuminates us with blessed knowing and being.

This idea of a resurrection without a judgment is an interesting view of looking at the afterlife, one that does not strictly reflect either the Jewish tradition in which Mahler was raised, nor the Christian one that he nominally joined. However, this vision of love being the key to understanding our own humanity and the immortality of our spirit seems to reveal a combination of both these religions and the ideals of the aesthetic philosophy of Wagner and Schopenhauer.

Schopenhauer believed that the feeling of empathy that forms the bond between human beings was derived from the fact that we are all a part of one universal noumenal realm. He felt that in this emotion, connection between humans was the key to our understanding of our selves, each other, and our place in the universe. Wagner agreed with this viewpoint, stating in *The Art Work of the Future* that, “the highest human need is love” and that one could experience the sense of happiness and belonging engendered by this emotion through the process of transcendence. In Mahler’s chorale are words that express this idea:

> With wings which I have won me,  
> In love’s fierce striving,  
> I shall sore upwards  
> To the light to which no eye has soared

The reference to love indicates the composer’s belief that it is this universal emotion which motivates man and will lead him to exceed the limitations of the human experience, particularly those of suffering and mortality.

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Finally, the lines “I shall die, in order to live” coincide with the climactic arrival on the “Eternity” theme, for here is the central idea of his world view. In these words we find the full meaning of the “Resurrection,” the realization that there is an eternal life beyond the superficial world of appearances and the frightening reality of death. In the final stanza of the poem, Mahler reiterates this belief in redemption as the entire choir sings together the words “Aufersteh’n” (“rise again”). This dramatic finale that unites word and tone and the voices of men and women in one final statement is the culminating achievement of the symphonic work. Mahler’s chorale is the true expression of art as the great equalizer in his ability to draw together so many different elements of sound into one cohesive whole.
If art is the ultimate means of self-expression, then there is always room for its interpretation, for any number of elements can influence the way in which one chooses to manifest the ideas that are most central to his world view. In the case of the Second Symphony, the “Resurrection” that Mahler portrays is one that is religious as well as philosophical, a reflection of his own inner conflict to understand the world around him. In order to come up with his solution, he drew inspiration from many sources, expressing these ideas through a unique piece of music that combined both the grand symphonic form with the power of the human voice.

Although the symphony is deeply reflective of Mahler’s own life, it also illustrates the crisis that many of his contemporaries faced at the end of the nineteenth century. Sensing that they world as they knew it was ending, the men and women of the fin-de-siècle were desperately frightened by the unknown, no longer finding security in the view of life that they had once accepted. The modern world needed a new inspiration to give them hope that their lives still had meaning in the midst of the chaos and uncertainty that was enveloping them.

Mahler’s music offered a glimpse at the Truth in a world that had been turning inward to a superficial, decadent world that offered a comforting means of escape. His vision was a combination of these two schools of thought, the merging of the Judeo-Christian belief in an all-loving and powerful God with whom we seek a mystical union, and the humanist conviction of the power of the human spirit to overcome the difficult struggles of the material world. Edward Reilly further emphasizes this point by suggesting that “what Mahler is essentially addressing are the very basic human fears of
death and judgment (not just damnation, but the judgment of the worth of one’s life), and the need to feel that life has meaning. His answers are affirmations that we in our striving and in our love give meaning to our lives, and that we can transcend both death and judgment.”

The text of Mahler’s poem supports this thesis for there is no reference to good and evil. His conclusion seems to be that the promise of heaven and redemption is for everyone, as that is our reward for the sorrows and hardships that one experiences in life. Mahler’s vision of the resurrection is the result of the heroic struggle that is the underlying theme of the entire work. While the hero is indeed doomed to a fate he cannot control, his prize is that of “the wings which I have won me in love’s fierce striving” which will lead him upwards to a heavenly paradise, or in the context of aesthetic philosophy, to a mystical union with the noumenal realm and a deeper understanding of himself. Death, which appears as a frightful, nagging motive in the first movement has become the mode by which the hero is saved.

