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# *Natural Theology and the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*

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# Natural Theology & the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams

Christopher Jeremy Blakey

## Abstract

Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote much about his belief in musical transcendence, defining music as ‘reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound’. Such statements put his thought in dialogue with theology, understood in a broad Anselmian sense as ‘faith seeking understanding’. Furthermore, Vaughan Williams’s entanglement with the science-religion discourse of his intellectual context saturates his theology with issues of evolution, nature, and progress. Whilst ideas of religion permeate Vaughan Williams scholarship, the more specific category of theology has not been considered. The present thesis addresses this lacuna by arguing that Vaughan Williams’s music affords theological interpretation.

In order to pursue this argument an interdisciplinary method is constructed using elements of theology, musicology, and music analysis. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of music analysis and theology are explored thoroughly. In arguing for their complementarity, this method draws on literature addressing the relationship between science and theology. Nattiez’s tripartition and Hopps’s concept of affordance structures are employed to engage with issues of musical meaning. Analysis of Vaughan Williams’s vocal music reveals potent theological affordance structures: the interaction of these structures points to a deistic theological paradigm. These observations also extend to his symphonic music. Symphony No. 5 evokes an ambiguous but positive natural theology that resonates with Vaughan Williams’s deistic, evolutionary intellectual context. In contrast, the *Sinfonia Antartica* expresses a failed natural theology which reflects trends in twentieth-century ideas of nature and progress.

Thus, this study interprets Vaughan Williams in new ways; introduces new perspectives on how art, science, and theology interact in the milieu of late-Victorian and modernist ideas; and introduces new interdisciplinary methods appropriate for studying the relationship between music and theology.

# Natural Theology & the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams

A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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*Dedicated to the memories of Bernard Maliphant and John Blakey (Snr)*

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# Introduction

Throughout his life the British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) wrote much about his belief in the link between music and transcendence. He defines music as ‘reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound’,<sup>1</sup> he describes how ‘the wildest howl of the savage, or the most careless whistling of the errand boy is nothing else than an attempt to reach into the infinite, which attempt we call art’,<sup>2</sup> and he claims that the ultimate object of art is to ‘obtain a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties- of that, in fact, which is spiritual’.<sup>3</sup> In making these statements he goes beyond claiming that music simply relates to the ‘transcendent’ – something that can be defined, using Martin J. De Nys’s words, as ‘other than ourselves and other than anything else that is in any other way other than ourselves’ – by implying that it is capable of revealing something of an asserted transcendent reality that normally lies beyond the sphere of comprehension.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding Vaughan Williams’s aversion to defined religion and doctrine, the invocation of the concept of revelation puts his thought in dialogue with theology, understood in a broad Anselmian sense as ‘faith seeking understanding’.<sup>5</sup>

Although Vaughan Williams’s music is interpreted in various ways, I argue that a vital approach can be found through theology. I expand and defend this idea in subsequent chapters to support the central supposition of this thesis: that Vaughan Williams’s music affords theological interpretation. Its foregrounding of theological concepts through text, musical structures, and their interaction, invests this music in discourses that resonate strongly with Vaughan Williams’s intellectual context, not least the interaction between science and theology. The ideas of natural theology are particularly pertinent to Vaughan Williams’s music, as these were an integral part of his intellectual context. Vaughan Williams’s own natural theology, I argue, is intertwined with broader, nineteenth-century issues that find their home in the science-religion discourse. Whilst the term ‘science-religion debate’ is widespread, I prefer ‘science-

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “The Making of Music”, in *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1963] 1987), 206.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, in *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, [1963] 1987), 63.

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “The Letter and the Spirit”, *Music & Letters* 1, no. 2 (1920): 88.

<sup>4</sup> Martin J. De Nys, *Considering Transcendence: Elements of a Philosophical Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>5</sup> St. Anselm, *Monologion*, 1 (I:14).

religion discourse’ as it avoids the unnecessary implication of conflict. I preserve the moniker ‘science-religion’, despite the fact that, especially in academic contexts, it is more often theology that is in dialogue with science: the discourse within which I locate my research is, in the main, limited to the level of ideas, rather than the structural outworking of these ideas.<sup>6</sup>

The written intention of Vaughan Williams, the evidence presented by the music, and trends in its reception all lead to the conclusion that this is music which demands to be read theologically: if not to the exclusion of other readings, then as an indispensable approach for its complete comprehension. As Vaughan Williams himself expressed: ‘a work of art is like a theophany which takes different forms to different beholders.’<sup>7</sup> Whilst the consistent interpretation of Vaughan Williams’s music as in some way ‘transcendent’ seems to bear this out, however, the terms of this interpretation tend to be theologically undetermined.

## Vaughan Williams and Theology

### Reception and Literature

The reception of Vaughan Williams’s music as relating to transcendent topics persists across its history and involves a broad spectrum of his musical output. It is especially notable in the reception of his symphonies, which have a rich history of being understood as dealing with transcendent concepts. In the first major biographical work on the composer – published in 1950, some eight years before the composer’s death – Hubert Foss opines on the overall mood of Symphony No. 5:

We lack no evidence of struggle, but the victory is, in the main, that of soul over materialism. The thinker takes us by the hand and leads us—willing travellers—over the rougher places to a valley where we can contemplate, in a blessed silence, both the wisdom of the ages and the folly of brutality in war-sought ambition. We meet no pacifism nor Communism nor any other ‘ism’. We meet only the wisdom of religion, of the Bible, of John Bunyan.<sup>8</sup>

Published three years later, Percy Young’s account of the composer contains similar thoughts on the same symphony:

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<sup>6</sup> Alister McGrath defends an approach that focusses on the specific category of Christian theology as opposed to the more general category of ‘religion’. See Alister E. McGrath, *The Science of God* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 31–33.

<sup>7</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (London: Harrap, 1950), 145.

Vaughan Williams evokes that spiritual ecstasy particular to the twenty-third psalm, combining love for simple things with a devotion, surely indicated in the ubiquitous quotation from *lasst uns erfreuet*, to the divine [...] In some phrase shapes the symphony reflects moods prevalent in other late works: the ‘blessedness of the Magnificat, the ‘truth and righteousness’ of the *Dona Nobis Pacem*, the Epilogue of the String Quartet in A minor, all aspiring towards an ineffable state of contentment.<sup>9</sup>

Frank Howes’s 1954 study strikes a deliberately ‘expository’, ‘analytical’ tone overall.<sup>10</sup> Yet even he verges into theological territory when discussing the symphonies. His treatment of the Symphony No. 6’s epilogue is a fascinating and dense concoction of unexplored scientific and theological themes:

To met [sic] his Epilogue spells out the emotional significance of the word ‘aftermath’. The end of war is not triumph but dead-sea fruit. This is truth as a seer sees it, and, since prophecy is this vision of the seer, the music is prophetic not with the menace of an Old Testament prophet adjuring a contumacious people but with the cold asseveration of the scientist addressing an obtuse, or at least a careless generation. Here are the spiritual consequences of war.<sup>11</sup>

Kennedy’s voluminous study of the composer describes the same passage in similarly transcendent terms:

The Epilogue, so daring a musical feat, is an attempt to peer into the dimmest recesses of the Unknown Region. The cold impersonal splendour of the universe, depicted by Holst in ‘Neptune’, here becomes the mystery of life’s transitory nature and the unsolvable riddle of the ‘sleep’ of death. It is agnostic music, in the same sense that *Sancta Civitas* is.<sup>12</sup>

Writing much later than these authors, but in a similar spirit, Wilfrid Mellers suggests an interpretation of the *Sinfonia Antartica* symphony laced with transcendent concepts:

Aspiration, it seems has weathered – spiritually as well as physically – the pain that flesh is heir to: as it had, judging from Scott’s last words in his journal, in the case of this particular pilgrim through the unknown region. If the end is nirvana, or nothingness, this is a victory not for evil, but for Nature’s neutrality.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst diverse motivations and specific cultural contexts beyond the scope of this thesis lie behind each of these quotes, a significant consistency in theologically loaded language can be observed between them. These trends in reception and scholarship feed into established tropes that, historically, have tended to construct an image of a man with a coherent worldview, whose music and writings both espouse a unified set of ideas. In particular, as David Manning argues, the initial reception and subsequent critical commentary of Vaughan Williams’s music established ‘a network of related ideas which the composer’s music is understood to express:

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<sup>9</sup> Percy M. Young, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Dobson, 1953), 162.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), v.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford University Press: London, 1964), 351.

<sup>13</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989), 205.

Englishness, the pastoral, mysticism, humanism, and the spirit.’<sup>14</sup> In the musicological construction of Vaughan Williams’s thought, these themes are often seen to interrelate in non-contradictory ways. Such a construction is only possible if certain portions of the composer’s output, both musical and literary, are selectively ignored.<sup>15</sup> A close reading of his compositions and writings reveals significant dissonances, not just between these five themes, or, between the beliefs associated with them and other beliefs held by the composer, but within the themes themselves. The refusal to engage with these contradictions has resulted in a simplistic view of the composer and his music. This has, in turn, caused the relationship between Vaughan Williams and such issues to be, at times, entirely misunderstood.

According to Manning, recourse to these themes often takes the place of analytical examinations of Vaughan Williams’s idiom; furthermore, it might be argued that they have also supplanted detailed engagement with cultural context. In addition to this – and in some respects, as a result of this – Manning also suggests that ‘a very small canon of popular works has emerged which are typical of the pastoral style.’<sup>16</sup> In other words, restrictive *ex post facto* interpretative criteria are placed on the interpretation of the music, and details located in the score, or in the composer’s cultural context, are rode over roughshod.<sup>17</sup> Precisely the same dynamic is at work in the typical reading of Vaughan Williams’s music as transcendent; this base assumption, related to Manning’s themes of ‘mysticism’ and ‘the spirit’, has tended to rule over genuine engagement with the composer’s intellectual and theological context, and detailed analysis of the musical structures that support such readings.

Readings of Vaughan Williams’s music as transcendent, whilst prevalent in the literature are, by and large, applied uncritically, and without in-depth consideration of intellectual or theological context, significant recourse to substantive musical evidence, or due attention paid to the semiological nature of music’s meaning. Simplistic assumptions of the terms of transcendence encountered in Vaughan Williams’s music allows commentators to

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<sup>14</sup> David Manning, “Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams’s Music” (PhD Cardiff University, 2003), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ceri Owen has recently problematised the relationship between Vaughan Williams’s nationalism and his understanding of English folksong by bringing to light some of the composer’s own writings. See Ceri Owen, “Vaughan Williams, Song, and the Idea of ‘Englishness’” (PhD University of Oxford, 2014), 22–69.

<sup>16</sup> Manning, “Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams’s Music”, 9.

<sup>17</sup> This can be seen at work in Hubert Foss’s biography, which revises his earlier, pre-war work on the composer. Foss completely excises any traces of Vaughan Williams’s modernism in favour of Manning’s ‘network of related ideas’. See Kirstie Asmussen, “Biographical Revisionism: Hubert Foss’s Conflicting Portrayals of Vaughan Williams”, *Journal of Musicological Research* 38, no. 3–4 (2019): 285–86.

project their own agenda onto it.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, many of these views seem to construct an autonomous musical transcendence divorced from cultural context: a consistent tension between claims of the music's 'absolute' status and its interpretation as relating to transcendence in culturally specific ways can be observed.<sup>19</sup> Kramer's critique of associating music with the ineffable in general seems apposite in all too many of these cases:

[...] music has by no means always been ineffable. It became ineffable, borrowing from a traditionally religious field of understanding, as part of a familiar historical process, the idealizing and transcendentalizing of music in Europe that occupied much of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, to entirely dismiss all such interpretations of Vaughan Williams's music is excessively reductive. Whilst the musical and cultural evidence that many writers supply for their readings may not support such specific quasi-theological readings, talk of religious experience and theological expression regarding this music need not be abandoned. Despite Kramer's claims to the contrary, music's link with the ineffable might be worth exploring in the case of Vaughan Williams, even if this link has historically been explored and expressed in unsatisfactory terms. This thesis takes as a guiding principle that the theological interpretation of Vaughan Williams's music need not subscribe to the same aesthetic assumptions that underpin the accounts listed above. The question of evidence – of what sort, and of how it is corralled – is vital to negotiate and state clearly in the investigation of theological meaning in music. The question of context is paramount, as is the analytical approach taken to ascertain the semiological relationships between theological ideas and musical structures.

More recent Vaughan Williams scholarship tends to prioritise a thorough understanding of social context and foregrounds a re-evaluation of the nature of the connection between the composer and the themes which have both defined the reception of his music and the construction of his character. Alain Frogley, as part of one of the earliest concerted efforts to reappraise these issues, addresses the relationship between Vaughan Williams and 'Englishness', by identifying important factors that have their origin in Vaughan Williams's

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<sup>18</sup> Wilfrid Mellers' work is a case in point. As I discuss below, his interpretations of Vaughan Williams often invoke theological ideas, but lack both musicological and theological rigour. See Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, especially 176–86.

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy's writings on Symphony No. 5 are typical in this regard: he makes claims for its status as 'absolute music' whilst, at the same time, describing it as a 'Symphony of the Celestial City'. See Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 279–83.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *The Thought of Music* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 47.

context, rather than the composer's own agency.<sup>21</sup> This represents an important methodological shift in Vaughan Williams scholarship regarding the origin of Manning's five themes: here, the emphasis is placed on the context and immediate reception of his output. Frogley compellingly suggests that it is these factors, more than any other, that have constructed simplistic and misleading views of the composer. Allied to this are projects that reinterpret Vaughan Williams as a modernist: Daniel Grimley, for example, reads the pastoral style exhibited in *A Pastoral Symphony* (1922) as 'a characteristically modernist gesture [...] [offering] a complex and often fractured vision.'<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the rather uncritical 'analysis' seen to support traditional interpretive trends has seen some rebuttal in work grounded in modern approaches to music analysis. Whilst there are still huge amounts of Vaughan Williams's work that remain poorly understood, a small resurgence of analytical method with regards to British music can be observed.<sup>23</sup>

Such methods serve well their purpose to defend Vaughan Williams's music against the criticism that it faced after his death by contributing to a less-distorted, more nuanced view of the composer.<sup>24</sup> This approach extends to the relationships between Vaughan Williams and ideas of the 'beyond' in a broad sense: Byron Adams, for example, tracks the progression of Vaughan Williams's relationship with religion across his career by analysing the use of biblical texts in his music.<sup>25</sup> Julian Onderdonk and Charles McGuire pick through genres implicitly related to such ideas – hymn tunes and church music, and large-scale choral pieces respectively – and anchor these pieces in contemporaneous British musical culture.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Alain Frogley, "Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams", in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–2.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Grimley, "Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral", in *British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960*, ed. Matthew Riley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 173.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Julian Horton, "The Later Symphonies", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Daniel Harrison, "Three Short Essays on neo-Riemannian Theory", in *The Oxford Handbook of neo-Riemannian Music Theories*, ed. Edward Gollin and Alexander Rehding (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Arnold Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major': Models and Mutations", in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Anthony Pople, "Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle", in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Frogley, "Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams", 1.

<sup>25</sup> Byron Adams, "Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams", in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Julian Onderdonk, "Folksong Arrangements, Hymn Tunes and Church Music", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Charles Edward McGuire, "'An Englishman and a Democrat': Vaughan Williams,

However, as Ceri Owen suggests, the method inherent in such projects of reinterpretation can, at times, serve to effectively silence the composer's own voice.<sup>27</sup> Despite the undoubted role that factors beyond Vaughan Williams's control had on the reception of his music, it is impossible to deny the power that he himself exerts in constructing associations with, for example, issues of transcendence and theology, through both his words and his music. The interaction of Vaughan Williams' own agency and cultural trends which interpret his art in certain ways is nuanced, and the reception of his music cannot be effectively reduced to either one.

As I argue below, most aspects of the composer available to study impinge upon theological issues. Furthermore, although significant recent research has improved understanding of Vaughan Williams's cultural context, the theological factors underpinning Vaughan Williams's beliefs have remained largely unaddressed. Vaughan Williams research has, by and large, focused on religion at the expense of theology. There is much scholarship on Vaughan Williams's purported relationship with religion – the question of his faith is often raised – but comparatively little on the nature of his theological beliefs as written about and expressed in his music.<sup>28</sup> Whilst there is investigation of practicalities and connections with the practice and text of religion, there is no sustained analysis of his theological presuppositions. Bennett Zon argues this point in relation to musicology more broadly, suggesting that the only acceptable part of music theology to musicology is congregational music studies, because it 'studies theology as religion'.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, whilst ideas of transcendence and religion abound in Vaughan Williams's context, music, reception, and scholarship, there is scant engagement with the rather more specific category of theology; a topic into which all of these ideas encroach. Furthermore, there is no scholarship that attempts to ground any such reading in analytical evidence. Such a project, I argue, would require not only the investigation of theological trends and ideas, but also of

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Large Choral Works, and the British Festival Tradition", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Owen, "Vaughan Williams, Song, and the Idea of 'Englishness'", 6.

<sup>28</sup> For discussions of Vaughan Williams's religion, see Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 29; Adams, "Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams"; Eric Seddon, "Beyond Wishful Thinking: A Re-Evaluation of Vaughan Williams and Religion", *Journal of the RVW Society* 36 (2006); Gavin Bullock, "Too Much Wishful Thinking", *Journal of the RVW Society* 37 (2006).

<sup>29</sup> Bennett Zon, "Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies", in *Studying Congregational Music: Key Issues, Methods, and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Monique Marie Ingalls (London: Routledge, 2021), 111–12.

scientific ones. Wherever contact with theology can be observed in the case of Vaughan Williams and his music, science lurks also.

### **Vaughan Williams, Science, and Theology**

Vaughan Williams was a self-proclaimed agnostic and was born the son of a vicar into the wider family of Charles Darwin; he grew up with both a keen understanding of the concepts of Christian faith and of recent scientific developments. Through his music and writings, he embodies the fraught relationship between seemingly contradictory beliefs about the randomness of life and the theological design of nature. The way in which he does this – through music, and through writings on music – broadens the issue further so as to encompass debates over the nature of music itself, its claim to being theology, and its place in relation to science and theology. Both Vaughan Williams’s view of music and the reception of his music impinge upon questions of the sacred and secular, the theological and the scientific, and the transcendent and the immanent. Despite the enormous impact that evolutionary ideas had on British culture, they have not often entered musicological discussion; only recently have these relationships been explored in a scholarly fashion.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the recent effort to approach his thought with fresh, critical insight, the relationships between Vaughan Williams, science and theology have remained under-researched. Whilst various authors have tackled Vaughan Williams’s relationship with religion and scripture in a contextualised way, they neglect to consider the full intellectual ramifications of their presence alongside the composer’s beliefs in evolution, and the music’s ability to reveal the transcendent. In short, they have neglected the crucial issue of natural theology. There are few musicological studies that consider the full weight of the evolutionary thought that pervades his writings or attempt to unpack what this might mean for his music. This is surprising, considering that how prominent these themes are in Vaughan Williams’s own output, and how prominent the complicated relationships between these issues were in writings throughout the long nineteenth century.

Vaughan Williams’s connections with ideas of science and theology go deeper than his writings. His beliefs as to the evolutionary origin of music directly shape his compositional

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<sup>30</sup> See Bennett Zon, “The ‘non-Darwinian’ Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being”, in *Evolution and Victorian Culture*, ed. Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Bennett Zon, *Evolution and Victorian Musical Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

output,<sup>31</sup> and many of his works directly address issues of transcendence. He, like so many other figures in late- and post-Victorian Britain, indulged in ‘scientific’ anecdotes to back up his evolutionary beliefs.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Vaughan Williams is inexorably linked to traditions of English religious choral music.<sup>33</sup> To a greater extent than almost any other English composer, his music – both ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ – is interpreted as dealing with issues of transcendence and spirituality. Thus, the distinction between sacred and secular music is deeply problematic in Vaughan Williams’s work, as arguments surrounding the composer’s faith – or, perhaps, lack of it – show.<sup>34</sup> These issues impinge directly upon his place within the science-religion discourse. In both his writings and his music, then, Vaughan Williams represents an important case-study in the complex relationships between music, science, and theology in his time and place. He embodies a fascinating intersection between evolutionary thought and a faith in the theological capacity of music to point to the transcendent. As such, the issues of transcendence and evolution in Vaughan Williams are intertwined with broader, nineteenth-century natural-theological issues in the science-religion discourse.

The discursive relationship of science and theology is important to the present thesis in at least two distinct ways. In the first instance, it constitutes a significant part of the theological backdrop to the thought and music of Vaughan Williams. In the second, modern research into the relationship between science and theology offers a vital interdisciplinary example to follow in the investigation of theology and music. The arguments and discussions found in this corpus of work provide useful entry points for the construction of the method for this thesis which, by nature of its subject matter, trespasses the boundaries of distinct fields as they have been traditionally understood. Such approaches are couched in critical realism: a philosophical perspective in which a separation between the ‘real’ and the ‘observed’ is preserved. The way in which this discussion attends to epistemological and ontological issues provides a model for the construction of an inter-discipline capable of successfully interrogating the thesis at hand: that Vaughan Williams’s music affords theological interpretation.

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<sup>31</sup> Anthony Pople, for example, suggests that Vaughan Williams’s evolutionary ideas of music are embodied in the structure of *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. Pople, “Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle”, 56–60.

<sup>32</sup> Vaughan Williams used, on more than one occasion, an anecdote regarding a preacher on the Isle of Skye as ‘evidence’ that music originated from impassioned speech. See, for example, Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 17–18.

<sup>33</sup> That Vaughan Williams was conscious of this himself is evidenced in his writings. See, for example, Vaughan Williams, “Some Thoughts on Beethoven’s Choral Symphony With Writings on Other Musical Subjects”, 182.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Seddon, “Beyond Wishful Thinking: A Re-Evaluation of Vaughan Williams and Religion”; Bullock, “Too Much Wishful Thinking”.

## Outline

### Rationale and Research Questions

Jean-Jacques Nattiez suggests that musical meaning is constructed by contextual factors, receptive factors, and the irreducible trace not subsumed into either of these categories that belongs to a piece of music.<sup>35</sup> At all three levels, I argue that Vaughan Williams's music presents as theologically meaningful. This observation, whilst evidence-based, straightforward, and relatively uncontroversial, has not previously been followed up in a scholarly manner which pays attention to all three of Nattiez's levels. Therefore, I argue that a significant dimension of Vaughan Williams's music remains as yet unaddressed by scholarship. The reasons behind this are myriad, but one significant factor is the interdisciplinary nature of this particular object of study: its comprehension requires the interaction of such diverse fields and methods as historical musicology, the history of science, theology, and music analysis.

From a theological perspective, the rationale I outline here suggests that Vaughan Williams is an ideal subject for doing 'theology through music'.<sup>36</sup> Yet, despite the obvious relevance to the area, research into the interaction between the fields of music and theology, from a theological perspective, has not engaged with the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, music theology has not fully embraced music analysis as a method, leaving much to be desired regarding how this field engages with the issue of musical meaning. Addressing this gap would enable the field to engage more rigorously with musical hermeneutics while expanding its lexicon of theological composers. Vaughan Williams is also ideal as a case study for exploring the intersection of science, theology, and music in a period of dynamic transformation. His thought and music intersect with broader issues such as the science-religion discussion and the state of natural theology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These issues are evident in his writings and compositions, yet seldom in academic scholarship has this connection been made. This project aims to redress the situation by contextualising Vaughan Williams's beliefs, analysing his music, and interpreting this through the ideas of natural theology.

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<sup>35</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 28–32.

<sup>36</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 271.

<sup>37</sup> David Brown briefly mentions Vaughan Williams's hymn-setting. See David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98–102.

Vaughan Williams's belief that the composing of music is a response to a 'dimly [seen] vision of something beyond' provokes some important research questions.<sup>38</sup> How are concepts of natural theology evoked in his music? To what extent can his symphonic music be approached as theologically significant? More broadly, what can Vaughan Williams's natural theological beliefs reveal about the discourse between science and religion in late nineteenth- to mid- twentieth-century Britain? How will this knowledge reshape current understandings of the relationship between music and theology?

## Method and Structure

This study takes Vaughan Williams's own claim that music might be capable of obtaining 'a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties- of that, in fact, which is spiritual' and applies it to his own music.<sup>39</sup> This basic impulse guides the thesis through addressing various issues of music and theology. I explore Vaughan Williams's writings and music by situating them within contemporary paradigms of natural theology and Darwinian and non-Darwinian evolutionism. More specifically, musical analysis and cultural-musicological research methods are used to uncover and interrogate theological perspectives inscribed within the music: in particular, I focus on relationships between humanity and transcendence, concepts of nature and progress, and the question of whether life – both spiritual and physical – is governed by design and an over-arching teleology. Interpreting Vaughan Williams's music theologically in this way relies upon thorough research into factors both musical and cultural. It is vital to pay due attention to the prevailing theologies and worldviews in the artist's context, for it is these that structure his conceptualisation of the 'beyond' in the first place. It is equally vital to base such readings upon a thorough, analytical engagement with individual pieces that does not rely upon interpretative criteria that have come to define the reception of Vaughan Williams's music. As such, an interdisciplinary method that draws on a diverse range of fields is required.

Chapter 1 introduces such a method, drawing primarily on musicology, music analysis, and theology. I critique the field of music theology as it currently stands, highlighting which discourses my research relates to in the process. Drawing from contemporary discussions on the relationships between science and theology, I outline how these disciplines might

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<sup>38</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 13–14.

<sup>39</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Letter and the Spirit", 88.

correspond at an ontological, epistemological, and methodological level. I argue for music analysis as an essential part of any method which purports to investigate musical meaning, whilst highlighting the need for any such approach to be aware of the contextual and transient nature of music's meanings. Nattiez's tripartition, as adopted by the music theologian Maeve Heaney, is introduced here as a template for this method. Also introduced here is Gavin Hopps's use of the concept of musical 'affordance structures', which maintain a theological approach to music whilst navigating between, on the one hand, reliance upon suspect claims of autonomy and, on the other, abandonment of all ability to comprehend the relationship between music's immanent structures and its meaning.

Chapter 2 explores the idea of affordance structures in the specific case of Vaughan Williams's oeuvre. A wide survey of his shorter vocal and choral music serves to introduce these affordance structures, as well as providing case-studies for the expression of theological meaning in Vaughan Williams's music. In doing so, I introduce the centrality of deism to Vaughan Williams's operating theological paradigms. Initially, the selection and use of texts in this corpus are analysed. These texts, whilst affordance structures in their own right, forge obvious theological links with musical structures which occur throughout the composer's music. Music analysis forms the bridge between theology and music here by broaching the issue of musical meaning; rather than critiquing any single Lisztian 'programme', I approach Vaughan Williams's music as a 'nexus of extra-musical ideas', generating multiple theological meanings and layers of self-intertextuality.<sup>40</sup> It is only through analysis that these ideas can be traced. Any theoretical basis for analysis of Vaughan Williams's music must, in the words of Alain Frogley, consider 'chromatic and modal complexities, yet still do justice to [...] centric tonal properties'.<sup>41</sup> Thus I employ several complementary analytical approaches. The use of modality in this corpus, perhaps the musical feature most associated with Vaughan Williams, is analysed in terms of its connections to theological meaning. In particular, I understand Vaughan Williams's exploitation of modal ambiguity and resolution as a feature with both a capacity to generate large-scale teleological structures and to relate strongly to theological concepts. Another commonly cited feature of Vaughan Williams's music is successions of pure triads in apparently non-diatonic contexts. Neo-Riemannian theory elucidates the harmonic relationships that these contexts generate, which are strongly implicated in theological

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<sup>40</sup> Alain Frogley argues for a similar approach. See Alain Frogley, *Vaughan Williams's Ninth Symphony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12, note 37.

symbolism. I also consider the interaction of these factors, and their collusion to produce intertextual connections across the composer's output, as primary affordance structures.

Chapter 3 introduces key concurrent debates in the fields of science and theology – most importantly the status and development of natural theology – before investigating the expression of these ideas in the composer's Symphony No. 5. I expose the dissonance between different evolutionary sources in Vaughan Williams's thought, and I ascertain the placement of music with regards to contemporary natural theology. Vaughan Williams emerges as a 'pic 'n' mix' Darwinian, emblematic of the non-Darwinian revolution, whilst maintaining strongly held yet imprecise beliefs about the transcendence of music.<sup>42</sup> The deistic paradigm I introduce in Chapter 2 is expanded upon here. Throughout Vaughan Williams scholarship, Symphony No. 5 is the piece most often discussed in terms of transcendence and theologically significant ideas. Using music-analytical methods, I interrogate this piece theologically. Overall, I argue in this chapter that Symphony No. 5 evokes a positive natural theology which heavily recapitulates concurrent ideas from the science-religion discourse. The musical structures contributing to this 'positive' natural theology are thoroughly investigated, though their fragility and ambiguity is also exposed by this process. This fragility is itself predicated upon a deistic natural theology inherited from Vaughan Williams's natural theological context.

Chapter 4 pursues these ideas further in the case of the *Sinfonia Antartica*, and its place within contemporary debates over the ideas of nature and progress. I begin by exploring the programmatic links between this piece and the story of Robert Falcon Scott's Antarctic expedition; the natural-theological context of this story brings the fragile concepts of 'nature' and 'progress' to the fore as topics of discourse. Investigations into the history of these ideas show their interaction with scientific debates, and the effect which Darwinian ideas and world events have upon them. I then trace these ideas in the symphony itself, using music-analytical techniques drawn from both neo-Riemannian theory and set-theory. Again, the *Sinfonia* is interrogated as a theological object; this time, one that pits distinct ideas of nature in opposition to each other and invites the interrogation of the idea of progress. Similar themes to Symphony No. 5 emerge, although here an emphatically 'negative' natural theology dominates. The ambiguities and uncertainties suggested in the deistic natural theology of Symphony No. 5 are, I argue, exposed in the music of the *Sinfonia*. I conclude this thesis with a summary of my findings; additionally, I suggest future avenues of research that my work makes possible for

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<sup>42</sup> Zon, "The 'non-Darwinian' Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being", 197.

both the study of Vaughan Williams's music, and for the theological interpretation of music more broadly.

# 1. Method<sup>1</sup>

## Music and Theology

### Analysis and Theology

The music critic Wilfrid Mellers describes his experience of the opening bars of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in striking terms:

The effect is awe-inspiring [...] Mystery is inherent in the fact that, while the concordant but rootless harmonies are in limbo, the melodic formula is the acoustically 'innocent' pentatonic scale; and since the melody declines it may even affect us, thus harmonized, as a Fall from grace to disgrace [...] in the course of the work some rite of passage occurs, and has something to tell us about the reasons why the Christian Fall was also a blessing.<sup>2</sup>

This account corresponds implicitly to at least two modes of comprehending music. On the one hand, it relates to a theological understanding of music, which emphasises its powerful efficacy in relation to Christian religious experience and as a potential site of theological resonance. On the other hand, it relates to an understanding of music predicated upon analytical engagement with reference to theoretical models. Both ways of engaging with music are well-established, having existed for thousands of years.<sup>3</sup> The fact that both Mellers's analysis and his theology are suspect also have a precedent.<sup>4</sup> Interactions of analytical and theological engagement with music have been weaponised by various aesthetic, political, and philosophical interests.<sup>5</sup> Music analysis and theology individually also endure somewhat turbulent relationships with the rest of musical academia: recent trends in the discipline of musicology

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<sup>1</sup> The main part of this chapter is due to be published in Christopher Blakey, "Music Analysis and Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Christian Theology*, ed. Bennett Zon and Steve Guthrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 51.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Augustine's music theology. Carol Harrison, "Augustine and the Art of Music", in *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology*, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 31.

<sup>4</sup> Byron Adams and Alain Frogley critique Mellers's interpretations on the grounds of their theological imprecision and handling of musical analysis. See Byron Adams, "Review: Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion by Wilfrid Mellers", *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (1990); Alain Frogley, "Review: Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion by Wilfrid Mellers", *Music & Letters* 71, no. 3 (1990).

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Begbie and Steve Guthrie point out the 'double hazard' of theological instrumentalism and theological aestheticism. See Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, "Introduction", in *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology*, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (2011), 11–13.

have openly opposed both.<sup>6</sup> Whilst analysis as a discipline persists and, as the field of music theology shows, constructive scholarly engagement with theological ways of reading music has not died out, the criticisms levelled at these two ways of engaging with music remain particularly pertinent at the point of their intersection. The impasse of how an artistic medium whose relationship with meaning is slippery, changeable, and culturally contingent is purportedly able to disclose a particular asserted transcendent reality remains. If a thesis reading music theologically is to be argued successfully, these two modes of comprehending music need to work together in symbiosis.

The suggestion that music can be theological is, of course, not a claim that is unique to the music of Vaughan Williams. Women and men have composed and performed music in accordance with such beliefs for centuries. In a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, the composer and theologian Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), for example, refers to ‘the sacred sound through which all creation resounds’, which Mark Atherton describes as part of her ‘philosophy of music’.<sup>7</sup> Almost a thousand years later, Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) articulates a similar idea in describing his compositional *raison d’être* as expressing ‘the existence of the truths of the Catholic faith’.<sup>8</sup> The strong link between music and theology is further attested to by the prevalence of theological reception and interpretive trends. The reception of composers such as Messiaen,<sup>9</sup> J.S. Bach (1685–1750)<sup>10</sup> and Anton Bruckner (1824–1896),<sup>11</sup> among many

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<sup>6</sup> David Brown and Gavin Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 3–9.

<sup>7</sup> Hildegard and Mark Atherton, *Selected Writings*, trans. Mark Atherton (London: Penguin, 2001), ix–x.

<sup>8</sup> Olivier Messiaen, *Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel* (Portland, OR: Amadeus, 1986), 20.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Siglind Bruhn, *Messiaen’s Interpretations of Holiness and Trinity: Echoes of Medieval Theology in the Oratorio, Organ Meditations, and Opera* (Pendragon: Hillsdale, NY, 2008); Siglind Bruhn, *Messiaen’s Contemplations of Covenant and Incarnation: Musical Symbols of Faith in the Two Great Piano Cycles of the 1940s* (Pendragon: Hillsdale, NY, 2007); Siglind Bruhn, *Messiaen’s Explorations of Love and Death: Musico-poetic Signification in the Tristan Theology and Three Related Song Cycles* (Pendragon: Hillsdale, NY, 2008); James D. Herbert, “The Eucharist In and Beyond Messiaen’s Book of the Holy Sacrament”, *The Journal of Religion* 88, no. 3 (July 2008) (2008); David Pitt, “Incarnation and Eschaton in Olivier Messiaen’s *Le Verbe*”, *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2011) (2011).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, John Butt, “Bach’s Metaphysics of Music”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Eric T Chafe, “The St John Passion: Theology and Musical Structure”, in *Bach Studies*, ed. Don O Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Robin A. Leaver, “Johann Sebastian Bach: Theological Musician and Musical Theologian”, (2000); Robin A. Leaver, “Music and Lutheranism”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Robert L. Marshall, “On the Origin of Bach’s Magnificat: a Lutheran Composer’s Challenge”, in *Bach Studies*, ed. Don O Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Constantin Floros, *Anton Bruckner: The Man and the Work* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011); Paul Hawkshaw, “Bruckner’s Large Sacred Compositions”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner*, ed. John Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); A.C. Howie, “Traditional and Novel Elements in Bruckner’s Sacred Music”, *The Musical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1981); Timothy L. Jackson, “Schubert as John the Baptist to Wagner-Jesus: Large-scale Enharmonicism in Bruckner and his

others, foregrounds theological issues. Whilst there can be good autobiographical evidence that grounds such interpretive strategies in compositional intention, theological readings tend to outstrip this; in other words, whilst the fact that music is *created* as theologically resonant is important, it is just as significant – perhaps more so – that it is continuously *interpreted* as such. The field of theology has engaged with music in increasingly significant ways over the last 30 years.<sup>12</sup> However, the roots of this project are old; theologians from Augustine to Karl Barth have found cause to interrogate music’s theological dimensions.<sup>13</sup>

## Towards Interdisciplinarity

The phenomenological approach that underscores both theology and studies of music seems conducive to addressing issues of musical religious experience. Yet, the commonplace nature of discussions of such experience belies its resistance to academic inquiry. It is a phenomenon that resides in the gaps between the domains of traditional disciplines. The fundamentally different questions that theology asks of its objects are not often effectively reconciled to musicological method which, in turn, tends to show a limited grasp of theological concepts and methods. In a similar way, however, theology often struggles to do justice to music, especially to its structures and to how these relate to meaning in cultural contexts. Even the scope of music theology fails to address these issues fully.<sup>14</sup> Whilst music theology has built some bridges to historical musicology and ethnomusicology, it rarely does so with regards to analysis or hermeneutics.

Whilst many disciplines have a legitimate claim to comprehending religious meaning and experience in music, the fields of theology and music analysis are particularly implicated. Readings or experiences of music as evoking a Christian transcendent reality, scholarly or

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Models”, *Bruckner Jahrbuch 1991–93* (1995); Timothy L. Jackson, “The Enharmonics of Faith: Enharmonic Symbolism in Bruckner’s Christus factus est (1884)”, *Bruckner Jahrbuch 1987–88* (1990); Peter Kwasniewski, “Anton Bruckner, Sacred Tonality, and Parsifal’s Redemption: Spiritual Enfleshment and the Musical Via Positiva”, *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2005); Margret Notley, “Formal Process as Spiritual Progress: the Symphonic Slow Movements”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner*, ed. John Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber, 1989); Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*; Maeve Louise Heaney, *Music as Theology: What Music has to say about the Word* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2012); Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *De Musica*, trans. Robert Catesby Taliaferro (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1947), 324–79; Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 160–65; Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), especially 31–49.

<sup>14</sup> Maeve Heaney’s direct engagement with issues of musical meaning is something of an exception. See Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 27–134.

otherwise, rest upon answers to two questions: 1) How do musical structures relate to theological meaning? Addressing this question requires an understanding of how music functions as a meaningful system of symbols within a given cultural context. As Jean-Jacques Nattiez argues, this requires analysis as well as broader historical-musicological research.<sup>15</sup> 2) How does any situated meaning in the observable world relate to such an asserted transcendent reality? Addressing this question requires grappling with the comprehensibility and immanence of the Christian God: it is fundamentally about the distinctively Christian theological concept of revelation. Whether made explicit or not, these questions underpin theological discussions of music. These discussions thus rest, implicitly or explicitly, upon both analytical and theological claims: upon theories of how music works as a symbol, and how revelation is understood within the framework of Christian theology. Each field, thus, offers a distinct (yet incomplete) explanation for the same phenomenon which is irreducibly tied up with the mechanics of the other.

A successful approach to the issue of music's apparent relationship to theology – whether in the case of Vaughan Williams or any other music – requires an interdisciplinary framework capable of attending to the particulars of meaning with regard to both music and theology. Such an approach would place theology, music analysis, and musicology more broadly, in direct dialogue with each other. In order to facilitate this, however, the foundations of these disciplines and fields need to be explored before potential symbioses are formulated. Such a project necessitates a metatheoretical engagement with the scope, means, and aims of the disciplinary fields that surround its object of study; particular attention needs to be paid to the underpinning ontologies and methods of the implicated disciplines. The scientific method intertwines with these concerns in the case of all members in this interdisciplinary partnership, and the science-religion discourse provides a vital example for the interaction of analysis and theology outlined below. As such, this chapter briefly considers the origins and development of musicology, and analysis's place with regards to this. Key concepts and approaches from the field of theology are introduced before the current disposition of the interdisciplinary field of music theology is considered in more detail. Following this, I explore issues of musical meaning and analysis more directly, before a more thorough engagement with the ontological underpinnings of music analysis and theology. The purpose of this chapter with regards to the current thesis is to set out an interdisciplinary approach and method capable of addressing the relationship between Vaughan Williams's music and theology and, ultimately, reading his

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<sup>15</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, 99–100.

music theologically. However, in doing so, it also aims to articulate a framework that is more broadly applicable.

## Disciplines

### Musicology

Such preliminaries are necessary for the discipline of musicology in particular, as it is a relatively young discipline (certainly in comparison to theology), and because its very status of ‘discipline’ is somewhat contested. The origins of musicology, as with many other modern disciplines, can be found in the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The status of musicology as an independent ‘discipline’, however, has always been fraught. In 1885 the first issue of the *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft* – the first journal of musicology – was published; in this issue, Guido Adler defines the new discipline in his article ‘The Scope, Means, and Aim of Musicology’.<sup>17</sup> The thrust of Adler’s argument is that musicology borrows its method from the natural sciences; the study of music, for him, needed to be grounded in objective method. Adler subdivides musicology into ‘historic’ and ‘systematic’ branches; he considers the classification of music a primary concern of the musicologist, and musical analysis the only viable way of verifying classification:

[...] the structural nature of the work of art is examined [...] The individual parts are examined with respect to cadences, transitions, and accidentals, and placed in relation to the whole [...] then one can address the question, to which species of art does the piece belong, namely, to which species according to the perception of the period when the work of art originated.<sup>18</sup>

Within this scientific framework, Adler summons up a whole host of ‘auxiliary sciences’ that form part of the method of musicology such as ‘acoustics[...] mathematics[...] physiology [...] psychology [...] grammar, metre and poetics,’ and ‘paedagogics’,<sup>19</sup> as well as posing ‘scientific questions’ that rely upon the study of ‘culture, climate [...] the national economic

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<sup>16</sup> John R. Gibbins, “‘Old Studies and New’: The Organisation of Knowledge in University Curriculum”, in *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain*, ed. Martin Daunton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 242.