Oskar Kokoschka, the famous Viennese expressionist artist defined modern man as one “condemned to recreate his own universe.” This mission was the driving force behind Mahler’s compositions – to illustrate life as he experienced it. But although his work is deeply reflective of this era in history, the questions he asks within the Second Symphony are ones that are still applicable to us as listeners today. For who in their own life does not question their self-worth and place within this chaotic world?

Wagner wrote in his essay, Beethoven, that “in Music the Idea of the whole World reveals itself…with all its changing moods of grief and joy, weal and woe.” Mahler’s

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112 Schorske, Fin de Siècle Politics and Culture, p. xxix.
Second Symphony truly lives up to this statement, for his music transcends the boundaries of time to speak to us today and to illustrate the essence of human life in all of its states: its joys, sorrows, struggles, and triumphs.

Oskar Fried, a close friend of Mahler’s, wrote the following words about the composer after his death:

To achieve what one considers necessary for art is a challenge. They submitted to you, because you were strong; but at every opportunity their fury broke through. They hindered what was to be hindered, and destroyed what was to be destroyed. Your friends while you lived were few. But the best of them were loyal in their veneration and love – beyond death. You yourself were a noble, simple, man...full of love, Full of love.

Your genius, the deep moral seriousness of your devotion, the perfection of your heart was the wonderful light that streamed from your being – meanness was no match for that. A warrior has died – at the height of his powers. We must serry ranks. We must continue the fight, shoulder to shoulder. Against malicious folly – against all mediocrity. Sleep in peace.

Mahler’s life was not without its share of hardship. But like the hero of his Second Symphony, these were trials that he bore for the love of his art and his work.

Mahler’s work remains as a challenge to all who listen to it and hear his message to question their world and to never cease this journey for understanding.
APPENDIX I

EXCERPTS FROM THE SECOND SYMPHONY[^114]

Figure 1: “Death Motive”

Figure 2: “Haupthema”

Figure 3: “Gesang”

Figure 7: “Eternity”

Figure 8: Andante Movement: A Theme

Figure 9: Scherzo Movement: Grace Note Motive

Figure 10: “Resurrection”
Figure II: "Entreaty"

Text in German:

Im Anfang sehr zurückgehalten.

Alle Gebete:

O glie-he, Mein Herr o glie-he.
APPENDIX II

TEXTS FOR THE SECOND SYMPHONY

Movement IV:

Urlicht
O Röschen rot!
Der Mensch liegt in grösster Not!
Der Mensch liegt in grösster Pein!
Je lieber möcht’ ich im Himmel sein!

Primeval Light
O red rose!
Man lies in deepest need,
Man lies is deepest Pain.
Yes, I would rather be in heaven!

Da kam ich auf einen breiten Weg:
Da kam ein Engelein und wollt’ mich abweisen.
Ach nein! Ich liess mich nicht abweisen!
Ich bin von Gott und will wieder zu Gott!

I came upon a broad pathway:
An angel came and wanted to send me away!
An no! I would not be sent away!
I am from God and will return to God.

Der liebe Gott wird mir ein Lichtchen geben,
Wird leuchten mir bis in das ewig selig Leben!

The dear God will give me a light,
Will light me to eternal blessed life!

(from Des Knaben Wunderhorn)

Movement V:

Aufersteh’n, ja aufersteh’n wirst du,
Mein Staub, nach kurzer Ruh!
Unsterblich Leben! Unsterblich Leben
Wird der dich rief dir geben

Rise again, yea, thou shalt rise again,
My dust, after short rest!
Immortal life! Immortal life
He who called thee will grant thee.

Wieder aufzublühn wirst du gesät!
Der Herr der Ernte geht
Und sammelt Garben
Uns ein, die starben!

To bloom again art thou sown!
The Lord of the Harvest goes
And gathers in, like sheaves,
Us who died.

O glaube, mein Herz, O glaube:
Es geht dir nichts verloren!
Dein ist, was du gesehnt!
Dein, was du geliebt,
Was du gestritten!

O believe, my heart, O believe
Nothing is lost with thee!
Thine is what thou has desired,
What thou hast lived for,
What thou hast fought for!

114 Translations by Deryck Cooke, taken from Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music, pp. 59-60.
O glaube,  
Du wardst nicht umsonst geboren!  
Hast nicht umsonst gelebt,  
Gelitten!

O believe,  
Thou wert not born in vain!  
Hast not lived in vain,  
Suffered in vain!

Was entstanden ist  
Das muss vergehen!  
Was vergangen, auferstehen!  
Hör’ auf zu bebèn  
Bereite dich zu leben!

What has come into being  
Must perish,  
What perished must rise again.  
Cease from trembling!  
Prepare thyself to live!

O Schmerz! Du Alldurchdringer!  
Dir bin ich entrungen!  
O Tod! Du Allbezwinger!  
Nun bist du bezwungen!

O Pain, thou piercer of all things,  
From thee have I been wrested!  
O Death, thou masterer of all things,  
Now art thou mastered!

Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,  
In heissem Liebesstreben,  
Werd’ ich entschweben  
Zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug’ gedrungen!

With wings which I have won me,  
in love’s fierce striving,  
I shall soar upwards  
To the light to which no eye has soared.

Sterben wer’ ich, um zu leben!

I shall die, in order to live!

Aufersteh’n, ja aufersteh’n  
Wirst du, mein Herz, in eimen Nu!  
Was du geschlagen  
Zu Gott wird es dich tragen!

Rise again, yea thou wilt rise again,  
My heart, in the twinkling of an eye!  
What thou hast fought for  
Shall lead thee to God!

(Klopstock / Mahler)
APPENDIX III

PROGRAMS FOR THE SECOND SYMPHONY

I. Report by Natalie Bauer-Lechner, January 1896

[Quoting Mahler:] “The first movement depicts the titanic struggles of a mighty being still caught in the toils of this world; grappling with life and with the fate to which he must succumb – his death. The second and third movements, Andante and Scherzo, are episodes from the life of the fallen hero. The Andante tells of love. The experience behind the Scherzo I can describe only in terms of the following image: if, at a distance, you watch a dance through a window, without being able to hear the music, then the turning and twisting movement of the couples seems senseless because you are not catching the rhythm that is the key to it all. You must imagine that to one who has lost his identity and his happiness, the world looks like this – distorted and crazy, as if reflected in a concave mirror. – The Scherzo ends with the appalling shriek of this tortured soul.

The “Urlicht” represents the soul’s striving and questioning attitude towards God and its own immortality.

While the first three movements are narrative in character, in the last movement everything is inward experience. It begins with the death-shriek of the Scherzo. And now the resolution of the terrible problem of life – redemption. At first, we see it in the form created by faith and the church – in their struggles to transcend this present life. It is the day of the Last Judgement…The earth trembles. Just listen to the drum-roll and your hair will stand on end! The Last Trump sounds; the graves spring open, and all creation comes writhing out of the bowels of the earth, with wailing and gnashing of teeth. Not they all come marching along in a mighty procession: beggars and rich men, common folk and kinds, the Church Militant, the Popes. All give vent to the same terror, the same lamentations and paroxysms: for none is just in the sight of God. Breaking in again and again- as if from another world- the Last Trump sounds from the Beyond. At last, after everyone has shouted and screamed in indescribable confusion, nothing is heard but the long drawn –out call of the Bird of Death above the last grave – finally that, too, fades away. There now follows nothing of what had been expected: no Last Judgment, no souls saved and none damned: no just man, no evil-doer, no judge! Everything has ceased to be. And softly and simply there begins: “Aufersteh’n. ja aufersteh’n…” [“Rise again, yea, rise again”] – the words themselves are sufficient commentary…”