<sup>17</sup> Guido Adler and Erica Mugglestone, “Guido Adler’s “The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology” (1885): An English Translation with an Historico-Analytical Commentary”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 13 (1981).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

relationships of a people' and '[...] the older as well as the more modern philosophers'.<sup>20</sup> In short, Adler defines musicology more in terms of an 'interdiscipline' – and a scientific one at that – than a discipline. Bennett Zon recognises the same tendency in the early Victorian musicologists: contemporaries of Adler such as Hubert Parry and William Spottiswoode. According to Zon,

[Victorian] Musicology built bridges spanning every conceivable discipline, including a wide array of increasingly professionalized disciplines in the arts and sciences such as zoology, anthropology, ethnology, pedagogy, biography, history, philosophy and theology, to name but a few.<sup>21</sup>

Vaughan Williams himself bears witness to the interdisciplinary nature of the study of music. As I argue in Chapter 3, a quasi-scientific method can be detected in his writing; despite, in some ways, articulating a modernist outlook, Vaughan Williams follows the example of many Victorian writers by indulging in pseudo-scientific anecdotes to back up his theories of musical origins.<sup>22</sup> He famously held on to his teacher Parry's Spencerian belief that music was 'subject to the laws of evolution', thereby articulating a view of music steeped in scientific language and ideas.<sup>23</sup> Yet, as I argue above, Vaughan Williams approaches music in transcendental, even theological terms, which take it well beyond the modern scope of the sciences. Furthermore, he consistently put forward an entirely social understanding to music that is captured neither by science, nor by philosophy or theology. He describes how when 'we listen to a symphony as we should do, we are actually taking part in it, together with the composer and the performers. We are taking part in the creation of that symphony.'<sup>24</sup> For him music was, first and foremost, 'self-expression'<sup>25</sup> but, as he famously opined throughout his career, 'The composer must not shut himself up and think about art, he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community- if we seek for art we shall not find it.'<sup>26</sup> It could be argued that, in taking these three views, Vaughan Williams

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 11–12.

<sup>21</sup> Bennett Zon, "All Arts Constantly Aspire to the Condition of Musicology: Victorian Musicology as Interdiscipline", in *Victorian Culture and the Origin of Disciplines*, ed. Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (New York: Routledge, 2019), 286.

<sup>22</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 17.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>24</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Making of Music", 237.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>26</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?", *Royal College of Music Magazine* 9, no. 1 (1912). Reprinted in David Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42.

holds on to multiple ‘ontologies’ of music as described by Philip Bohlman: I explore the interaction of these in his thought more thoroughly in Chapter 3.<sup>27</sup>

Many of the trends of western musicology can be traced through Vaughan Williams scholarship. Frank Howes’s *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, first published in 1954, seems to ascribe to a more-or-less Adlerian ideal of musicology. Howes is similarly preoccupied with taxonomy, strikes an objective tone, and straddles ‘historical’ and ‘systematic’ approaches. Howes’s book, in his own words, ‘[...] is wholly expository. Its method is that of conventional analysis, but its intention is in general to relate technical features to aesthetic effect [...] [it] is intended as a study in applied aesthetics’.<sup>28</sup> Yet, many of Howes’s aesthetic interpretations are asserted in a manner which erodes the façade of objectivity. Sometimes, these suggest theological interpretations: for example, as noted in the introduction, Howes claims that Vaughan Williams’s *Symphony No. 5* is ‘the most successful attempt since Beethoven to use music as a direct penetration of the mystery of life [...] perhaps a more successful attempt than Beethoven’s to deal with metaphysical issues in the language of sound.’<sup>29</sup> Vaughan Williams himself, as I investigate in Chapter 3, objected to the specific interpretations of Howes.<sup>30</sup>

Written only a few years before Howes’s book, Hubert Foss’s biography of Vaughan Williams betrays more overt interpretative biases that verge on the nationalistic. As Frogley notes, ‘Perhaps the most extreme, and certainly the most thoroughgoing, identification of Vaughan Williams with Englishness is found in the first full-length study of the composer, written by Hubert Foss [...] For Foss, the composer’s publisher and personal friend, Vaughan Williams is almost literally the personification of England, warts and all.’<sup>31</sup> As Kirstie Asmussen argues, however, Foss’s depiction of Vaughan Williams shifted as required; the ‘thoroughly conservative and traditional’ picture offered in the biography is directly opposed to the ‘progressive, modernist’ picture that emerges from Foss’s other publications, which were integral to his ‘inter-war agenda’.<sup>32</sup> Such culturally contingent readings of Vaughan Williams

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<sup>27</sup> Phillip Bohlman, “Ontologies of Music”, in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>28</sup> Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, v.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–43.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Kennedy, “Fluctuations in the Response to the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 285–86.

<sup>31</sup> Frogley, “Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams”, 19.

<sup>32</sup> Asmussen, “Biographical Revisionism: Hubert Foss’s Conflicting Portrayals of Vaughan Williams”, 286.

with a veneer of objectivity came to be hugely influential for mainstream interpretation of Vaughan Williams throughout the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

In the later part of the twentieth century, much of the scope, method, and aim of the musicology of previous decades was challenged. Modern historical musicology and music theory – heirs of Adler’s musicological subdivision – were decried as ‘positivistic’ and ‘formalistic’ respectively by Joseph Kerman in 1985.<sup>34</sup> In challenging musicology’s preoccupation with ‘the factual, the documentary, the verifiable, the analysable, the positivistic’, Kerman’s criticisms can be seen to be partly aimed at musicology’s construction as a science.<sup>35</sup> It is notable that in his own brand of musical criticism Kerman draws heavily upon art and literary criticism.<sup>36</sup> In both Kerman’s approach and in so-called ‘new musicology’ more generally, musicology’s interdisciplinary nature is not challenged. Rather, as Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist suggest, ‘the boundaries between musicology and other humanities disciplines became increasingly fuzzy’; musicologists, in other words, merely sought to build bridges to other disciplines.<sup>37</sup> Cook and Everist themselves argue for a ‘generously conceived’ musicology consistent with their own questioning of musicology’s very identity as a discipline.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, and more recently, in their introduction to *Musicology: The Key Concepts*, David Beard and Kenneth Gloag label the object of their inquiry as ‘the discipline (or disciplines?) of musicology’.<sup>39</sup>

Vaughan Williams scholarship shows a reaction to these ideas towards the end of the twentieth century. Writing in 1996, Alain Frogley articulates a critical change in this field:

[...] taking a Freudian lead from colleagues in other disciplines, we have begun to realize that unreflective reactions of this kind can be analysed in a respectable intellectual framework, and that they can often tell us a great deal about the ideological substrata on which our view of the musical world is built.<sup>40</sup>

The importance of partnerships with other disciplines suggested by Cook and Everist are implicit in Frogley’s invocation of Freud, as are the post-modern tendencies to deconstruct previously accepted ‘objectivity’ which find a kindred spirit in Kerman’s work. These two

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<sup>33</sup> Manning, “Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams’s Music”, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 18.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, “Preface”, in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), x.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth Gloag and David Beard, *Musicology: The Key Concepts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), xii.

<sup>40</sup> Frogley, “Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams”, 1.

themes run throughout much Vaughan Williams scholarship over the last few decades. Amidst this, a continued interest in theological topics can be observed, even if theology as a discipline is not specifically invoked.<sup>41</sup>

## Analysis

Music analysis at least in theory, exists in its modern state as a subdivision of a broadly conceived musicology. In partnership with music theory, it retains a dialogue with scientific method to a greater extent than most other parts of musicology. Ian Bent defines music analysis as ‘that part of the study of music which takes as its starting-point the music itself rather than external factors’.<sup>42</sup> Whilst acknowledging the difficulty in separating internal and external factors (and in defining music), Kofi Agawu agrees, emphasising that music analysis is only musico-centric as a ‘starting point’; ideally this opens out into a dynamic, never-ending process.<sup>43</sup> So-called external factors, however they are defined, are not alien to music analysis *per se*. Jean-Jacques Nattiez conceives of music analysis in a similar way, integrating it as an essential part of the study of musical meaning. Nattiez’s approach underscores an important guiding principle for music analysis: whilst the contact of music with the external (both poietic and esthetic) is impossible to bypass in any engagement with it, it fails to explain music exhaustively. In other words, music analysis recognises that its object of study possesses irreducibly emergent properties. Karol Berger terms this the ‘partial autonomy’ of music: that which cannot be explained by extramusical functions.<sup>44</sup> Julian Horton argues along similar lines for the ‘technical autonomy’ of music.<sup>45</sup> It is this level which is most crucial in the identification and analysis of ‘affordance structures’ in Chapter 2.

There is more than a whiff of the scientific method to music analysis, which is made most apparent in its inextricable relationship with music theory. Horton sums up music theory

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Daniel Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear”: The Landscapes of Vaughan Williams’s *Sinfonia Antartica*”, *The Musical Quarterly* 91, no. 1–2 (2009): 136–43; Adams, “Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams”; Onderdonk, “Folksong Arrangements, Hymn Tunes and Church Music”; Whittall, ““Symphony in D Major”: Models and Mutations”, 210–12.

<sup>42</sup> Ian Bent and Anthony Pople, “Music Analysis”, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Second Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 526.

<sup>43</sup> V. Kofi Agawu, “How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In Again”, *Music Analysis* 23, no. 2/3 (2004): 270.

<sup>44</sup> Karol Berger, *A Theory of Art* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 116.

<sup>45</sup> Julian Horton, “On the Musicological Necessity of Musical Analysis”, *The Musical Quarterly* (2020): 79.

and analysis as, respectively, '[...] the modelling of musical systems or the taxonomy of praxis,' and '[...] the application of theory in the elucidation of works'.<sup>46</sup> Music analysis thus conceived is a 'doing', a practical experiment, which relates any given musical structure to a theoretical model. As in the sciences, theory is both informed by and revealed in experiment.<sup>47</sup> Bent describes music analysis along similarly scientific lines as ultimately answering the question: 'how does it work'? Yet, Bent admits that this is an ideal: a 'highly 'purified' portrayal of music analysis, impartial, objective'. The analyst, like any scientist, 'works with the preconceptions of his culture, age and personality'; the values, ideas and preconceptions of the researcher are inevitably recapitulated within the framework of the experimental act.<sup>48</sup> Agawu, similarly, defends music analysis from accusations of positivism, whilst Horton defines it along quasi-scientific (but not necessarily positivistic) terms as a 'communicative rationality that develops propositions about music to the end of building discursive consensus'.<sup>49</sup>

The study of music, it seems, always requires an interdisciplinary approach of some sort; this is surely no more so than where music's apparent link with the transcendent is encountered, and where the theological potential of music is taken seriously. As such, the defence of my thesis – that Vaughan Williams's music affords theological interpretation – depends upon good interdisciplinary relationships. Any attempt to argue for the theological potential of music has to involve a dialogue between studies of music and the discipline of theology: specifically, with doctrines of revelation.

### **Theology, Transcendence, and Revelation**

Theology can be defined, using Anselm's famous formula, as 'faith seeking understanding'.<sup>50</sup> Thus conceived of, as John Polkinghorne argues, theology is 'a reflection upon religious experience, the attempt to bring our rational and ordering faculties to bear upon a particular part of our interaction with the way things are'.<sup>51</sup> It is, however, epistemologically distinct due to its incorporation of the concept of revelation, and its assertion of a transcendent reality behind this. Transcendence lies at the core of Christianity's doctrines regarding the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>47</sup> John C. Polkinghorne, *Science and Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 1998), 9–10.

<sup>48</sup> Bent and Pople, "Music Analysis", 528.

<sup>49</sup> Horton, "On the Musicological Necessity of Musical Analysis", 81–82; Agawu, "How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In Again", 274.

<sup>50</sup> St. Anselm, *Monologion*, 1 (I:14).

<sup>51</sup> John C. Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, Second ed. (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, [1986] 1986), 34.

nature of God; Thomas Aquinas argues that ‘concerning God, we cannot grasp what he is, but only what he is not, and how other beings stand in relation to him’.<sup>52</sup> The immanence of God – that is, God’s presence within the observable universe – as understood in orthodox Christianity is paradoxically inherent in God’s transcendence; De Nys suggests that ‘the transcendence of the sacred is wholly other than any other transcendence, in that it does not exclude but reciprocally includes immanence.’<sup>53</sup> Frederic Platt articulates something similar in referencing Hildebert’s *Super cuncta* ‘God is immanent in the universe, but not shut up in it; He transcends it, but is not shut out of it.’<sup>54</sup>

Christian theology posits a God who is not merely the abstract object of study, but rather who is self-disclosive and desires relationship with the observer; in this way, revelation might be defined as divine communication in, and to, the observable world. Christian revelation, furthermore, is very particular: it recognises something distinctive about the life of Jesus and considers this a primary source of revelation. The comprehension of God’s immanence is theorised in the doctrine of revelation. Broadly speaking, revelation is understood in terms of two categories: special and general. The former attends to God as revealed through the scriptures climaxing in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, whilst the latter addresses how God is revealed through creation, and how this interacts with human reason. Accordingly, two systems of theology are built upon these two types of revelation; ‘revealed’ theology takes as its origin the revelation of God through special revelation, whilst ‘natural’ theology is based upon general revelation. The diversity exhibited in theology emerges in part from the weighting given to different sorts of revelation: the interplay of these types is often complex in theological method. Like musicology, the result of theology is intimately bound up with the identity and cultural context of the theologian. Whilst the resulting diversity of theological approaches eschews a unified approach, theology often takes on something of a scientific method. The possibility of a so-called ‘scientific theology’ is argued for by theologians and theologian-scientists such as Thomas Torrence and Alister McGrath.<sup>55</sup> Polkinghorne, similarly, describes the similarity in outlook between theology and science: ‘each can be, and should be, defended as being investigations of what is, the search for increasing verisimilitude in our understanding

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<sup>52</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 30.

<sup>53</sup> De Nys, *Considering Transcendence: Elements of a Philosophical Theology*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Frederic Platt, *Immanence and Christian Thought* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1915), 1.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas F. Torrence, *Theological Science* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969); Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2001); Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 2 – Reality* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002); Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 3 – Theory* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003).

of reality'.<sup>56</sup> Theology is especially concerned with comprehending human religious experience; something Polkinghorne describes as the 'raw material' of the theologian's art.<sup>57</sup>

It is vital to the success of examining the link between music and theology to distinguish between a 'theology of nature' and a 'natural theology'. Colin Gunton defines a theology of nature as 'an account of what things naturally are, by virtue of their createdness'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, a theology of nature falls under the remit of revealed theology. Natural theology, meanwhile, is defined by Alister McGrath as 'the systematic exploration of a proposed link between the everyday world of our experience and another asserted transcendent reality'.<sup>59</sup> Natural theology, therefore, is a broader approach; it is an effort to gain knowledge of the sacred transcendent from 'sources other than scripture and religious experience'.<sup>60</sup> The parallels between natural theology, as I describe it here, and Vaughan Williams's claim that art is an attempt to 'obtain a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties' should be readily apparent; as I argue in Chapter 3, Vaughan Williams relates music to natural theology throughout his writings. Chapters three and four also argue that this connection underpins Vaughan Williams's own Symphony No. 5 and the *Sinfonia Antartica*. The study of Vaughan Williams, I contend, demands an interdisciplinary approach that navigates between music and theology.

This chapter posits that musicology is always, in all its incarnations an interdiscipline. Despite its openness to interdisciplinarity musicology remains, in Bennett Zon's words, 'interdisciplinarily selective', especially with regards to theology.<sup>61</sup> Given the widespread assertions of music's link with theology, and the simultaneously unsatisfactory attempts for either field to investigate this in isolation, the rationale for 'music theology' seems sound. There is both a substantial enough historical precedent for this approach, and enough evidence of experience – the 'data', to invoke Polkinghorne's description of theological method – to suggest that such an approach might be worthwhile. Such a field, of course, already exists; whilst it has not yet engaged with all musicological enquiry – in particular, music analysis – it provides an important context for the approach adopted throughout this thesis.

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<sup>56</sup> Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, 51.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation: The 1993 Warfield Lectures* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 56.

<sup>59</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: a New Vision for Natural Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Neil A. Manson, "The Design Argument and Natural Theology", in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, ed. Russell Re Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 295.

<sup>61</sup> Zon, "Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies", 107.

## Interdisciplines I: The Field of Music Theology

### Introduction

Over a similar timeframe as the significant changes in musicology I outline above, the relationship between music and theology has received a surge in scholarly attention primarily as part of a theological attempt to grapple with the importance of the arts. Key writings by Jeremy Begbie, David Brown, Maeve Heaney, and others, aim to address this relationship from an explicitly theological standpoint.<sup>62</sup> Such research constitutes part of music theology which, as Zon notes, begins with the premise that its objectives and objects of study are ‘intrinsically theological’.<sup>63</sup> Music theology can be further differentiated by which disciplinary partnerships it forms and by their related methods. For example, as Zon argues, congregational music studies ‘is largely ethnomusicological (and therefore socio-anthropological) in disciplinary complexion.’<sup>64</sup> Other methodological partners available to music theology include ‘theological methods like mystagogy or natural theology; philosophical methods like epistemology or semiotics; and musicological methods like analysis’.<sup>65</sup>

The basic ‘music is theological’ premise of music theology has many implications, and these underscore various interdisciplinary discourses in the field; Zon lists “musical theology,” the “theology of music”, “music and theology”, and “music as theology” as possible options.<sup>66</sup> These discourses can be differentiated according to how music is situated in a theology of revelation and by the identity of the ‘theologian’ in relation to the ‘composer’ and ‘listener’. None of these discourses are necessarily mutually exclusive – in fact their boundaries are often porous – though denominational divisions can, at times, create a more stratified appearance to the field. For example, I argue below that Reformed approaches to music theology tend to emphasise one particular discourse.

These different discourses all show that, despite attempting to preserve the integrity of both music and theology, music theology is, at least in its current state, primarily conceived as

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<sup>62</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*; David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama*; Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*; Jeremy S. Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God* (London: SCM Press, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> Zon, “Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies”, 103.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

a theological endeavour that asks theological questions of music. This section proceeds by outlining a few key discourses, before offering suggestions for a fresh approach that incorporates dialogue with music analysis. The particulars of this project – the theological reading of Vaughan Williams’s music – require the interaction of theology and music analysis in particular, in conjunction with elements of historical musicology.

### **Discourse 1: Music as the Object of Natural Theology**

Music theology can proceed on the premise that music relates to theology as an object of natural theology. As I suggest above ‘natural theology’ can be taken to mean a theology based upon God as revealed in the observable world. For the Christian theologian this is, in other words, a theology of God based upon God’s self-revelation through creation. It takes seriously the psalmist’s suggestion that ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.’<sup>67</sup> Music, by virtue of its identity as a phenomenon either natural or human in origin, can be understood as a part of this creation and, therefore, can be viewed in a way that discloses the Creator of its creator. Such a discourse can be found in the writings of St. Augustine, one of the earliest theologians to significantly deal with music. In *De Musica*, Augustine outlines ‘[...] the basic, but revolutionary, insight [...] that God is music: he is supreme measure, number, relation, harmony, unity, and equality.’<sup>68</sup> Thus, according to Augustine, music ultimately stems from a divine source, and it is this that enables it to disclose the beauty of God. Music as it is heard, however, is also capable of corruption; while for Augustine, this does not preclude it from being theological, it does limit its revelation: ‘Even the sinful and miserable soul may be moved by numbers and set numbers moving even to the lowest corruption of the flesh. And these numbers can be less and less beautiful, but they can’t lack beauty entirely.’<sup>69</sup> This approach has also formed a significant part of the recent development of music theology as an area of study. Antoni Monti clearly espouses this view of the relationship between music and theology in *A Natural Theology of the Arts*,<sup>70</sup> as does Russell Re Manning in a chapter tellingly entitled ‘Unwritten Theology: Notes Towards a

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<sup>67</sup> Psalm 19: 1–2 (NIV)

<sup>68</sup> Harrison, “Augustine and the Art of Music”, 31.

<sup>69</sup> Augustine, *De Musica*, 375.

<sup>70</sup> Anthony Monti, *A Natural Theology of the Arts: Imprint of the Spirit* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 81–85.

Natural Theology of Music.’<sup>71</sup> Additionally, much of David Brown’s work is conceived, in the author’s own words, as ‘a form of what used to be called natural religion’.<sup>72</sup> As Chapter 3 argues, Vaughan Williams himself subscribes to this way of configuring the relationship between music and theology.

Brown’s recent work with Gavin Hopps foregrounds the experiential aspects of this approach; they are primarily concerned with the ways in which music ‘both classical and popular, may be able to engender religious experience.’<sup>73</sup> Their approach ‘seeks to move away from a tendency to focus on works of music as “listener-free” objects – whose immanent properties may offer us catechetical insights about the divine – and to advocate an expanded focus that takes cognizance of “the listener’s share” and considers the ways in which music can help to elicit an experience of the divine.’<sup>74</sup> In articulating the importance of ‘the listener’s share’, Brown and Hopps explicitly articulate their music theology in natural theological terms, in opposition to approaches which, in their opinion, ‘seek to predetermine the theological meanings of music’.<sup>75</sup> Whilst they remain open to all forms of music participating in this phenomena, they use the concept of musical ‘affordance structures’, which make religious experience more likely.<sup>76</sup> The idea of affordance originally comes from James Gibson’s work on visual perception.<sup>77</sup> Nicholas Cook applies this concept to music, stating that ‘[...] it is wrong to speak of music *having* particular meaning; rather, it has the potential for specific meanings to emerge under specific circumstances’.<sup>78</sup> In Hopps’s words: ‘affordances are not determinative, and are precisely valuable in thinking about music because, although they allow us to recognise common tendencies and the likelihood of certain associations, they leave the range of possibilities open.’<sup>79</sup>

In modern academia, this discourse lies largely within theological circles. Whilst it relies upon musical awareness, the vast majority of research exploring this discursive framework is theological, as are the questions that tend to be asked by scholars who adopt this view. If, however, natural theology is conceived of in the modern sense – most importantly, in

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<sup>71</sup> Russell Re Manning, “Unwritten Theology: Notes Towards a Natural Theology of Music”, in *Music and Transcendence*, ed. Férdaia J. Stone-Davis (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 69–73.

<sup>72</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>75</sup> Gavin Hopps, “Negative capability and religious experience”, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 20, no. 1 (2020): 79.

<sup>76</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 178.

<sup>77</sup> James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

<sup>78</sup> Nicholas Cook, “Theorizing Musical Meaning”, *Music Theory Spectrum* 23, no. 2 (2001): 181.

<sup>79</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 220.

a way that does not enforce a ‘universal “natural philosophy,” available to all people at all times through rational reflection on the natural order’<sup>80</sup> – then this strand of music theology can remain consonant with a contemporary musicological understanding of music’s meaning, as Brown and Hopps are keen to point out.<sup>81</sup>

## **Discourse 2: Music as Ancillary to Revealed Theology**

The relationship between music and theology can also be understood in terms of music’s capacity to become the indirect object of a revealed theology. By this, I mean that music resonates with an aspect of doctrine previously established through a revealed theology; music, in other words, is a parable. This approach gives theological primacy to the scriptures and the life and death of Jesus Christ in an obvious way: it aligns itself with Gunton’s ‘theology of nature’ in opposition to ‘natural theology’ and so, to paraphrase Gunton, it is often an account of what music naturally is, by virtue of its createdness.<sup>82</sup> The denominational divide between this discourse and the previous one is marked. Because that approach relies on the credibility of natural theology as a legitimate theological enquiry it is more often (though not always) the preserve of Catholic and Anglo-Catholic theology. This discourse, by contrast, tends to be associated with a Reformed theological outlook which often denies the possibility of a genuine natural theology. Karl Barth, who influentially articulated an opposition to natural theology, wrote in this way about music.<sup>83</sup> Barth places Mozart above the greatest theologians in his own estimation.<sup>84</sup> For him, it is possible to afford Mozart this position because ‘he knew something about creation in its total goodness’;<sup>85</sup> in the words of Phillip McCosker, ‘Barth exalts Mozart’s music as the sound of creation’s redeemed freedom, in which yes always trumps no’.<sup>86</sup>

Unlike the discourse I discuss above, music is not conceived of here as the direct object of a natural theology (the revelation that is used to construct a theology) but rather the indirect object of a revealed theology (an object that is viewed in light of a pre-existing theology). Barth

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<sup>80</sup> McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 125.

<sup>81</sup> Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*, 1–9.

<sup>82</sup> Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation: The 1993 Warfield Lectures*, 56.

<sup>83</sup> Karl Barth, “No!”, in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Karl Barth* (Wipf and Stock: Eugene, OR, [1934] 2002), 67–128.

<sup>84</sup> Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Karl Barth, “The Misconception of Nothingness”, in *Doctrine of Creation, Vol. 3 (48–51)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 300.

<sup>86</sup> Philip McCosker, “‘Blessed Tension’: Barth and Von Balthasar on the Music of Mozart”, *The Way* 44, no. 4 (October) (2005): 93.

makes this position abundantly clear, writing that ‘[...] the golden sounds and melodies of Mozart’s music have from early times spoken to me not as gospel but as parables of the realm of God’s free grace as revealed in the gospel.’<sup>87</sup> Jeremy Begbie’s approach to the relationship between music and theology follows this same formula; for him, music advances theology ‘first and foremost by enacting theological wisdom’.<sup>88</sup> Elsewhere, Begbie is keen to point out the primacy of the scriptures whilst denying the possibility of both a musical natural theology and, as I show below, some approaches to considering music as theology:

In the Christian tradition [...] privileging linguistic theology is not an arbitrary decision taken by those with a fetish for words, but simply the outworking of the content of Jewish-Christian belief about the action of God. Such a privileging need not negate or render trivial the potential of music to enrich theology.<sup>89</sup>

In this discourse, the composer is often viewed as a creator of an object that points to theology; the theologian is, in this case, the listener. Music is seen to reflect a theology that it cannot itself express; as Begbie suggests, this is only possible if a theological ‘pre-judgement’ based on the witness of scripture is in place.<sup>90</sup> This being the case, it is clear that this discourse, like the one above, is an almost entirely theological pursuit; because of this, and because of the smaller role that ‘the listener’s share’ tends to play, there is a danger inherent in this discourse that insufficient attention is paid to the peculiar ways that music comes to mean something. Francis Watson recognises this in his critique of Barth’s musical theology:

We cannot assume [...] that “Mozart has a place in theology, especially in the doctrine of creation and also in eschatology” [...] If there were any real theological or musical warrant for these views, it might make our task a great deal simpler. But the distance between the tradition-bound human practice of music and the inarticulate voice of the cosmos is too great to be bridged with such ease.<sup>91</sup>

This is not to say, however, that this discourse always remains unaware of musicological issues. Indeed, Begbie’s open admittance that a theological criterion is necessary to understand music’s ability to enrich theology is certainly consonant with some aspects of the ‘new musicology’. In essence, Begbie is here addressing the issue of musical autonomy; for him, music’s ability to resonate with theology is not self-evident, but predicated upon a particular approach that is grounded in revealed theology. The concerns of this approach are

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<sup>87</sup> Karl Barth, *How I Changed My Mind* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 71.

<sup>88</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Jeremy Begbie, “Negotiating Musical Transcendence”, in *Music and Transcendence*, ed. Férdia J. Stone-Davis (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 109–10.

<sup>90</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, “Openness and Specificity: A Conversation with David Brown on Theology and Classical Music”, in *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown*, ed. Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 152.

<sup>91</sup> Francis Watson, “Theology and Music”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 4 (1998): 436.

relevant to debates surrounding ideas of ‘nature’ in chapters three and four. Additionally, the specificity argued for by theologians such as Begbie offers a useful contrast to Vaughan Williams’s own conception of music’s relationship to theology.

### **Discourse 3: Music as Theology**

A third discourse in music theology explores the idea that music can, in some way, function as theology. This discourse approaches music as a medium for theological expression rather than a theological object. This can take the form of natural theology where, for example, music becomes a vehicle for McGrath’s ‘exploration of a proposed link between the everyday world of our experience and another asserted transcendent reality’. The key distinctive feature of this approach is that, in opposition to the two discourses I cover above, the theological ‘freight’ is bound up with the composition, context, and reception of music; as much as this approach does not necessarily render music autonomous in its ability to mean something, it does require that the ability for music to carry meaning is taken seriously.

The discourse of music as theology has achieved some level of prominence within the field of music theology. In her book of the same name, Maeve Heaney sets out this approach in clear terms:

[...] could music not also be theological? Does it not offer us at the very least, a form of understanding of our faith, and perhaps even an aid in attaining and entering into that faith? The conviction underlying this book is that it can – that music offers a form of approach to our comprehension of faith that is different to our linguistic and conceptual understanding of the same, and for that very reason is complementary to it, in theological discourse [...] I propose that there are aspects of the Logos, our God revealed in the Word made flesh, which are better expressed through music, and that theology would do well to integrate this symbolic form of expression.<sup>92</sup>

In this way, Heaney argues, contra Begbie, for the ‘non-linguistic’ art of music to be considered as potentially being able to ‘be theological’. As will be readily apparent, this discourse has to rely upon a deep understanding of musical meaning; importantly, Heaney grounds her own research in an in-depth exposition of a musical semiotics.<sup>93</sup> In other words, with reference to Begbie’s position, it is less that theology is possible without words and more that, as many contemporary musicologists would argue, music is not so very different from

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<sup>92</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–135.

language after all.<sup>94</sup> Music's semiological nature is, for Heaney, one reason why it might be reasonable to approach music as theology.

In the same way that traditional theology is not in and of itself revelation, understanding music as theology does not entail reading it as ultimately revealing God. Rather, it suggests that music is capable of embodying thought about God. In this way, 'music as theology' has often been employed to ascertain the faith of composers; if, in Daniel Chua's terms, music can become the 'mouthpiece of theology', then the theological outlook of a composer can potentially be understood through their music.<sup>95</sup> This is, in many ways, what Begbie attempts to do in his analysis of Edward Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*.<sup>96</sup> Begbie is able to stick to his guns regarding the primacy of linguistic theology due to the fact that this piece, of course, contains text (and explicitly theological text at that); nevertheless, through an analysis of the piece, he arrives at something approaching a critique of this music as theology.

Elgar's oscillation between confidence and anxiety, exemplified in *The Dream of Gerontius* but evident elsewhere, at its deepest level concerns a theological ambivalence with respect to the status of the Christian in relation to God, an ambivalence that is thoroughly consistent with, and clearly exposed in Newman's vision of purgatory.<sup>97</sup>

Much scholarship concerning the music of Olivier Messiaen uses a similar method, though, in this case, there is often no libretto to support the argument as in *Gerontius*. Here, this approach has to fully engage with music's ability to function as a system of signs. Siglind Bruhn employs a semiological approach to Messiaen's music: in an analysis of *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant-Jésus*, she argues that Messiaen's musical language 'can indeed be read as symbolic, containing particularly representations of divine attributes and other transcendental concepts.'<sup>98</sup>

When music is approached as theology, as with all discourses in music theology, the listener becomes the theologian. However, this approach uniquely raises the possibility that a

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<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*; V. Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: a Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Michael Klein, "Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative", *Music Theory Spectrum* 26, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>95</sup> Daniel Chua, "Music as the Mouthpiece of Theology", in *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology*, ed. Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (2011), 137.

<sup>96</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, "Confidence and Anxiety in Elgar's Dream of Gerontius", in *Music and Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Martin Clarke (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>98</sup> Siglind Bruhn, "Symbolic Representation of Divine Attributes in the Musical Language of Olivier Messiaen Exemplified in His Piano Cycle "Vingt Regards sur l'enfant-Jésus"", *Symmetry: Culture and Science* 3, no. 4 (1992): 356.

piece of music can become a site, not just of religious meaning, but of theological expression. As such, a composer of a piece of music might also be seen as a theologian; in the same way that a traditional, linguistic theologian might engage with the writings of another theologian, a music theologian might engage with the compositions of a theological composer. This approach, I argue, can engage with musical biography; evidence of intention in some way is, it goes almost without saying, necessary if one is to call a composer a ‘theologian’. Nevertheless, such an approach needs to remain open to the possibility that music can be theological without the composer’s intention, because music acquires meaning not just in its composition but also in its reception. In this way, the ‘music as theology’ discourse views the composer as somewhere on a spectrum between a creator of an artistic form that carries theological meaning (deliberately or otherwise) and a theologian. Furthermore, in contrast to the discourses I discuss above, this approach remains an irreducibly joint pursuit of musicology and theology. The burden of proof has to lie on both sides for this method to be possible. On the one hand, the case has to be made through some type of analysis that music carries meaning; on the other, it has to be shown that what is meant by the music is theological. Engaging with music in this way rests not only upon doctrines of revelation, but an understanding of how musical meaning functions in cultural contexts.

### **Placing the Present Thesis in Discourses of Music and Theology**

As I describe above, the music of Vaughan Williams relates to theology in various distinct ways. The composer’s own writings on music’s relation to transcendence, and the consistent interpretation of his music as dealing with theological issues – varied though these are – suggest that interpreting his music theologically might prove a fruitful approach for the comprehension of his music in general. In particular, Vaughan Williams’s music resonates with natural theology: both in terms of his writing and reception, as well as broader trends in intellectual culture in which he is implicated. My approach advances a position that engages with ‘discourse 2’ and ‘discourse 3’, whilst interrogating the ways in which Vaughan Williams and others are invested in ‘discourse 1’.

In order to facilitate this approach, I adopt Brown and Hopps’s concept of affordance structures as an important guiding principle. The isolation and comprehension of these affordance structures requires the interaction of music theology with music analysis and a commitment to investigating music’s semiological capacity more broadly. Music theology has

not often built bridges to music analysis, or directly engaged with musical semiosis. The approach adopted here follows Heaney in establishing Nattiez's tripartition theory as the most helpful method in negotiating between the culturally constructed nature of music's semiology and the theological concept of revelation.

## **Music Analysis, Theological Meaning, and Autonomy**

### **Social and Metaphysical**

Vaughan Williams's approach to musical meaning focuses on two tenets: he emphasises both its transcendent and its social dimensions. He describes how the composer of music has a 'vision' – describing this elsewhere as 'a vision of something beyond'<sup>99</sup> – and then seeks to express this vision in their music; 'At first it is vague and cannot be accurately expressed [...] It has to be crystallised into some definite form [...] the man [sic] who has to have had this vision, has to crystallise it into definite musical sounds.'<sup>100</sup> This contrasts with his oft-cited opinion that the composer 'must not shut himself up and think about art; he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community.'<sup>101</sup> Elsewhere, he argues for a national music capable of expressing 'the soul of a nation', defining a nation as 'any community of people who are spiritually bound together by language, environment, history, and common ideals and, above all, a continuity with the past.'<sup>102</sup>

Susan McClary also invokes these two approaches, pitting them against each other as two basic ways of understanding music:

[...] from very early times up to and including the present, there has been a strain of Western culture that accounts for music in non-social, implicitly metaphysical terms. But parallel with that strain (and also from earliest times) is another which regards music as essentially a human, socially grounded, socially alterable construct.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Howland Medal Lecture", Lecture, (1 December 1954). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 102.

<sup>101</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?". Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 42.

<sup>102</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 68.

<sup>103</sup> Susan McClary, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics in the Bach Year", in *Music and Society: the Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 15.

For McClary, as for many others, these two ways of understanding music form something of a binary opposition, with one strain clearly being the preferred option.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the problematisation of music's privileged link with the transcendent has become a hallmark of much mainstream musicology since Kerman. This is a direct outcome of new musicology's main challenge to traditional musicology, which is to problematise the notion of autonomous music, and to critique methods that it sees as being supportive (and supported by) this notion.

Kramer and other writers associated with new musicology, according to Gloag and Beard, seek to 'displace positivism and the concept of the musical work' and, instead, underscore the subjective nature of musical experience.<sup>105</sup> This reversal of the values of autonomy and cultural contingency remains a necessary challenge to the academic study of music. However, it is not merely an essentially nineteenth-century view of Western classical music that is attacked by the new musicological critique.<sup>106</sup> In their commitment to context-related meaning, these writers question the methodological legitimacy and disciplinary viability of music theory and analysis. Many also, like McClary, set up a dichotomy between social and transcendent interpretations of music that side-lines any theological reading of music.<sup>107</sup> Whilst both music analysis and theology are invested in the partial autonomy of music, neither necessarily subscribe to the sort of autonomy critiqued by new musicology. Music analysis and music theology broadly subscribe to the same subjectivity of meaning that has become a central tenet across many musical disciplines. Both, I argue, can engage with the cultural specificity of music. Both suggest that the link between music and religious experience need not be sequestered from issues of cultural specificity and extra-musical meaning. Furthermore, dialogue between their complementary but distinct approaches can enable the study of musical religious experience to effectively interrogate its subject. As I argue below, there is no need to construct transcendent and social 'ontologies' of music as mutually exclusive; in fact, this dissertation argues that both strains are vital to a full comprehension of music's link with theology. I follow Vaughan Williams in seeing no necessary conflict between these dimensions of music.

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<sup>104</sup> Christopher Norris, "Introduction", in *Music and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), 9.

<sup>105</sup> Gloag and Beard, *Musicology: The Key Concepts*, 92.

<sup>106</sup> Kramer, *The Thought of Music*, 46.

<sup>107</sup> Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*, 1–9.

## Autonomy

The widespread belief that music has a privileged link with the transcendent – indeed, can become a ‘venue of transcendence’<sup>108</sup> – has often been anchored in the belief that music is capable of escaping the limited meaning of words, and therefore can claim some sort of autonomy. In a book published in 1799, for example, the influential Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote about music’s ability to become ‘speech without words, the most definite, most understandable expression of what is innermost [...] In holy hymns and choruses, to which the words of the poet cling only loosely and lightly, that is exhaled which definite speech can no longer comprehend.’<sup>109</sup> This ideal can be traced throughout the nineteenth century through Austro-German writers such as E.T.A. Hoffman and Eduard Hanslick.<sup>110</sup> It is also hinted at in the writings of Vaughan Williams, who considered it ‘one of the glories of the art of music’ that music ‘can be put to no practical use. Poets can be used for propaganda, painters for camouflage, architects for machine-gun posts, but music is purely of the spirit and seems to have no place in the world of alarms and excursions.’<sup>111</sup> As Vaughan Williams shows, this idea persisted far beyond its nineteenth-century origins. ‘No ideas about music,’ writes Kramer, ‘are more conventional than that music has no meaning, at least in the sense that words do, and that this lack is something to be treasured, something that helps make music special.’

Assuming this sort of musical autonomy implies that the understanding of music relies solely upon the analysis of ‘the music itself’; that is, the musical ‘object’ abstracted from its context. In stark and deliberate contrast to musicology’s original scientific ambition, Kramer defines his project of hermeneutics as the ‘art of understanding’; it is ultimately concerned with the issue of musical meaning.<sup>112</sup> Meaning, for Kramer, is never something that can lie exclusively ‘in’ the music; ‘Music cannot “speak” with its “own” voice until it finds a voice, or voices, among a multiplicity of others that constantly blend with, mimic, and chafe against

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<sup>108</sup> Lawrence Kramer, “The Musicology of the Future”, *repercussions* 1, no. 1 (1992): 8.

<sup>109</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, ed. and trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1799] 1996), 75.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, E. T. A. Hoffman and Arthur Ware Locke, “Beethoven's Instrumental Music: Translated from E. T. A. Hoffmann's “Kreisleriana” with an Introductory Note”, *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1917): 127–33; Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, [1854] 1986), 30.

<sup>111</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “The Composer in Wartime”, *The Listener* 23, no. 592 (1940). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 11.

the rest.’<sup>113</sup> Any attempt to understand music, in other words, has to acknowledge the various, culturally-embedded variables that play a vital part in the formation of meaning.

In much scholarship associated with new musicology and following on from it, the construction of musical autonomy has been viewed as supporting the necessity of musical analysis. In order for musicology’s scientific credentials to be preserved in its original nineteenth-century context, – and the implication was that, if they could not be, then musicology was of little worth to the academy – musicology was required to focus on what was ‘objectively’ true about the musical ‘object’.<sup>114</sup> This ‘ascertaining of [musical] facts’ is the first stage of Adler’s method, which then proceeds to creating framing laws by ‘generalising from these facts by induction.’<sup>115</sup> All this was designed to lead musicology towards its ultimate aim: ‘Discovery of the True and Advancement of the Beautiful.’<sup>116</sup> The idea that, through musical analysis, the ‘truth’ of a piece of work can be arrived at is heavily critiqued in new musicological literature. According to this critique, the ascertaining of a musical ‘truth’ through analysis often relies on the concept of organicism: the idea that pieces of music are (or, rather, should be) essentially unified. In this way, Kerman dismisses analysis as being ideology, rather than science; for him, analysis ‘exists to articulate the concept of organicism, which in turn exists as the value system of the ideology’.<sup>117</sup> The impact of these criticisms of musical analysis for musicological method is significant.<sup>118</sup> In light of them, scholars have offered alternatives to analysis: Kramer, for example, suggests that ‘musical criticism’ should take the place of a ‘formalist’ musical analysis, whilst ‘hermeneutical’ methods should replace analytical methods such as the application of Schenkerian theory.<sup>119</sup> Analysts themselves also adapted in light of these criticisms, in addition to defending their field against such critiques more broadly.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>114</sup> Suzanne Cusick, “Gender, Musicology, and Feminism”, in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 473.

<sup>115</sup> Adler and Mugglestone, “Guido Adler’s “The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology” (1885): An English Translation with an Historico-Analytical Commentary”, 3.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>117</sup> Joseph Kerman, “How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get out”, *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 2 (1980): 318.

<sup>118</sup> Cook and Everist, “Preface”, x–xi.

<sup>119</sup> Lawrence Kramer, “Haydn’s Chaos, Schenker’s Order; Or, Hermeneutics and Musical Analysis: Can They Mix?”, *19th-Century Music* 19, no. 1 (1992): 3–6.

## Beyond Autonomy

As Horton suggests, ‘The wholesale association of analysis with modernist rational metanarratives is [...] based on a rather selective reading of this relationship’.<sup>120</sup> Agawu offers a staunch defence of analysis, and highlights trends in what he terms the ‘New American Music Theory’ which eschew many of the concerns of new musicology.<sup>121</sup> In the years since the height of this debate, as Horton notes, ‘fields under the new theory’s banner have flourished and acquired siblings in diverse areas, including the analysis of pop music, music and emotion, Romantic form, topic theory, and musical narrativity.’<sup>122</sup> Yet, despite this, Horton paints a rather bleak picture as to the perception of analysis in musicology more widely:

The manifest disparity between analysis’s recent health and perceptions of it in the musicological literature suggests that the legacy of the 1990s is not a pluralist *rapprochement* but a condition in which musicology neglects analysis, because musicology’s disciplinary identity is predicated in part on analysis’s morbidity.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps most noticeably, this situation belies the proliferation of analytical methods focused on musical meaning. Some important strands of research involve conceiving of music as: rhetorical, discursive, and capable of signifying.<sup>124</sup> In all three bodies of thought, the autonomous nature of music is significantly problematised; music’s meaning is seen as entirely dependent upon its context and, crucially, the difference between music and language that traditionally supports music’s link with the transcendent is undermined. Research into musical hermeneutics has centred on the idea that music is a semiological art: musical meaning, therefore, can be seen to concern a system of signs. Modern musical semiology tends to take the sign as theorised by Charles Sanders Peirce as its model;<sup>125</sup> this is made up of the ‘representamen’ (a sign that mediates understanding of the signified), the ‘object’ (the thing or concept being signified), and the ‘interpretant’ (the sense made of the sign).<sup>126</sup> Peirce further distinguishes three ways in which the interpretant relates to the object: as an ‘icon’, an ‘index’, and a ‘symbol’.<sup>127</sup> An icon ‘exhibits or exemplifies’ its object; an index signifies its object

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<sup>120</sup> Julian Horton, “Postmodernism and the Critique of Musical Analysis”, *The Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2001): 361.

<sup>121</sup> Agawu, “How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In Again”, 268.

<sup>122</sup> Horton, “On the Musicological Necessity of Musical Analysis”, 62.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>124</sup> See, for example, Agawu, *Playing with Signs*; Agawu, *Music as Discourse*; Robert S. Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, 5–8.

<sup>126</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 82–84.

<sup>127</sup> Robert E. Innis, *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 8.

‘through an existential connection [...] or a sign of this object’; a symbol is associated with its object ‘by a conventional rule’.<sup>128</sup> As Raymond Monelle notes, this threefold distinction has seemed the most musically pertinent area of Peirce’s theory.<sup>129</sup> A hermeneutical study of these dynamics requires the method of music analysis, the framework of music theory, and significant contextual, historical work in establishing signifiers and signified. The acknowledgement of the Peircean ‘interpretant’ allows semiological music analysis a great deal of accord with the post-modern concerns of contemporary musicology and, more importantly for the current thesis, with the concerns of music theology.

Tripartition theory – one of the fruits of semiology as a broader pursuit – fully engages with the possibility of multiple interpretants and the cultural dependence of the ‘representamen’. Developed by Jean Molino, it was introduced to the field of music analysis by Jean-Jacques Nattiez. As its name suggests, it considers the meaning of music to be comprised of three overlapping layers: the ‘poietic’, the ‘neutral’ or ‘immanent’ level, and the ‘esthetic’. The immanent level corresponds to the musical artefact as distinct from its context and reception (equivalent to Agawu and Bent’s music-centrism), the ‘poietic’ to ‘the components that go into the work’s material embodiment’, and the ‘esthetic’ to ‘the description of perceptive behaviours within a given population of listeners’.<sup>130</sup> It is, of course, a fallacy to suggest that the distinction between these layers can be maintained. In particular, the ‘immanent’ level can never be fully neutral as its comprehension and analysis is fully dependent upon the historical and cultural context of the analyst or listener. As I discuss above, there is no method of analysis that is free from its own poietic or esthetic level.

There can be no denying the fact that religious experience has remained core to how music has been created, practised, and discussed throughout history. The study of such issues would seem to lie well within the remit of an approach to music that prioritises subjective meaning over positivistic, modernist understandings. However, as Brown and Hopps mention, Kramer stands for many others in choosing to ‘associate any talk of [music’s] “ineffable” character with reactionary claims to the autonomy of music, thereby failing to acknowledge the possibility that such language might equally spring from concretely situated subjective experiences’.<sup>131</sup> In contrast to Kramer’s critique, theology does not have to be invested in an

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<sup>128</sup> Arthur W. Burks, “Icon, Index, and Symbol”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 6, no. 4 (1949): 675–80.

<sup>129</sup> Monelle, 99

<sup>130</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, 92.

<sup>131</sup> Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*, 4.

autonomous music devoid of specific meaning in order to approach music as ‘intrinsically theological’.<sup>132</sup> As Brown and Hopps mention, theology is more than capable of conceiving of religious experience in terms of situated, subjective meaning.

The doctrine of the incarnation suggests a possible approach to this. Christian theology posits a God who is simultaneously transcendent, and who also reveals themselves through specific, incarnated acts. The specifics of Jesus’s cultural context, for example, are not unimportant to the revelation of his own divine identity through his life; rather, it is through these specifics that God is revealed. Whilst Christian theology tends to acknowledge the supremacy and perfect nature of this particular act of revelation, the same principle can be applied elsewhere to a lesser degree. The specifics of different musics, for example, can assist in understanding God. In Jeremy Begbie’s work, the conception of temporality in Western classical music reveals something about ‘the way things are’ in general: it reveals a Christian perspective of time.<sup>133</sup> Begbie’s approach does not require Western classical music to possess a unique claim to explaining the universe; rather, it suggests that its situatedness does not prevent it from being meaningful to some people in this way.

Natural theology also provides a context for thinking about religious experience in a way which preserves situated meaning, and that fundamentally undermines claims of music’s autonomy. As McGrath notes, ‘if nature is to disclose the transcendent, it must be “seen” or “read” in certain specific ways – ways that are not themselves necessarily mandated by nature itself’; knowing God through his creation, according to this principle, requires the donning of ‘a particular and specific set of spectacles’.<sup>134</sup> The same principle is applied to music: it does not autonomously generate religious experience. Rather, the properties of any music interact with a complex of social and contextual factors which may well elicit a religious experience. I argue in chapters two, three and four that these factors proliferate in the case of Vaughan Williams’s music.

Regarding the investigation of theological meaning in music, Heaney suggests that:

Any attempt to grasp the meaning or discern and evaluate the music’s roles in the transmission of Christian faith will only lead to dissension if it does not take into account these three areas: the birthplace, context, and intention behind its composition, the piece of music as it is passed on, and the ever-changing variety of listeners or interpreters, who ‘receive’ and reinterpret it.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Zon, “Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies”, 103.

<sup>133</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 69–176.

<sup>134</sup> McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 77–78.

This ‘tripartite’ model, as espoused by Heaney, is taken directly from Nattiez; this forms an important point of contact between analysis, musical hermeneutics, and theology. Heaney’s work shares a central concern with the approach adopted here: the relationship between music’s transient meanings and theology’s claims to ‘truth’. My method follows Heaney in adopting Nattiez’s tripartition, which is particularly well-suited to these concerns:

Nattiez’s combination of the quest for truth with the recognition of the complexity and contextual nature of our apprehension of meaning touches the core of what is at stake in many discussions on music in Christian circles and theology: eternal truth in history. We can neither give up on the quest for truth nor ignore that its apprehension is complex and incarnated, in circumstances that are contingent.<sup>136</sup>

Both theology and music analysis can approach the issue of meaning in music with nuance, with acknowledgement of the situatedness of all meaning, and with an awareness of the partial autonomy of music. On the issue of religious meaning, they can assist each other in preserving this approach in the overlap of their scopes. Tripartition theory emerges as the most helpful framework through which these approaches might form a dialogue: the specific natures of the theological object and the musical representamen can be preserved at all three levels. In this dialogue, theology underlines the specifics of Christian transcendence, as opposed to any other. This acts as a qualifier to analytical accounts of signified ‘transcendence’ in music: as theology proves, not all ideas of transcendence are compatible. Through the pursuit of natural theology and doctrine of the incarnation, theology also provides a framework and rationale for how the situated nature of musical meaning might still be capable of disclosing something of the Christian transcendent, however contingent and fleeting the context may be. Music analysis, on the other hand, shows how meaning in music is dependent upon musical context: something that theology has often struggled to grasp. Music analysis’s provision of rational discourse of musical structures can also provide a qualifier and lend evidence to theological readings of music. This proves indispensable to my theological readings of Vaughan Williams in chapters two, three, and four.

Nattiez attempts to distinguish object, observer, and creator in his method, whilst advocating for an approach that takes the interaction between all three seriously. This is the approach that is adopted here: Nattiez refers to this as ‘type 6’ of music analysis, where ‘an immanent analysis is equally relevant to the poietic as to the esthetic.’<sup>137</sup> For Heaney, this is the preferred approach:

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>137</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, 142–43.

In music of and within faith circles, the ideal will be this sixth approach, in which the piece in itself, how it is received over time, and where it was born of come together in evaluating and discerning its impact in the present moment and its capacity of helping mediate and translate faith.<sup>138</sup>

Chapters three and four show the efficacy of this approach in the case of Vaughan Williams's symphonies. This is, in part, due to the complex ways that poietic, esthetic, and trace levels interact: each of these chapters applies the tripartition in a straightforward way as a means of introducing these layers of meaning, before a more integrative analysis is offered. The question of evidence – of what sort, and of how it is used – is vital to negotiate and state clearly in the investigation of religious meaning in music; all the more so in when claims of music's relationship with theology are tested. This is something that the interaction of music analysis and theology – the vital partnership in such an approach – can assist in. It is also the most challenging and least-attempted part of music theological method: even Heaney does not engage substantially with methods of analysis or bodies of music theory. The next section explores this relationship in more detail by considering the methodological approaches of theology and music analysis. Drawing from scholarship on the relationship between science and religion, I investigate the ontological underpinnings of both approaches to music to expose their similarities, their differences, and their potential symbioses. In doing so, the methodological grounding for the entire thesis is fully articulated.

## **Interdisciplines II: Music Theology and Analysis**

### **Science and Religion**

Whilst the relationship between music analysis and theology often remains unspoken, it bears important similarities to a more well-established topic of discourse: the relationship between science and religion.<sup>139</sup> To the extent that music analysis (paired with theory) shares an approach with the natural sciences, the comparison is a close one. In fact, the relationship

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<sup>138</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 98.

<sup>139</sup> The literature on this topic is extensive. The research most congenial to the approach adopted here includes Torrence, *Theological Science*; Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*; John C. Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship Between Science and Theology* (London: SPCK, 1991); McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature*; McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 2 – Reality*; McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 3 – Theory*; Nicholas Spencer, *Magisteria: the Entangled Histories of Science and Religion* (London: Oneworld, 2023).

between theology and music analysis might be seen as a microcosm of perceived tensions between theological and scientific ways of interacting with the world around us.<sup>140</sup> Similar anxieties are at play in this debate: on the one hand, that music analysis might hinder or ‘disprove’ theological engagement with music, on the other that theology might read music in ways that require suppressing analytical evidence. However, as various scholars have noted, there are important points of similarity between science and religion that afford the two a close kinship with the possibility of genuine interaction and mutual gain. Many of these same points of similarity can be seen to exist between music analysis and theology. The science-religion discourse offers insights into how good relations between theology and music analysis might be achieved and maintained.

The relationship between science and religion can be understood through different models.<sup>141</sup> I explore these in relation to Vaughan Williams’s thought in Chapter 3. In a similar way, different models could be posited in terms of how music analysis and theology relate. However, whilst ‘conflict’ ‘complexity’ and ‘complementarity’ might be postulated, the definitive mode of interaction on the surface appears to be ‘incommunicado’. The disciplines of music analysis and theology do not often explicitly converse; whilst they may circle each other, this tends to happen so implicitly that their relationship is barely commented on. Their underlying relationships remain obscured.

Theological approaches to music tend to eschew explicit engagement with music analysis, despite often relying on analytical detail in their arguments. Jeremy Begbie’s work, for example, contains implicit recourse to music analysis – such as his application of theories of time and repetition – but there is little engagement with the method and scope of music analysis as a field.<sup>142</sup> Elsewhere, he expresses uncertainty regarding the capacity for music to carry specific meaning.<sup>143</sup> For Begbie, the role of music in theology is not predicated on this; therefore, his arguments tend to avoid direct contact with music analysis. The writings of David Brown and Gavin Hopps remain more open to musical meaning.<sup>144</sup> However, neither engage substantively with music analysis, preferring to offer simple verbal descriptions of music to aid theological interpretation. Proponents of music analysis are similarly reticent to engage with

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<sup>140</sup> Chua, “Music as the Mouthpiece of Theology”, 142–53.

<sup>141</sup> John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>142</sup> Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, 156–64.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>144</sup> Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*, 6.

theology, though perhaps for different reasons. Since analysis proceeds from the music first,<sup>145</sup> its potential interaction with theology tends to be limited to where this seems to be self-evident, for example, in analyses of Messiaen, Bruckner, or Bach. Whilst all music theology might be analytical, not all music analysis is theological. Yet, analytical accounts of the capacity of music for religious experience tend to be theologically lacking.

In some cases, the lack of correspondence between music analysis and theology leads to implicit conflict between them. Karl Barth's theological reading of Mozart, for example, demonstrates (and requires) ignorance of both analytical and musicological research.<sup>146</sup> Occasionally, the conflict model is espoused more explicitly: musicologist Daniel Chua, for example, describes the scientific underpinning of both music analysis and music theory as a potential enemy to theological engagement with music.<sup>147</sup> Danuta Mirka, along similar lines (though an apparently different perspective), pits Martin Luther's 'theological speculation' directly against the 'scientific explanation' of the analytical application of topic theory.<sup>148</sup>

Rarely, an opinion is voiced that suggests a possible compatibility between music analysis and theology. Maeve Heaney provides perhaps the most extensive insight into how theological and analytical accounts of music might relate. Whilst not specifically undertaking analysis, Heaney's work sketches an important role for it in theological method. In doing so, as I discuss above, she draws heavily on the work of Jean-Jacques Nattiez, and positions analysis as central to studying music and theological meaning.<sup>149</sup>

Despite the lack of explicit discussion of the relationship between theology and music analysis, a multiplicity of interactions can be observed under the surface. Overall, like the science-religion discourse, the best thesis for comprehending this relationship turns out to be one of complexity.<sup>150</sup> It is the guiding principle of this thesis that, if any sense is to be made of discussions surrounding the purported ability of Vaughan Williams's music to elicit religious experience and express theological ideas, then the relationship between music analysis and theology must be addressed. Their distinctive accounts must engage in discourse at ontological, epistemological, and methodological levels. As such, this section addresses the following questions: How do these different disciplines understand music? What are their methodological

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<sup>145</sup> Bent and Pople, "Music Analysis", 526.

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, 31–49.

<sup>147</sup> Chua, "Music as the Mouthpiece of Theology", 142–53.

<sup>148</sup> Danuta Mirka, "Introduction", in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10.

<sup>149</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 69–102.

<sup>150</sup> Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, 6.

underpinnings? How do they differ, how are they similar, and how might they interact fruitfully? How might their interaction address issues of musical meaning, Christian revelation, and cultural specificity? This chapter argues that, despite their differences, the musical ontologies of music analysis and theology have the potential to coexist fruitfully. This is facilitated by a shared commitment to intelligibility as an ontological prime, a shared belief in the emergent properties of music, and a shared scientific method. Music analysis and theology both form viable and distinct ways of understanding music; they possess the capacity to work together in a way which interrogates the theological meaningfulness of music in culturally specific contexts. This capacity provides the basis for the approach I adopt in chapters two, three, and four.

### **Ontology and Epistemology**

Contemporary dialogue between science and theology is couched in a philosophical commitment to critical realism.<sup>151</sup> In theology, as I discuss above, revelation affords an intelligibility of God. However, this intelligibility is not complete: God's immanence does not cancel out God's transcendence. Theology thus proceeds as a critical-realist endeavour, where a separation between the 'real' and the 'observed' is preserved. It is this critical realism which underscores theology's approach to 'the way things are': whilst it suggests that the answer to why humans find the world around them intelligible lies in their created origin, it differentiates between the real and an understanding of the same. Critical realism also underscores the relationship between theology and biblical text, and its formation of doctrine.<sup>152</sup> The natural and social sciences adhere to the same philosophical framework; Roy Bhaskar, whose work is most closely associated with critical realism, differentiates between real, actual, and empirical domains in scientific ontology.<sup>153</sup> In this way the epistemic fallacy of 'reducing statements about being to statements about knowledge' is avoided.<sup>154</sup> Bhaskar also argues for the irreducibility of emergent strata;<sup>155</sup> as Alister McGrath notes, a critical-realist approach

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<sup>151</sup> McGrath, *The Science of God*, 139–52.

<sup>152</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 32–37.

<sup>153</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, Second Edition ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 2.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–29.

<sup>155</sup> Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 107–15.

‘recognizes that reality is multi-levelled, and that a working method appropriate for one level [...] may not work at another’.<sup>156</sup>

Because of this critical-realist outlook, both theology and science are predicated on intelligibility: as Lonergan notes, the ontological reality is intelligibility of reality, not reality itself.<sup>157</sup> Critical realism also accounts for the observer-centric nature of knowledge creation in the scientific method: something Polyani relates to the concept of ‘tacit’ knowledge.<sup>158</sup> It acknowledges the fact that in both science and theology the scholar is unable to remove themselves from the reality which they are studying. The shared epistemology of science and theology affords them the possibility of effective communication; they can be understood as disciplines seeking to understand reality in distinct but philosophically coherent ways. Science and theology emerge as sharing a consistent ontology and epistemology. Furthermore, the differences between theological and scientific method are coherent with Bhaskar’s discussion of the appropriateness of the approaches of different disciplines for different levels of reality.<sup>159</sup>

Like most sciences, both theology and music analysis give a critical realist account – in this case, of music – in which the ontological prime is intelligibility. For music analysis, this intelligibility is epistemologically predicated on the conceptual origins of music. Music’s conceptual dimensions are given priority over its embodied ones: Horton, for example, invokes Karl Popper, suggesting that analysis studies music as a ‘World 3’ object.<sup>160</sup> World 3 is defined as ‘the world of products of the human mind’, and, in Popper’s theory, it is autonomous from both ‘World 1’ (‘the world of physical entities’) and ‘World 2’ (‘the world of mental states provoked by World 1’).<sup>161</sup> Whilst analysis accepts that music exists in World 1, its epistemological approach is predicated upon the existence of music in World 3: it suggests that music is intelligible because it owes its very existence to human intelligence. Like music analysis, though for different reasons, the ontological basis for theology is intelligibility. Theology is epistemologically possible because of revelation: God intentionally communicates in ways that are intelligible to the human mind. Or, to look at it another way, theology suggests that humans possess a capacity to know God partly because they are made in God’s image.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> McGrath, *The Science of God*, 24.

<sup>157</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 101.

<sup>158</sup> Michael Polyani, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1–26.

<sup>159</sup> Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar’s Philosophy*, 107–15.

<sup>160</sup> Horton, “On the Musicological Necessity of Musical Analysis”, 80.

<sup>161</sup> Karl Popper and John Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1983), 36–38.

<sup>162</sup> Gen 1:26–27, 2:7

Theology posits the same epistemology for the study of the world around us: reality is intelligible for the same reason. Music, therefore, does not have to rely on its credentials as a product of the human mind to be intelligible: rather, the crucial factor is that both of these exist ultimately as part of an intelligible creation. Furthermore, the rationale for perception of the emergent properties of music – including its aesthetic dimension – has the same explanation: the human mind is made in the image of God.

Both music analysis and theology are invested in the emergent properties of music: both, in some way, consider music to be partially autonomous. In line with Bhaskar's conception of a levelled reality, each discipline approaches the subject appropriately – in a way that is 'shaped by the reality encountered'<sup>163</sup> – without reducing it to nothing more than the layer below.<sup>164</sup> Music, for example, is more than *just* sound waves or *just* social behaviour. Whilst physics and anthropology are appropriate disciplines to engage with these elements of music, they would not exhaustively uncover all that music is. The different ways in which theology and music analysis conceive of the emergent properties of music underscore important differences between them, and this dictates their approaches to the subject.

Whilst the definitions of music offered by music analysis and theology are complementary, they are not identical. Music analysis proceeds with the assumption that music is more than just esthetic and poietic processes. Though these remain necessary music remains, in some way, conceptual. As a product of the human mind, music is fundamentally about and by humans. Therefore, because music is reflective of the human mind, music analysis, ultimately reveals humanity. The analytical act is thus a self-reflective one, in which humanity seeks to understand itself through its music. Following Bhaskar's theory, music analysis is an appropriate, viable, but incomplete way of dealing with the emergent properties of music. Theological approaches to music tend to consider an extra dimension to the emergence of music. Theology considers music to be more than just a product of the human mind: it is, more fundamentally, part of the created order. It is for this reason that music theology approaches its subject as something that is 'intrinsically theological'.<sup>165</sup> The validity of this approach is borne out in the significant evidence for religious experience in the context of music.<sup>166</sup> This approach is often underscored by a natural theology that goes beyond the mere intelligibility of music;

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<sup>163</sup> John C. Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief* (London: SPCK, 1994), 33.

<sup>164</sup> Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*, 107–15.

<sup>165</sup> Zon, "Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies", 103.

<sup>166</sup> Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*, 1–3.

because music is created by creative creations, it has the potential to reveal the Creator behind all these things: perhaps, in some way, to participate in general revelation. Music, therefore, does not just reveal humanity: it can reveal God, too, and can serve as an example for ‘the way things are’ in creation. This idea, as I explain above, is stated to varying degrees of strength within the discipline. These differences in ontology and epistemology have important ramifications for the musical methodologies of music analysis and theology.

## The Origins of Music

At the root of how theology and music analysis consider the emergent properties of music lies the question of the origin of music. Here, music analysis and theology tend to express diverging opinions which are implicated in the science-religion discourse. The anthropocentric understanding of music offered by music analysis aligns with the views of Herbert Spencer; in this approach, the origin of music lies in impassioned speech. Music in Spencerian terms is posterior to language, and therefore necessarily conceptual: it becomes evidence of a higher intelligence not shared with other animals.<sup>167</sup> Music is thus afforded a place at the very end of a teleological evolution: it is inherently human and does not exist outside of the human sphere of influence. Both Popper and the field of music analysis in general recapitulate these ideals; in doing so, they prioritise music’s ‘World 3’ dimensions. The viability of Popper’s autonomous world 3 is, however, contested.<sup>168</sup> Popper’s ontology differs sharply from the monist account that most theologians support.<sup>169</sup>

In opposition to Spencer, Charles Darwin postulates that the origins of music lie before the dawn of humanity. He suggests that the presence of musical faculties is determined by the principles of sexual selection seen in many animals.<sup>170</sup> Darwin methodically strips away the idea that music is inherently linked to – or dependent upon – a teleological progression of nature. Crucially, Darwin places the origin of music prior to the development of language: for him, in opposition to Spencer, it is an evolutionary precedent to language.<sup>171</sup> The acceptance of the Spencerian view in Victorian culture is emblematic of what Peter Bowler calls the ‘non-

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<sup>167</sup> Herbert Spencer, “On the Origin and Function of Music”, in *Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects* (The Floating Press, [1875] 2009), 318.

<sup>168</sup> Volker Gadenne, “Is Popper’s Third World Autonomous?”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 46, no. 3 (2016): 289–96.

<sup>169</sup> Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief*, 21.

<sup>170</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Revised and Augmented ed. (New York: D. Appleton, [1871] 1889), 218.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

Darwinian revolution'.<sup>172</sup> Ironically, theological approaches to music tend to be far more aligned to Darwin than they are to Spencer. Theology, unlike music analysis, postulates God as the origin of music, sometimes in quite a literal sense.<sup>173</sup> Human beings, like other animals, create music because God does. Whilst a differentiation between human and animal music is maintained, this is a matter of degree.<sup>174</sup> A theological ontology of music is, thus, far less anthropocentric. Furthermore, it is not tied to viewing music as fundamentally conceptual. Music, for theology, is thoroughly embodied and immanent: congenital in all life. Chapter 3 explores these ideas of musical origins more broadly, and links them both to natural theology in general and Vaughan Williams's thought in particular.

## Methodology

As well as sharing an epistemological underpinning, theology and music analysis share something of a scientific method. Music analysis conducts experiments, tests hypotheses, and can incorporate an empirical approach.<sup>175</sup> Theology often follows the scientific-methodical pattern of observation, hypothesis, experiment/analysis, and interpretation.<sup>176</sup> Both also heavily rely upon the creation of and interaction with theory.<sup>177</sup> The scientific methods of music analysis and theology also share a commitment to navigating what Popper calls 'the problem of induction'.<sup>178</sup> Whilst music analysis might look to Popper as a way of understanding the partial autonomy of music, its scientific method is non-Popperian in that it foregrounds induction as an important principle; this is particularly clear in its interaction with theory.<sup>179</sup> Popper rejects induction, and suggests 'falsifiability' as the only reliable indication of a scientific system; as such, Popper argues that 'it must be possible for an empirical scientific

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<sup>172</sup> Peter J. Bowler, *The non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 5.

<sup>173</sup> Harrison, "Augustine and the Art of Music", 31.

<sup>174</sup> In Luther's theory of music, for example, animal and human music is put in the same category of 'Musica Humana', though only human music is linked to 'Musica Caelestis'. J Andreas Loewe, "'Musica Est Optimum': Martin Luther's Theory of Music", (2013): 583–93..

<sup>175</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy provide one example of an empirical approach to musical form. James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>176</sup> As Zon notes, Music Theology is science. Zon, "Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies", 105.

<sup>177</sup> McGrath, *The Science of God*, 171–245.

<sup>178</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge, [1935] 2002), 4.

<sup>179</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, for example, use analyses of music written by Haydn, Beethoven, and Mozart to establish 'inductively inferred norms' for their theory of sonata form. See Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, v.

system to be refuted by experience'.<sup>180</sup> Falsifiability may not be possible for all analytical propositions, but this does not prevent it from progressing. Similarly, music analysis, perhaps more so than science, requires tacit skills that cannot easily be accommodated in Popper's philosophy. Theology also works inductively; this becomes increasingly so, McGrath argues, as theology interacts with science.<sup>181</sup>

However, whilst the methods of music analysis and theology might be scientific, their subject matter and overall trajectory diverge from traditional scientific fields of study. Both theology and music analysis are interested in the rational enquiry of phenomena outside the traditional scope of the natural sciences, though for different reasons. Perhaps more importantly, the outcome and progress of these disciplines is not always scientific. Whereas the progression of science might exhibit an 'ever tightening grip on reality',<sup>182</sup> music analysis and theology do not enjoy the same sense of teleology. The result of analysis, as Agawu notes, is more analysis; it is never 'finished'.<sup>183</sup> Theology remains similarly incomplete due to the challenge of its 'infinite Subject [...] beyond the total grasp of finite minds'.<sup>184</sup> The natural sciences converge; both theology and music analysis diverge. Despite this, both theology and music analysis posit a method which remains anchored to their sources. Like the sciences, they are based in experience; they are essentially phenomenological disciplines. Whilst a complete understanding of music is unattainable in a critical-realist approach, neither music analysis nor theology abandon rationality or the concept of truth.<sup>185</sup> Music analysis provides a framework for rational discourse about music; this discourse, whilst never completed, always remains minimally separated from any given music: in other words, it finds new ways of being musicocentric. Theology, similarly, is beholden to its founding documents – even though it may dispute the authorial weight afforded to these documents – and generates rational discourse relating to these sources. In this way, theological approaches to musical religious experience require a weighing of what music might say against what has been said both in tradition and in the scripture, although there exist profound differences as to where this weighing should occur, and what the weighting between them should be.<sup>186</sup> Theology might aim for consensus, and

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<sup>180</sup> Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 18.

<sup>181</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Territories of Human Reason: Science and Theology in an Age of Multiple Rationalities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 172–75.

<sup>182</sup> Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, 22.

<sup>183</sup> Agawu, "How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In Again", 270.

<sup>184</sup> Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief*, 39.

<sup>185</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, 41.

<sup>186</sup> Hopps, "Negative capability and religious experience", 82–84.

might work to maintain a sense of orthodoxy, but it revels in the diversity of approaches in the light of its infinite subject.

Whilst music analysis and theology share many aspects of their method, there remain fundamental differences in their approaches. Because of their different conceptions of music's nature and origin, music analysis and theology answer similar questions in different ways. The difference between theology and music analysis is made particularly evident where their domains overlap: the question of musical religious experience. Music analysis posits that, because music is created by rational beings and is inherently conceptual, experience of it can be explained by a rational inquiry into its structure; in this way, it primarily reveals the ways in which humans understand music. Whilst it might remain committed to understanding the 'real', it does not suggest that understanding of the real and the real is the same. Because of the nature of this approach, mechanism is the main insight music analysis can offer into the emergent properties of music. It can reveal how experience of music is constructed, and how the structures of music affect listeners. Thus, as Bent notes, the guiding question of music analysis is: 'How does it work?'.<sup>187</sup> Its method is configured to answer this question over any other. In answer to the question: 'why does listening to Vaughan Williams elicit religious experience?', an analyst might offer causal explanations drawn from musico-centric data in dialogue with a cultural framework of musical meaning. Because a theologian generally considers music to be intrinsically theological, they will answer this question differently, drawing on the doctrine of revelation. The guiding question here might still be 'how does it work?', but the explanation is metaphysical, not causal.<sup>188</sup>

### **Towards Complementarity**

The disciplines of music analysis and theology have the potential for a better, more communicative relationship than they currently enjoy. There is enough similarity between the disciplines in terms of ontology, epistemology, and method to facilitate this. Most important here is their shared commitment to intelligibility as an ontological prime, a shared belief in the emergent properties of music, and a shared scientific method. Furthermore, their divergent assumptions and the different approaches they employ do not cancel each other out; rather,

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<sup>187</sup> Bent and Pople, "Music Analysis", 528.

<sup>188</sup> Zon, "Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies", 106.

they make for a fuller picture. This is precisely what I mean by ‘complementary’: that their compatible but distinct approaches to music make for a more complete scholarly field of vision. The issue of musical religious experience demonstrates this particularly clearly. Dialogue with music analysis on this issue is very beneficial to music theology, which remains ill-equipped to answer the question: ‘how does it work?’ in musically causal terms. Theology is required to engage in dialogue with the natural sciences when it talks about the natural world, as McGrath notes:

A fundamental assumption of a scientific theology is that, since the ontology of the natural world is determined by and reflects its status as God’s creation, the working methods and assumptions of the natural science can stimulate and inform the working methods and assumptions of a responsible Christian theology.<sup>189</sup>

Similarly, I propose that music theology, as a scientific theology, is greatly enriched by dialogue with music analysis, which has the potential to undertake a beneficial ancillary role. In this arrangement, music analysis provides musically casual answers to questions such as: ‘how does music communicate theologically’? It provides for theology an understanding of the semiotic capabilities of music as well as a language for rational discussion of those musical structures that are particularly implicated in the construction of theological meaning. It also provides insight into how historically situated music expresses theological issues: I explore this idea in the case of Vaughan Williams throughout chapters three and four. Music analysis, furthermore, provides a regulatory function; it submits theological claims about music to rational musicological enquiry.

There is also scope for music analysis to benefit from this relationship, though perhaps to a lesser extent; as mentioned above, whilst all music theology is analytical, not all music analysis is theological. Music analysis, nevertheless, is fundamentally concerned with making sense of musical structures, and the experience of these structures is often hugely influenced by theological concerns. Moreover, as I discuss above, there is wide evidence of religious experiences in music. A dialogue with theology would benefit music analysis by enabling it to quantify and understand these factors in an appropriate way. The theological mindset behind both reception and production of music is an important and often-ignored area that music analysis might explore with theological help. Claims of religious experience in music might not only be put to the test of analytical enquiry, but also to that of the theological doctrine of revelation. Theology assists in answering the questions: ‘Why is music read as relating to

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<sup>189</sup> McGrath, *The Science of God*, 22.

transcendence?’ ‘On what grounds can it be claimed that music reveals God?’. In this way, theology plays an ancillary role to music analysis. In particular, the principles of natural theology present themselves as an appropriate dialogue partner.<sup>190</sup>

### **Methodology and Complementarity**

This chapter argues that the exploration of any relationship between music and theology – as is evident in the case of Vaughan Williams – requires an interdisciplinary approach. Studies of music and theology offer distinctive but complementary approaches to issues of meaning: for this reason, any approach that completely observes disciplinary boundaries will fail to do justice to the task of investigating the phenomenon of musical religious experience. An alternative is offered by the field of music theology: whilst musicology is invariably an interdiscipline, various factors have inhibited the growth of this particular partnership. However, music theology does not often directly interrogate the semiological capabilities of music as outlined in Heaney’s adoption of Nattiez. This is of central importance to the research area of this thesis: in particular, the fields of music and analysis and theology need to be partnered, alongside an awareness of culturally contingent meanings garnered from historical-musicological method. Such an investigation into the relationship between theological ‘truths’ and musical ‘meanings’ foregrounds the partial autonomy of music by taking the ‘trace’ level seriously as a layer of meaning.

The fields of music analysis and theology offer distinct but complementary ontologies of music, in the sense that their distinctive approaches have the potential to combine and improve the scholarly grasp of music’s theological dimensions. Comprehending religious experiences of music requires theological and analytical interaction. However, this is belied by a lack of discussion between these fields: their interaction is often implicit and unspecified. Through recourse to the science-religion discourse, I propose that theology and music analysis share a commitment to critical realism, intelligibility, and belief in the emergent properties of music that constitutes its partial autonomy. Furthermore, both fields employ elements of a scientific method to understand the emergent properties of music. Both, in their own way, are more than capable of attending to the culturally embodied nature of musical meaning; neither subscribe to the complete autonomy of music. These points of contact provide a framework for interaction between these fields. However, theology and music analysis differ in various ways

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 88–92.

which enhances their potential complementarity. Their conception of the emergent properties of music, their understanding of the origins of music, and their underlying assumptions differ in a way that attends to different levels of musical reality. Their bifurcated approaches intersect at the point of musical religious experience: a phenomenon that their interaction has the potential to investigate successfully.

Whilst I argue that the approach outlined in this chapter is successful in addressing the main research questions of my thesis, it contains important limitations. One such limitation is its lack of engagement with the embodied, performative contexts in which music is often encountered. This has not often been attempted with regards to Vaughan Williams though Alan Atlas, for example, offers analyses of various recorded performances of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, and includes a consideration of the dimensions of Gloucester Cathedral: the space for which the music was originally written.<sup>191</sup> More broadly, I have not attempted to engage fully with the idea of ‘musicking’ in the way that other music theologians have.<sup>192</sup>

A second limitation can be found in my treatment of the esthetic level: this would benefit from dialogue with the scientific field of music psychology. The phenomenon of musical ‘chills’, in particular, seems relevant to discussions of musical affordance structures. Bannister and Eerola identify two types of ‘chills’: ‘[...] vigilance chills, linked to awe, expectancy, and auditory looming; and social chills, linked to being moved, empathy, and social bonding.’<sup>193</sup> These correspond closely to Vaughan Williams’s transcendent and social approaches to music, and suggest intriguing lines of enquiry for the empirical study of affordance structures. Whilst such concerns lie, by necessity, beyond the scope of my thesis, research which successfully rectifies them with the main issues of meaning covered here would make a significant contribution to the field of music theology.

A third limitation lies in the fact that the approach outlined here is only as strong as current analytical scholarship. Many aspects of music lie beyond the current grasp of music analysis. The music theory I engage with here is almost entirely pitch-based. Some recent

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<sup>191</sup> Allan W. Atlas, “On the Structure and Proportions of Vaughan Williams's "Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis"”, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>192</sup> See Zon, “Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies”, especially 108–09.

<sup>193</sup> Scott Bannister and Tuomas Eerola, “Vigilance and Social Chills with Music: Evidence for Two Types of Musical Chills”, *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 17, no. 2 (2023): 242. See also Scott Bannister, “A survey into the experience of musically induced chills: Emotions, situations and music”, *Psychology of Music* 48, no. 2 (2020).

attempts to overhaul music theory, however, argue that all musical parameters are unified by the idea of frequency: ‘all music’ Chua and Rehding suggest, ‘is repetition’.<sup>194</sup> Whilst my pitch-based approach supports important affordance structures, large aspects of the music – most notably, perhaps, its texture and rhythm – are left relatively unaddressed. This is largely the case across Vaughan Williams scholarship: Lionel Pike’s investigation of the ‘unjustly neglected’ parameter of rhythm in the symphonies is, by the writer’s own admission, ‘preliminary’.<sup>195</sup>

Overall, however, theology and music analysis emerge here as complementary ways of engaging with musical reality as experienced. Though this interaction has the potential to benefit both theological and analytical ways of engaging with music, this is perhaps most significant for the former. Lonergan’s definition of theology as ‘negotiating with religion and a cultural matrix’ seems apt:<sup>196</sup> theology, augmented by music analysis, performs this function in the case of religious musical meaning. In the case of Vaughan Williams, the intersection of these fields explains, both causally and theologically, how and why his music elicits a religious response. In addition, this approach allows for critical engagement and rational discourse relating to readings of Vaughan Williams’s music as transcendent and, most importantly, provides a methodological framework for reading his music theologically. The following chapter outlines various important affordance structures implicated in this process.

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<sup>194</sup> Daniel Chua and Alexander Rehding, *Alien Listening: Voyager’s Golden Record and Music from Earth* (New York: Zone Books, 2021), 83–84.

<sup>195</sup> Lionel Pike, “Rhythm in the Symphonies: a Preliminary Investigation”, in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166.

<sup>196</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi.

## 2. Theology and Vocal Music

### Introduction

#### A Toolkit for Affordance Structures

The concept of affordance structures, according to Hopps, allows the recognition of ‘both the specific properties of music and the openness of its potential effects,’ and therefore enables ‘a pragmatic middle course between ‘immanent’ and ‘attributed’ models of meaning.’<sup>1</sup> In doing so, they mediate between the ‘trace’ and ‘esthetic’ levels of meaning outlined in the tripartition. As Cook suggests, musical meanings can be understood as ‘afforded (and hence constrained) by the properties of the musical trace while at the same time recognizing their cultural constructedness’.<sup>2</sup> These structures are, therefore, rooted in the religious experience of those who engage with music, and yet irreducibly tied to musical parameters. A pertinent question for the scope of this thesis would, therefore, be: what affordance structures does Vaughan Williams’s music exhibit? Which musical attributes are most consistently linked to theological meaning and religious experience?

In this thesis, I use the term ‘affordance structure’ to refer to specific elements of the trace level that are likely to suggest theological meaning in particular cultural contexts. Vaughan Williams’s music, as this chapter argues, contains such structures within various diverse aspects of the musical trace. Affordance structures are, therefore, the essential building blocks of this thesis, which reads Vaughan Williams’s theologically. I argue that this is a reasonable approach when music semiologically accesses a vocabulary of theological ideas. Music analysis, as I describe above, has an important role to play in the investigation of many of these structures. It can quantify the musical construction of these affordance structures, map where they occur both locally and globally, and analyse their interaction.

In this chapter, I outline several key theological affordance structures in the specific case of Vaughan Williams and establish a music-theological toolkit for their investigation. I

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<sup>1</sup> Gavin Hopps, “Music and Theology: Some Reflections on ‘the Listener’s Share’”, in *Annunciations: Sacred Music for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. George Corbett (OpenBook, 2019), 351, note 62.

<sup>2</sup> Cook, “Theorizing Musical Meaning”, 184.

also explore how these structures are interpreted symbolically using Peirce's icon–index–symbol trichotomy (as described in Chapter 1). In doing so, the symbols by which music engages with theology are located and their means of signification is explained; going forward, this enables both a theological reading of Vaughan Williams's music, and critiques of other readings of his music as relating to theological concepts. These structures pertain strongly to Symphony No. 5 and the *Sinfonia Antartica*: thus, the toolkit presented in this chapter provides the base of my theological engagement with these pieces in chapters three and four. In the same way that these affordance structures form the basis of theological expression in music, so the tools used to analyse them are required for the theological reading of music. Ultimately, this approach allows the following questions to be addressed: How do musical structures support theological meaning? What is the underpinning theology expressed through Vaughan Williams's music? How does this music depict the transcendent: both in terms of source and attributes?