II. Letter from Mahler to Max Marschalk, 26 March 1896

“I called the first movement “Todtenfeier.” It may interest you to know that it is the hero of my D major symphony that I bear to his grave, and whose life I reflect, from a higher vantage point, in a clear mirror. Here too the question is asked: What did you live

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for? Why did you suffer? Is it all only a vast, terrifying joke? – We have to answer these questions somehow if we are to go on living – indeed, even if we are only to go on dying! The person in whose life this call has resounded, even if it was only once, must give an answer. And it is this answer I give in the last movement.

The second and third movements are intended as an interlude, the second being a memory! A ray of sunlight, pure and cloudless, out of that hero’s life. You must surely have had the experience of burying someone dear to you, and then, perhaps, on the way back some long-forgotten hour of shared happiness suddenly rose before your inner eye, sending as it were a sunbeam into your soul – not overcast by any shadow – and you almost forgot what had just taken place. There you have the second movement! When you then awaken from that melancholy dream and are forced to return to this tangled life of ours, it may easily happen this surge of life ceaselessly in motion, never resting, never comprehensible, suddenly seems eerie, like the billowing of dancing figures in a brightly lit ball-room that you gaze into from outside in the dark- and from a distance so great that you can no longer hear the music! Life then becomes meaningless, an eerie phantom state out of which you may start up with a cry of disgust. There you have the third movement. What follows is certainly clear to you! - - -

What it comes to, then, is that my Second Symphony grows directly out of the First.”

III. Program written by Mahler for a performance in Dresden on 20 December 1901

Symphony in C minor

1st movement. We stand by the coffin of a well-loved person. His life, struggles, passions and aspirations once more, for the last time, pass before our mind’s eye. And now in this moment of gravity and of emotion which convulses our deepest being, when we lay aside like a covering everything that from day to day perplexes us and drags us down, our heart is gripped by a dreadfully serious voice which always passes us by in the deafening bustle of daily life: What now? What is this life – and this death? Do we have an existence beyond it? Is all this only a confused dream, or do life and this death have a meaning? And we must answer this question if we are to live on.

The next 3 movements are conceived as intermezzi.

2nd movement. – Andante: a happy moment from the life of his beloved departed one and a sad recollection of his youth and lost innocence.

3rd movement – Scherzo: the spirit of unbelief, of presumption, has taken possession of him. He beholds the tumult of appearances and together with the child’s pure understanding he loses the firm footing that love alone affords: he despairs of himself and of God. The world and life become for him a disorderly apparition: disgust for all being and becoming lays hold of him with an iron grip and drives him to cry out in desperation.
4th movement Urlicht (alto solo). The moving voice of naïve faith sounds in his ear.

‘I am of God and desire to return to God!
God will give me a lamp. Will light me unto the life of eternal bliss!’

5th movement.
[?...the cry of desperations starts up…?] We again confront all the dreadful questions and the mood of the end of the 1st movement. – The voice of the caller is heard: the end of all living things is at hand. The last judgment is announced and the whole horror of the day of days has set in. The earth trembles, graves burst open, the dead arise and step forth in endless files. The great and the small of this earth, kings and beggars, the just and ungodly – all are making that pilgrimage: the cry for mercy and grace falls terrifyingly on our ear. The crying becomes ever more dreadful – our senses forsake us and all consciousness fades at the approach of eternal judgment. The great summons is heard: the trumpets from the Apocalypse call: in the midst of the awful silence we think we hear in the farthest distance a nightingale. Like a last quivering echo of earthly life! Softly there rings out a chorus of the holy and the heavenly:

“Risen again. Yea thou shalt be risen again!” There appears the glory of God! A wonderful gentle light permeates us to our very hear – all is quiet and blissful! An behold: there is no punishment and no reward! An almighty feeling of love illuminates us with blessed knowing and being!
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