In order to trace how these affordance structures express theological ideas, the most straightforward cases need to be considered first. The most immediately obvious affordance structure is, of course, explicitly theological text. The way in which Vaughan Williams sets theological text, and the theological themes observed in text selection, constitute important lines of enquiry for the broader investigation at hand. The common musical structures used to set theological text are likely to be affordance structures when they occur in other places: for example, in the symphonies. I argue that the reception history of Vaughan Williams bears this supposition out. Following this I introduce two related musical parameters – modality and harmony – that feature very prominently in descriptions of Vaughan Williams's work in terms of its theological meaning. Finally, this chapter considers intertextuality, followed by a presentation of a holistic approach that integrates all these affordance structures. The system of affordance structures in Vaughan Williams's music is observably consistent across his output. Thus, these structures form semiological short circuits and dialogues across pieces: this has the effect of modulating meaning and providing additional routes into reading such music theologically.

Whilst the concept of affordance structures focuses primarily on the 'trace' and 'esthetic' levels, the 'poietic' dimension of musical meaning is often a potent component in the theological reception of Vaughan Williams's music. As I argue below, and in Chapter 3, there is good evidence to suggest that Vaughan Williams himself considered the writing of music to be a theological act: and a natural-theological one at that. Thus, whilst the mechanisms

of theological affordance structures are not circumscribed by compositional intent, the likelihood of their presence is greatly enhanced by it.

### **Communicating a Vision**

At the centre of Vaughan Williams's musical ethos lies a belief in the possibility of communication through music. His writings on music are founded upon the principle that the composer's role is to express a personal vision through their art. Writing in 1902, he argues that 'A musician who wishes to say anything worth saying must first of all express himself [sic] – in fact, his music must be the natural utterance of his own natural emotions.'<sup>3</sup> This idea occupied the composer for his entire career; during his acceptance lecture for Yale's Howland Medal some fifty years later, he outlined the very same belief, this time expanding its application to the process of composition.

A musician, or any artist for that matter, has a vision. At first it is vague and cannot be accurately expressed [...] It has to be crystallised into some definite form. And in the case of music the man [sic] who has to have had this vision, has to crystallise it into definite musical sounds. And that is so especially if he wants others to share the vision with him. But how are these musical sounds to be explained to people? [...] as you know musicians have invented what is I must confess, a very incomplete and clumsy system of symbols, dots, dashes, circles, and so on, to indicate what sounds he wishes to be made, so that his vision may be realised. In fact, he is saying, by means of these symbols to anybody who knows, 'If you blow or scratch or hit, in the way indicated by these dots and dashes, you will (I hope) achieve, ultimately, the vision which I have in mind.'<sup>4</sup>

For Vaughan Williams music is, before it is anything else, the expression of a subjective experience. He also suggests that music is peculiarly well suited to this purpose, as it is 'the subtlest, most sensitive, and purest means of self-expression, is supposed to be on a plane by itself, a thing detached from its surroundings, a mere sensation to be enjoyed by the epicure.'<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, his writings on music and nationality argue that this expression through art is intimately connected to the artist and their cultural context:

A work of art, if it is to have strength and vitality- in short, if it is to have any value, must grow out of the character of its inventor. It must be the outcome of the desire for self-expression on

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "A School of English Music", *The Vocalist* 1, no. 1 (1902). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Howland Medal Lecture". Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 102–03.

<sup>5</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?". Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 40. Here, Vaughan Williams invokes the sentiments of Walter Pater, who famously suggested that 'all art constantly aspires to the condition of music.' See Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L Hill (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, [1893] 1980), 304.

the part of some person or group of persons, otherwise it means nothing either to those who make it or those who hear, see, or read it.<sup>6</sup>

In this way, if the art is successful then something of the artist's context is also to be found in the musical expression of their vision. It is this compositional ethos that lies behind Vaughan Williams's most famous saying, repeated across his written output: that the composer '[...] must not shut himself [sic] up and think about art, he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community— if we seek for art we shall not find it.'<sup>7</sup>

## Visions of the Beyond

The primary type of vision for the artist, according to Vaughan Williams, is one which 'goes beyond' the mundane normality of life:

We all, whether we are artists or not, experience moments when we want to get outside the limitations of ordinary life, when we see dimly a vision of something beyond. These moments affect us in different ways [...] those whom we call artists find the desire to create beauty irresistible [...] for composers, it takes the form of the magic of ordered sound.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, Vaughan Williams elevates the expression of such a vision to the level of an all-encompassing definition of art.

Before going any further may we take it that the object of an art is to obtain a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties—of that, in fact, which is spiritual? and that the means which we employ to induce this revelation are those very senses and faculties themselves? The human, visible, audible and intelligible media which artists (of all kinds) use, are symbols not of other visible and audible things but of what lies beyond sense and knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Vaughan Williams explicitly links this type of vision to the expressive role of a composer. In this way, the composer's job becomes one of articulating their vision of the beyond: '[...] the musical composer, in effect, says to his performers [...] "I desire to produce a certain spiritual result on certain people; I hope and believe that if you blow, and scrape, and hit in a particular manner this spiritual effect will result [...]"'<sup>10</sup> In articulating a belief in – and experience of – a 'beyond', and in locating the essence of musical art in the communication of

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "British Music", *The Music Student* 7, no. 1–4 (1914). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Who Wants the English Composer?". Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 13–14.

<sup>9</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Letter and the Spirit", 88.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

this vision, Vaughan Williams implicates himself, and the act of musical composition, in the business of theology: ‘Faith seeking understanding’, as Anselm defines it.<sup>11</sup> According to his own ideas, his music should be, amongst other things, an attempt to communicate his personal vision of the ‘beyond’: in other words, an embodiment of his theology.

As I argue in the introduction, virtually all aspects of Vaughan Williams available to scholarly study – his writings, compositions, cultural context, and reception – impinge upon and are intimately connected with theological issues. In short: understanding Vaughan Williams requires a music-theological approach. In Chapter 1, I defend the legitimacy of this approach and shows how it might draw from the interaction of theological and musicological ontology and method. In light of Vaughan Williams’s statements regarding music and expression, it becomes clear that in approaching his music theologically I am also, in several significant ways, approaching it through his own conceptualisation of the artistic process. Attempting to understand his music in these terms is by no means a comprehensive approach; however, I argue that using the composer’s own ideas to interrogate his music helps in understanding the theology which underpins it, and the way that this is expressed in his music. If, as Vaughan Williams himself claims, ‘[...] the business of the composer is to make his visions intelligible to others,’<sup>12</sup> then the business of the music theologian should incorporate consideration of these visions as a matter of some importance.

## **Tripartition**

Such an approach cannot proceed on the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between compositional intent and reception. Vaughan Williams wrote under no illusion of the complexities of musical communication. He understood the visions ‘achieved’ by performances of his music were likely to be interpreted in distinct and diverse ways not always continuous with his own intentions. For example, whilst he disliked Frank Howes’s description of his Symphony No. 6 as a ‘war symphony’ in *The Times*, he admitted that there was ‘nothing to prevent any writer from expressing his [sic] opinion’ with regards to interpretations of his music.<sup>13</sup> As I suggest in Chapter 1, Nattiez’s tripartition provides the best conceptualisation of this problem and the most successful way of navigating through it. Michael Klein offers a

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<sup>11</sup> St. Anselm, *Monologion*, 1 (I:14).

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “The Romantic in Music: Some Thoughts on Brahms”, *The Music Student* 2, no. 8 (1910). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 169.

<sup>13</sup> Hugh Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 453.

particularly useful way of applying Nattiez's tripartition with regards to interpreting a piece of music (in this case, as narrative):

On the poietic level, a composer may wish to write music that narrates, focusing on musical attributes that signal narration. On the immanent level, the music may have such attributes, regardless of whether the composer intends to write narrative music. On the esthetic level, a listener may want to hear music as a narration, regardless of the composer's intent.<sup>14</sup>

This way of thinking can be extended to issues of musical religious experience and theological interpretation. Given the transient relationship with meaning that music possesses, the pertinent questions are not along the lines of 'what precise theological meaning does this music convey to its listener?', but rather 'what is it about this piece that causes a theological response?'; 'how does Vaughan Williams seek to express his theological visions?'. This relates strongly to Gavin Hopps's use of the concept of 'affordance'; Hopps suggests that whilst openness to religious experience in all musics is a basic tenet of his project, it is still possible to conceive of 'more or less likely correlations' on the basis of 'affordance structures'.<sup>15</sup> It is my contention that Vaughan Williams's music contains many such affordance structures.

At the poietic level, there is strong evidence that Vaughan Williams intended to write music open to some sort of transcendent interpretation. Whilst the composer expressed ambivalence over specific interpretations of his music, the intention to communicate a vision of the beyond runs throughout his written output. Theology has a role here in engaging with Vaughan Williams's own beliefs as he presents them in both words and music. The vision to be communicated, however, is only part of the picture: as Nattiez notes, art is more than one-way communication.<sup>16</sup> At the trace level there exist strong affordance structures that make the possibility of interpreting this piece in terms of Christian religious experience more likely regardless of Vaughan Williams's intentions. A bifurcation emerges here between esthesis and poiesis: whilst, as Chapter 3 argues, Vaughan Williams was not an orthodox Christian, he created music that is religiously meaningful to many. There are theological considerations here too: as Hopps notes, any experience can be subjected to theological criteria after the fact.<sup>17</sup> The analytical and theological approach detailed above provides answers as to how theology might be related to musical structures in Vaughan Williams's music and goes some way to answering why this piece might carry Christian religious meaning for some listeners. Governing all these responses, however, is the ever-present esthetic level. Whilst the way his music is presented is

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<sup>14</sup> Klein, "Chopin's Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative", 24.

<sup>15</sup> Hopps, "Negative capability and religious experience", 91–92.

<sup>16</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Hopps, "Negative capability and religious experience", 83–84.

likely to elicit a religious response – an artwork ‘open to the divine’ as Brown and Hopps would have it – this is only realised in individualistic responses.<sup>18</sup> Vaughan Williams was himself reluctant to tie his music down to concrete interpretations: ‘A work of art’ he suggests, ‘is like a theophany which takes different forms to different beholders.’<sup>19</sup> Music, as an object of natural theology, requires a specific approach. As McGrath notes, general revelation requires the viewing of reality with a particular set of spectacles.<sup>20</sup> The theological axioms underpinning music’s status as ‘inherently theological’ as I discuss above come into play here, as well as the culturally specific nature of musical meaning. The fields of musicology, analysis and theology are required to correspond in a critical examination of these esthetic factors.

## Vocal Music

In this chapter, I build towards a theological understanding of Vaughan Williams’s music by using some of his many short vocal pieces as musical case studies. If Vaughan Williams’s attempts to communicate theologically through his music in general – especially in his symphonies – are to be successfully analysed, then a thorough understanding of how the composer seeks to express his visions of the beyond through the musical structures in these pieces is required. These pieces offer a useful entry point to the theological discussion of Vaughan Williams’s music because they contain explicit, surface-level connections with religious meaning and theological issues. Whether or not other genres in Vaughan Williams’s output are to be read theologically, such an approach seems obvious for his settings of Christian scriptures and poetry concerning the transcendent. In terms of Peirce’s trichotomy, as Innis notes, all words and sentences are symbols.<sup>21</sup> Within the scope of the music, therefore, these texts refer to theological concepts in secure, conventional ways. However, as I shall argue, such texts are also indexical to Vaughan Williams’s own interpretations, symbolic of affects suggested by a text’s symbolic meaning, and indexical to the cultural context of any given text.

These pieces form an important part of his musical output for the purposes of this thesis because they contain the most immediately obvious links to his visions of the beyond. Vaughan Williams’s musical output is highly consistent in its use of particular musical structures at particular expressive junctions. Moreover, it is deeply intertextual. Thus, these short vocal

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<sup>18</sup> Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*, v.

<sup>19</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 3.

<sup>20</sup> McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Innis, *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, 16.

pieces contain vital examples, in miniature, of the musical language which Vaughan Williams uses to communicate such visions. My analysis shows that, through various musical parameters, Vaughan Williams maximises possible contact with theological meaning. In this chapter, I show how he brings already meaningful structures (musical and textual) into his vocal pieces, embracing and modulating the meaning they might have accrued elsewhere. As I argue, a complex network of theological meaning emerges from this process: whilst the overlapping of these theological symbols might result in an expression of a somewhat undetermined theological vision, it enhances its expressive potency and effectiveness in communicating something theological.

## **Text Setting**

### **Text and Expression**

Throughout his career, Vaughan Williams saw fit to express his visions of the beyond through short settings of texts concerning transcendent topics for vocal forces. These include settings of Biblical and Apocryphal texts as well as other literature and poetry. These texts are, in diverse ways, deeply invested in theological issues and religious expression. While many of these compositions fulfilled particular uses or commissions they seem to contain, as Onderdonk notes, a surprisingly significant degree of personal expression given the composer's statements in early life about religion.<sup>22</sup>

Vaughan Williams famously held that 'there is no reason why any atheist could not write a good Mass'.<sup>23</sup> On the face of it, this quote would seem to imply that he espoused a belief in the rigid, true meaning of a text, and a composer's duty to write a setting that is coherent with this meaning. Throughout his oeuvre, however, it is the expressive prerogative of the composer, rather than the 'correct' meaning of the text which is consistently prioritised. As Byron Adams notes, Vaughan Williams considered the manipulation of texts as entirely within his jurisdiction: this view is stated very strongly in Vaughan Williams's correspondence with Hubert Foss regarding the publishing of A. E. Housman's letters.<sup>24</sup> Vaughan Williams

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<sup>22</sup> Onderdonk, "Folksong Arrangements, Hymn Tunes and Church Music", 153.

<sup>23</sup> Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 138.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, "Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams", 100.

had set several of Housman's poems from *A Shropshire Lad* in the 1909 song-cycle *On Wenlock Edge*. In doing so, he omitted two verses from *Is My Team Ploughing?*. In 1938, Hubert Foss wrote to Vaughan Williams to notify him that letters criticising his omission were due to be published: Vaughan Williams replied that he did not mind, and added that '[...] the composer has a perfect right artistically to set any portion of a poem he chooses provided he does not actually alter the sense'.<sup>25</sup> Even this frank admission of his opinion on the issue does not quite do justice to the composer's attitude towards text: as Adams notes, he did indeed alter the sense of texts many times.<sup>26</sup> There are several examples that wilfully misinterpret texts (biblical and otherwise) as the composer saw fit.<sup>27</sup>

It can be argued, therefore, that a better understanding of Vaughan Williams's claim that 'there is no reason why any atheist could not write a good Mass' would be that he believed it possible for any composer to find ways of expressing their vision through the setting of these texts if they so desired. This would also tie in with his understanding of Biblical texts; Vaughan Williams followed Gilbert Murray in assigning a communal origin for scripture, considering it culturally as well as theologically important.<sup>28</sup> Its importance to society was, for him, measured in its utility in aiding expression of the spiritual, rather than in its unique claim to spiritual truth. Throughout Vaughan Williams's output the selection, editing, manipulation, and setting of theologically resonant texts is not distinct from the process of artistic expression: rather, they are an inherent part of it. Analysing the selection and manipulation of these texts has the potential to reveal something of Vaughan Williams's own theology as well as providing insight into these powerful affordance structures for theological interpretations of his work in general.

## Transcendence Without Immanence

Byron Adams charts an often observed change in Vaughan Williams's beliefs over his career: that he began an atheist and became an agnostic. This trajectory, also espoused by Julian Onderdonk, is consistent with Ursula Vaughan Williams's famous summary of her husband's faith.<sup>29</sup> Vaughan Williams shows a liking for theologically potent yet doctrinally unmoored

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<sup>25</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 256–57.

<sup>26</sup> Adams, "Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams", 100, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Both *A Vision of Aeroplanes* (1956) and the *Magnificat* (1932) play with particular associations in their biblical sources that are not germane to their traditional interpretations.

<sup>28</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 23.

<sup>29</sup> Onderdonk, "Folksong Arrangements, Hymn Tunes and Church Music", 104; Vaughan Williams, *R. V. W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 29.

transcendent writings in his earlier career. Walt Whitman and G.E. Houseman are good examples of this: these texts appropriate biblical metaphors and language, but do not describe the knowable God of Judeo-Christian theology. Vaughan Williams prioritises a vague and ambiguous vision of the beyond in the use of these texts: the concept of a personal deity is somewhat lost in the face of a ‘great unknown’. *Towards the Unknown Region* – Vaughan Williams’s 1907 setting of Whitman’s poem *Darest Thou Now O Soul* – is a good example of such a text. This is shown in full in Example 2.1. The inscrutability of the transcendent is the defining theme of this text: it is ‘unknown’, ‘inaccessible’, and there is ‘no map there, nor guide’. Yet the soul’s eventual access to this realm, as well as its ‘prepared’ existence – autonomous from human existence or perception – is underlined at the end. Whilst it might not resonate strongly with the Christian doctrine of transcendence, it is not without theological meaning.

When using more explicitly Christian texts, Vaughan Williams shows a preference for those that focus on the absolute transcendence of God whilst minimising any sense of immanence. Doubt is often expressed as to the observer’s ability to access the transcendent in any meaningful way. These texts, amplified by the musical structures in Vaughan Williams’s settings, depict a God who might exist, but is not known personally. Skelton’s mystical *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, shown in Example 2.2, describes attributes of God (‘interminable [...] incomparable [...] essential [...] perfite’) whilst emphasising God’s inscrutable transcendence: ‘Whose magnificence is incomprehensible, All arguments of reason which far doth exceed’. This all occurs in a poem whose refrain is a hope to at last see God’s ‘glorious face’. Vaughan Williams’s 1948 setting of the piece embraces the sense of divine inscrutability but undermines the ultimate unification with God through various musical structures: I analyse this piece below. In Vaughan Williams’s settings of theologically loaded text, any divine being invoked does not seem in communion with their creation. The incarnation of God as Christ is notably absent, and there is little sense of the specificity in transcendence that permeates discussions in modern music theology.<sup>30</sup> The texts of *Towards the Unknown Region* and “From far, from Eve and Morning”, the latter shown in Example 2.3, both indicate some sort of unknown transcendent: the intention is not to evoke a Christian transcendence *per se*. Overall, the combination of belief in a transcendent other coupled with the unspecific nature of that other

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<sup>30</sup> Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts*, especially 37–38.

(most notably an absent Christology) reveals deism as a common operating theological premise for Vaughan Williams.

However, behind the imprecision or vagueness in Vaughan Williams's communicated vision of the beyond seems to lie an intentional strategy to communicate the composer's vision effectively to a listener regardless of their own faith. This is the express intent behind Vaughan Williams's renaming of the eponymous character of 1951's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>31</sup> The result of this universalist instinct through Vaughan Williams's music is an extremely pliable vision of the beyond that suggests theological meaning without being prescriptive with regard to either denomination or religion; it creates the possibility of theological interpretation, especially in tandem with musical structures which have the ability to modulate and enhance the meaning of the text. In place of texts describing a knowable deity Vaughan Williams consistently selects texts for their polysemic properties. There often exists a high chance of multiple interpretations of these pieces in which only the most general observations might be agreed upon. This would be consistent with what is known of Vaughan Williams's own beliefs; as I argue in Chapter 3, the ambiguous, inconsistent, idealistic vision of the beyond that is communicated seems to be similar to what the composer also believed. In this way, whilst the symbolic attributes of any given text are preserved, such texts also have the potential to become indexical of Vaughan Williams' own interpretation.

### **Transcendence and Adversity**

Vaughan Williams often employs texts that articulate a seeking of transcendence in the midst of difficulty. The idea of an afterlife – of immortality, of heaven – is present in many of these pieces whether it is described as seeing the face of God, or as a place free from the troubles of the world. Vaughan Williams used such texts with some consistency in works connected to remembrance and wartime. *The Souls of the Righteous* (1947), for example, was commissioned by William McKie, organist of Westminster Abbey, for the dedication of the Battle of Britain Chapel at the abbey, where it received its premiere.<sup>32</sup> The text, shown in Example 2.4, is taken from the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon; the Latin rendering of this text *Beati Quorum Via* was set by several prominent British composers before Vaughan

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<sup>31</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 485.

<sup>32</sup> Vaughan Williams was absent but tuned in to the live radio broadcast. See Ralph Vaughan Williams, Letter from Ralph Vaughan Williams to William McKie, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1947, <https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/letter/letter-from-ralph-vaughan-williams-to-william-mckie/>

Williams, not least his own teacher Charles Stanford. After initially expressing doubt, Vaughan Williams evidently changed his mind and accepted the commission, perhaps finding something worth expressing.<sup>33</sup> The text is consoling in nature, addressed to the living concerning the state of the departed. A similar sentiment permeates *Valiant for Truth*, shown in Example 2.5: Kennedy emphasises the post war grief and personal loss behind this setting of John Bunyan.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the theological effect of the choice of these texts may not be reducible to their symbolic relationship to theological concepts; their indexical relationship to a cultural theological identity is also an important factor.

The general absence of Christ throughout Vaughan Williams's output is especially notable where text describes the theological outcome of Christ's actions, such as *Valiant for Truth*. Overall, a more general sense of a spiritual immortality supersedes the Christian idea of heaven. Elsewhere, however, somewhat bleaker ideas of annihilation are expressed. "The Cloud-Capp'd Towers" – the second of the *Three Shakespeare Songs* – is good example of this, setting lines from *The Tempest*. The text, shown in Example 2.6, is unequivocally concerned with theological concepts: it describes the precipice of the apocalypse whilst pondering the transience of human existence. For Vaughan Williams there is no sense of Christian paradise in his setting of Shakespeare, or even fear of hell at the point of death. Instead, annihilation is the expected outcome. This sense of annihilation in conjunction with this specific Shakespeare quote, crops up elsewhere in Vaughan Williams's music. Shakespeare's musings on the impermanence of human life in this text were also used by Vaughan Williams, in a rare moment of candour regarding the meaning of his music, to explain to Kennedy the bleak ending to Symphony No. 6: 'we are such dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep'.<sup>35</sup> The visions of the beyond expressed in these piece is hardly optimistic; whilst this is not a consistent feature of Vaughan Williams's musings on the transcendent, this piece is instructive in the musical language used to address these issues. I explore its connections with the *Sinfonia Antartica* in Chapter 4.

The soul's eternal plight is linked to another prominent theme in the transcendent texts that Vaughan Williams selects: the insignificance of humans. *O vos omnes* (1922) is an early example, pitting a suffering person against a seemingly all-powerful yet uncompassionate God.

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<sup>33</sup> See Ralph Vaughan Williams, Letter from Ralph Vaughan Williams to William McKie, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1947, <https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/letter/letter-from-ralph-vaughan-williams-to-william-mckie-6/>; Ralph Vaughan Williams, Letter from Ralph Vaughan Williams to William McKie, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1947, <https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/letter/letter-from-ralph-vaughan-williams-to-william-mckie-5/>;

<sup>34</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 258.

<sup>35</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 573.

It is in his later period this theme is explored more extensively. Onderdonk discusses how Vaughan Williams's setting of the Old Testament in 'The Voice out of the Whirlwind' (1947) and 'A Vision of Aeroplanes' (1956) underlines the 'base inadequacies' of human beings.<sup>36</sup> The former of these texts, as Example 2.7 shows, is especially stark in its comparison of humanity to God. "The Cloud-Capp'd Towers", shown in Example 2.6 is another good example of this. Such texts are, thus, not merely symbolic of theological ideas: they are symbolic of affects induced by such ideas.

### **Text as an Affordance Structure**

Vaughan Williams emerges as something of a magpie when it comes to text selection, choosing and remoulding whatever he saw fit to communicate his visions of the beyond effectively. Various themes in these texts reveal something of Vaughan Williams's own theology: his firm belief in a spiritual reality of some sort shines through, though the nature of this reality is uncertain, as is access to it. Any divine being residing in Vaughan Williams's theology would be deistic, and not at all identical to the God of orthodox Christian theology. In terms of his own theology, it is perhaps what is not said which reveals more than what is: the lack of Christ is particularly noteworthy. Nevertheless, these texts achieve what Vaughan Williams asks of them: to communicate a general, but powerful, sense of transcendent spiritual reality open to believers of all faiths (or none).

This is especially true within Vaughan Williams's cultural context. Throughout his selection of theologically loaded texts, Vaughan Williams capitalises on the cultural resonances of various authors and texts: the aesthetics underpinning his remodelling of an English music, which stress an awareness of roots, also extends to his use of texts. Allusions to British Tudor and Elizabethan music – by Vaughan Williams's estimation, the last time England had a musical tradition to be proud of – are mirrored by settings of Skelton and Shakespeare.<sup>37</sup> These not only connect to a shared sense of national identity, but a shared sense of national spirituality. Whilst they muddy the water somewhat in terms of their theological impact, they increase the likelihood of spiritual engagement in British audiences both then and now. The use of a text's cultural resonance is particularly obvious in the relationship between Vaughan

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<sup>36</sup> Onderdonk, "Folksong Arrangements, Hymn Tunes and Church Music", 153.

<sup>37</sup> Vaughan Williams, "British Music". cited in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 47.

Williams's music and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>38</sup> In *Valiant for Truth*, Vaughan Williams makes the existing connection between *The Pilgrim's Progress* and a shared national sense of remembrance and sacrifice clear and obvious. As Nathaniel Lew argues, Vaughan Williams was deeply affected by this text and set portions of it throughout his life.<sup>39</sup> He consistently found it a useful way of expressing his visions of the beyond, and ideas of consolation in the face of adversity: I explore this this in more detail below.

The selection and manipulation of text thus provides a primer coat of meaning in many of Vaughan Williams's vocal pieces. The text, however, is only one level at which affordance structures exist, and its meaning is hardly stable and guaranteed. Rather, in Vaughan Williams's music, it engages with other aspects of the music and, by extension, other texts too. It modulates, and is modulated by, other transcendent signifiers.

## Modality

### Vaughan Williams and Modality

Modality is often cited as the defining characteristic element of Vaughan Williams's musical style.<sup>40</sup> The composer himself, as an anecdote concerning his studies with Charles V. Stanford reveals, sought to use modality in his striving for personal musical expression, and as a source for the refashioning of national music.<sup>41</sup> Vaughan Williams was also acutely aware of the symbolic power of modality. His quest for a truly 'British' music prompted him to call upon that most ancient of resources: folksong. This, as Vaughan Williams explains, was often modal in content.<sup>42</sup> Modality thus becomes a symbol for national spirit. Vaughan Williams

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<sup>38</sup> Nathaniel G. Lew, "'Words and Music that are Forever England': *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the Pitfalls of Nostalgia", in *Vaughan Williams Essays*, ed. Byron Adams and Robin Wells (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 176.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 175–76.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Second Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 354–57.

<sup>41</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "The Teaching of Parry and Stanford", in *Heirs and Rebels: Letters Written to Each Other and Occasional Writings on Music*, ed. Ursula Vaughan Williams and Imogen Holst (London: Oxford University Press, 1959). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 320.

<sup>42</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Folk-Song", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1929). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 230.

himself applies the principles of modality to both melody and harmony, creating a distinctive mode of musical expression that self-consciously referenced its heritage.

In Vaughan Williams's music, modality functions as a symbol of the beyond in several distinct ways: it is polysemic, almost over-determined in its signification of theologically resonant ideas. The iconic connection with the primordial music of the composer's home nation affords modality a sense of transcendent timelessness. For Vaughan Williams, folk music was the source of all music. For that reason, the presence of modes in earlier forms of English church music represents not a new invention but rather a codification of what was already standard practice in secular music. Vaughan Williams held the Tudor composers in high regard; he saw them as a lesson from history of how a 'great school' might spring up if the musical conditions were right. These conditions, rather predictably, involve a dependence on folksong:

There is no written record of a musical soil which could have produced such wonderful flowerings as when the wonderful Tudor school suddenly appeared... When the great School of Tudor music arose, it could go straight to the fountain head for its inspiration [...] inheriting its energy and vitality from the unwritten and unrecorded art of its own countryside.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, this era of British music became a reified object of historical fabrication in its own right.<sup>44</sup> In his 'Musical Autobiography', for example, Vaughan Williams wrote that 'We pupils of Parry have, if we have been wise, inherited from Parry the great English choral tradition which Tallis passed on to Byrd, Byrd to Gibbons, Gibbons to Purcell, Purcell to Battishill and Greene, and they in turn through the Wesleys to Parry.'<sup>45</sup> According to Julian Onderdonk, 'From the late 1870s, a focus on the "eternal" values of the English countryside and a vogue for the English past, notably the Tudor and Elizabethan periods, became an increasingly dominant strain in the national culture.'<sup>46</sup> Alain Frogley paints a compelling picture as to why synthetic traditions might have been constructed in England during this time;

[...]although in the last quarter of the nineteenth century Britain was still [...] powerful [...] grave doubts about the future were beginning to set in [...] a perception began to develop amongst the ruling classes that, for British pre-eminence to be maintained, there would need to be a deliberate fostering of national identity and solidarity, and an associated promotion of certain moral and social qualities. These qualities were for the most part considered to be those

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<sup>43</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 50–52.

<sup>44</sup> For a wider discussion of the construction of English traditions, including musical ones, see Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially 7–8; David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820–1977", in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially 129–32.

<sup>45</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony With Writings on Other Musical Subjects", 182.

<sup>46</sup> Onderdonk, "The Composer and Society: Family, Politics, Nation", 10–11.

of the countryside, particularly in so far as this embodied an idealized English past, as against the corrupting influences of the modern city.<sup>47</sup>

In Vaughan Williams's music, this presents a distinct type of theological symbolism. Many of his pieces self-consciously reference this era of music through modality, often in conjunction with transcendent tropes and texts. The ecclesiastical connections invest Vaughan Williams's music with strong theological affordance structures, though their expression of national spirit – of shared history and shared spirituality – was perhaps the primary driver for Vaughan Williams himself. This is coherent with Adams's view of Vaughan Williams in relation to ecclesiastical texts and music: he harnesses the cultural associations of this music to great effect.<sup>48</sup> My understanding of modality as a symbol has similarities with how Mirka integrates musical topics with Peirce's icon-index-symbol trichotomy. Modality acts as a sign, in the first instance, of an established musical style: like Mirka, I treat this relationship as iconic rather than indexical.<sup>49</sup> However, this style is itself treated as indexical to both social contexts and affects: in this case, theological ones. Modality in Vaughan Williams's music is, therefore, an indexical symbol not just of Christianity, but of English religiosity and 'national spirit'.<sup>50</sup> The evolutionary context in which Vaughan Williams describes folksong, combined with its associations with the pastoral in general throughout his work, underpins modality's theological symbolism in an additional, subtly distinct way. Through these associations, it comes to stand for transcendent concepts of nature more broadly. I explore this further in Chapter 3.

## Analysing Modality

Vaughan Williams's handling of modality demonstrates various musical structures that are conducive to theological readings. The composite of all modes possesses an internal network of relations that Vaughan Williams exploits throughout his output. Ian Bates theorises this by formalising three possible types of relationship between modes: fixed-tonic

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<sup>47</sup> Frogley, "Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams", 8.

<sup>48</sup> Adams, "Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams", 108.

<sup>49</sup> Mirka, "Introduction", 30–31. Mirka sets out this view in contrast to that of Raymond Monelle, who understands this relationship as indexical. See Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17–18.

<sup>50</sup> The *Mass in G Minor* (1921) contains the most extended music in this vein. See, for example, Arthur Hutchings preview of the work; The piece reminds Hutchings 'only of our English heritage[...] to know how, in its greatest days, English music differed from the best that the continent could show, is to see how much Vaughan Williams owes to his nationality, not how much to the sixteenth century.' Arthur Hutchings, "Vaughan Williams and the Tudor Tradition", *The Listener* 45, no. 1156 (1951): 276.

relationships (modes which share a tonic), fixed-key-signature relationships (modes which share the same set of notes), and fixed-scale-type relationships (modes which share the same pattern of intervals in relation to their given tonic).<sup>51</sup> These relationships are summarised in Table 2.1. This model creates a measure of distance applicable to modal modulations and allows for the sequences of modes utilised by Vaughan Williams across musical structures to be effectively mapped out. Such large-scale changes in modality in Vaughan Williams's music have the potential to form theological affordance structures. At a basic level, modal modulation acts as an iconic sign of change. Other musical signs present in the music – including modality's own indexical and iconic relationship to British ideas of spirituality as discussed above – are capable of specifying the theological nature of this change. Thus, in combination with other musical structures that reference theological ideas in indexical and symbolic ways, this iconic sign of change has the potential to act as a theological affordance structure.

The network of relationships within which individual modes exist, and the particular ways in which Vaughan Williams uses them, can give them an inherent ambiguity. Because each mode stands in a fixed-key-signature relationship with six other modes, the other two variables (tonic and scale type) can exist in a state of flux. This is something that Vaughan Williams capitalises on in his expression of transcendent visions: it forms a central part of my analysis of Symphony No. 5 in Chapter 3. As I argue in Chapter 3, such structures act as iconic signs of ambiguity, and are given theological specificity by other means. The resolution of modal ambiguity becomes a prominent theme in his symphonies, most especially those with links to transcendent extra-musical meaning.<sup>52</sup>

David Manning offers a different way of conceptualising Vaughan Williams's use of modes that is mostly congruent with Bates's idea of 'fixed-tonic relationships'. Manning posits the idea of the CMS: the 'combined modal scale'. This is a hyper-mode that includes every note of all the modes based on one tonic.<sup>53</sup> Figure 2.1 shows this for modes based on C. Whilst this hyper-mode contains every chromatic pitch, it is, according to Manning, 'sensitive to scale-degree identities.' For example, whilst it is possible to conceive of a D $\flat$  (the flattened second degree) in a C-based CMS, it is impossible to accommodate C $\sharp$  (the sharpened tonic). Manning suggests that notes which do not occur in the CMS are 'chromatic' to that system.<sup>54</sup> The

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<sup>51</sup> Ian Bates, "Vaughan Williams's Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus": A Study of the Composer's Approach to Diatonic Organization", *Music Theory Spectrum* 34, no. 1 (2012): 35–36.

<sup>52</sup> Horton notes their presence in symphonies 4–6. See Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 207–14.

<sup>53</sup> Manning, "Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams's Music", 77.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–78.

language used in this conceptualisation of modes is immediately more useful for describing the more expressive and sensuous effects Vaughan Williams conjures with modality. These features are often associated with heightened expressive states linked to transcendent topics: as such, they are indexical of affective states induced by theological ideas.

### **The Souls of the Righteous**

*The Souls of the Righteous* provides a good example of some of the ways in which Vaughan Williams uses modality in the service of expressing his visions of the beyond. Much of the material in this piece is straightforwardly modal in the sense that it exists in entirely diatonic space.<sup>55</sup> The melodic material often remains in a single mode for some length of time; as Example 2.8 shows, the piece can be conceived of as a series of diatonic modal zones. His idiosyncratic monophonic writing throughout this piece anchors the piece to sentiments of national spirituality through its allusion to both modal folksong and modal British Tudor music. Vaughan Williams's response to McKie's commission thus uses modality as a signifier of particular transcendent tropes.

Whilst the identity of the three modal parameters (key signature, tonic, scale type) is explicit for much of the time, these are undermined at key junctures. The opening section of the piece (bars 1–14), shown in Example 2.8, is written almost entirely in diatonic pitch-space. The first 9 bars remain within F#–Aeolian and essentially articulate an F# minor triad in monophonic or two-part polyphonic writing. Whilst there is no doubt as to the music's modality and tonal centre, there is little which strongly enforces an F# minor tonality in the traditional tonal sense. These two observations are, of course, connected: the Aeolian mode contains no raised seventh, thus making it less tonally determined. Whilst these are often present in traditional 'modal' harmony, Vaughan Williams avoids it here: as he notes, it is this that prevents his style from becoming anachronistic because 'real archaic harmony is never truly modal.'<sup>56</sup> By contrast, Vaughan Williams argues that following the principles of modal melodies is, for 'modern' composers, 'nevertheless suggestive of a new kind of harmony.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> By 'diatonic', I mean any 7-note scale which contains 5 tones and 2 non-adjacent semitones per octave or, to put it in terms of set-class theory, any set of set class 7–35.

<sup>56</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 25.

<sup>57</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, "English Folk-Songs", *The Music Student* 4, no. 6–11 (1912). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 193.

At bar 10, the material is transposed down a minor second to F#–Aeolian through a fixed-scale-type relationship before arriving at an E major triad at bar 11, once again through a downwards minor second transposition. This triad is initially interpreted as the dominant of a mode in A, before itself becoming a modal tonic by bar 15. The following music (bar 15–27) features a series of modal centres which alternate between Aeolian and Ionian. Many of these do not exist in any sort of fixed parameter relationship: I explain the logic behind this particular succession of modal centres below in my consideration of Vaughan Williams’s harmonic language. Two of these modal centres (bar 16–19 and bar 23–26) are of particular interest because they contain examples of vertical modal mixture (in Manning’s terms, drawing on multiple CMS scale-degree options simultaneously); that is, multiple scale-degree options being expressed at once. In both of these cases, the sustained major triad implies an Ionian mode (or perhaps Lydian, or Mixolydian) but the melodic material is Aeolian. Therefore, the third degree of the scale is present in both minor and major versions creating a ‘bimodality’ full of dissonant false relations. The minor sixth of the Aeolian mode reinforces this clash, as all modes with a major third degree also contain a major sixth. The coexisting of multiple scale-degree options from the CMS creates an uncomfortable, ambiguous effect; this is eventually resolved by an arrival at a straightforward, diatonic modal centre immediately afterwards. The result resonates indexically with the text, which expresses sentiments of temporary negative states in both cases.

The overall trajectory in *The Souls of the Righteous*, shown in Figure 2.2, sees F#–Aeolian and A–Ionian jostling for supremacy; A–Ionian ultimately emerges as the goal and final resting point of this progressive modal plot, though this doesn’t become apparent until the last four bars. Bars 1–14 and 28–39 prominently feature interplay between F#–Aeolian and A–Ionian and thus can be seen as being based upon the same musical plot. They form ‘A’ and ‘A\*’ sections respectively: the initial ‘A’ is incomplete because A major is not affirmed as the tonic. This is shown in grey in Figure 2.2. The middle B section features a sequence of modes on various tonics interspersed with repeated chords hinting at the A major goal of the piece. F# has its most tonic-like moment at bar 35, where its major triad is reached from A major. This proves to be the peak of the contest, however, as this gives way to F#–Aeolian, which morphs into A–Ionian. This move is finalised in the last bars of the piece: here, unlike the harmonically static modal areas of bars 14–28, the voice-leading tendencies of modality are utilised to form a plagal cadence in A major. Both F#–Aeolian and A–Ionian contain the same pitch classes: in

Bates's terms, they have a 'fixed-key-signature relationship'.<sup>58</sup> This observation corresponds with an established analytic mode of engagement in Vaughan Williams: the large-scale resolution of modal ambiguities or relationships.<sup>59</sup> Vaughan Williams's tendency to write music featuring large-scale modal transformations is used here to theological effect. Modal trajectories are effective vessels of iconic meaning, and many readings could be mapped onto them. The harmonic language and text anchor this particular modal trajectory in theological ideas of heaven. The overall progression of modes in a fixed-key-signature relationship works in tandem with use of the CMS and the text to model Vaughan Williams's vision of the afterlife: of a permanent place of rest reached through impermanent suffering.

### **Modality as an Affordance Structure**

Vaughan Williams's visions of the beyond are expressed through modality. This is accomplished both through what it signifies in and of itself, and how it is able to set up its own metasystem of signification. Concerning the former, modality in general acts as an iconic signifier which indexically brings various theologically loaded ideas to the fore in the composer's output: in particular, resonances with shared cultural history, with church, and with nature. Modality also accrues meaning as a point of difference in comparison to more familiar tonal syntax: this occurs within Vaughan Williams's own music as well as marking it out from the music of other composers. Concerning the latter, modality offers Vaughan Williams an entire network of pitch collections capable of evoking complex concepts and of conveying intense emotion. Modal trajectories serve theological ends throughout Vaughan Williams's output: as I argue in Chapter 3, this is a key component of the theological discussion surrounding Symphony No. 5 in particular. As well as these large-scale modal structures, the combined resources of modality afford Vaughan Williams an expressive language in the moment, either by modal mixture or juxtaposition between two modes simultaneously. However, much of Vaughan Williams's harmonic language outstrips even the capacious realm of modality. A different analytical approach is required to understand the logic underpinning such progressions as that which occupy the middle portion of *The Souls of the Righteous*; this

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<sup>58</sup> Bates, "Vaughan Williams's Five Variants of "Dives and Lazarus": A Study of the Composer's Approach to Diatonic Organization", 36.

<sup>59</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 207–14.

is all the more necessary because of the theological signification allowed for by Vaughan Williams's harmony in such moments.

## Harmony

### Triadicism

Descriptions of Vaughan Williams's style often involve a focus on harmony as well as modality. Much is made of the part that the idiosyncratic handling of this particular musical parameter contributes to the overall distinctiveness of his musical style. Particular focus is paid to non-diatonic successions of triads. The relationships between the individual triads in these progressions, according to traditional methods of calculation, is often uncertain or distant. Such harmonic language, I argue, emerges prominently as a signifier of the transcendent, and is best analysed through a neo-Riemannian approach. The second of Vaughan Williams's *Three Shakespeare Songs* "The Cloud-Capp'd Towers", provides a useful entry point to this discussion. This piece is shown in its entirety in Example 2.9, complete with labels for each triad: '+' for major and '-' for minor. As I discuss above, the text is redolent with a sense of the impermanence of human existence. Almost the entirety of the setting focusses attention on one musical attribute: the harmony. The texture is consistent; the melody is sparse but unified in motivic content; the rhythm sets the words plainly; the tempo is moderately slow; the dynamic indications range from *piano* to *pianississimo*, with occasional crescendos left to the director's discretion; and the form is initially elusive. The harmony, on the other hand, is hugely expressive and challenging to account for in terms of traditional methods.

This sort of harmonic language has been the subject of much enquiry in Vaughan Williams scholarship. In the *New Grove Dictionary*, Hugh Ottaway describes a particular harmonic 'image' – using the example progression of C minor to E major – as being 'fundamental' to Vaughan Williams.<sup>60</sup> He also discusses a 'characteristic' chord relationship found in *Riders to the Sea* and Symphony No. 6 comprised of parallel stepwise movement between two chords with roots a semitone apart which share a third.<sup>61</sup> Anthony Pople refers to

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<sup>60</sup> Hugh Ottaway, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 572.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 574.

the root third progressions in early Vaughan Williams as ‘characteristic harmonic progressions’.<sup>62</sup> In his revision of Ottaway’s *Grove* entry, Alain Frogley designates ‘the simple juxtaposition of triads with roots a third apart and involving false relations’ a ‘Vaughan Williams “fingerprint”’.<sup>63</sup> David Manning’s thesis unites both third progressions and parallel stepwise progressions under the title ‘characteristic harmonic progressions’.<sup>64</sup>

This ‘characteristic’ harmony occurs with some frequency in works with explicit links to theology. Manning gives various examples of such progressions from seven pieces; *On Wenlock Edge*: “From far, from Eve and Morning” (1909), *O Vos Omnes* (1922), *Mass in G Minor* (1922), *Job: A Masque for Dancing* (1930), *The Souls of the Righteous* (1947), *Three Shakespeare Songs*: ‘Cloud Capp’d Towers’ (1951), and *A Vision of Aeroplanes* (1956). Whilst Manning’s aim is strictly analytical – in his own words, ‘to understand how the musical materials relate to or resist one another, motivated by a commitment to close reading and theoretical engagement’ – two commonalities relating to musical meaning can be observed in these examples.<sup>65</sup> Firstly, all but one of these pieces is written for voices: in fact, with only two exceptions, they are all written for choral forces. Secondly, they all contain explicit referentialist links to transcendent ideas in some way. *Valiant for Truth* (1940) and *Prayer to the Father of Heaven* (1948) might be added to this list of seven; these choral pieces set explicitly theological texts by Bunyan and Skelton using the same sort of harmonic language. This corpus is evenly spread across the composer’s entire career, and ‘characteristic progressions’ are consistently used throughout; clearly, these play a key part in Vaughan Williams’s expression of his vision of the beyond.

Pan-triadic syntax is firmly established in Vaughan Williams’s reception as a signifier of the beyond. Julian Rushton, for example, describes these ‘chains of simple triads’ as ‘Triadic magic’ and relates it to ‘mystery, exaltation, or the (metaphorically) magical’.<sup>66</sup> This sort of esthetic response is consistently associated with pan-triadic music throughout Western classical music. Ernst Kurth’s writings on Wagner’s harmony are a case in point; he suggests that ‘Wagner especially loves to symbolize everything magical by means of the absolute effect of unfamiliar harmonic connections, e.g., the magic of the *Tarnhelm* with its disjunctive mediant shifts in *Das Rheingold*, or the related Magic-Potion-motive from

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<sup>62</sup> Pople, “Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle”, 67.

<sup>63</sup> Ottaway and Frogley, “Vaughan Williams, Ralph”, 354.

<sup>64</sup> Manning, “Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams’s Music”, 73.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Julian Rushton, “‘A Thing of Wonder’: Triadic Magic in Early Vaughan Williams”, in *Let Beauty Awake: Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Literature*, ed. Julian Rushton (London: Elgar Editions, 2010), 119.

Götterdämmerung.’<sup>67</sup> Such progressions, for Kurth, typify Romantic harmony more broadly: ‘With the escalation of the Romantic character of art, in addition to the effects of chromatic progressions, those of mediant progressions of all types increase greatly.’<sup>68</sup> Richard Cohn argues that major third progressions are heavily associated with ‘semiotics of the supernatural’.<sup>69</sup> In particular, Cohn note the coincidence of the ‘hexatonic pole’ progression with depictions of ‘phenomena that Jentsch and Freud identify as inducing the uncanny [...] including dead bodies, necroanimism, reincarnation, magic, and spirit.’<sup>70</sup> Richard Taruskin observes connections with similar ideas in the case of minor third progressions in the music of Rimsky Korsakov.<sup>71</sup> Recent hermeneutic analyses of film music shows that all of these associations are still very much woven into the fabric of the reception of western music.<sup>72</sup> As such, there is significant evidence to suggest that pan-triadic syntax is symbolic of theological ideas through agreed convention. However, as Monelle argues, such conventional signification can be underpinned by pre-existing indexical and iconic relationships: whilst Monelle suggests that the latter two can be superseded by the former, I argue that all three might be conceived of existing in the case of pan-triadic syntax.<sup>73</sup>

Such interpretive trends might be seen to originate in the status of this triadic language as ‘other’ in comparison to the norm of tonal gravity. Cohn’s idea of the ‘double syntax’ provides the theoretical framework for this observation.<sup>74</sup> Maxwell Ramage describes such harmonic language as ‘transcendent’ in comparison to traditional tonal syntax.<sup>75</sup> Whilst its signification of the beyond might seem arbitrary on its own merits, this sort of harmony accrues meaning in opposition to prevailing hierarchical pitch organisation. To the tonally conditioned

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<sup>67</sup> Ernst Kurth and Lee Rothfarb, *Ernst Kurth: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Lee Rothfarb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 124.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Cohn, *Audacious Euphony: Chromatic Harmony and the Triad’s Second Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Cohn, “Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 2 (2004): 287.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Taruskin, “Chernomor to Kashchei: Harmonic Sorcery; Or, Stravinsky’s “Angle””, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38, no. 1 (1985): 93, 103.

<sup>72</sup> Erik Heine, “Chromatic Mediants and Narrative Context in Film”, *Music Analysis* 37, no. 1 (2018): 107–28; Vincent Rone, “Scoring the Familiar and Unfamiliar in Howard Shore’s *The Lord of the Rings*”, *Music and the Moving Image* 11, no. 2 (2018): 48–60; Kenneth M. Smith, “Vertigo’s Musical Gaze: Neo-Riemannian Symmetries and Spirals”, *Music Analysis* 37, no. 1 (2018): 68–73.

<sup>73</sup> Monelle gives the example of the “sighing” appoggiatura which, whilst originally iconic of a real sigh, later become symbolic as its iconic associations were forgotten. See Raymond Monelle, “Music and the Peircean Trichotomies”, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 22, no. 1 (1991): 102.

<sup>74</sup> Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 11–13.

<sup>75</sup> Maxwell Ramage, “Transcendental Oscillations in Popular and Classical Music Since the 1800s” (PhD Duke University, 2021), 1–9.

ear, this harmonic language sticks out as exceptional; in some way beyond the normal logic and way things are in musical experience. As Ferdinand de Saussure suggests, ‘meaning is difference, leaving no positive terms for signs’.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, Cohn provides evidence to suggest that certain progressions – in particular the ‘hexatonic pole’ progression, which is prominent in Vaughan Williams’s music – obtains associations with the uncanny through their voice-leading properties.<sup>77</sup>

In this way, pan-triadic syntax can be considered to be iconic in its signification of theological ideas in two distinct ways: 1) because of its contrast with tonal syntax; 2) because of its inherent voice-leading properties. In particular, as I argue below, the former of these is significant to Vaughan Williams’s music. In fact, the variations in the relationship between pan-triadic and tonal syntax across his music suggests that pan-triadic syntax also comes to indexically signify states induced by theological ideas. As such, in order for Vaughan Williams’s theology to be properly understood, it is necessary to consider an analytical framework that accommodates this central part of his harmonic idiom.

### **Analysing Characteristic Progressions**

The principles of modality clearly underlie aspects of Vaughan Williams’s music, and the resolution of modal instability are rightly understood as fundamental in many cases, not least his symphonic works. However, this does not necessarily privilege modality above any other approach as the best framework by which to understand all aspects of his idiom. As I argue, a significant amount of Vaughan Williams’s ‘characteristic’ harmonic language lies beyond the scope of a modal approach. The identification of a method of analysis amenable to this music is of vital importance to my thesis: as I describe above, this part of Vaughan Williams’s musical language is closely and consistently associated with idea of the ‘beyond’ and ‘ultimate realities’. This is evident in the case of both Symphony No. 5 and the *Sinfonia Antartica*, as chapters three and four argue.

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<sup>76</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Charles Baly and Albert Sechehaye (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, [1916] 1959), 121–22. Robert Hatten and Michael Klein make use of this idea through Hatten’s theory of markedness and correlation, in which ‘an opposition in the music (major/minor, for example) correlates to extra-musical meaning (non-tragic/tragic)’. See Klein, “Chopin’s Fourth Ballade as Musical Narrative”, 27; Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>77</sup> Cohn, “Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age”, 303–20.

Manning posits that such features can be understood through the concept of the CMS. Whilst it is perfectly possible, as Anthony Pople shows, to consider a D major to B major progression as lying within the CMS system on B there are similar fingerprint progressions in Vaughan Williams's music which defy such explanations.<sup>78</sup> Manning suggests that these characteristic Vaughan Williams progressions, if they are not accounted for in the CMS, might be understood as modulations. To support this, he cites a passage from the *Mass in G minor*, shown in Example 2.10. Here, because E major's third – G# – is chromatic to the CMS on G, it must, therefore, signal a modulation from that tonal centre.<sup>79</sup> Sometimes, however, Vaughan Williams's idiom does not allow for this possibility either. One such example is found in the opening bars of the anthem *Prayer to the Father of Heaven* (1948), shown in Example 2.11. If this music was approached in terms of modality, then G would be posited as the tonic. However, the E $\flat$  minor chord in bar 4 cannot be accounted for in a CMS on G because of its minor third: G $\flat$ . It also seems improbable that this progression signals a modulation, as this chord is sandwiched directly between two G major chords.<sup>80</sup> In the next few bars, Vaughan Williams seems to move between E $\flat$  minor and G major with the same freedom that allows him to move from G major to B $\flat$  major – a movement that can be understood with recourse to the CMS – in bar 13. All of this occurs in a piece which the composer viewed as 'characteristic' of himself, as the epigraph accompanying the piece reveals; Vaughan Williams dedicated this piece to the memory of his former teacher, Hubert Parry 'not as an attempt palely to reflect his incomparable art, but in the hope that he would have found this motet (to use his own words) "something characteristic."'”

It is also hard to understand Manning's other characteristic progression – that of 'parallel stepwise movement between triads' – in these terms. Between bars 9 and 10 of 'The Cloud Capp'd Towers', as shown in Example 2.9, there is a harmonic progression from A $\flat$  major to A minor. Both E $\natural$  and A $\natural$  are impossible to understand in terms of the CMS on A $\flat$ , but a modulation is unlikely since the music returns to A $\flat$  major only two bars later with no intervening harmonies. Furthermore, a few bars later, G becomes the local tonic again – another semitonal movement – and there are no intervening harmonies to suggest any sort of modulation.

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<sup>78</sup> Pople, "Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle", 66.

<sup>79</sup> Manning, "Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams's Music", 76.

<sup>80</sup> This problem is similar in nature to Richard Cone's problematisation of attempts to explain the harmonic relationships in the first-movement recapitulation of Schubert's B $\flat$  major Piano Sonata (D.960, 1828) according to classical tonal theory. See Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 2–3.

## Neo-Riemannian Theory

The general reluctance to view Vaughan Williams's harmonic practice as anything other than modal might be ascribed to a desire to protect the composer's nationalist credentials, or perhaps a desire to stress the independence of Vaughan Williams's music from his predecessors, and thus protect his status as a modernist. An alternative approach, which is capable of accommodating all such progressions in all circumstances, can be found in neo-Riemannian theory. Richard Cohn argues that the remit of neo-Riemannian theory is to 'map the group structure of triadic transformations in an equal-tempered (twelve-pitch-class) environment, with special attention to those transformations that optimise pitch-class intersection and, more generally, voice-leading parsimony.'<sup>81</sup> This suggests that neo-Riemannian theory might present a viable alternative to understanding Vaughan Williams's harmonic syntax for two reasons; firstly, because its twelve-pitch-class environment enables enharmonic equivalency, and removes the need to understand all triadic progressions in terms of hierarchical tonality or modality and, secondly, because Vaughan Williams's characteristic progressions often exhibit parsimonious voice-leading.

Despite Neo-Riemannian theory's obvious applicability to music throughout Vaughan Williams's oeuvre, its application has remained limited. Frogley briefly mentions both hexatonic and octatonic collections in his update to the *Grove* entry, but neither is related to triadic harmony (I explore the importance of these to neo-Riemannian theory below).<sup>82</sup> Manning directly considers the merits of neo-Riemannian theory in relation to Vaughan Williams's 'characteristic' harmony in his thesis. However, he concludes that such approaches are neither necessary nor even the most satisfactory approach to Vaughan Williams's music, preferring instead the concepts of 'modalised tonality, juxtaposition and chromaticism'.<sup>83</sup> For Manning, neo-Riemannian theory offers, at best, a 'counter coherence'.<sup>84</sup> Daniel Harrison applies elements of neo-Riemannian theory to the triadic harmony in the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in perhaps the most sustained treatment of Vaughan Williams using this body of theory, though he does not engage with the sets that I do below, or relate these progressions

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Cohn, "Weitzmann's Regions, My Cycles, and Douthett's Dancing Cubes", *Music Theory Spectrum* 22, no. 1 (2000): 89.

<sup>82</sup> Ottaway and Frogley, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph", 356. Frogley also briefly mentions hexatonic poles in relation to the triadic opening to *A Sea Symphony*. See Alain Frogley, "History and Geography: the Early Orchestral Works and the First Three Symphonies", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 104, note 31.

<sup>83</sup> Manning, "Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams's Music", 112.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

to theological meaning.<sup>85</sup> Walter Aaron Clark explores the use of octatonicism in Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*, although he does not tackle the issue of triadic octatonicism as much as he does the surface-level existence of octatonic scales. In his analysis of Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia Antartica*, Daniel Grimley invokes the intriguing set-class 5–22 as a governing collection.<sup>86</sup> I return to Grimley's principle of identifying other triad-generating collections in Chapter 4. For now, it is worth noting that he does not attempt to incorporate all of Vaughan Williams's 'characteristic' progressions within this framework, nor does he examine the 'dual nature' of the triad. Cameron Logan seeks to explain many of the characteristic progressions (and more besides) in terms of nonatonic collections; whilst his argument is persuasive in his case studies, there are some elements of Vaughan Williams's characteristic harmony that are less successfully understood from a purely nonatonic perspective.<sup>87</sup> As such, despite the obvious applicability of neo-Riemannian theory to the vocal music of Vaughan Williams, no previous scholarship has sought to thoroughly explain 'characteristic' progressions in these terms.

In *Audacious Euphony*, Cohn sets out to formalise a 'double syntax' of triadic music, which aims to describe exactly the harmonic language found in Vaughan Williams's 'characteristic' progressions.<sup>88</sup> Cohn seeks to 'position triadic harmonies in relation to neither a diatonic system nor a tonal centre, but rather to other triadic harmonies on the basis of the number of pitch-classes that they share, and [...] on the efficiency of the voice leading between them.'<sup>89</sup> Voice-leading work is considered in terms of 'units', with one unit of voice-leading work defined as 'the motion of one voice by one semitone.'<sup>90</sup> Central to Cohn's argument is the idea that this syntax – which he terms 'pan-triadic' – can exist in duality with the syntax of functional harmony.<sup>91</sup> Tonally-centric approaches to Vaughan Williams's music need not entirely be supplanted; however, whilst the 'characteristic' progressions might sometimes be understandable through modalised tonality, and might sometimes not be, they are always amenable to a neo-Riemannian approach. It seems prudent to further an explanation for this

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<sup>85</sup> Harrison, "Three Short Essays on neo-Riemannian Theory", 564–73.

<sup>86</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 129. The Forte name for this set is 5–22.

<sup>87</sup> Cameron Logan, "Nonatonic Harmonic Structures in Symphonies by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Arnold Bax" (PhD University of Connecticut, 2014), especially 163–261.

<sup>88</sup> Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 11–13.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Cohn, "As Wonderful as Star Clusters: Instruments for Gazing at Tonality in Schubert", *19th Century Music* 22, no. 3 (1999): 214.

<sup>90</sup> Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 6–7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

phenomenon that works in all cases and is able to relate these progressions to a formalised body of theory.

Neo-Riemannian theory suggests that chord progressions can also be understood as ‘transformations’ thus removing their anchor to a tonal centre. Neo-Riemannian analysis utilises various transformations to describe pan-triadic harmony: ‘P’ maps a major triad onto its parallel minor (C+ to C-) and vice-versa; ‘L’ maps a major triad onto its mediant minor (C+ to E-) or a minor triad onto its submediant major (E- to C+); ‘R’ maps a major triad onto its relative minor (C+ to A-) and vice-versa.<sup>92</sup> These transformations maintain voice-leading efficiency with the first two being maximally smooth (comprised of the movement of one voice by one semitone). They can also be considered in combination: applied consecutively, these transformations generate collections of triads with interesting properties. Successively applying P and L to any given triad generates a closed group of six triads with a major third between each root: the so-called hexatonic collection (6–20), of which four unique transpositions exist, is the resultant pitch collection. As Cohn describes, this collection has the interesting property of forming a ‘maximally smooth’ cycle of triads.<sup>93</sup> Figure 2.3 shows the triadic entities of these collections. Hexatonic progressions are prominent symbols of the beyond in Vaughan Williams’s music, especially, as chapters three and four show, his symphonic music. A cycle with similar properties can be formed when applying P and R transformations. As Figure 2.4 shows, this generates a closed group of eight triads with a minor third between each root: whilst the voice leading in this group is not maximally smooth (R is a whole-tone transformation), it possesses very similar properties. The total pitch collection of such a cycle is the so-called octatonic collection (8–28), of which three unique transpositions exist.<sup>94</sup> The minimal voice leading encountered in these collections is not just a point of theoretical interest: as Cohn notes, this aspect of these groups is capable of underpinning harmonic syntax.<sup>95</sup>

Two further elements of theory need to be incorporated to comprehend Vaughan Williams’s harmonic affordance structures. Firstly, whilst Hexatonic and Octatonic systems describe the ‘characteristic’ progressions related by a third adequately, those by a semitone are

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<sup>92</sup> Cohn takes these labels from Bryan Hyer’s adaption of David Lewin’s labels. See *ibid.*, 29; Brian Hyer, “Tonal Intuitions in ‘Tristan und Isolde’” (PhD Yale University, 1989), 162; David Lewin, “A Formal Theory of Generalized Tonal Functions”, *Journal of Music Theory* 26, no. 1 (1982): 52–54.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Cohn, “Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions”, *Music Analysis* 15, no. 1 (1996): 13–30.

<sup>94</sup> Richard Cohn, “Neo-Riemannian Operations, Parsimonious Trichords, and Their “Tonnetz” Representations”, *Journal of Music Theory* 41, no. 1 (1997): 39–42.

<sup>95</sup> Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 39–40.

not all accounted for. Cohn notes the existence of a Weitzmann transformation he terms ‘S’ following David Lewin’s identification of the ‘slide’ transformation.<sup>96</sup> This transformation perfectly describes Ottaway’s ‘characteristic’ progression from Symphony No. 6: parallel stepwise movement between two chords with roots a semitone apart and which share a common third. Whilst the location of this transformation within a Weitzmann region anchors it in hexatonic syntax, Grimley approaches this same progression in terms of set class 5–22, indicating that it is not distinctive of that collection.<sup>97</sup> In any case, Vaughan Williams’s use of parallel stepwise movement goes beyond this transformation: it also incorporates triads that do not share a third. Following Julian Horton’s work on Anton Bruckner, I define slide progressions more broadly and distinguish between 4 different possible transformations within slide syntax: S1 (semitonal root motion between triads sharing a common third), S2 (semitonal root motion between major triads), S3 (semitonal root motion between minor triads), and S4 (semitonal root motion between major and minor chords which do not share a third).<sup>98</sup> Figure 2.5 shows these transformations. The total product of these transformations gives the set class 7–z37, as shown in Figure 2.6. Going forward, I refer to all such progressions as ‘Slides’ and, in diagrams, as being part of set-class 7–z37. I argue below and in Chapter 4 that this transformation has very specific associations as a theological affordance structure.

Secondly, the tetradic progressions found in Vaughan Williams’s music need theoretical context. As Adrian Childs notes, the ability to participate in parsimonious voice leading cycles is not the exclusive property of consonant triads: seventh chords (dominant, minor, diminished, and half-diminished) also share this property. Childs posits that each of the three unique diminished-seventh chords is minimally displaced by four dominant seventh chords, and four half-diminished chords.<sup>99</sup> With the addition of intermediary minor seventh chords and French sixth chords, these regions can be connected by octatonic regions. Figure 2.7 shows this network of transformations using Steinbach and Douthett’s ‘4–cube trio’.<sup>100</sup> I

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 64; David Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 178.

<sup>97</sup> Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 129. Grimley also notes that this collection contains elements of two distinct octatonic sets.

<sup>98</sup> Julian Horton, “Form and Orbital Tonality in the Finale of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony”, *Music Analysis* 37, no. 1 (2018): 281.

<sup>99</sup> Adrian P. Childs, “Moving Beyond Neo-Riemannian Triads: Exploring a Transformational Model for Seventh Chords”, *Journal of Music Theory* 42, no. 2 (1998): 184–85. Cohn refers to these chords as the ‘Tristan-genus’. See Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 148–51.

<sup>100</sup> Jack Douthett and Peter Steinbach, “Parsimonious Graphs: A Study in Parsimony, Contextual Transformations, and Modes of Limited Transposition”, *Journal of Music Theory* 42, no. 2 (1998): 262, note 12.

argue below that this interaction bridges the gap between pan-triadic and tonal in *Prayer to the Father of Heaven* and, as such, becomes an important part of a theological affordance structure.

The efficacy of an approach which considers all of these aspects of pan-triadic syntax alongside each other can be seen clearly in examples of purely pan-triadic music. Vaughan Williams's "The Cloud-Capp'd Towers" is a case in point. As Figure 2.8 shows, bars 3–10 contain music underpinned by all these aspects of pan-triadic (and tetradic) syntax in a theologically-loaded context. This figure represents passages of music through the operative triad in each instance. Here, these are represented by labels rather than by notation. These are placed on 'staves' representing hexatonic, octatonic and slide syntaxes: the black line represents the syntactic route taken by the music.

### **Prayer to the Father of Heaven**

*Prayer to the Father of Heaven* provides a useful case study for the interaction of harmony and theological meaning in Vaughan Williams's music. The piece operates within the traditional pairing of non-functional harmony with transcendent concepts. The text, shown in Example 2.2, is explicitly theological in intent; as I describe above, it ruminates on the attributes of God, with a view to the eternal destiny of the believer of being able to behold them fully. The use of pan-triadic syntax is extensive; the vast majority of the harmonic language is tonally non-functional, with the occasional cadential progression anchoring keys momentarily. Whilst this may negate the special sense of transcendent 'breakthrough' afforded by sparing uses of this harmonic language it evokes theological meaning in other, more subtle ways.

The piece begins with a short chordal motif: overall, this occurs four times in the piece, as shown in Example 2.12, each time initiating similar music. This motif appears to be in Eb–Ionian/C–Aeolian, but the progression quickly leads to G major suggesting that it might best be understood through the CMS based on G. G major is more strongly articulated and is the first pure triad heard in the piece: additionally, the following music, shown in Figure 2.9, is unambiguously based around G. Figure 2.9 shows the syntactic route taken by this piece using a similar format to Figure 3.8. Here, chord labels are replaced by notation. Additional labels identify collections and transformations. Triads operating in multiple syntaxes simultaneously are connected with stems. The opening of the piece hints at its governing tonal plot: the juxtaposition between Eb and G as rival tonics. Whilst modal mixture can explain the

movement between E $\flat$  major and G major in bar 1, it can also be understood in terms of the Western Hexatonic collection. Both possibilities are shown in Figure 2.9's graph. As such, pan-triadic syntax can be found at the root of this piece. Hexatonic syntax becomes a necessity when considering the transformation in bar 4; the E $\flat$  minor chord contains G $\flat$ , which cannot exist within a G–CMS. This fleeting visit foreshadows a proper tonicisation of E $\flat$  minor in bar 6. As such, the opening six bars introduces E $\flat$  in increasingly significant ways, as Figure 2.9 shows.

Throughout the piece Skelton's text is strictly set according to its punctuation and form: the first two lines form a discrete section in the piece (bars 1–9), with a subdivision in the middle between the lines (bar 4). Bars 1–9 act as an antecedent in an important sense: although movement towards E $\flat$  underpins the phrase, the proposed progressive tonal arc is not complete in that there is no closure in E $\flat$ . Neither, however, is the initial G modality recovered at the end. Instead, at the last moment, E $\flat$  is supplanted by E. The closure of this section hinges upon the dual nature of the half-diminished chord, which is enharmonically identical to a minor triad with an added sixth. Vaughan Williams exploits the ability of this chord to act cadentially as  $iv^6$ .<sup>101</sup> In bar 8, a major sixth is added to an E $\flat$  minor triad, thus allowing it to enter tetrachordal space.<sup>102</sup> This chord is reinterpreted as  $C^{\emptyset7}$ , which transforms parsimoniously to  $F^{\sharp\emptyset7}$  via a fully diminished chord under octatonic tetradic syntax. This chord is then reinterpreted as  $iv^6$  in a mixed-mode E major cadence. Overall, the progression articulates an S4 relationship. This syntactic interaction becomes a formula for closure used throughout this piece, occurring six times in all. These are shown on *4–Cube trio* in Figure 2.10. All stick to a similar voice-leading model, though they utilise different chords and different octatonic sets. Bars 8 and 14 together exhaust all the half-diminished options from octatonic set 1: this resonates with Cohn's concept of 'class substitution', in which a composer 'can introduce variety whilst still maintaining an overall voice-leading trajectory.'<sup>103</sup> Vaughan Williams utilises this syntactic interaction to modulate freely and effect closure.

Bars 1–9 thus form an 'A' section which begins in G, tonicises E $\flat$ , then abruptly cadences in an E–CMS. The piece successfully moves away from G, but does not secure a

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<sup>101</sup> The precedent for this had been set more than a hundred years previously in the modal mixing of 19th-century composers. See Robert Bailey, "An Analytical Study of the Sketches and Drafts", in *Wagner: Prelude and Transfiguration from Tristan and Isolde*, ed. Robert Bailey (New York: W W Norton, 1985), 118–19.

<sup>102</sup> Julian Hook calls this an 'inclusion' transformation. See Julian Hook, "Uniform Triadic Transformations", *Journal of Music Theory* 46, no. 1-2 (2002): 117.

<sup>103</sup> Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 160.

satisfying end: E, in fact, acts as something of a surrogate for the initial G in that they both coexist in the same octatonic set. The sense of progression is illusory, a feeling underlined by the recapitulation of G and the opening material in the next bar. The following section – bars 9–17 – forms the consequent ‘A\*’. It follows a very similar pattern: beginning in G, moving through E $\flat$ , and utilising the same octatonic closing formula. Again, the arrival of E $\flat$  fails: this time G returns as a modal centre at the end. As Figure 2.11 shows, a very minor alteration in the model set out by A disrupts A\*’s path of transformations in such a way as to arrive back at G by the end instead of E. Rather than entering tetradic–octatonic syntax through E $\flat$  minor, the music does so through G $\flat$  minor (an octatonic substitution), reached through a slide transformation from ii<sup>6</sup> of E $\flat$  in bars 13–14. This provides the means to return to G major, an arrival which is strongly articulated by the post-cadential repetition of iv<sup>6</sup> to I motion, though the tone is unsettling due to the mixed modality here.

A and A\* together provide the tonal blueprint for the piece. G is presented as an initial state; E $\flat$  is presented as the desired state but, despite great effort, this cannot be secured. Chapter 4 observes a similar relationship, also between G and E $\flat$ , in the main theme of the *Sinfonia Antartica*. In *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, this plot is recapitulated in practically identical fashion in bars 31–49, and in a broadly similar way (with one important alteration) in bars 55–67 which close the piece. This blueprint is the medium of expression for a text which pits the transcendence of God against the all-too immanent and limited state of humanity: thus, one is easily mapped onto the other. G becomes identified with the human condition, E $\flat$  with the desired condition: unity with – or perhaps access to – God. The goal of the piece in musical terms becomes the assertion of E $\flat$ : a structure anchored to theological concerns through pan-triadic syntax, an embodiment of the theological idea of revelation. However, this structure does more than simply represent the meaning of the text. In several important ways it undermines and modulates the text, which ultimately becomes just one of several transcendent signifiers used by Vaughan Williams in this piece to the end of furthering his own vision of the beyond.

Of the three non-A sections in this piece two – bars 17–30 and 49–54 – are very similar. These two ‘B’ sections are perfect microcosms of Vaughan Williams’s pan-triadic harmony. In both sections, octatonic and hexatonic syntaxes are required to understand the succession of tonics visited: in the first of these ‘B’ sections, bars 17–30, all the possible modal tonics in both the Western Hexatonic and in Octatonic set 1 are exhausted in turn: all the modal tonics following the initial G are minor, as Figure 2.12 shows. Although B1 is syntactically and

texturally differentiated from any A section, it performs the same overall trajectory of G major to E major across its span as A (bars 1–9) although, as shown in Figure 2.10, a slightly different set of tetradic–octatonic transformations precede the cadence in bar 29. Thus, whilst introducing new material, B1 still necessitates a return of A\* for the music to cadence again in G. This is exactly what happens from bars 32–36 (Figure 2.9). B2 (bars 49–54) follows a similar pattern to B1 with a few important differences. The Western Hexatonic system again governs the first few transformations (bars 49–51): both major and minor modes are visited, resulting in completely parsimonious voice-leading. The sequence of chords is not identical to B1 as only E $\flat$  and B modal areas are explored here. Like B1, this is followed by octatonic syntax; however, B as a modal tonic becomes the link to the octatonic region, meaning that Octatonic set 3 is visited here. A series of transformations within this set bring the music to an F minor triad in bar 53: this then effects a modulation back to G major in modal syntax. Figure 2.13 shows this sequence of triads.

The effect of these purely pan-triadic sections is startling; the invocation of transcendence is there – in both text and musical symbol – but there is no anchor in tonality: the syntax semiologically coded as rational and comprehensible. The same progressions that might have a jubilant, ‘breakthrough’ quality elsewhere (for example in the ‘Gloria’ of the *Mass in G Minor*) have an inscrutable, mysterious atmosphere without tonal context; the text here, with its focus on God’s creative power, is given a mystical, perhaps even ambiguous interpretation. This is consistent with the strong sense throughout this piece of the inscrutableness of the divine – of transcendence without immanence – and of the inability to truly access the ‘beyond’. The remaining ‘C’ section, bars 42–49, shows the extreme of this. It is significantly different to anything else in the piece, both in terms of texture and syntax. As Figure 2.14 shows, modal, slide, and octatonic syntaxes all contribute to its harmonic language. Whilst pan-triadic syntax persists, the presence of disorientating dissonance contrasts strongly with the pure triadicism seen elsewhere, often rendering the triadic harmony ambiguous and obscure. Such language places this section at a distance from everything else in the piece: it is the most extreme point of its inscrutability. The text set at this point is also the most invested in the idea of complete transcendence: ‘Whose magnificence is incomprehensible, All arguments of reason which far doth exceed [...]’. Not coincidentally, it concludes with the only E $\flat$  cadence in the piece at bar 49. This is the point at which the piece finally achieves its goal, and yet it is cold, distant, and confusing. Once again E $\flat$  is implicated in the theological aspects of God’s transcendence, but the musical rhetoric at this point is far from resolved or triumphant.

Through repeated motives, cadential formulas, harmonic trajectory, and textural differentiation – all achieved through the interaction of various triad-generating syntaxes – an almost symmetrical form (A, A\*, B, A\*, C, B, A\*) emerges in this piece, as shown in Figure 2.15. This figure, like Figure 2.8, represents passages of music through the operative triad in each instance. Here, the formal structure is indicated simply by the brackets and section labels above the ‘staves’. As can be seen, there is no single collection underpinning the background form of this piece. Rather, it is the recurring path through the collections that establishes and delineates formal units. As Figure 2.15 shows, at the background level, most transformations rely on set classes besides 7–35. Whilst modality is a necessary analytical component to aspects of the music’s surface layer, it explains very little of the succession of triads and local tonics, or of the underlying structure.

Skelton, despite the acknowledgement of God’s ‘otherness’, achieves an optimistic outlook; the prayer ends with a petition for a good life until the worshipper is able to behold God’s ‘glorious face’. Unlike Skelton, Vaughan Williams’s theology permits no certainty of revelation. The perpetual return to G major at the end of each stanza through the unsettling slide and ‘Tristan Genus’ transformations evoke this fraught theology: whilst transcendence is glimpsed in the non-functional harmony, no transcendence is achieved, and the post G major theme of each section, flirting with the minor mode, is troublesome. This is momentarily challenged in the last section. Bars 55–62 recapitulate the material that closes the first and second stanza; this time, E $\flat$  major – reached through a hexatonic PL transformation – blazes through with strong sentiments of the soul’s eventual unification with God in heaven. The A\* blueprint is augmented to include the most significant attempt to assert E $\flat$  as the tonic. Figure 2.16 depicts the moment that the cadential formula is aborted, and the post-cadential melodic material is sung *fortissimo* in a triumphant E $\flat$  major tonality. Following this, however, E $\flat$  fails. The cadential formula is resumed and the music returns to G. The closing theme is heard in a settled major mode; although, perhaps, the state is fundamentally unchanged despite an experience of transcendence, a more positive outlook is briefly achieved. This condition, which the text describes, is, however, completely undermined by the closing measures, which reintroduce the disquieting minor mode. Overall, whilst the text can be read in a plainly optimistic, reverential way as a symbol of theology, Vaughan Williams’s setting casts a particular theological shadow through its use of non-functional harmony and the indexical way it expresses responses to theological ideas. Chapters three and four explore similar musical

strategies that undermine theological certainty or optimism in distinct ways in Symphony No. 5 and the *Sinfonia Antartica*.

## **Harmony as an Affordance Structure**

Vaughan Williams's use of harmony is a key part of his theological expression in several ways. Pan-triadic harmony in and of itself becomes a symbol of the 'beyond': the precedent for this is set outside Vaughan Williams's own composition and is consistent across the reception of much Western classical music. This iconic signification originates in the contrast between the unique voice-leading properties of pan-triadic syntax and those of gravity-bound tonality: what Cohn calls the 'double syntax'. Vaughan Williams uses this dichotomy to great effect in some pieces, maintaining the sense of 'breakthrough' often associated with sparing, dramatic uses of this language. However, elsewhere, he saturates his music with pan-triadicism, almost to the exclusion of other musical parameters. Whilst this still maintains the connection to the transcendent through symbolic, its indexical meaning is more ambiguous and uncertain. The overwhelming sense of multiple possible tonal centres leads to none being asserted, and thus the sense of transcendence evoked has a cold, inscrutable feel to it. Like modality, Vaughan Williams's use of pan-triadic harmony creates a framework through which musical plots can be constructed and associated with theological issues: the double syntax described by Cohn becomes a semiotically-charged aspect of Vaughan Williams's music, through which theological concerns are embedded. My central thesis – that Vaughan Williams's affords theological interpretation – receives significant support from the presence of these harmonic affordance structures.

## **Intertextuality**

### **Shorthand**

As many commentators have noted, Vaughan Williams maintains a significant consistency in musical language over the span of his career.<sup>104</sup> As this chapter argues, transcendent affordance structures occur across Vaughan Williams's choral and vocal output

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<sup>104</sup> Ottaway and Frogley, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph", 347.

in repeated and consistent ways. The common use of these expressive devices forges iconic links between apparently disparate topics in a way which foregrounds the ambiguity of Vaughan Williams's visions at the same time as contributing to the potency of their expression and their openness to a diversity of reception.

However, the use of affordance structures goes beyond mere consistency. Vaughan Williams is deliberately intertextual in his compositional practice to a significant degree. Musical structures and theological texts are quoted and modulated between pieces, carrying with them meaning accrued from elsewhere in the composer's output. Through these interactions, lines of dialogue are set up between pieces separated by many years and sometimes, on the face of it, entirely different subject matter. Musical quotations from sources beside his own compositions are also used to this effect. These connection points allow Vaughan Williams's music a 'shorthand' expression of complex meaning and form a core part of how he expresses his visions of the beyond. The tropes created by these intertextual connections form an important part of the theological reception of his music and are themselves able to shed some light on the composer's own theological intentions. Chapter 4 explores how these dynamics function with regards to the *Sinfonia Antartica*. In a similar way to harmony, then, Mirka's integration of topic with Peirce's trichotomy is a helpful model.<sup>105</sup> Like topics, moments of intertextuality act as iconic signifiers of other music. However, they also indexically signify what those pieces themselves signify.

### **Types of Intertextuality**

Where pieces with explicit text are linked to pieces without through musical allusion or quotation, it seems likely that something of the text's meaning becomes invested in the musical quotation, and thus some of this meaning is imported into a new context. Vaughan Williams himself suggests direct intertextual links between pieces: as I discuss above, he quotes Shakespeare when explaining the meaning underlying the ending of his Symphony No. 6; this quote forms the closing part of the text for "The Cloud-capp'd Towers". It is surely no accident that both music is based on a similar musical structure: the 'slide' progression I describe above, as Examples 2.9 and 2.13 show. Thus, whilst this is not a direct quotation, significant intertextuality occurs that has the potential to modulate the meaning of both pieces. The

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<sup>105</sup> Mirka, "Introduction", 30–32.

direction of travel here is from non-textual to textual, such that the former piece (in this case Symphony No. 6) retrospectively accrues new layers of meaning.

Vaughan Williams's output also contains transcendent signifiers which rely on referencing music that originates outside the composer's own writing. Many of these are folksongs and hymns: a case in point is the 'Dives and Lazarus' tune, which appears in various compositions across the composer's oeuvre.<sup>106</sup> The fact that this piece finds its origin in British folksong traditions rather than Vaughan Williams himself is ideologically important and allows for particular topics to enter the musical discourse. The fact that this tune also forms the bases of one of Vaughan Williams's contributions to *The English Hymnal* only reinforces its importance in terms of a signifier of national music and, furthermore, welds this ideologically to the institution of the Church of England, and to Christianity in general. The text generally sung to this tune, as indicated in Vaughan Williams' contributions to the *English Hymnal*, is Horatius Bonar's 'I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say'.<sup>107</sup> Unlike those often chosen by Vaughan Williams in his compositional output, this text is emphatically Christological. Thus, this extrinsic melody relates to wider ideas of religions cultural significance and, as such, has the potential to bring some of this meaning into instrumental musical contexts.

Vaughan Williams also set certain texts multiple times across his career, setting up networks of inter-related interpretations in doing so. The choral motet *The Voice out of the Whirlwind*, for example, sets the text to music first heard in *Job: a Mask for Dancing*. Whilst the latter piece is textless, both take the book of Job as their inspiration. Another clear example is Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which crops up throughout Vaughan Williams's output.<sup>108</sup> The multiple uses of the same text for related but distinct expressive ends leads to differing interpretations which serve to enrich, if not elucidate, the meaning inherent in each case.

### **“From far, from Eve and Morning”– and Beyond**

One of the most extensive examples of intertextuality in Vaughan Williams is an opening gesture that appears in several pieces across Vaughan Williams's output, each time heralding the potential for theological meaning. The earliest definitive statement of this gesture

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<sup>106</sup> It is used in the hymn tune *Kingsfold* (1906), features in the *Folk Song Suite* (1923) and, of course, forms the basis of the *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'* (1939)

<sup>107</sup> *The English Hymnal (with tunes)*, ed. Percy Dearmer and Ralph Vaughan Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1906), 574.

<sup>108</sup> Lew, “‘Words and Music that are Forever England’: *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the Pitfalls of Nostalgia”, 175–76.

is heard at the outset of “From far, from Eve and Morning”, the second song from the 1909 song cycle *On Wenlock Edge*. This gesture is, in fact, a *locus classicus* for the harmonic affordance structures that link Vaughan Williams’s music to the transcendent across his output. Here, a short sequence of chords, played *pianissimo*, is used as an introduction for melodic material; a consistent homophonic texture persists throughout this palindromic sequence containing five consonant major triads. This progression emphasises strong bass-soprano counterpoint with contrary motion observed throughout, resulting in an undulatory shape. It is free from any strong sense of tonal or modal centre with chords moving exclusively by root third and second progressions: the minor third progression between the opening major triads is particularly notable in this regard. This harmonic syntax is, as I argue above, best analysed using neo-Riemannian theory. Such an analysis is shown in Figure 2.17, along with the interval between soprano and bass to illustrate the distinctively strict counterpoint.<sup>109</sup> Whilst this is the first definitive statement of this gesture it quite clearly references predecessors that fulfil a similar role at the opening of pieces: in particular, the orchestral opening to *Towards the Unknown Region*, shown in Example 2.14, which features the same commitment to contrary motion and overall undulatory shape (though inverted). Whilst there are significant differences – most notably the prominence of the dissonant half-diminished seventh chord, and the fact that the entire progression is straightforwardly understood with reference to a tonal centre (D minor) – the sense of theological resonance is reinforced by the ensuing text. This is shown in Example 3.3 and contains many of the classic features of the texts Vaughan Williams chose in his early career as I describe above. This piece in turn, as Kennedy argues, may well draw its initial descending line and contrary motion bassline from an earlier piece: *Bright is the Ring of Words*.<sup>110</sup> However, the progression in this piece does not function as an introduction, instead providing the main theme of the song.

Many of the features expressed in the opening to “From far, from Eve and Morning” are also present in the introduction to the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, shown in Figure 2.18, which was composed during the same period. Wilfrid Mellers identifies this link, citing the ‘awe-inspiring’ effect of the ‘alternation of diatonic concords’ in both pieces.<sup>111</sup> The same strict counterpoint applies: the *Fantasia*’s introduction is almost entirely contrary motion and completely avoids parallel fifths and octaves. This is particularly notable in the context of

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<sup>109</sup> This diagram takes inspiration from Harrison’s Example 20.15 in Harrison, “Three Short Essays on neo-Riemannian Theory”, 569.

<sup>110</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 112.

<sup>111</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 51.

a piece which goes on to foreground such parallel intervals. Parallel movement is a significant aspect of Vaughan Williams's language: he certainly felt no need to stick to familiar rules of harmony and voice-leading. Therefore, his deliberately strict Soprano-Bass counterpoint seems to be to a particular expressive end. Whilst there are no individual progressions which defy tonal explanation the entire progression, as Harrison notes, expresses so many possible tonal centres that, in effect, it expresses none.<sup>112</sup> The descending shape of the soprano closely mirrors that of *Toward the Unknown Region*, indicating that there is some sort of cross-pollination from two extant introductions. Kennedy, in contrast to Mellers, emphasises this intertextual link.<sup>113</sup> Another piece with an opening containing many of these features is the 'Gloria' of 1922's *Mass in G minor*, shown in Figure 2.19. After the short intonation, the introduction 'proper' is heard in the opening six bars. Again, the music is entirely made up of pure triadic harmony in strict counterpoint (almost entirely contrary motion). The distinctive minor third progression between major triads is present as the opening gambit, although the sense of modal centre is stronger after this progression than in other examples of this opening gesture.

Perhaps the two uses of this trope that stand in closest relation to "From far, from Eve and Morning" are the beginning of the slow movement from Symphony No. 5, and the beginning of Scene Two from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, shown in Figure 2.20 and Figure 2.21. All three feature only three distinct triads and two distinct root motions (minor third and major second). The minor third progression between major triads opens all three, though the progressions from *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Symphony No. 5 descend, whereas "From far..." ascends. Whilst the oscillation between triads a major second apart occupies much of the rest of all three progressions, the third triad of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Symphony No. 5 is minor, whereas all the triads in "From far..." are major. "From far..." also returns to the opening triad by means of a third progression, which the other two do not. All three feature complete contrary motion between soprano and bass, although the shapes of the latter two are inverted. In fact, these later progressions stand in even stronger relationship with each other, such that the use of this progression in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is in dialog with Symphony No. 5 (and *vice versa*) rather than merely the original statement. In terms of the triads visited, the progression from *The Pilgrim's Progress* merely transposes the progression from Symphony No. 5 up a minor third, though there are differences in counterpoint and inversion which differentiate the two beyond this.

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<sup>112</sup> Harrison, "Three Short Essays on neo-Riemannian Theory", 572–73.

<sup>113</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 124.

This introductory harmonic gesture has become something of a touchstone for describing Vaughan Williams's style: it is often cited as an early moment of the composer's mature style beginning to show itself and a high-water mark of his song-writing.<sup>114</sup> *On Wenlock Edge* itself became a landmark composition for Vaughan Williams and is one of the earliest examples of the consistent musical devices that he used to express his visions of the beyond throughout his career: many of the other pieces listed above are also used as typical examples of the composer's style in general.<sup>115</sup> Because of the status held by these pieces, the quotation has the effect of chaining their reception and, more importantly, the transcendent tropes evident in all its uses. The defining harmonic properties of the gesture – pure, pan-triadic harmony – are, as I have outlined above, clear transcendent signifiers in themselves. Beyond this, as Daniel Harrison notes, the progressions seen in these gestures anchor them in ancient ecclesiastical music; there is something almost Tallis-like about the soprano-bass counterpoint.<sup>116</sup> The slow pace and quiet dynamics used in these cases only add to the sense of theological anticipation.

Aside from this theologically expressive consistency, the presence of the texts connected to many of these pieces creates distinct lines of dialog. From its contact with Houseman's text in its first appearance, this progression is indexically invested in transcendent ideas regardless of its harmonic content. This has particularly interesting ramifications in the pieces of instrumental music, where the intertextual link has the potential to prime the listener to receive the piece as dealing with transcendent topics. In both of these examples, this is not the only quotation that occurs. The *Fantasia* is, of course, entirely based on Tallis's psalm tune, itself redolent with themes of faith, church, and state. The whole piece is suffused with transcendent signifiers that guarantee the potency of the piece's spiritual reception as well as its inherent ambiguity. Symphony No. 5, meanwhile, accesses the opening harmonic gesture of "From far..." via its presence in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, thus creating a double layer of intertextuality. In both cases, the text of "From far..." combines with the invocation of other texts to jostle for position in a hierarchy of theological meaning.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Ottaway and Frogley, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph", 346–56.

<sup>116</sup> Harrison, "Three Short Essays on neo-Riemannian Theory", 568.

## **Intertextuality as an Affordance Structure**

The dizzying array of theological affordance structures in Vaughan Williams's vocal music does not cohere easily into a clear vision of the beyond: still less does this translate into a consistent reception. I observe similar trends in chapters three and four with regards to Symphony No. 5 and the *Sinfonia Antartica*. However, the interaction of these pieces reinforces their reception as theological in each individual case. The links forged between pieces outline consistent themes in Vaughan Williams's theological views. The equating of diverse transcendent texts by means of the same musical device – ecclesiastical, Christian literature, and secular, transcendent poetry – suggests an almost universalist position with regard to the nature of the transcendent (backed up by Vaughan Williams's writings, especially regarding *The Pilgrim's Progress*) whilst, at the same time, filibustering its definition. Certainly, Vaughan Williams's transcendence does not seem to be in-step with orthodox Christianity. Instead, a deistic theology – which I explore in greater depth in Chapter 3 – emerges as the dominant framework for Vaughan Williams. Theological meaning is there to be found because of the music's polysemic capabilities, as Vaughan Williams intends. The forging of these links, furthermore, allows much of Vaughan Williams's output to enter into this discussion. His shorthand for theological meaning emerges throughout his output – both in pieces with texts and those without – such that the vision of the beyond truly becomes a defining theme of his music.

## **Interplay**

### **Multiple Transcendent Signifiers**

As this chapter argues, Vaughan Williams's vocal music features several key musical parameters which invest his musical language with theological meaning. Text, modality, harmony, and intertextuality all function here as means by which Vaughan Williams's vision of the beyond is expressed; they work as potential theological affordance structures and create a high likelihood that this music is received as being related to theological issues. However, these affordance structures do not merely function in isolation; they interact in theologically significant ways. The most obvious of these interactions is, of course, between musical

structures and the particular text at hand. The majority of this chapter explores this interaction as a baseline for understanding how each feature interacts with the meanings in the text. However, in all of the individual pieces I mention in this chapter, the more purely musical affordance structures parameters coexist, overlap, and modulate each other's effect on the theological whole. The combination of these multiple transcendent signifiers creates a complex network of possible meanings and interpretations: their interaction is capable of forming musical tropes which can be read as expressing theological ideas.

This has implications for the analytical method applied here: it is not enough that each structure is accounted for analytically on its own terms in relation to its potential semiotic capabilities. Rather, any successful analytical approach needs to incorporate the interplay of these structures into its investigation of the embodiment of meaning: this requires engaging with multiple theoretical perspectives.

### **Interplay in *Valiant for Truth***

*Valiant For Truth* (1940) provides a good case study for the interaction of these different musical parameters as it possesses strong theological affordance structures in its text, modality, harmony, and intertextuality. The piece was composed as a memorial to Dorothy Longman, an old friend of Vaughan Williams who had passed away earlier in 1940. Dorothy's husband Robert found particular resonance in this text (shown in Example 2.5) related to his wife's last days and interaction with Vaughan Williams himself. In a letter written to the composer the following year, he quoted a portion of the text:

“When he understood it, he called for his friends”. Though at the time I did not know it, I feel that Dorothy did understand & I thank God that you came to her on that Wednesday, 3 days before she “passed over”; from that evening until the end it was too late for she knew no one. It was you and Fanny that she most wished to see & both of you came. She wd: [sic] wish for no better memorial than “Valiant for Truth”.<sup>117</sup>

There is thus a deeply personal connection to this piece for Vaughan Williams: It is therefore no surprise that many of his most distinctive and idiosyncratic transcendent affordance structures – Bunyan's text, modal resolution, pan-triadic harmony – can be found in this expression of his vision of the beyond.

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<sup>117</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 330.

## Tropes, Harmony, and Modality

Pan-triadic harmony is used extensively in this piece: as I argue above, this is inherently linked to transcendent topics in Vaughan Williams's music and beyond. This is augmented by the concurrent presence of modality; the section from bars 8–25, shown in Example 2.15, makes heavy use of a particular way of pairing these two which is commonplace in Vaughan Williams's vocal music: it is evident in many of the pieces above, including *The Souls of the Righteous* and *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*. A solo voice sings in a single mode while the other parts sustain the tonic triad of that mode in harmonic stasis. The chordal parts then navigate parsimoniously to another modal centre, and the melodic voice starts again in the new mode. Often, as in the first part of this section, the logic that underpins the relationship between the modal centres cannot be understood through modality: the harmony here is pan-triadic, and thus neo-Riemannian theory represents the best option for analysis. Cohn's concept of the 'double syntax' is, furthermore, very appropriate to this context. Consider the D minor triad in bar 10–14, shown in Example 2.15. It is clearly acting as the tonic triad of a Dorian mode, and thus is part of the asymmetric pitch collection 7–35, which generates the hierarchical system of tonalities and modes. Yet, at the same time, it is clearly acting in pan-triadic space as a triad within the second octatonic scale. The movement between D minor and the modal centres of B minor that surround this passage is best understood through the neo-Riemannian transformations RP and PR, a point underlined by the parsimonious movement in bars 9 and 14–15. Triads here are thus simultaneously housed within modal and octatonic systems and syntaxes. They are liminal objects: the triad's existence in both sets underpins the logic of this music. Whilst the music in this section is internally coherent because of its modal syntax, the external cohesion in this piece relies on pan-triadic syntax. As I argue above, both modality and pan-triadic syntax are theological affordance structures. Thus, the dual syntax here also results in a duality of transcendent signifiers: a theologically charged musical trope. Coupled with a culturally resonant text and its intertextual connections across Vaughan Williams's output, a surfeit of theological meaning is suggested. Similar tropes can be observed in Vaughan Williams's symphonic music, as chapters three and four show.

## Intertextuality and Theological Meaning

*Valiant for Truth* stands in an intertextual relationship with other pieces in Vaughan Williams's output because its text is drawn from Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*: a piece that preoccupied the composer for much of his career. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a particularly personal choice as a means of expressing thoughts on the trials of life and visions of the beyond. As Nathaniel Lew notes, the text had a nostalgic power over the composer: '[Vaughan Williams's] compulsion to revisit Bunyan's text [...] suggests that it was an important link in a strong attachment that Vaughan Williams felt to his personal and cultural past.'<sup>118</sup> Lew goes on to describe the unique place this book has in English culture:

The Baptist preacher John Bunyan (1628–88) produced the first part of his most famous work, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This world to That which is to come Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream*, while serving a 12-year jail term during the Restoration due to his public preaching of his Puritan religious beliefs. The book was published in 1678, after Bunyan's release, and a second part appeared in 1684. Immediately upon its publication *The Pilgrim's Progress* attracted enormous and lasting popularity with a wide audience. As the book entered the literary canon Bunyan's central images insinuated themselves into the consciousness of the English reading public, where they evoked a more general Englishness, both religious and cultural, than Bunyan probably intended. Although sharply critical of the formalism of the Anglican Church, the book was adopted (at least by the laity) as a key to the simpler side of the Christian faith and became universal childhood reading. Even to nineteenth-century readers with little sympathy for a narrative of salvation and the triumph over sin the book offered a nostalgic picture of English country life of the seventeenth century and was an accessible literary link to the tradition of religiosity which so many otherwise secular Britons (still) hold dear.<sup>119</sup>

Vaughan Williams's most extensive engagement with this text is, of course, found in the 1951 opera of the same name. By this time, however, Vaughan Williams had engaged musically with this text at least four times: firstly, as Lew notes, writing instrumental music for a dramatic production of the book in Reigate (1905/6); secondly, in his own *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922); thirdly in *Valiant for Truth* (1940); and fourthly, in the incidental music for Edward Sackville West's BBC radio play (1942). Thus, *Valiant for Truth* exists within a network of other settings of Bunyan by Vaughan Williams. In fact, it sets a portion of the text missed out by the opera: writing to Vaughan Williams about the opera, Rutland Boughton expressed sadness that Mr. Valiant for Truth had been left out; in response, Vaughan Williams wrote that he 'left out Valiant for Truth – one had to leave out many people (e.g

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<sup>118</sup> Lew, "'Words and Music that are Forever England': *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the Pitfalls of Nostalgia", 176.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

Faithful) as his great speech w<sup>d</sup> [sic] not have gone well in the mouth of the Pilgrim – (as a matter of fact I once made a musical setting of Valiant’s speech)’.<sup>120</sup>

The relation to these other texts anchors *Valiant for Truth* in ideas of spiritual pilgrimage, universal spirituality, and national identity, as well as the biography of the composer. As mentioned above, Vaughan Williams famously changed the name of Bunyan’s protagonist from ‘Christian’ to ‘Pilgrim’. In the same letter mentioned above, Boughton gently questioned this decision; in response, Vaughan Williams revealed to him that he ‘on purpose, did not call the Pilgrim “Christian” because I want the work to be universal and apply to any body who aims at the spiritual life whether he [sic] is Xtian, Jew, Buddhist, Shintoist or 5<sup>th</sup> day Adventist.’<sup>121</sup> In a similar way to modality, Bunyan’s text in Vaughan Williams’s music melds national and spiritual identity in a theologically charged affordance structure. Its potency as a religiously meaningful text is inherently intertwined with English history and similar ideas of national spirit that pervades Vaughan Williams’s writings. For Lew, nostalgia underpins – even hampers – Vaughan Williams’s continued return to the text; the 1951 opera: ‘[...] drew [Vaughan Williams] back to a vanished or vanishing aesthetic associated with earlier eras: outmoded styles of theatrical presentation, religious worship, musical expression, and national self-definition.’<sup>122</sup> This text also strongly conforms to the idea of a spiritual journey which, as Kennedy argues, is an idea that pervades much of Vaughan Williams’s work.

In Vaughan Williams’s firmament three stars were fixed by which he navigated course. They were *A Sea Symphony*, *The Pilgrim’s* various forms, and *Scott of the Antarctic* [...] The connecting links between those three works are [...] In the first place [...] the idea of a journey or voyage. Added to this is the sense of man adventuring into the unknown against either natural or supernatural odds. Whitman’s strong appeal for Vaughan Williams lay in his imagery for this mysterious journey which the spirit of man undertakes: ‘Darest thou, O Soul, walk out with me toward the unknown region?’ That is the theme of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* too, and it is the theme of nearly all Vaughan Williams’s symphonies, especially the sixth and the ninth.<sup>123</sup>

In setting this text, Vaughan Williams accesses these concepts in the context of death and life’s difficulties. Bunyan’s text provides consolation in the face of adversity: the generalised spiritual journey is made specific here in its description of ‘passing over’ to the other side, where the ‘marks and scars’ from life are carried as a ‘witness for me, that I have fought his battles, who now will be my rewarder’ (see Example 2.5). The sense of universal

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<sup>120</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 485.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Lew, “‘Words and Music that are Forever England’: *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the Pitfalls of Nostalgia”, 199–200.

<sup>123</sup> Michael Kennedy, “The Unknown Vaughan Williams”, *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 99, no. 1 (1972): 31–32.

spirituality is also present here, given the fact that the identify of this deity who ‘rewards’ is left unclear. This was certainly not Bunyan’s intention: the end of this speech features explicit quotes from 1 Corinthians. However, as I argue, Vaughan Williams does not exclusively equate biblical text with orthodox Christian theology, rather viewing it as a repository of truths and spiritual expression. It was certainly connected to what he perceived as an ‘English’ mode of expression he no doubt found in Bunyan.<sup>124</sup> Thus, the text set in *Valiant for Truth* is laden with intertextual connections which deepen its already potent theological significance.

### **Musical Plots and Spiritual Journey**

The ever-present sense of spiritual journey that accompanies Vaughan Williams’s settings of Bunyan is embodied in the modal and harmonic plot of this piece. Like *The Souls of the Righteous*, *Valiant for Truth* pairs a modal resolution with the concept of a progression to the ‘other side’. Modes in D minor (Aeolian and Dorian) are juxtaposed with two possible major resolutions through a progressive modality: B♭ Major and G Major. Resolution of modal ambiguity lies at the heart of this piece. The initial modality, shown in Example 2.16, is ambiguous: the tonic appears to be D, but the music does not present the requisite number of pitches for the mode to be identified. There is no sixth scale degree, meaning the identity of the initial mode could be D–Aeolian or D–Dorian. Initially, the music suggests that the mode is D–Aeolian, as B♭ major is arrived at through G minor in bar 3. This modal trajectory is made possible by the intersection of G–Aeolian/B♭–Ionian with D–Aeolian/Dorian: they share six of seven pitches. The B♭ in bar 3 suggests that the opening mode should retrospectively be understood as D–Aeolian: it appears to contain the missing sixth scale degree. Indeed, in the continuation of the opening material after the homophonic interlude underlining B♭, the definitive flattened sixth degree is heard. This sets a precedent for the initial D minor modality to become B♭ major by the end of the piece for two reasons: firstly, because this is the first transformation encountered and, secondly and relatedly, because B♭ major is a subset of D–Aeolian. However, at the start of the second sentence, Vaughan Williams restates the opening phrase transposed a fifth higher. This restatement of the opening material, shown in Example 2.15, is clearly D–Dorian, as it features prominent major sixth degrees. This is then followed by music which eventually affirms G major as the tonic in bar 25, with the textual support of ‘going to my Father’s’ suggesting G major as the possible resolution of the initial D minor.

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<sup>124</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 23.

This would retrospectively suggest that the initial mode is actually D–Dorian because the first time the opening phrase is restated it contains the raised sixth degree: G major would thus be contained in the initial mode. Following this music, the piece presents material housed in a bold G–Ionian mode from bar 25–28, before this material is repeated in B♭ from bars 29–31. This is shown in Example 2.17. Thus, the two possible goals for the piece’s progressive modality are outlined.

Whilst the tonalities of G major and B♭ may not hold specific types of meaning in themselves, the opposition of these two possible routes to major resolution creates the form of the piece and anchors the listener in limbo, awaiting a final destination. Ultimately, as Example 2.18 shows, G major is presented as the goal at the very last minute, undercutting a strident passage in B♭ major. The manner of this final transformation – the direct motion from B♭ to G – is notable: additionally, the precise moment of this transformation – the point at which Mr. Valiant For Truth finally arrives at ‘the other side’ – renders it particularly rich with theological resonance. Whilst both B♭ and G major triads intersect with the initial ambiguous D–Aeolian/Dorian, they are not closely related themselves by modality. Indeed, there is no single mode in which B♭ major and G major coexist. Instead, they are more strongly related to each other by their coexistence in the same octatonic scale where they are related by an RP transformation. Again, at the root of this piece, modal and pan-triadic resources combine to create theologically resonant musical structures: Figure 2.22 shows how these cohere at the background level of the piece. Thus, the means by which the goal is reached is not related to the initial subject. This is not a Beethovenian struggle-to-victory: whilst there is a sense of overcoming in the piece, the final transition relies on an unseen, transcendent power. This relates strongly to Vaughan Williams’s own thoughts on eternal life, no doubt made particularly pertinent by the personal connection he had to this piece. Similar modal ambiguities and trajectories underpin theological ideas in Symphony No. 5, as Chapter 3 argues.

### **Interplay of Affordance Structures**

My analysis of *Valiant for Truth* shows how Vaughan Williams combines multiple transcendent signifiers in his music. The resulting tension creates polysemic connections to transcendent meaning. Modality and pan-triadic harmony, in particular, emerge as bedfellows in the visions of the beyond depicted by Vaughan Williams’s vocal music. It is partly through the interaction of harmony with modality, and in the ensuing articulation of form, that Vaughan

Williams's music communicates theologically. The resulting meditation on suffering and eternal life resonates strongly with other pieces in the composer's output, not least those that also engage with Bunyan's text: the intertextual nature of Vaughan Williams's output invests this piece with particular theological themes and resonances with the composer's own beliefs.

Whilst individual transcendent signifiers have their own somewhat unstable relationships with theological meaning, the tension created by their simultaneous activity enhances the sense of ambiguity whilst, at the same time, maximising its possible contact with theology. Attempts to reduce this ambiguity might well diminish its power of affordance as a whole. Perhaps the interaction of affordance structures in Vaughan Williams's music does not require 'solving' to prove its efficacy as a site of theological meaning. What theology and analysis can do, however, is create the possibility of rational debate whilst, at the same time, providing some answers as to why and how such music might be read as theological. A similar approach – one that remains receptive of ambiguity – underpins my music-theological analysis of Vaughan Williams's symphonic movement in Chapters 3 and 4.

### **Theological Affordance Structures in Vaughan Williams's Music**

In this chapter I argue, firstly, that a primary motivation underpinning Vaughan Williams's compositional practice is a desire to express a personal vision of the beyond; thus, there is a strong case for considering his music as intentionally invested with theological meaning. Secondly, I show that various distinct musical parameters in Vaughan Williams's choral music act as theologically charged symbols, and I offer analytical methods and theoretical models for comprehending these features and their links to theological meaning. These musical features act as affordance structures'; whilst they do not guarantee a uniformity in theological engagement, they do create a high chance that such music elicits religious experience or is related to theology in some way. Vaughan Williams's use of diverse texts betrays particular theological concerns: most notably the dominance of transcendence over immanence and an appeal to transcendent ideas of heaven in the face of adversity. Modality becomes a theological sign at multiple levels. The sacred and secular collapse into one another in Vaughan Williams's use of modality: it acts as an index for ideas of English spiritual identity through its iconic connection to folk song and Tudor and Elizabethan polyphony, whilst also indexically referring to broad concepts of nature. Furthermore, Vaughan Williams's extensive use of modality and

engagement with networks of related modal centres endows his music with expressive plot trajectories that evoke theological ideas: most notably, the resolution or progression of the ‘home’ modality across the span of a piece becomes invested with ideas of spiritual pilgrimage and the soul’s journey to the ‘other side’. *The Souls of the Righteous* is a perfect example of this. Harmony is also invested with theological meaning; this is made particularly obvious in pieces such as “The Cloud-Capp’d Towers”, where variation and expression in other musical parameters is minimised. Pan-triadic harmony emerges as an iconic sign of the beyond; in part, this is due to the particularities of its voice-leading in comparison to hierarchical tonality and modality. Whilst this relationship is present as a symbol of transcendent ideas throughout Western classical music over the last two hundred years, it is foregrounded in Vaughan Williams’s output, sometimes in quite extreme ways. As well as providing more immediate tools for expression, pan-triadic harmony, and its tension with hierarchical tonicisation creates, like modality itself, long-range musical plots through which theological ideas can be explored. *Prayer to the Father of Heaven* exhibits many of these features. Intertextuality in Vaughan Williams’s oeuvre further embeds theological meaning into individual pieces. Vaughan Williams’s propensity for quoting himself, as well as returning to textual sources multiple times, creates a ‘shorthand’ for theological expression. This is seen clearly in the various pieces that utilise the short chordal introduction first heard in “From far, from Eve and Morning” as a way of heralding theologically significant music.

Thirdly, I argue that these musical affordance structures are not merely presented as static signs; rather, they exist in tension with one another and are capable of forming complex tropes. Dialogues emerge in this music between different signifiers with different connotations regarding the Christian transcendent. The result is often a melting pot of musical symbolism linked to religious experience and theological issues: this is exemplified in *Valiant for Truth*, where pan-triadic harmony and modal resolution interact with each other and with intertextual connections to other Bunyan pieces in Vaughan Williams’s output.

Rather than ensuring a specific interpretation located in his intention, Vaughan Williams evokes these ideas in a way which intentionally leaves room for diverse theological reception: it is music composed to be read theologically by the widest possible audience, rather than music composed with a strict theological ‘message’. There is inherent ambiguity here which prioritises strength of expression and broadness of accessibility over defined doctrine. Thus, the role of music theology becomes, in conjunction with analysis, one of explicating *why* and *how* these pieces are capable of becoming theological in the way they do and providing a

rational framework by which more individual and specific interpretations might be discussed. Specific interpretations require a substantial threshold of evidence to achieve widespread agreement which cannot always be met. Whether or not any given experience can achieve plausibility or acceptance in a wider sense depends on the interaction of musicological, analytical, and theological methods at the level of evidence in any given case. Thus, the readings offered here, though they are anchored in significant evidence garnered from esthetic and poietic levels of meaning, are not final or concrete. As Agawu notes, any form of analysis 'is ideally permanently open, that it is dynamic and on-going, and that it is subject only to provisional closure. In an ideal world, analysis would go on always and forever.'<sup>125</sup>

This chapter uses vocal pieces as case studies for how theological meaning might interact with Vaughan Williams's music. Vaughan Williams's theological expressions are not limited to pieces which set religiously significant texts: as the composer's writings suggest, this is a guiding concern behind much of his music. This corresponds with the reception of Vaughan Williams's music; his symphonies, in particular, are consistently interpreted as being invested with theological concerns. The remainder of this thesis, therefore, takes up the analytical frameworks I discuss here to generate informed theological interpretations of Vaughan Williams's symphonic music.

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<sup>125</sup> Agawu, "How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In Again", 270. at

## 3. Natural Theology and Symphony No. 5

### Introduction

#### Theological Themes in the Reception of Symphony No. 5

Of all the pieces in Vaughan Williams's oeuvre, few attract such theological interest as Symphony No. 5. For reasons including the piece's intertextual connections, the presence of theological affordance structures in the shape of established transcendent musical tropes, the existing reception of the composer, and the cultural context the piece entered, it is consistently approached as being related to theological issues to a greater degree than almost any other of his pieces. These connotations are evident from the earliest reception to the piece: Frank Howes opined in his review of the premiere that it 'belongs to that small body of music that, outside of late Beethoven, can properly be described as transcendental.'<sup>1</sup> The Beethoven comparison was also made by Howes a decade later: he describes it as 'the most successful attempt since Beethoven to use music as a direct penetration of the mystery of life' and 'a more successful attempt than Beethoven's to deal with metaphysical issues in the language of sound.'<sup>2</sup> For Michael Kennedy, whilst it remains 'absolute music' this is the 'Symphony of the Celestial City'.<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Mellers, meanwhile, views the cadential resolution at the end of the symphony as a 'gateway to Paradise'.<sup>4</sup> More recent accounts tend to be slightly less grandiose in their assertions, but still underline the piece's undoubted transcendent dimension. Music analyst Arnold Whittall, for example, describes the first movement as 'perhaps his most penetrating expression of the pastoral as transcendent.'<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Whittall is one of the few to approach the piece's apparent links with theological ideas through an analytically grounded approach.<sup>6</sup> He goes on to describe the outlook of the piece more precisely:

Vaughan Williams's Fifth uses its 'human side' to raise questions about 'eternity' which are by definition unanswerable in terms of human experience [...] The result is the more powerful for

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, "Promenade Concert. Vaughan Williams's Symphony", *The Times*, June 25 1943, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 42–43.

<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 279–83.

<sup>4</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 186.

<sup>5</sup> Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major': Models and Mutations", 192.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

not offering a seamless synthesis between its various facets of meaning and form— for observing Elysium with both feet firmly on the ground.<sup>7</sup>

This quote suggests an intriguing nexus of theological ideas. Though Whittall does not engage in dialogue with theological ideas in any substantive sense, he identifies a core theological tension in this piece between ‘grounded’ ideas and an inscrutable transcendence; the ‘beyond’ and its presence in the finite, observable, natural world. The central issue, according to this line of thinking, appears to be one of natural theology.

Whittall’s analysis, at least implicitly, suggests that this piece might afford theological interpretation. I outline the rationale for such an approach in chapters one and two. Symphony No. 5 can be seen to resonate with the ideas of natural theology: How much can be known about a transcendent entity? What do the rumours of transcendence in the observable natural world reveal? What is to be done about this? These are the questions that occupy Symphony No. 5 in this reading. These questions, in turn, suggest the following lines of inquiry for the analytically minded music theologian: How does Vaughan Williams’s music evoke these tensions? What sort of natural theology does Symphony No. 5 express? To begin answering these questions, Vaughan Williams needs to first be placed in his natural-theological context. This means, primarily, investigating his place in the science-religion discourse.

### **Science and Theology in Vaughan Williams’s Thought**

To pit two often-cited quotes against each other, Vaughan Williams held simultaneously that ‘music like everything else in the world is subject to the laws of evolution,’<sup>8</sup> yet he also firmly believed that music was, ultimately, an artistic response to experiencing a vision of the transcendent: a dim ‘vision of something beyond’.<sup>9</sup> These two aspects of Vaughan Williams’s beliefs have often been cited in scholarship; respectively, they have been used to support his evolutionary beliefs,<sup>10</sup> and to support interpretations of his work that suggest his music might point to the transcendent.<sup>11</sup> Yet, at their core, these beliefs appear to be

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>8</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, “Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams”, 101.

<sup>11</sup> Byron Adams, “Vaughan Williams’s Musical Apprenticeship”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29.

fundamentally incompatible. The former firmly grounds music in an apparently materialistic, rationalist view of the world, whilst the latter allows it to disclose something that lies ‘beyond’ the materialistic world; thus, together, they express the central tension of natural theology. Vaughan Williams’s natural theology represents a fascinating intersection between evolutionary thought and a faith in the capacity of music to point to the transcendent. As arguments surrounding the composer’s faith – or, perhaps, lack of it – show, this facet of his thought is difficult to accommodate within a strict sacred-secular binarism.<sup>12</sup> These issues are directly connected to his place within the science-religion discourse.

The origins of Vaughan Williams’s own evolutionary beliefs, and the ways in which these sources interact, have yet to be fully understood. Jeremy Dibble identifies Herbert Spencer, channelled through Hubert Parry, as the main source of Vaughan Williams’s evolutionary ideas;<sup>13</sup> this has been the prevailing view for some years, though it has started to be undermined by new research. Ceri Owen, for example, suggests that Vaughan Williams’s evolutionary beliefs betray a more complicated ancestry; as well as channelling Spencer, some of his views stem more directly from his great-uncle, Charles Darwin (1809–1882).<sup>14</sup> Such a ‘hotchpotch’ of evolutionary ideas is not unique to Vaughan Williams; this was a common feature of British intellectual culture around the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as evolutionary ideas slowly fed into musical culture.<sup>15</sup> These sources remain, at times, fundamentally incompatible; this is shown clearly in the debate on music’s origin in Chapter 2.<sup>16</sup> It is at this point, also, where their natural-theological potentials become more obvious. For the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to expose the dissonance between different evolutionary sources in the thought of Ralph Vaughan Williams, and to ascertain where this places him with regards to contemporary natural theology. This forms a vital step in attempting to understand the influence of the interaction of science and religion for his theological understanding of the ‘beyond’, and the way in which these theological issues are expressed in

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Seddon, “Beyond Wishful Thinking: A Re-Evaluation of Vaughan Williams and Religion”; Bullock, “Too Much Wishful Thinking”.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremy Dibble, “Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams: The Creation of Tradition”, in *Ralph Vaughan Williams in Perspective*, ed. Lewis Foreman (London: Albion Press, 1998), 32–37.

<sup>14</sup> Owen, “Vaughan Williams, Song, and the Idea of ‘Englishness’”, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Cecil Sharp, for example, who was closely associated with Vaughan Williams, is described by Bennett Zon as espousing both Darwinian and Spencerian ideals. See Zon, *Evolution and Victorian Musical Culture*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> See Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 566–73, especially note 39; Spencer, “On the Origin and Function of Music”, 618.

his music. As Chapter 4 argues, these issues remain relevant to Vaughan Williams's later symphonic work.

Vaughan Williams's own experiences of visions and 'moments when we want to get outside the limitations of ordinary life'<sup>17</sup> seem to have found their source and context in the natural world. Nature had a transcendental dimension for him. In this chapter, I build towards an understanding of Vaughan Williams's music by placing him in his natural-theological context. Building on the discussion surrounding science and theology in Chapter 2, this chapter begins by considering how issues of transcendence and evolution in Vaughan Williams's thought are intertwined with broader, nineteenth-century natural-theological issues in the science-religion discourse. In order to understand the context for Vaughan Williams's theology, this study locates his evolutionary thought in Victorian natural theology. Building on the analytical work of Chapter 2, where I outline various important processes by which Vaughan Williams's music is invested with theological meaning, I then turn to Symphony No. 5 as an analytical case study of how this theology is evoked in his music. I engage with both music analysis and theology – using Mellers and Whittall as interlocutors – to interrogate Symphony No. 5 through the ideas of natural theology.

## Vaughan Williams's Natural-Theological Context

### Conflict and Complexity

Since the revolution in scientific thought that occurred in the wake of nineteenth-century evolutionary theories, the prevalent model for viewing the relationship between science and religion has been one of 'conflict'. This view finds its early expression in certain popular late-Victorian writings, particularly those by John William Draper and Andrew Dickson.<sup>18</sup> Scientific and religious understandings of the world have, however, not always been as clearly defined and separated as indicated by these texts, or as they might appear to be today.<sup>19</sup> As this

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<sup>17</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 13.

<sup>18</sup> John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1874] 2009). Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1896] 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most pervasive and common of modern conceptions of the relationship between science and religion is epitomised by Stephen J Gould's concept of 'Non-Overlapping Magisteria' (NOMA). See Stephen Jay Gould, "Nonoverlapping Magisteria", *Natural History*, 1997.

chapter argues, their relationship was nuanced and complex in Vaughan Williams's intellectual context.

The 'conflict' model has been challenged by many historians of science over the last thirty years, perhaps most influentially by John Hedley Brooke's thesis of 'complexity'. Brooke claims that 'serious scholarship in the history of science has revealed so extraordinarily rich and complex a relationship between science and religion in the past that general theses are difficult to sustain. The real lesson turns out to be the complexity.'<sup>20</sup> In fact, despite the popularity of Draper and Dickson in the late nineteenth century, other, more 'complex' models were readily available and prevalent. Natural theology was a prominent feature amongst those who rejected the 'conflict' hypothesis; many scientific writings in this period, though they posed challenges to certain aspects of established Christian faith, were laced with natural-theological language. Like Vaughan Williams, they worked under the assumption that the observable natural world disclosed a transcendent reality.

Many nineteenth-century natural theologians claimed an influence from the thought of Francis Bacon (1561–1626) regarding the separation of reason and revelation;<sup>21</sup> his 'two-books' approach, which suggested the separation of 'God's word' and 'God's works', provided an ideal that many aimed for.<sup>22</sup> However, as Robert Young notes, this legacy was not always completely followed in practice by those who claimed to do so: 'the point about Bacon's advice is not that it is transparently good advice but that everyone thought that he was following it [...] Each was determined to separate science from theology, but the question was where to draw the line.'<sup>23</sup> Thus, natural theology as an enterprise flourished in Britain. The nature of this natural theology, however, remained in flux due to the rapid advance of scientific discoveries and theories over the course of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>20</sup> Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Robert M. Young, *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning", in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath ([1605] 2011), 301. John Channing Briggs argues that this famous idea is not entirely representative of Bacon's thought; for him, Bacon believed that, if they were properly conceived, 'the new sciences provide a possible opening to the understanding of God's will by means of a new method[...] Bacon[...] suggests that divinity and nature[...] can indeed be mixed if mixed wisely.' See John Channing Briggs, "Bacon's science and religion", in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 175.

<sup>23</sup> Young, *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture*, 12–13.

## Paley

The name of William Paley and the arguments of Paleyan natural theology have become synonymous with the pursuit of natural theology as a whole. Writing in the early nineteenth-century, Paley believed that it was possible to prove the existence of the Christian God through natural theology alone;<sup>24</sup> like many other scientists before him, he took it for granted that scientific investigation fostered a ‘pious appreciation of the benevolence and wisdom that pervaded the creation.’<sup>25</sup> Paley sought to prove this by very effective analogies and by a vast array of examples taken from the natural world. It was an enormously successful argument: McGrath maintains that Paley’s *Natural Theology* marked ‘the high-water point of English natural theology,’ whilst simultaneously generating ‘a framework of reference and contextualization that is essential to understanding the theological impact of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*.’<sup>26</sup> As Aileen Fyfe argues, its influence was felt by Cambridge University’s natural scientists throughout the nineteenth century, despite the political risk inherent in its deistic leanings.<sup>27</sup> These leanings were perhaps its most pervasive legacy; the book suggested to many that the existence of the Christian God could be proved through natural theology, and that this natural theology need not be rooted in revealed theology to accomplish this. Scientific discoveries during Paley’s time, however, problematise both the simple acceptance of an inherently good and perfect creation and an unchanging natural order. Paley’s argument, heavily based on work written almost a century before by philosophers such as Bernard Nieuwentyt, rested on both assumptions.<sup>28</sup> Since his major influences had written their own works, significant geological discoveries had started to point to the extinction of previously living species; this raised issues for both of these preconditions.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Thomas Malthus’s influential work on population had challenged ideas of God’s omnibenevolence.<sup>30</sup>

Because of the status of Paleyan natural theology, and because this way of understanding the natural world, however popular it was, eventually became completely

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<sup>24</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1802] 2009), 488–90.

<sup>25</sup> Jon. H Robert, “Religious Reactions to Darwin”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80–81.

<sup>26</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 85, 99.

<sup>27</sup> Aileen Fyfe, “The Reception of William Paley’s “Natural Theology” in the University of Cambridge”, *The British Journal for the History of Science* 30, no. 3 (1997): 330–33.

<sup>28</sup> McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology*, 88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–12.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Conlin, *Evolution and the Victorians: Science, Culture and Politics in Darwin’s Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 33.

untenable under the weight of scientific discoveries, it has often been suggested that natural theology ceased to exist by the end of the nineteenth century. Historians have tended to stress the importance of the ‘Darwinian’ evolution above anything else in the collapse of Paleyan natural theology. However, natural theology developed significantly between Paley’s *Natural Theology* and Darwin’s *Origin of Species*; as recent studies show, the idea that Darwin’s theories single-handedly defeated Paleyan natural theology is unjustified.<sup>31</sup> Recent scholarship on the history of natural theology promotes a rather different view. ‘The enterprise may have been refined and redirected,’ claims McGrath, ‘[but] it was certainly not abandoned, in England or elsewhere.’<sup>32</sup> One of the developments that followed in the wake of theories of evolution was a widespread tendency for the pursuit of natural theology to be dislocated from the idea of a specifically Christian God. Whilst theories of evolution made it eventually impossible to ‘prove’ an orthodox Christian God with a Paleyan recourse to nature, they did not prevent the proving of a deistic god. This shift, I argue, is apparent in the thought of Vaughan Williams. I explore its ramifications further with regards to ideas of nature and progress in Chapter 4.

### Natural Theology and Evolutionary Contexts

The modern reception of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859)<sup>33</sup> has tended to overemphasise its direct impact on Victorian culture. As Peter Bowler suggests, ‘the parts of Darwin’s theory now recognised as important by biologists had comparatively little impact on late nineteenth-century thought.’<sup>34</sup> Darwin’s own theory of evolution was only one of many competing theories: Topham suggests that various aspects of Darwin’s theories presented enough challenges to Victorian culture to cause a widespread favouring of alternatives.<sup>35</sup> The fact that the significantly new parts of Darwin’s theory of ‘natural selection’ were largely unpalatable to the culture surrounding him was not, according to Thomas Kuhn, primarily due to its supposed conflict with religion. Rather, the greatest threats facing its survival emanated

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan R. Topham, “Natural Theology and the Sciences”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71–75.

<sup>32</sup> McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1859] 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Bowler, *The non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*, ix.

<sup>35</sup> Topham, “Natural Theology and the Sciences”, 74–75.

from other competing theories of evolution, and the unwillingness of Victorian culture to relinquish faith in the idea of teleology:

All the well-known pre-Darwinian evolutionary theories— those of Lamarck [...] Spencer [...] had taken evolution to be a goal-directed process [...] Each new stage of evolutionary development was a more perfect realisation of a plan that had been present from the start [...] *The Origin of Species* recognised no goal set either by God or nature.<sup>36</sup>

Adopting Darwin's revised notion of teleology, as Jon Robert suggests, necessitated questioning the superiority of humanity to nature:

Although Darwin described the human species as 'the wonder and glory of the Universe', he maintained that it had descended [...] from progenitors that had been 'covered with hair, both sexes having beards; their ears were pointed and capable of movement; and their bodies were provided with a tail, having the proper muscles'.<sup>37</sup>

This, perhaps, was the most unpalatable part of Darwin's theory to Victorian culture. Many rejected it and turned to non-Darwinian adaptations that maintained the uniqueness and teleological position of humanity; this is the essence of the so-called 'non-Darwinian revolution'.<sup>38</sup> As I argue below, music was complicit in this argument; it was used as evidence both by Darwinians and non-Darwinians in the matter of the distinction between human and beast. Vaughan Williams himself became entrenched in this debate when he claimed, along with Parry, that 'music like everything else in the world is subject to the laws of evolution'.<sup>39</sup>

Natural theology was also thoroughly complicit in this revolution. As Jon Robert argues, 'the Darwinian hypothesis challenged the idea that natural history was the realisation of a plan initiated and sustained by a providential deity and undermined the veracity of the scriptural depiction of the scheme of redemption.'<sup>40</sup> The question of the supremacy of humanity was a key issue for natural theology; the biblical account of creation found in the book of Genesis strongly emphasises the difference between human and beast, whereas Darwin's theory threatened to break down this division.<sup>41</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising that Darwin's theory has often been seen to topple a Paleyan understanding of natural theology, even if, by the time of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, this had largely already occurred.<sup>42</sup> Natural theologians

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas S Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Third ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1996), 171–72.

<sup>37</sup> Robert, "Religious Reactions to Darwin", 85.

<sup>38</sup> Bowler, *The non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 6.

<sup>40</sup> Robert, "Religious Reactions to Darwin", 80.

<sup>41</sup> 'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." Gen. 1:26 NRSV.

<sup>42</sup> Topham, "Natural Theology and the Sciences", 71–75.

often got around the issue by cherry-picking evolutionary ideas: an approach which Bennett Zon terms ‘pic-’n’-mix Darwinism’.<sup>43</sup> Whilst many reference Darwin in their acceptance of evolutionary ideas, this often merely disguises ideas that diverge significantly from their namesake’s.

The idea that God had created laws and set them in motion at the beginning of time, rather than acting miraculously at various points throughout history, was a common feature for Christian thinkers who latched onto evolutionary ideas. The novelist and priest Charles Kingsley (1819–1875), for example, wrote to Darwin, claiming that he had ‘gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of Deity, to believe that He created primal forms capable of self-development into all forms [...] as to believe that He required a fresh act of intervention to supply the lacunas which He Himself had made’.<sup>44</sup> Kingsley, however, like many others, abandoned Darwin when it came to issues regarding humanity and morality; here, he betrays the influence of the non-Darwinian theories of recapitulation and Lamarckism.<sup>45</sup> Thus, he holds on to the wider teleology that Darwin’s theory did not support. Notwithstanding the place these ideas give to a divine entity, they find their greatest exponent in Herbert Spencer (1820–1903).

Spencer – the originator of the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’<sup>46</sup> – represented a viable evolutionary alternative for many late-Victorian thinkers. Spencer’s philosophical and social adaptations to Darwin’s theory might have taken his own theory out of the modern magisterium of science, but these adaptations ensured that it was his theory, not Darwin’s, that became most influential in late-Victorian society; this is seen no more clearly than in issues of natural theology. As Bowler describes:

[...] many conservative thinkers were eventually forced to abandon their faith in the distinct character of the human soul and accept the evolutionary view of human origins. Once brought to the fence, they found it easier to jump than they had feared. Spencer might talk of natural progress rather than the divine plan, but it was possible to argue that such a directed process is intended to reach its goal by the Creator of the universe that sustains it.<sup>47</sup>

Crucial to this success was the fact that Spencer’s theory, as opposed to Darwin’s, was able to be subsumed into a greater teleology; it was saturated ‘in the comforting predictabilities of recapitulation theory’; that is, its ability to be what it represents. Bennett Zon posits that:

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<sup>43</sup> Zon, “The ‘non-Darwinian’ Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being”, 211–19.

<sup>44</sup> Robert, “Religious Reactions to Darwin”, 82.

<sup>45</sup> Conlin, *Evolution and the Victorians: Science, Culture and Politics in Darwin’s Britain*, 120.

<sup>46</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Works of Herbert Spencer, Vol. 2: The Principles of Biology, Vol. 1* (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, [1864] 1966), 269–70.

<sup>47</sup> Bowler, *The non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*, 64.

The idea of being what one represents enjoyed a long pedigree in German idealist thought, and found special pride of place in Victorian national self-identity. Culminating in the mid-century works of Ernst Haeckel, and saturating Victorian literature in a Spencerian mindset, recapitulation fuelled British political, technological and economic imagination.<sup>48</sup>

Though Darwinian evolution would eventually prove to be ‘fitter’ in the scientific realm, non-Darwinian evolution continued to thrive in other parts of culture. Even well into the twentieth century, Spencerian teleology prevailed in some quarters; its influence can be felt strongly in the writings of musical figures such as Hubert Parry and Vaughan Williams. During much of Vaughan Williams’s lifetime the torch of popular science was carried by James Jeans and Arthur Eddington: these influential, best-selling authors continued to explain science to the common person in language suffused, as Peter Bowler suggests, with ‘quasi-theological effusions’.<sup>49</sup>

It can be seen that two tenets were preserved as a priority in Victorian culture; firstly, a belief in teleology and, thus, the superiority of humanity and, secondly, a belief that knowledge about issues such as the origin of humankind, and the nature of morality could be arrived at through natural theology. To be a natural theologian in the nineteenth century was, thus, to find a way of preserving the link between nature and the transcendent in the face of an increasingly conflicted science-religion discourse. The maintaining of these beliefs was often prioritised over an acceptance of either Darwinian evolution or of orthodox Christianity; for the former, this prompted the non-Darwinian revolution, for the latter, this meant isolation from revealed theology. Young is not entirely incorrect when he suggests that ‘the impact of scientific findings progressively altered [...] natural theology until it was virtually devoid of content as a discipline in its own right.’<sup>50</sup> Though natural theology persisted throughout the nineteenth century, prompted by the tendency to adopt a ‘pic-’n’-mix’ attitude towards Darwinism, it increasingly took as its object a deistic god. The debate surrounding the ability of the natural world to disclose something of the divine had enormous ramifications for Victorian culture, not least musical culture.

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<sup>48</sup> Zon, “The ‘non-Darwinian’ Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being”, 200.

<sup>49</sup> Peter J. Bowler, *Science for All: The Popularization of Science in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Young, *Darwin’s Metaphor: Nature’s Place in Victorian Culture*, 128.

## Evolution and Music

When Vaughan Williams wrote that ‘music like everything else in the world is subject to the laws of evolution’, he was entering an ongoing argument over the origin of music which featured prominently in natural theological discussions. During the nineteenth century, music came to be understood as an evolved characteristic rather than a miraculous manifestation; whilst there were differences of opinion as to how this came about, evolutionary theories of music fundamentally challenged the tradition dating back to St Augustine that music originated directly from God.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, certain theories of evolution suggested that music was not even uniquely human, thereby threatening humanity’s dominant place in nature. Both of these facets impinge upon issues of music’s relation to natural theology; music’s potential ability to disclose the divine is greatly affected by its position within science-religion discourse. Vaughan Williams embodies these issues; in tracing the lineage of his thoughts, it becomes clear that his view of music is indicative of his theological stance.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin used music to suggest that *Homo sapiens* is far from a unique species without evolutionary precedent. He suggested that the presence of musical faculties was determined by the principles of sexual selection, and that they were present in a diverse array of animals including, for example, cicadas, grasshoppers, and crickets:

In two families of the Homoptera the males alone possess, in an efficient state, organs which may be called vocal; and in three families of the Orthoptera the males alone possess stridulating organs. In both cases these organs are incessantly used during the breeding-season, not only for calling the females, but for charming or exciting them in rivalry with other males. No one who admits the agency of natural selection, will dispute that these musical instruments have been acquired through sexual selection.<sup>52</sup>

Darwin methodically strips away the idea that music is inherently linked to – or dependent upon – a teleological progression of nature, and thus he undermines a core ‘proof’ of humanity’s superiority to nature: that of consciously producing and recognising beauty. Crucially, Darwin places the origin of music as prior to the development of language; in fact, for him, it is an evolutionary precedent for it:

As we have every reason to suppose that articulate speech is one of the latest, as it certainly is the highest, of the arts acquired by man [sic], and as the instinctive power of producing musical

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<sup>51</sup> Carol Harrison suggests that Augustine’s ‘basic, but revolutionary insight is that God *is* music: he *is* supreme measure, number, relation, harmony, unity, and equality.’ Harrison, “Augustine and the Art of Music”, 31.

<sup>52</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 327.

notes and rhythms is developed low down in the animal series, it would be altogether opposed to the principle of evolution, if we were to admit that man's musical capacity has been developed from the tones used in impassioned speech. We must suppose that the rhythms and cadences of oratory are derived from previously developed musical powers.<sup>53</sup>

For him, music – unlike language – proved that there was ‘no fundamental difference’ in the mental faculties of humans and the higher mammals. The placement of music before language is a key distinction of Darwin's thought; in this perspective, music becomes thoroughly embodied and immanent. It is universal and congenital in all life; thus, it seems entirely divorced from any sense of teleology, or the transcendence that Vaughan Williams believed it capable of symbolising.

In the nineteenth century, music was, confusingly, also used to ‘prove’ the exact opposite. Bennett Zon describes a tendency amongst Victorian amateur naturalists to provide anecdotes concerning the reaction of animals to music. These anecdotes, he suggests, follow a generic plotline:

[...] while in a natural environment, a man or men play instrumental music and/or sing (as individuals or in variously numbered groups); animals accidentally overhear the music (seldom if ever specified); and their peculiar response is observed, recorded and interpreted by the astonished onlooker. These range from factually innocuous accounts of the kind described above to more theologically loaded descriptions revealing man's true dominion over nature.<sup>54</sup>

The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reception of theories of musical evolution exemplify the non-Darwinian revolution; these anecdotes are an example of this, but a more significant one is to be found in the championing of an alternative, non-Darwinian theory of musical origin. Again, Darwin's theory challenged the core beliefs of Victorian culture and, again, many sought an evolutionary alternative that preserved humanity's place in nature. This alternative also elevated music to the transcendent-disclosing level many people thought it deserved; not least, of course, Vaughan Williams.

Herbert Spencer's theory of music's origin and evolutionary development was completely congruent with assertions that music was the preserve of civilisation and therefore of no other species besides *Homo sapiens*.<sup>55</sup> Hence, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was Spencer's theory, rather than Darwin's, which captured the imagination of Victorian culture.<sup>56</sup> Spencer protected the idea that music was the product of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 572.

<sup>54</sup> Zon, *Evolution and Victorian Musical Culture*, 55.

<sup>55</sup> For introduction to Spencer's musical thought and criticism see Bennett Zon, “Spencer, Sympathy and the Oxford School of Music Criticism”, in *British Musical Criticism and Intellectual Thought, 1850–1950*, ed. Jeremy Dibble and Julian Horton (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018), especially 40–47.

<sup>56</sup> Zon, “The ‘non-Darwinian’ Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being”, 196.

teleology by claiming the opposite to Darwin; ‘vocal peculiarities,’ he suggests, ‘which indicate excited feeling *are those which especially distinguish song from ordinary speech.*’<sup>57</sup> In opposition to Darwin, Spencer asserted that language was a precondition for music. Music was speech charged with emotion and thus it was thus afforded a place at the very end of a teleological evolution culminating in modern Victorian culture. Emotions themselves were, for Spencer, the hallmark of an advanced species; music represented the ‘greatest extreme’ of these emotions by, in a sense, freeing language from its constraints.<sup>58</sup>

A Spencerian view of musical evolution endorses music’s link to the transcendent. This view is reprised in writings of composers and musicologists like Hubert H Parry (1848–1919) who constructed an entire natural history of music according to the concepts of Spencerian musical evolution. Much of the content of this publication was originally set out in a book called *The Art of Music*, published in 1893, but significantly, as Jeremy Dibble notes, it was published again in a revised edition as *The Evolution of the Art of Music*.<sup>59</sup> Here it formed, as Volume No. 80, ‘part of Kegan Paul’s “strongly Darwinian” *Scientific Series*, rubbing shoulders with works by Bain, Huxley, Tylor, Spencer, Oscar Schmidt and Walter Bagehot.’<sup>60</sup> Contrary to Dibble’s suggestions, however, this places Parry in unequivocally non-Darwinian company. In this book, Parry outlines a belief, laced with scientific racism, that the entirety of musical history, from the ‘crudest efforts of savages’ to ‘mature art’, was guided by the principles of evolution.<sup>61</sup>

Both Spencer and Darwin challenged the Augustinian notion that music derives from God by placing its origin within a natural, evolutionary context. Spencer’s theory, however, used music to continue to prove humanity’s dominance over nature – as well as Victorian man’s domination over other groups of people – and it was this that afforded it primacy over Darwin’s theory of the origin of music throughout the late nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Spencer’s theory allowed people like Vaughan Williams to speak both of music’s evolutionary history, and its link with the transcendent as the result of its place at the culmination of a teleological development. The entanglement between music and natural theology raised significant challenges to music’s proposed link to the divine. Vaughan Williams actively engaged with

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<sup>57</sup> Spencer, “On the Origin and Function of Music”, 618. Italics in original.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> C. Hubert H. Parry, *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1893] 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Dibble, “Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams: The Creation of Tradition”, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Parry, *The Evolution of the Art of Music*, 47, 12.

<sup>62</sup> Zon, “The ‘non-Darwinian’ Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being”, 203–04.

these challenges; the way in which he does so is emblematic of the non-Darwinian revolution, and his theology, in turn, shows the ramifications of this position.

## Vaughan Williams's Natural Theology

### Vaughan Williams and the Origin of Music

Now that I have set the evolutionary context for beliefs concerning the origin of music, Vaughan Williams's thoughts on this issue are now considered and situated within the debate. In the opening pages of *National Music*, Vaughan Williams openly states that 'Parry in his book, *The Evolution of the Art of Music*, has shown how music like everything else in the world is subject to the laws of evolution, that there is no difference in kind but only in degree between Beethoven and the humblest singer of a folk-song'.<sup>63</sup> As Jeremy Dibble argues, Vaughan Williams clearly shows the Spencerian ancestry of his evolutionary beliefs in statements such as this.<sup>64</sup> Byron Adams summarises his beliefs as 'for the most part derivative, filtered through the writings of Hubert Parry'.<sup>65</sup> However, there remains an incorrect tendency to equate both Parry's and Vaughan Williams's evolutionary beliefs with Darwinism; Dibble, as I note above, describes Parry's outlook as 'Darwinist'.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Vaughan Williams himself seems to conflate the two later in his life when describing Parry: 'When Parry was a young man, the Darwinian controversy was in full swing. He became a follower of Herbert Spencer and decided to find out how far music, as well as the rest of life, followed the laws of evolution.'<sup>67</sup> As has been shown, Darwinian and Spencerian views are not at all compatible on the issue of musical evolution, or indeed much else; in some ways, Vaughan Williams proves to be a typical 'pic-'n'-mix Darwinian' on this issue in that he holds non-Darwinian beliefs underneath Darwinian labels.

Throughout his writings, as Ceri Owen convincingly argues, Vaughan Williams shows a tendency to afford vocal music a central position in his musical thought, and in particular in

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<sup>63</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 6.

<sup>64</sup> Dibble, "Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams: The Creation of Tradition", 35.

<sup>65</sup> Adams, "Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams", 101.

<sup>66</sup> Dibble, "Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams: The Creation of Tradition", 38.

<sup>67</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Teaching of Parry and Stanford". Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 317.

his conception of an ‘English’ music.<sup>68</sup> This is founded upon an apparently Spencerian understanding of musical origin; in *National Music*, and in other writings, Vaughan Williams is clear in his belief that ‘song [...] is nothing less than speech charged with emotion.’<sup>69</sup> This is ‘proved’ by a personal testimony of Vaughan Williams himself; used more than once in his written output, this anecdote bears more than a superficial resemblance to those mentioned above which sought to ‘scientifically’ prove the distinction between human and beast through music. Vaughan Williams describes how he witnessed the impassioned speech of a preacher on the Isle of Skye ‘become’ music:

I was once listening to an open-air preacher. He started his sermon in a speaking voice, but as he grew more excited the sounds gradually became defined, first one definite note, then two, and finally a little group of five notes [...] it seemed that I had witnessed the change from speech to song in actual process.<sup>70</sup>

Vaughan Williams’s belief that music can be ‘national’ – that is, can exhibit the peculiar characteristics of certain aggregations of people – may also be seen to originate in the writings of Spencer, channelled through Parry. In *The Origin and Function of Music*, Spencer describes how the characteristics of people groups and classes might be expressed in their music.<sup>71</sup> Parry makes the racist ramifications of this theory clear:

Folk-tunes are the first essays made by man [sic] in distributing his notes so as to express his feelings in terms of design. Highly sensitive races express themselves with high degrees of emotional force and variety of form; placid races show perfect content in simple design with little meaning; races of moderate intelligence who have considerable skill in manipulation and love of effect, introduce much ornamentation; serious and strong races, and those with much reserve of disposition, produce very simple and dignified tunes; and so on in varying degrees.<sup>72</sup>

Whilst Vaughan Williams seems unmotivated by the evidencing of a speculative hierarchy of race, he goes further than Parry in terms of music’s connection to nationhood; he believes music to be capable of expressing ‘the soul of a nation’, defining a nation as ‘any community of people who are spiritually bound together by language, environment, history, and common ideals and, above all, a continuity with the past.’<sup>73</sup> Vaughan Williams’s understanding of the evolution of folksong also betrays Spencerian influences. He claimed that:

There is no “original” in traditional art, and there is no particular virtue in the earliest known version [...] One man [sic] invents a tune [...] He sings it to his neighbours and his children. After he is dead the next generation carry it on [...] only the good changes will hold and be

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<sup>68</sup> Owen, “Vaughan Williams, Song, and the Idea of ‘Englishness’”, 22–69.

<sup>69</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Spencer, “On the Origin and Function of Music”, 637–38.

<sup>72</sup> Parry, *The Evolution of the Art of Music*, 80–81.

<sup>73</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 68.

passed on: anything that is musically corrupt or disintegrated – ‘unfit’– will fall by the wayside.<sup>74</sup>

The evolutionary principle of selection is clearly invoked by Vaughan Williams; in implying ‘survival of the fittest’ he underlines a specifically Spencerian idea of teleology, and thus a classic non-Darwinian attitude to evolution. This teleology also seems to be present in his understanding of a musical macroevolution which, again, stems directly from Parry. Vaughan Williams believed that Parry ‘proves, conclusively to most people, that Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, for example, is not an isolated phenomenon, but a highly developed stage of a process of evolution which can be traced back to the primitive folksongs of our people’.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Vaughan Williams held that ‘Music does not grow out of nothing, one idea leads to another and the test of each is, not whether it is ‘original’ but whether it is inevitable.’<sup>76</sup> The word ‘inevitable’ in this context is laden with Spencerian notions of teleology.

And, yet, various parts of Vaughan Williams’s output approximate a more orthodox Darwinian view, or at least challenge the teleological Spencerian model. Owen notices that Vaughan Williams – like Darwin, and unlike Spencer – entertains the possibility that music originated before speech:

I cannot see why it should not be equally natural to presuppose an aptitude for singing in the natural man [sic] as an aptitude for speaking; indeed, singing of a primitive kind may be supposed to come before speaking [...] I have no doubt myself that song is the beginning of music.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, Vaughan Williams can be seen to agree with Darwin’s claims that ‘articulate speech is one of the latest, as it certainly is the highest, of the arts acquired by man [sic] [...] We must suppose that the rhythms and cadences of oratory are derived from previously developed musical powers.’<sup>78</sup> Whilst he does not suggest, like Darwin, that the origin of music is to be found in non-human animals, this statement does significantly problematise a Spencerian view of musical origin and leads him to adopt an ultimately contradictory position. As Owen summarises, he holds that ‘song is the beginning of music,’ whilst simultaneously claiming that ‘song is nothing less than speech charged with emotion.’<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 28–31.

<sup>75</sup> Vaughan Williams, “The Teaching of Parry and Stanford”. Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 317.

<sup>76</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>78</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 572.

<sup>79</sup> Owen, “Vaughan Williams, Song, and the Idea of ‘Englishness’”, 52; Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 16–17.

Vaughan Williams's championing of folk music is also problematic to the teleological progression towards art music inherent in Spencerian musical evolution and expounded by those such as Parry. Vaughan Williams suggests that 'perfection of form is equally possible in the most primitive music and the most elaborate,'<sup>80</sup> thereby undermining a wider musical teleology, and aligning himself more with Darwin's 'narrower' idea of teleology in natural selection. Music is often seen by Vaughan Williams to evolve within its own context, rather than in a teleological fashion over time, analogous to Darwin's idea with regards to individual species. Indeed, in his championing of the features of folk music, Vaughan Williams may almost be seen to reverse the teleology of music from complex to simple. Writing about his time as a pupil of Charles Stanford (1852–1924), Vaughan Williams remembers a certain argument that took place more than once:

When I was under Stanford I used to vex him much with my flattened sevenths. He tried to prove to me that the flat leading note was pure theory and that all folk-songs descended on to the tonic, but I felt in my bones that he was wrong, though it was only later, when I heard traditional singers, that I was able to prove my point to my own satisfaction.<sup>81</sup>

Stanford obviously viewed the raised seventh as a mark of musical evolution; Vaughan Williams's adoption of this previous, 'outdated' idiom challenges a Spencerian conception of musical teleology.

Hence, Vaughan Williams's idea of musical evolution finds its influences – consciously or not – from more than one source. He completely contradicts himself concerning the origins of music. This confused position allows him to maintain music's primacy over language alongside its uniquely human status, whilst legitimising the drawing of inspiration from past modes of musical expression to further the cause of national music. Vaughan Williams thus straddles the gap between the Darwinian and the non-Darwinian.

The evolutionary framework of Vaughan Williams's understanding of music creates a problem for the status of music in Christianity as 'sacred'; his view does not allow for the Augustinian notion that music originates in God. This is highlighted in Vaughan Williams's writings on the evolution of church music: 'Nowadays,' he suggests, 'we think of the church with its music and its ritual as something at the latter end of a long tradition, but each church had to begin somewhere and had to start with a popular appeal.'<sup>82</sup> Vaughan Williams goes on

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<sup>80</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 6.

<sup>81</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony With Writings on Other Musical Subjects", 187.

<sup>82</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 74–75.

to provide an anecdote to evidence his claims in a markedly similar way to his tale of the open-air preacher:

We have direct evidence of the effect of folk-song on the plainsong or music of the church in the history of French song [...] First, here is a French folk-song. Secondly, it is connected with an ancient custom. Thirdly, French ecclesiastical music is accused of being rustic. Fourthly, it is likely, therefore, that this music should be based on folk-song, especially on ceremonial folk-song, and lastly, the family likeness between 'Le Chant des Livrées' and the 'Tonus Peregrinus'.<sup>83</sup>

Vaughan Williams believed, fundamentally that 'church music derives from folk-music.'<sup>84</sup> Thus, he believed that 'sacred' and 'secular' music share the same evolutionary source; this, alongside the natural evolutionary framework in which he places music in general, completely collapses the sacred-secular divide of a traditional Christian viewpoint. For Vaughan Williams, the connection between music and the transcendent was a property of all music – from the whistling of an 'errand boy'<sup>85</sup> to a setting of the *Te Deum*. In believing that music is inherently material, natural, and thoroughly earthly, he challenges the notion of a divinely inspired music.

Whilst a purely Darwinian view of music's origins might allow a closer connection between ideas of God's self-revelation and music's ability to disclose this, its ramifications for the status of humanity were too far-reaching for contemporary tastes, as I discuss above. Non-Darwinian adaptations fixed this second problem and paved the way for music's transcendent powers as impassioned speech; however, this transcendence becomes isolated from any conception of an orthodox Christian God. Overall, Spencer proved to be more influential for Vaughan Williams than Darwin because it was Spencer's theory that left room for the composer's conception of music's transcendence. Vaughan Williams recapitulates the natural-theological ramification of accepting non-Darwinian adaptations; his non-Darwinian – or, indeed, 'pic-'n'-mix Darwinian – understanding of musical evolution divorces an understanding of musical transcendence from the Christian God. Following trends in the science-religion discourse, the object of his musical transcendence becomes deistic.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 75–77.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 63.

## Vaughan Williams and the Science-Religion Discourse

In the early part of his life, Vaughan Williams vehemently refuted the idea of Christian religion; purportedly having a reputation as ‘most determined atheist’ during his time at Cambridge.<sup>86</sup> He was famously described by his second wife Ursula as ‘an atheist during his later years at Charterhouse and at Cambridge, though he later drifted into a cheerful agnosticism: he was never a professing Christian.’<sup>87</sup> Byron Adams states that a previously existing impulse towards atheism was ‘further encouraged at Cambridge [...] Through his cousin Ralph (Ranolph) Wedgwood, Vaughan Williams entered a circle that included G.E. Moore, as well as G.M. Trevelyan and Bertrand Russell.’<sup>88</sup> All of these men championed the cause of the natural sciences and were staunchly agnostic. Adams argues that Vaughan Williams’s early rejection of religion had much to do with his knowledge of science and philosophy, suggesting that: ‘However and whenever he may have sampled the fruit of the tree of knowledge regarding the theory of evolution or the philosophy of Hegel, Vaughan Williams was aware as a schoolboy of the conflict between rationalism and religion.’<sup>89</sup> As such, throughout his early life, Vaughan Williams clearly sides with the ‘conflict’ model of the science-religion discourse.

Vaughan Williams’s belief in musical transcendence, however, contradicts the conflict model. In showing that music is a fundamentally human phenomenon, evolved over time, whilst maintaining a suggestion that it possess a link to the transcendent, Vaughan Williams seems to strongly support a model of complementarity between science and religion. Whilst he rejected many of the specifics of orthodox Christian religion, it is clear that he held a belief in musical transcendence and some form of ‘ultimate reality’ throughout his career. Furthermore, as I show, he uses an overtly scientific idea – the theory of evolution – to support this belief throughout his writings. Thus, science implicitly underpins his belief in a transcendent nature; a position not unlike the reverse of his great uncle who, for a large part of his life, used theological arguments to underpin his scientific theories.<sup>90</sup> Vaughan Williams’s complementary view of the science-religion discourse also seems opposed to Herbert Spencer’s

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<sup>86</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 42.

<sup>87</sup> Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 29.

<sup>88</sup> Adams, “Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams”, 102.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Stephen Dilley, “Charles Darwin’s use of theology in the *Origin of Species*”, *The British Journal for the History of Science* 45, no. 1 (2012): 29.

idea of ‘coalescence’,<sup>91</sup> in that it entertains the possibility for the natural to disclose the transcendent: ‘artistic inspiration’, he claimed, ‘is like Dryden’s angel which must be brought down from heaven to earth.’<sup>92</sup> Spencer, meanwhile, completely denied that the ‘beyond’ could ever be contemplated in any meaningful way.<sup>93</sup>

And yet, in other ways, Vaughan Williams can also be seen to hold fast to a Spencerian ‘coalescence’ of science and religion. He viewed religion as intimately connected to the principle of evolution; in *National Music*, as I mention in Chapter 2, he invokes Gilbert Murray, agreeing with him that the ‘great national literature’ of the Christian Bible had behind it ‘not the imagination of one great poet, but the accumulated emotion, one may almost say, of the many generations who have read and learned and themselves afresh re-created the old majesty and loveliness [...] There is in them, as it were, the spiritual life-blood of a people.’<sup>94</sup> In the same way, Spencer viewed the development of science and religion as inseparable:

Religion ignores its immense debt to Science; and Science is scarcely at all conscious how much Religion owes it. Yet it is demonstrable that every step by which Religion has progressed from its first low conception to the comparatively high one it has now reached, Science has helped it, or rather forced it, to take; and that even now, Science is urging further steps in the same direction.<sup>95</sup>

Vaughan Williams, in this way, embodies three key perspectives in the science-religion discourse – conflict, complementarity, and coalescence – despite the fact that each of these perspectives contradicts the other two. This conflicted position greatly impinges upon his own musical natural theology and is symptomatic of his recapitulation of the science-religion discourse in general. Vaughan Williams evidences the natural-theological ramification of accepting non-Darwinian adaptations. Much like other natural theologians of a post-Darwinian persuasion, Vaughan Williams’s natural theology declines an orientation towards an orthodox Christian understanding of God and, instead, focusses on a vaguely defined deistic conception of transcendence. My preliminary investigations of Vaughan Williams’s musical theology in Chapter 2 suggest a prominent deism. I explore this further with regards to his symphonies in the current chapter and the next. Although Vaughan Williams’s beliefs as to the origin of music show a ‘post-Darwinian’ approach, his view of the divine, notwithstanding the faint possibility of disclosure, finds its greatest point of contact in the writings of Herbert Spencer.

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<sup>91</sup> Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1867] 2009), 99.

<sup>92</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Spencer, *First Principles*, 98.

<sup>94</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 23.

<sup>95</sup> Spencer, *First Principles*, 102.

## The Deistic Transcendent

The idea of a deistic god is explicit in Herbert Spencer's writings; he variously terms this transcendent reality the 'Absolute',<sup>96</sup> the 'Incomprehensible Omniscient Power',<sup>97</sup> the 'Ultimate Cause',<sup>98</sup> and the 'Unknowable';<sup>99</sup> despite these various descriptions, the exact nature and identity of Spencer's god remains obscure. As Spencer himself believed:

Though the Absolute cannot in any manner or degree be known, in the strict sense of knowing, yet we find that its positive existence is a necessary datum of consciousness; that so long as consciousness continues, we cannot for an instant rid it of this datum; and that thus the belief which this datum constitutes, has a higher warrant than any other whatever.<sup>100</sup>

Spencer's conception of transcendence denies any possibility of immanence; he argues that 'a sincere recognition of the truth that our own and all other existence is a mystery absolutely and forever beyond our comprehension, contains more of true religion than all the dogmatic theology ever written.'<sup>101</sup> He openly criticised religion for being 'irreligious' in the sense that it claims to know something of the transcendent.<sup>102</sup> Thus, Spencer's idea of transcendence had very little at all to do with a Christian understanding of that term; he denies the possibility for natural theology to elicit any revelation of the Christian God: or, in fact, any deity at all.

For Vaughan Williams, music does not have a connection with the transcendent because it is itself inherently divine; it has this connection because it is inherently immanent and, above all, human. It is afforded this capacity because of its position in the late stages of a teleological evolution; whether it is placed prior to the development of language or subsequently, its uniquely human credentials and its capacity to express emotion afford it a connection to the 'ultimate realities'. Vaughan Williams explicitly links the ability of music to liberate speech with a connection to the divine. In his preface to G.B. Chamber's *Folksong—Plainsong*, he aligns himself with Chamber's view that 'the "*Jubilus*" is not an ecclesiastical parallel to the coloratura of the *prima donna*, but has developed out of the wordless melismata of primitive people when their mystical emotions got beyond words.'<sup>103</sup> Vaughan Williams believed that

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 100–01.

<sup>103</sup> G. B. Chambers, *Folksong—Plainsong: A Study in Origins and Musical Relationships* (London: The Merlin Press, 1956). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 280.

music, amongst all the arts, was uniquely placed to have this connection with transcendence. Writing on the role of a composer in a time of war – a role that, by the end of his career, he was only too familiar with – he addressed this issue head-on:

I have up to now taken it for granted that music is not ‘useful’. How far is this true? It is certainly, to my mind, one of the glories of the art of music that it can be put to no practical use. Poets can be used for propaganda, painters for camouflage, architects for machine-gun posts, but music is purely of the spirit and seems to have no place in the world of alarms and excursions.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, for Vaughan Williams, music assumes the role of voicing an attempt to reach out to the transcendent. Like Spencer, he believed that music liberated speech; moreover, he believed that the artist had a duty to express the unsayable through music:

We all, whether we are artists or not, experience moments when we want to get outside the limitations of ordinary life, when we see dimly a vision of something beyond. These moments affect us in different ways [...] those whom we call artists find the desire to create beauty irresistible [...] for composers, it takes the form of the magic of ordered sound. It is not enough to feel these things; the artist wants to communicate them as well, to crystallise these vague imaginings into, as I have already said, ordered sound, clear and intelligible; and to do this he must make a synthesis between the thing to be expressed and the means of expression.<sup>105</sup>

Vaughan Williams’s description of an undefined ‘spirit’,<sup>106</sup> has a parallel in Spencer’s similarly vague, deistic ‘transcendence’. Unlike Spencer, however, Vaughan Williams leaves the door slightly ajar; revelation of the transcendent remains a goal, even a possibility, especially in the context of music. As I describe above, his writings are filled with statements supporting the existence of this link, not least in his claim that the object of art is to ‘obtain a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties- of that, in fact, which is spiritual,’<sup>107</sup> Thus, the viability of natural theology seems preserved in Vaughan Williams’s theology.

Vaughan Williams clearly articulates a one-way relationship between the material world and the supposed realm of ‘ultimate realities’ (despite often addressing music’s ability to disclose the transcendent Vaughan Williams remains, like Spencer, entirely unspecific as to the nature of this ‘reality’). There is no sense of ‘two-way traffic’, as McGrath would describe it;<sup>108</sup> music remains a fundamentally natural – and human – phenomenon. This makes his theology distinctively deistic: there is no place in it for a god with agency, only of reaching out

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<sup>104</sup> Vaughan Williams, “The Composer in Wartime”. Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 84.

<sup>105</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 13–14.

<sup>106</sup> Vaughan Williams, “The Composer in Wartime”. Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 84.

<sup>107</sup> Vaughan Williams, “The Letter and the Spirit”, 88.

<sup>108</sup> McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 20.

to a speculative deity. Vaughan Williams's statements surrounding music's ability to 'partially disclose' and 'reach out to' the 'ultimate realities of life', reveal that he viewed music as the exploration of a link between the natural and the divine. His view of music was, above all, an exploratory one. His theology was, much like the natural theology of the non-Darwinian revolution, largely devoid of a Christian doctrinal context. This tendency, in fact, reflects a broad trend amongst Victorian culture to abandon orthodox Christian faith.<sup>109</sup>

Vaughan Williams believed music capable of pointing to the transcendent of its own accord, with no frame of reference. Furthermore, he makes no attempt to describe the 'transcendent reality' he so often mentions. His natural theology is fundamentally constructed without revealed theological context. This is, perhaps, why he expresses both a belief and doubt in writings regarding the ability of music to disclose the transcendent. He holds that the object of music is to 'obtain' a revelation<sup>110</sup> – thereby implying an apparently concrete result – yet, at the same time, also seems to doubt that ability. The phrases 'reaching out,' and 'attempt to reach' imply that there is a significant uncertainty that this endeavour will result in any concrete idea of any 'ultimate reality'.<sup>111</sup> He views music's power as exploratory rather than revelatory. This conflicted position finds its roots in his recapitulation of issues in the science-religion discourse.

If a unity between Vaughan Williams's thought in writing and his compositional approach can be supposed, then it is reasonable to suggest that his music originates in a belief that music can point to the divine, but that his natural theological position renders void its ability to reveal anything concrete. This might be seen to be reflected in the sense of 'journey' and 'pilgrimage' that accompany so many of his pieces, as Michael Kennedy notes.<sup>112</sup> Symphony No. 5 very much falls into this category – not least due to its use of musical material later used in *The Pilgrim's Progress* – as does the 'Antarctic' music Vaughan Williams wrote which I analyse in Chapter 4.<sup>113</sup>

Vaughan Williams's conception of the link between music and the divine is entangled with the natural-theological concerns of his scientific and religious forebears. His 'pic-'n'-mix' approach to theories of evolution – especially regarding the origin of music – betrays a conflicted investment in rationality, teleology, and the belief that music, as a purely human

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<sup>109</sup> McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology*, 158–59.

<sup>110</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Letter and the Spirit", 88.

<sup>111</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Making of Music", 206; Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 63.

<sup>112</sup> Kennedy, "The Unknown Vaughan Williams", 32.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

expression, has access to matters of the ‘beyond’. His view of this transcendent ‘beyond’ finds its origin in the natural theology of the non-Darwinian revolution, meaning that his theology takes as its cornerstone a deistic conception of God. Furthermore, Vaughan Williams’s writings on music suggest that he viewed his art as related to the pursuit of natural theology: he saw it as a way of ‘seeking understanding’. These issues impinge directly on Symphony No. 5; the themes apparent in the piece – especially those recognised by its consistently theological reception – receive significant clarification from the Scientific context of Vaughan Williams’s natural theology. Having now ascertained something approaching Vaughan Williams’s natural theology, I now return to this piece to explore further my central thesis: that Vaughan Williams’s music can be read as expressing such a theology.

## **A Theological Tripartition of Symphony No. 5**

### **Locating Meaning**

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, Symphony No. 5 is consistently read as relating to theological concepts. It provokes such grandiose statements as Mellers’s, who claims it achieves nothing less than the ‘making true’ of the vision of the New Jerusalem.<sup>114</sup> Whilst the musical evidence supplied in these readings may not support such specific, quasi-theological readings, talk of theology regarding this music does not need to be abandoned. An important question lies at the centre of a rational approach to this issue: why is this music interpreted in theological terms? What is it exactly that prompts this response? As I argue in Chapter 1, this is a question that the interaction of music analysis and theology can assist in answering. An analytical approach is required here, in order to do justice to the evidence of the piece; as Whittall suggests, very few interpretations of Vaughan Williams’s Symphony No. 5 are analytically literate.<sup>115</sup> I argue that the piece’s association with theological ideas is, in great part, due to specific musical structures – affordance structures – and how these interact with theological context. However, this is by no means the only factor in the piece’s purported engagement with theology. As suggested in Chapter 1, Nattiez’s tripartition provides a useful framework for approaching this issue by incorporating poietic, trace, and esthetic levels; in

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<sup>114</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 186.

<sup>115</sup> Whittall, “‘Symphony in D Major’: Models and Mutations”, 190.

doing so, this method attempts to maintain the separation of object, observer, and creator, whilst advocating for an approach that takes the interaction between all three seriously. As I argue, there are significant factors at all three levels for this particular piece that inform the theological bent that dominates its reception.

## Poiesis

At the poietic level, there seems to have been some intention on the part of Vaughan Williams to invest this piece with theologically resonant ideas: as in the choral pieces I describe in Chapter 2, text and intertext form an important layer of theological meaning. There are several significant intertextual connections to other pieces which make these ideas more explicit: of these, the most often cited is the connection between the third movement and *The Pilgrim's Progress*; the introduction and first theme of this movement is also found (with some alterations) in Act 1, scene 2 of the opera. Figures 2.19 and 2.20 show these passages. The gestation of these two pieces is intertwined: despite the fact that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was not completed until 1951, the association of the music of the third movement with this text predates the completion of Symphony No. 5. The original manuscript made this clear, as Kennedy points out:

The composer conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra and let it be known that some of the themes were 'taken from an unfinished opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* – but except in the slow movement the symphony has no dramatic connection with Bunyan's allegory'. Above the slow movement, on the manuscript, was a quotation from Bunyan, since removed: 'Upon that place there stood a cross and a little below a sepulchre. Then he said: "he hath given us rest by his sorrow and life by his death".'<sup>116</sup>

The fact that Vaughan Williams later removed this quote is emblematic of his complicated feelings on 'programmes' and interpretation of his music. In a letter to Victor Hely-Hutchinson, Vaughan Williams made his thoughts on this matter abundantly clear:

I hear there was a very fine performance of my D. Symph yesterday for which I am grateful – I have decided to omit the "motto" which is part of the title of the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement. Would you be so good as to instruct the announcer at any future performances (if any!) that this quotation from 'Pilgrims Progress' is not to be read out. – I find it leads to misunderstanding.<sup>117</sup>

Frogley notes a similar, though further-reaching effort to remove explicit extra-musical associations in the case of Vaughan Williams's Ninth symphony:

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<sup>116</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 261–62.

<sup>117</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 386–87.

It is an intriguing testimony to Vaughan Williams's ambivalent attitude towards the programme that he should have gone through essentially private documents such as these sketchbooks, deleting many- although by no means all- programmatic inscriptions, even though the musical ideas associated with them were left largely intact, and the inscriptions themselves generally legible.<sup>118</sup>

Vaughan Williams was consistently evasive and even obtuse on the topic of meaning and compositional intent, despite being pressed on more than one occasion.<sup>119</sup> This renders the discussion of the poietic level somewhat less easy in the case of Vaughan Williams than in the case of other composers more traditionally associated with writing theologically significant music.<sup>120</sup> However, whilst there is scant evidence on Vaughan Williams's thoughts on the specific meaning and interpretation of individual pieces and even less on their inspiration, the case for deliberate theological signification is often strong even if, as I argue extensively in Chapter 2, that signification is itself ambiguous.

Aside from the *Pilgrim* connections, there are other, less-explicit intertextual links to theologically significant music. It has been noted by many scholars that the second theme of the first movement bears a striking resemblance to *Sine Nomine*, one of the hymn tunes Vaughan Williams composed for the 1906 *English Hymnal*.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, there is more than a suggestion of *The First Nowell* in a phrase heard repeatedly at the climax of the third movement: a tune very familiar to Vaughan Williams.<sup>122</sup> Whether or not these specific tunes are significant here, the fact that Vaughan Williams writes obviously hymnic music, suggestions a deliberate attempt to weave theological issues into the fabric of the piece.

These intertextualities shed some light on the intention behind the piece to evoke theologically meaningful topics. As I argue below, there are other musical features which seem to share this same intention. However, as I argue above, Vaughan Williams's writings on composition in general are predicated on a natural theological orientation. The guiding principle for all Vaughan Williams's music, by his own admission, is laced with theological intent, even if he falls shy of making the specifics of this explicit in the case of individual pieces. The hermeneutic of theology is certainly not misplaced, despite the composer's reluctance to wade in on the theological discussion of his music. Thus, the application of my

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<sup>118</sup> Frogley, *Vaughan Williams's Ninth Symphony*, 261.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 573.

<sup>120</sup> Messiaen, for example, writes copiously on his music's theological dimension. See Messiaen, *Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel*, especially 2–6.

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, G. J. Cuming, "Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony", *The Musical Times* 100, no. 1392 (February 1959): 19.

<sup>122</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 282.

thesis – that Vaughan Williams’s music affords theological interpretation – seems appropriate in this case.

## **Trace**

The ‘trace’ level of Symphony No. 5 is particularly saturated in theologically significant structures. As I describe in Chapter 2, the complete isolation of this level from either the poietic or esthetic level is impossible in practice; nevertheless, it remains the case that any given piece of music is always more than the sum of these levels. Building on Chapter 2, I argue that this piece contains numerous potent affordance structures which increase the likelihood of a theological interpretation. Many of the various musical structures in Symphony No. 5 that potentially contain theological meaning are those already introduced in relation to the vocal pieces in Chapter 2.

At its outset, as Example 3.1 shows, the piece presents the listener with an ambiguous modal complex. The identity of two of Bates’s three modal parameters– tonic and scale-type – remain uncertain, due to the D–orientated horn call, and the bass line’s fixation with C. The ‘key signature’ parameter, however, remains fixed for significant lengths of time, which has the effect of highlighting the ambiguity in the other two parameters. The result of this is the assertion of two pairs of ambiguous modes: C–Lydian and D–Mixolydian, followed by C–Ionian and D–Dorian. Both of these complexes foreground the C/D ambiguity that permeates the main theme. By the end of the fourth movement, this complex has been resolved to D–Ionian. As I argue in Chapter 2, the very idea of modality is steeped in theological resonance in Vaughan Williams’s output, none more so than in the context of a piece which deliberately harks back to British religious history; additionally, the resolution – or progression – of modality across a piece’s span is also often implicated in theological meaning in Vaughan Williams’s music, especially where this occurs in a musical milieu already saturated with theological text and intertextuality. At various points, this piece foregrounds pan-triadic syntax; as I argue in Chapter 2, this is a well-established symbol of the transcendent which, in this context, takes on a theological aspect. Example 3.2, taken from the opening of the third movement, presents this in an obvious sense: in Chapter 2, I discuss this exact passage in light of its connections with similar opening gestures in Vaughan Williams’s music that suggest transcendent meaning, almost always in the context of theologically resonant text (see Figure 2.20). In addition, this passage somewhat collapses the distinction between poiesis and trace:

the progression here is most closely related to that heard later in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The idea of pan-triadicism also introduces the concept of multiple syntaxes, as described by Richard Cohn.<sup>123</sup> Here, as elsewhere in Vaughan Williams's music, the interplay of multiple syntaxes becomes a theologically significant affordance structure.

## Esthesis

The context of the early reception of the piece amplifies and mediates these theological elements in particular ways. As a symphony composed during wartime, its theological resonances and apparently positive ending were often considered to convey some form of respite in the context of life's harsh realities. This sentiment prevails in Ursula Vaughan Williams's account of the premiere; she notes that the piece 'seemed to many people to bring the peace and blessing for which they longed.'<sup>124</sup> Adrian Boult communicates something similar in a letter to Vaughan Williams after hearing the premier on the radio: 'It is not for me to judge compositions but Ann & I both feel that its serene loveliness is completely satisfying in these times & shows, as only music can, what we must work for when this madness is over.'<sup>125</sup> Additionally, the place of Symphony No. 5 in Vaughan Williams's own symphonic output – in particular its relationship to the composer's previous symphony – adds another layer to its initial reception as relating to transcendent ideas. The Symphony No. 4 had, by this point, come to be associated with the representation of conflict; the theological significance of Symphony No. 5 is amplified by its essentially different tone in comparison. As Kennedy makes clear, however popular these views were, that the chronology of their implied compositional process does not match with historical reality:

Naturally, for those who thought that the Prophet Vaughan had foretold World War II in the F minor Symphony, the D major was heaven-sent. Now, in the midst of war, he had seen the vision of Peace Eternal. Unfortunately, they did not know that the vision had first taken shape in 1938.<sup>126</sup>

The specifics of the piece's early reception can also be seen to conform to a more general trend of later Vaughan Williams reception which, as Manning notes, interprets Vaughan Williams through the ideas of 'Englishness, the pastoral, mysticism, humanism, and

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<sup>123</sup> Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 195–210.

<sup>124</sup> Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 254.

<sup>125</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 360.

<sup>126</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 279.

the spirit.<sup>127</sup> In some cases, transcendent interpretations of Vaughan Williams's music along these lines become a means of articulating and furthering personal political and theological agendas. Mellers, for example, openly admits that his research on Vaughan Williams contains a 'strong autobiographical element.'<sup>128</sup> Byron Adams argues that Mellers's work on Vaughan Williams largely serves to promote the writer's social agenda.<sup>129</sup>

Whilst, as I have outlined, there is good reason for approaching this piece with an expectation that it communicates theologically in some way, any attempt to approach this issue must do so in mind of more recent Vaughan Williams research that, broadly, attempts to disentangle trace and esthetic levels of meaning. Having suggested where the elements underpinning a theological reading of this piece might lie, the following section explores these through the intersection of music analysis and theology in order to suggest a framework for how the dominant symphonic form of this piece – that is, the first movement, and its recapitulation and resolution in the fourth movement – might be read as evoking the ideas of natural theology. Doubtless, there are also theological ideas present in the interior movements (especially the third).<sup>130</sup> The theological reading proposed here, based on the first and last movements, is certainly not undermined by this fact: however, these interior movements are not implicated strongly in the central tension established throughout the *Preludio*. Julian Horton makes a similar point, claiming that the 'The "breakthrough" consequently both interjects within the Finale, and reframes the material of the second, third and fourth movements as an interjection suspending the first movement's formal action.'<sup>131</sup> Firstly, I consider the 'ambiguity' presented by the first movement and its resolution in the fourth, before turning attention to how such musical structures of ambiguity express theological meaning. Overall, I offer analytical and theological perspectives as to why a reading of natural theology is plausible, and to the sort of natural theology suggested by the piece.

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<sup>127</sup> Manning, "Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams's Music", 5.

<sup>128</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, xi.

<sup>129</sup> Adams, "Review: Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion by Wilfrid Mellers", 633–34.

<sup>130</sup> Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major': Models and Mutations", 205–07.

<sup>131</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 206.

## Ambiguity and Natural Theology in Symphony No. 5

### Analysing Ambiguity

Most scholars seem to agree that the first movement of Symphony No. 5 evinces ambiguity in its musical structure. Moreover, it is this sense of ambiguity which is most consistently linked to theological readings of this movement; in some way, musical ambiguity forms the evidence upon which these arguments are based. The plot of this ambiguity and its potential resolution plays out across the first movement, which ends where it begins without having reached any resolution. This plot is picked up and concluded towards the end of the last movement, giving the whole symphony a cyclic form.<sup>132</sup> Whilst the reading of this plot as ‘transcendent’ in some way is almost ubiquitous, the purported musical sources of this tension are diverse. As Whittall notes, ‘Vaughan Williams’s particular procedures in the *Preludio* create a musical atmosphere which has consistently impressed listeners, even though ways of describing it vary.’<sup>133</sup>

For most writers, the central musical tension and source of ambiguity relates to pitch content and its interaction with (or creation of) the piece’s form. Those writings that go on to argue for a theological or metaphysical interpretation tend to straightforwardly assign transcendent or theological ideas to technical equivalents in this musical tension, with varying degrees of success. In Mellers’s case, the fundamental musical tension is found in the juxtaposition of pentatonic and chromatic collections. These two different types of pitch collection, in turn, are argued to hold wider symbolic significance in Vaughan Williams’s output. Chromaticism, through its link with *Job: A Masque for Dancing* is seen to represent the satanic; pentatonicism, meanwhile, is seen to represent innocence and nature.<sup>134</sup> As in the rest of his approach to Vaughan Williams’s music, the idea of ‘doubleness’, and the Jungian approach of considering apparent opposites as actually dependent upon each other pervades his analysis of Symphony No. 5.<sup>135</sup> Such a wholesale and concrete association of pitch collection with theological meaning does not hold water, especially given that this relationship is hardly consistent across Vaughan Williams’s work. Furthermore, it is highly debatable that the evidence of the score bears out Mellers’s reading of this central tension in the piece’s form. As

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–06.

<sup>133</sup> Whittall, “‘Symphony in D Major’: Models and Mutations”, 191.

<sup>134</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 179.

<sup>135</sup> Frogley, “Review: Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion by Wilfrid Mellers”, 436.

Adams points out, the application of the literary idea of doubleness to particular musical structures resulting in specific meanings makes for a rather awkward fit with the music.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, as Alain Frogley argues, Mellers's use of Blake's ideas does not sit comfortably within Christian theology, as they bear many of the hallmarks of Gnostic heresy.<sup>137</sup> Whilst a theological engagement with such ideas is not inappropriate, Mellers's engagement with them, and his equation of them with theological norms, betrays a seriously undetermined theological method. Ultimately, Mellers asserts his worldview through this piece despite analytical and theological evidence whilst, nevertheless, utilising the potent intersection of analysis and theology to evidence his claims. As Whittall, Manning, Frogley, and others note, this stands in a long tradition of uncritical assumptions of transcendent meaning in Vaughan Williams's music. Overall, Mellers's engagement is both analytically and theologically lacking.

For Arnold Whittall, the form of the first movement is generated by the 'interplay of tonality and modality, of monotonicity and modulation,'<sup>138</sup> and, overall, by the movement's 'exploitation of a basic interaction between dependency on associations with the sonata-form model and simultaneous countering of that model in the sphere of tonal and harmonic structure.'<sup>139</sup> Ultimately, Whittall argues that there is no single strategy underpinning the first movement, but that 'the music moves between different orientations; it is, in a sense, purposefully non-committal'.<sup>140</sup> For this reason, he proposes that the first movement should be read as suggesting 'something of the mystery of the human condition, as a response to the number of unanswerable questions that even humanists must acknowledge.'<sup>141</sup> Whittall's approach is credible and, while it does not specifically engage with theology, it is not hard to see a coherence between his reading and the sort of natural theology that was prevalent in Vaughan Williams's context and evidenced in his writings. Whittall's approach, in some ways, intersects with the one I adopt: rather than 'debunking' transcendent readings, he seeks to subject them to evidence garnered from a rigorous analytical engagement with Nattiez's 'trace' level. In doing so, Whittall uses analysis to inform his interpretations. However, there are significant theological ramifications which Whittall does not explore: many of the issues and questions he outlines require theological answers. Furthermore, there are theologically significant musical structures which do not enter into his analysis.

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<sup>136</sup> Adams, "Review: Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion by Wilfrid Mellers", 632.

<sup>137</sup> Frogley, "Review: Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion by Wilfrid Mellers", 436.

<sup>138</sup> Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major': Models and Mutations", 194.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

For Julian Horton, the musical ambiguity in this piece is also generated by pitch collections. Horton places Symphony No. 5 in the context of Vaughan Williams's other middle-period symphonies, all of which have, at their core, a harmonic or modal duality which is generative of the piece's form.<sup>142</sup> Horton follows Whittall in locating the central duality of Symphony No. 5 in the identity of the sustained C in the bass at the piece's outset (see Example 3.1): is this C the tonic? Or is it the flattened leading note of D? This ambiguity lies at the centre of subsequent issues to do with modal identity: particularly the D–Mixolydian/C–Mixolydian and D–Dorian/C–Ionian complexes.<sup>143</sup> It is a core issue which the first movement spends time attempting to negotiate; the resolution is deferred to the last movement, where the symphony's cyclic properties are made overt. Horton offers a convincing approach to this piece's musical structures; he is, however, not concerned with relating these technical aspects to theological interpretations of the music. For Horton, the more pertinent reading is that of a dialogue between post and pre-tonal musical paradigms which concludes by creating a 'new musical order in which there is no contradiction between modal and post-tonal harmonic means.'<sup>144</sup> Horton's scepticism of some such readings encapsulates a motivating concern of modern Vaughan Williams research, as I describe in chapters one and two. This critical approach is well-founded: many writings on Vaughan Williams from the twentieth century indeed betray, in Horton's terms, 'pointedly metaphysical agendas'.<sup>145</sup> A desire to let Vaughan Williams's music 'speak for itself' is laudable given the rather unfortunate reputation that decades of uncritical engagement with his music has generated. Such a desire, however, as I argue in chapters one and two, might also motivate theological readings of his music.

As Chapter 2 makes clear, the generative properties of large-scale modal resolution are also germane to the discussion of theological concerns in the music of Vaughan Williams. The resolution or progression of ambiguous modalities across pieces is a device associated with transcendent topics in Vaughan Williams's vocal music, in particular with the progression between this life and the next. Given that this structure exists alongside the presence of other theological affordance structures in the case of Symphony No. 5, it can be seen here to act in a similar way. Whilst, as Horton proves, the musical plot can be convincingly interpreted in various non-theological ways, the overwhelming presence of other, independent, theologically significant musical structures – most notably thematic topics, intertextual links, and presence

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<sup>142</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 207–09.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

of pan-triadic harmony— suggests that some theological readings of the same may be at least equally convincing. To put this more strongly: Horton does not provide enough evidence to discourage theological interpretations of this piece, especially when such interpretations are seen commonly at the esthetic level and are predicated upon key interpretants at the trace and poietic level. Furthermore, I see no reason why rational, critical accounts of this piece’s clear links with transcendent meaning need to ‘conceal’ other, non-readings. Indeed, in the case of this piece as with others (perhaps most notably the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, which Horton also mentions), the issues of musical evolution and transcendent meaning are positively intertwined.<sup>146</sup>

### **Theme and Topic in the First Movement**

Elements of ambiguity can also be seen to interact with theological affordance structures at the thematic level, resulting in important topical juxtapositions between the first and second themes which articulate theological tensions. For Murray Dineen, the nature of the first theme itself is ambiguous, though this is not linked to a theological interpretation. Dineen’s analysis of the first movement explores the instability of the thematic content; invoking the idea of centonization, he suggests that there is no definitive theme, for it is perpetually in an evolutionary state of ‘flux and change’.<sup>147</sup> This, Dineen convincingly argues, is an idea that originates in Vaughan Williams’s understanding of the folksong idiom. The main melodic material is constructed from various musical figures; whilst there is no definitive version of the first movement’s main theme – and Dineen is clear that it would be fruitless to search for one – certain discrete fragments are relied upon. The theme is not defined by a single statement, but rather it is defined from the pool of musical fragments that it draws from (much like the ‘stock phrases’ that some folk tunes are built up of). Dineen understands these intrusions of the folk idiom as being a function of Vaughan Williams’s desire to be a national composer.<sup>148</sup> This synthesis of folksong idiom and symphonic thought has its effects on the symphonic process; ‘The influence of the folk-song,’ he claims, ‘[...] effected not only a loosening of thematic conception but also of the formal function of themes.’<sup>149</sup> However, this ‘loosening’ relates to

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>147</sup> Murray Dineen, “Vaughan Williams’s Fifth Symphony: Ideology and Aural Tradition”, in *Vaughan Williams Essays*, ed. Byron Adams and Robin Wells (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 18.

<sup>148</sup> Vaughan Williams explicitly states that the pursuing of a national style is the only way of being a ‘sincere’ and ‘great’ composer. See Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 10–11.

<sup>149</sup> Dineen, “Vaughan Williams’s Fifth Symphony: Ideology and Aural Tradition”, 21.

more than a compositional desire to engage with a national ideology of music: it resonates strongly with natural theological issues.

Example 3.1 shows the horn call which initiates the main theme's first statement. From this point, the theme then accrues various melodic phrases and tests these in various orderings: from bar 1.1 onwards, they all begin with the same phrase, up until the process starts again at bar 2.1. In a similar way, once this idea is reintroduced a few bars later, it begins all successive iterations until this process too peters out. Figure 3.1, inspired by Dineen's analysis, shows this. Vaughan Williams often combines these iterations in non-strict canon; this means that not only is there no definitive theme, at a single point in time two different permutations of the theme can coexist at a single point in musical time, with neither being the definitive statement at that point. A clear example of this can be seen in the two iterations beginning in bar 4.7, as Figure 3.1 shows; the second violin enters half a bar behind the first violin, but its material soon diverges. It is not merely a slight alteration of the fragments for harmonic reasons, as often found in non-strict canon; the fragments themselves appear in a different order. In tracing the main theme throughout the piece, good evidence emerges that each iteration is not entirely independent but is linked to its neighbours. For example, as I mention above, the motif that introduces the statement at bar 1.1 begins all the following statements until the process starts again at bar 2.1. Overall, the theme group has the feel of a determined search for a definite form, as opposed to a random series of combinations. However, because of the absence of a goal, there is no distinct overarching teleology to the story of the main theme throughout the movement. Each time the horn calls sound again, it is as if the music returns to square one and begins again its search for a definitive form. This remains the case through to the end of the movement, which recapitulates the opening uncertainty ensuring a symmetrical design. In its thoroughly ambiguous ending, both in terms of modality and thematic content, the first movement is implicitly forward looking, awaiting resolution.

The issues and questions posed by natural theology in Vaughan Williams's context are invoked in both the content and form of the first theme group. The form of the theme embodies a natural phenomenon – evolution – in its most rational, Darwinian sense, in that there is no wider teleology. 'Mistakes' or dead-ends occur in the theme's process and, even at the end, there is no progress made, no transcendence from its condition. This musical structure thus expresses fraught concepts of evolution that anchor the music's investment with theology in the science-religion discourse. The topical associations of the theme are also 'natural' in other senses; in the field of topic theory, horn calls are associated with the hunt and the pastoral

throughout the history of Western classical music.<sup>150</sup> As Whittall notes, the horn call evokes an ‘unearthly, veiled kind of pastoral’ due to the whole-tone context of the first horn dyad.<sup>151</sup> Daniel Grimley notes that ‘the association between images of the pastoral and notions of spiritual transcendence, are characteristic not merely of Vaughan Williams’s music in the early 1920s, but of early twentieth-century modernist practice more widely.’<sup>152</sup> Chapter 2 argues for modality as a symbol of such transcendence.

The fact that Vaughan Williams uses this ‘natural’ means of asking questions of the transcendent not only invokes natural theology but does so by embedding the issue of evolution – the primary hot-topic of natural theology in Vaughan Williams’s time, which articulates the ambiguous boundary of science and religion – at its core. Whilst, in (Spencerian) theory, evolution is teleologically orientated towards the transcendence, in (Darwinian) practice, it is unable to escape the confines of its niche. Unlike Anthony Pople’s reading of the Tallis Fantasia and Horton’s reading of the finale of Symphony No. 5 – both of which suggest a process which recapitulates an entire musical evolution culminating in Vaughan Williams’s own recapitulatory style – the ‘evolution’ embodied in Symphony No. 5’s main theme does not exhibit progress. I explore ideas of progress and their relation to theology in greater detail in Chapter 4.

In this symphony, Vaughan Williams’s ‘most penetrating expression of the pastoral as transcendent’,<sup>153</sup> the main theme of the first movement remains in a state of flux. For Vaughan Williams, even incorporating this representation of the natural system of evolution cannot *a priori* elicit any answers to life’s most profound questions. Whittall articulates a similar idea, referring to the ‘doubt’ expressed by this theme wherever it occurs. The exploration of the transcendent evident in this theme has no ultimate revelation, but this in itself reveals something of Vaughan Williams’s own theology; it resonates with the preoccupation of music reaching into the ‘beyond’ in his writings, and it expresses the concerns of his natural theological context. Spencer’s deistic god, who remains out of reach and unknowable, seems to be the operative transcendent idea here, even if the evolutionary idea embodied is Darwinian. There is something very profound in the fact that Vaughan Williams uses a representation of musical evolution in an attempt to fulfil an innate human desire: to understand the transcendent.

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<sup>150</sup> Andrew Haringer, “Hunt, Military, and Pastoral Topics”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196–97.

<sup>151</sup> Whittall, ““Symphony in D Major”: Models and Mutations”, 191.

<sup>152</sup> Grimley, “Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral”, 160.

<sup>153</sup> Whittall, ““Symphony in D Major”: Models and Mutations”, 192.

In fact, it is this recapitulatory embodiment of a natural, earthly system of evolution that provides this movement its connotations with the search for the transcendent.

The second theme, shown in Example 3.3, expresses ideas of transcendence in fundamentally different ways. For Whittall, it contrasts the ‘questioning’ of the first theme with ‘confidence’.<sup>154</sup> On the one hand, there is something distinctly hymn-like about this theme: as I argue above, its melodic contour seems to reference the setting of the word ‘Alleluia’ in Vaughan Williams’s tune *Sine Nomine*. This hymnic feel is furthered by its defined harmonic hierarchy, and thus a clearer articulation of tonality (of which more below). On the other hand, there is also pan-triadic syntax in this theme, both in its appearance here in the exposition and in the recapitulation. At the point it first appears – in E major – a pan-triadic hexatonic pole signals a breakthrough of transcendent nature. As I argue above, through its romantic association with transcendent themes, inherent voice-leading properties, and consistent use in the context of theological texts across Vaughan Williams’s output, this harmonic language is associated with transcendence and revelation. Whittall’s sense of this theme as ‘confident’ can be qualified theologically by suggesting that it approaches the idea of a transcendent beyond from a fundamentally different perspective: it suggests revealed, rather than natural, theology. In comparison to the searching, indefinite, evolving nature of the first theme, it is articulated as a definitive statement, perhaps intruding on the doubt expressed in the first theme from outside. It presents itself as something of a revelation, rather than a search; it has the hallmark confidence of revealed theology. However, it is short lived. As Example 3.4 shows, E major is followed by an implied E minor, at which point a succession of LP pan-triadic transformations recapitulate the opening theme in E–Phrygian and C–Aeolian modes. Following this, the material merges seamlessly into the start of the sonata’s development section.

Although the themes do not directly engage in strife with one another, their evocation of different spiritual outlooks directly impinges upon the theological perspective in this movement. This second theme returns in triumphant rhetoric in the recapitulation and secures G major very convincingly via a dramatic third modulation from B $\flat$  – an additional pan-triadic progression besides the one that initiates the theme – and then goes on to assert this key with some force. This is shown in Example 3.5. G major would be a very plausible progressive tonal plot were it to stick given G is the key that, in tonal terms, stands in maximal relation to D and C by virtue of pitch-class intersection. Furthermore, both the initial modal options of C–Lydian

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 200.

and D–Mixolydian exist in a fixed-key-signature relationship with G–Ionian. Vaughan Williams himself was, according to Kennedy, uncertain as to ‘what key-title to give the symphony’.<sup>155</sup> Given the topical references contained within this second theme, the spiritual narrative of the movement would be effectively resolved at this moment, with the security of a progressive tonal goal being achieved by this hymnic, revelatory theme. In representing the opposite pole to the first theme’s natural theology, this ending could represent an overpowering, optimistic outlook in the face of doubt. However, whatever this theme is considered to represent, it is not sufficient to permanently trounce doubt. From bar 14.1, this triumphant G major rhetoric is gradually moved aside in favour of a return to uncertainty and doubt. As Example 3.6 shows, G major is changed to G minor (aeolian), before material from the development section is recapitulated over a similar modal framework similar to that which follows the first statement of this theme. Again, pan-triadic progressions link the modal areas: this time, E♭, D, and F. This eventually leads to an oscillation between the initial modal complex and F–aeolian at bar 15.6; these two jostle for primacy, interjecting each other, with the former having the final word. As noted above, instead of progress, this movement opts for symmetry: it ends where it begins, in speculative, uncertain natural theology evoked by modal ambiguity. Whittall, who also notes this theme’s transcendent attributes, stresses that Vaughan Williams chooses a ‘return to earth’ soon after in the form of a return to the opening material.<sup>156</sup> In fact, Whittall reads the eventual doubt with which the movement ends as, in some way, caused by the overt confidence of this theme.<sup>157</sup> The confidence offered by revealed theology does not, in this case, assuage the doubt expressed in a speculative natural theology.

### Multiple Syntaxes

The narrative suggested by the topical nature of the themes is underscored by entirely different voice-leading syntaxes. On the one hand, the first theme is built of musical material which stays in the same mode for long stretches and articulates a sense of modal tonality. As Figure 3.2 shows, this music stays strictly within diatonic restrictions for vast stretches: in this case, the entirety of the exposition’s main theme group (bars 1–4.15). This syntax is capable of eliciting a pervading sense of tonic by repetition and heterophonic linear outline of melodies. Bars 3.8–3.12 are a good example; as Example 3.7 shows, they quite straightforwardly

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<sup>155</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 280.

<sup>156</sup> Whittall, “‘Symphony in D Major’: Models and Mutations”, 200.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

articulate F–Dorian. This syntax can, however, also subvert or deliberately obfuscate the identity of the tonic, as bars 1–3.7 do. In either case, however, triads drawn from these scales are absent. Any sense of modal tonic is derived from horizontal harmonic implication as opposed to the evident hierarchy of vertically organised harmony. The bi-modality evinced at the opening is not, in other words, just a result of the C/D ‘dissonance’ itself as, in this syntax, dissonance is hard to quantify. Similarly, it has nothing to do with chromaticism as the music sticks strictly to diatonic space. Rather, the modal ambiguity resides in the fact that bass line and melody project different tonics horizontally and seem to be anchored around different tonic notes.

This is contrasted by the second theme, which is introduced through a moment of overt pan-triadicism: a hexatonic pole transformation, as seen in Example 3.3. Such transformations, according to Cohn, are often associated with ideas of the beyond through their invocation of the ‘uncanny’.<sup>158</sup> In Vaughan Williams’s music, this harmonic entity retains its association of the beyond, though perhaps without the overt Freudian implications. I explore the hermeneutic weight of hexatonic poles in Vaughan Williams’s symphonic music in more depth in Chapter 4. Following this, the theme presents material which coheres to the laws of hierarchical tonality to a far greater extent. Whilst brief moments of pan-triadicism anchor the theme’s topical content in the beyond in particular ways, they do not impinge upon the fact that tonal voice-leading dominates here. The ‘gravity’ of tonal voice leading evinces a fundamentally different syntax to the opening movement.<sup>159</sup> In this syntax, closure and a sense of tonal centre are achieved by clarification of the hierarchy of triads generated from the scale. This syntax thus offers a fundamentally different method of dissonance treatment to the first theme; its ending, augmented twice by pre-cadential material, functions as a relatively traditional cadence. Example 3.3 shows this extract annotated with a Roman numeral analysis. In opposition to the opening theme, it provides a model for effective closure; in some ways, it shows an ideal state. The nature of this theme highlights the absence of closure in the first, thus expressing tensions between horizontally and vertically organised music whilst, at the same time, offering a glimpse of a possible resolution. At stake now is not just whether the initial ambiguity will be

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<sup>158</sup> Cohn, “Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age”, 285–88.

<sup>159</sup> Compare, for example, Cohn’s description of pan-triadic syntax with John Muniz’s models for the voice-tendencies of scale degrees. Cohn, “Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions”, 11; John Muniz, “A Tendency-Transformational Model of Enharmonic Modulations and Related Phenomena”, *Music Theory Spectrum* 41, no. 1 (2019): 1–6.

resolved, but in what fashion, and according to which syntax; the result of this has significant hermeneutical implications for theological readings of this piece.

These two paradigms are implicated in the theological plot initiated in the first movement, then picked up and concluded in the last movement. Woven through this plot, at various points, is pan-triadicism. As I describe above, this syntax outstrips even the subtlest of modal approaches and, as Cohn shows, such progressions also transgress the rules of hierarchical tonality.<sup>160</sup> The presence of this pan-triadic syntax presents even deeper levels of ambiguity. For example: is the relationship between the C/D complex and the ensuing F minor section tonal (assuming C as tonal centre) or octatonic (assuming D as the tonal centre)? There is good evidence for both: following the F minor section, the piece modulates to C minor underlining the potential tonic-subdominant relationship between the initial ambiguous modal complex and F minor. However, given that D is elsewhere treated as the ‘real’ tonic of this initial complex – for example, where the development section prepares for the recapitulation by articulating A as a dominant from bars 9.11–10.17 – the octatonic is also a live option. At various points, as is commonplace in Vaughan Williams’s music, pan-triadic syntax and modal writing function in tandem. During the development of the first movement, for example, areas of modal writing which elaborate modal tonics straightforwardly are connected by a background octatonic structure: namely, a complete RP co-cycle. Figure 3.3 shows this section, which bears a similarity to the music I describe in *Valiant for Truth*, shown in Example 2.15. This chain becomes an important point of contact between the first and last movement: in both cases, this structure precedes a return to the opening music.

Thus, there are three distinct musical paradigms at play in this piece: modality, tonality, and pan-triadicism. All three evince distinct voice-leading properties and relationships with concepts of tonic. Of these three the first two are essentially diatonic (7–35) phenomena, whilst the latter is chromatic. The first two are capable of tonicisation, whilst the latter is not. Together, the interplay of these three syntaxes underpins the main plot of the symphony; as Figure 3.4 shows, the sequence of tonalities (modal and otherwise) draws on each of these at different points. This figure takes the same basic form as Figure 2.15. In this case, the 7–35 ‘stave’ has been split to indicate modal or tonal syntax. Additionally, grey triad labels represent modal or tonal passages which are not linked to adjacent passages by modal means. Labels which refer to modally ambiguous passages are rendered half in grey, half in black, where multiple

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<sup>160</sup> Cohn, “Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions”, 9–11.

syntaxes could be at play: in these instances, the black text represents the valid transformation for that syntax. The grey lines represent connections between the surface-level modality and the background-level pan-triadic syntax. Brackets at the top of the figure represent the major formal units in this structure. The Preludio's sonata sections are labelled using conventions set out by Hepokoski and Darcy, where 'P' indicates the primary theme group, 'S' indicates the secondary theme group, and 'C' indicates closing space.<sup>161</sup>

The complexity of this interaction has hermeneutic implications for theological interpretations of this piece. As outlined in the Chapter 2, all three are, in their own way, theological affordance structures. They evoke diverse theologically resonant topics in their distinct musical characteristics and extra-musical significations. As in Vaughan Williams's vocal music, the result is a rich complex of theological meaning that unsurprisingly inspires diverse responses: the multiple transcendent signifiers – affordance structures – create a potent theological ambiguity. Here, however, their interrelations and tensions are elevated to a symphonic level of drama and structure, where theological affordance structures engage in a form of musical theological dialogue played out in a large-scale format.

## Resolution

As with all Vaughan Williams's music, it is worth considering how these ideas resonate with his own natural theological concerns, and how these are implicated in the broader discussion of science and religion, nature, and theology, in his intellectual context. Whilst, as I argue, these ideas are articulated in the first movement, they crystallise at the point of the plot's resolution in the fourth movement.

The fourth movement does not take up the plot of the first in an obvious sense until some way into the piece. For the majority of the movement there is, instead, a Passacaglia. This begins in an unproblematic D major, before hinting at the ambiguity and doubt of the first movement through various means, ultimately culminating with a return of the opening material. This breaks into the passacaglia pattern after the twenty-seventh iteration from bar 13.8 and is shown in Example 3.8.<sup>162</sup> At this point the passacaglia process is halted, though its thematic material continues to permeate the reprisal of the first movement's main theme. Thus, as

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<sup>161</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, xxv-xxviii.

<sup>162</sup> Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major': Models and Mutations", 207.

Horton notes, the first theme of the first movement interrupts the process of the final movement and, simultaneously, everything between the end of the first movement and this moment is reframed as an interruption of the overarching plot.

After reprising the central ideas of the first movement's first theme, its ambiguity is finally resolved in bar 15.2 as the bass settles on D, leaving the rest of the symphony to play out in D–Ionian. Example 3.9 shows this momentous moment in the piece's form; its rhetoric is low-key, almost curiously so. There is certainly no recourse to the first movement's bold, revelatory second theme. Opinions range as to what this moment represents; obviously, it implies some sort of positive outcome, though the scope of this positivity is uncertain. Horton, as I note above, suggests that it is not primarily about theology: rather, it embodies Vaughan Williams's own search for a musical style built on the past. The nature of the syntax which ends the piece also forms an important part of Horton's reading of this piece as testament to the formation Vaughan Williams's own style.<sup>163</sup> Ottoway describes the ending in terms of 'pure blessedness', where 'every tension is resolved'.<sup>164</sup> Mellers reads it as paradisaic, via ideas of rebirth and 'passing over' found in Bunyan, Blake, and Jung.<sup>165</sup> He anchors this reading to what he describes as Vaughan Williams's 'rediscovery' of the cadence: 'Whereas Delius and Holst, in their search for metaphysical ecstasy, in their very different ways disintegrate cadential resolution, Vaughan Williams, who had never been partial to it, rediscovers it; and paradoxically finds in it a gateway to Paradise.'<sup>166</sup> Whittall also argues for a metaphysical approach, but is more circumspect, suggesting that the movement leaves room for doubt. Citing Vaughan Williams's writings on Beethoven and Bach, he points out the composer's preference for 'the "human side" rather than a far-seeing look "into eternity"'. Ultimately, Whittall reads the ending as representing 'satisfying human repose and tranquillity [...] the sense of security which established religion and practical morality can provide, rather than a deeply mystical vision of the immortality of Jesus, or of some divine purpose operating mysteriously throughout the universe.'<sup>167</sup> There is much to admire about Whittall's approach which, almost unwittingly, suggests that this piece rejects the remote certainty of revealed theology in favour of the 'real' ambiguity of natural theology. Again, his approach is entirely congruent with a

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<sup>163</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 212.

<sup>164</sup> Hugh Ottaway, *Vaughan Williams Symphonies* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), 40.

<sup>165</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 185.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>167</sup> Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major': Models and Mutations", 210.

reading of this piece through the lens of long nineteenth-century natural theology, even if this left unexplored.

Cohn discusses the ability of the triad to act under tonal or pan-triadic syntax. Here, an additional duality might be considered: the 7-note diatonic pitch collection is heard at various points in this piece to act under either modal or tonal syntax. Whilst the concept of tonality and the Ionian mode are in theory mutable, in the music of Vaughan Williams they appear discrete because of the idiosyncratic ways that Vaughan Williams handles modality in defiance of tonal voice-leading. What happens at the point of resolution is not so much the triumph of tonal hierarchy over modal ambiguity; rather, as Horton and Whittall suggest, these two paradigms coalesce, closing in on each other over the course of the last movement's final section. At the conclusion, the identity of the syntax is modal, though this music effectively resolves tensions previously articulated in both syntaxes. In this way, Vaughan Williams's idiosyncratic handling of the Ionian mode acts as the overlap of the piece's syntactic Venn diagram. There is no tension between bass note and pitch content and, while the voice leading is modal-heterophonic rather than tonal, the resolution to a tonic still occurs.<sup>168</sup> The same end is reached, even if by different means. Example 3.10 shows the conclusion to this piece, which emphasises its modal language – pure diatony – within a tonally-resolved, unambiguous context.

Thus, Mellers's assertion that this piece 'rediscovers' the cadence in its closing stages, and that this represents an important metaphysical 'breakthrough' is misleading. Ironically, the cadences that evince closure most strongly and follow traditional blueprints most closely occur in the second theme of the first movement, as Examples 3.3 and 3.5 show. In this way, the climax of this piece could rather be seen as a rejection of the cadence: or, at least, a refutation of its unique claims to closing forms of music. As Horton notes, there is no triumph over modality at the end. It is the same modal syntax as the outset, where horizontal projections elaborate modal tonality; the only difference is that bass and melody are aligned to the same tonic.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, D major is not secured by some dramatic pan-triadic progression like that which dominates the second theme. In fact, it is notable that the symphony achieves its goal without recourse to the revealed theology of the second theme: it is notably absent in the Passacaglia's recapitulation of the first movement. The fact that this resolution occurs without the cadence, tonality, and dramatic pan-triadicism associated with the first movement's second theme has clear theological resonances. As Whittall suggests, any theologically positive ending

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<sup>168</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 212.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

is couched in the human, rather than the transcendent.<sup>170</sup> There might be contentedness, but there is no ultimate revelation. There is still distance between the natural and the supernatural: the parts are not resolved, even if the ending is happy. Revelation is rejected in the face of experience, but the rejection is not earth-shattering. Rather, the piece ends in the natural theological mode without its initial state of pervading doubt.

This piece articulates an awareness of the limitations of its natural theology but, eventually, is happy to rest in this uncertainty. A positive natural theology is suggested, entirely in consonance with the assertion of a deistic god who remains impossible to know. Yet, in this case, Vaughan Williams does not express this inherent gap between the observer and the transcendent to be a moral or existential problem. The peaceful ending of the symphony in the fourth movement does not attempt to provide any ultimate answer, but it does suggest that contentment is possible.

### **A Positive Natural Theology**

Music, for Vaughan Williams, constitutes a ‘spiritual necessity’; furthermore, for him, the art of music explores the link between the natural and a proposed transcendental realm.<sup>171</sup> Vaughan Williams’s conception of music, by this definition, resonates with natural theology. Any understanding of what music can disclose about the transcendent is dictated by theological belief: as I discuss above, Vaughan Williams was agnostic, and therefore saw no occasion to frame any idea of transcendence he experienced within a Christian revealed theology. Seen through both his writings and his music, he emerges as a deist, for the natural theology he espouses and depicts comes away empty-handed in terms of revelation.

The nature of Vaughan Williams’s natural theology – in particular his perception of the natural order, the attributes of the transcendence he describes, and the links between these ideas – is steeped in ideas of contemporary evolutionary thought, and the science-religion discourse. Vaughan Williams himself was implicated in this dialogue by virtue of his family connections and, more importantly, through his writings on the origins and evolution of music. Here, his views betray a complicated lineage of conflicting ideas sourced from his great-uncle and from thinkers such as Herbert Spencer via Hubert Parry. Spencerian and Darwinian models of evolution exist in a state of unresolved tension: whilst the proposed link between the everyday

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<sup>170</sup> Whittall, “‘Symphony in D Major’: Models and Mutations”, 210–12.

<sup>171</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 68.

world of phenomenological experience and a transcendent reality is a consistent feature of his writings, he was only too aware that music relationship with natural theology had its limits. As he wrote about his close friend Gustav Holst's music: 'All art is the imperfect human half-realization of that which is spiritually perfect. Holst's music seems especially to be a quest after that which in early life we can only partially fulfil.'<sup>172</sup> Thus, Vaughan Williams adopts a conflicted position regarding music's ability to reveal anything specific of the transcendence; this is borne out both in his fixation with the idea of a spiritual 'pilgrimage' in his own music and in the recent musicological endeavour to interpret his music's 'spiritual' qualities. Additionally, Vaughan Williams's own beliefs recapitulate many of the natural-theological concerns of the science-religion discourse in the nineteenth century. His contradictory adoption of the conflict, complementary, and coalescence models of science-religion relationships simultaneously gives support to, yet ultimately thwarts, the natural-theological endeavour his music expresses.

The theology of Symphony No. 5 evokes just such an exploration: it speaks with great profundity about the human condition necessitated by the assertion of a deistic deity and its divorce from Christian concepts of revelation. Throughout the first movement, no definitive statement of the main theme is heard. Its natural and transcendent topics are implicated in an evolutionary process, attempting to reach for the transcendent through doubt and insecurity. Its juxtaposition with the second theme – itself redolent of revealed theology – does nothing to assuage this doubt or provide its evolutionary process with the teleology it seems to require. Even the second theme's triumphant recapitulation manages nothing more than a return of the original state. These thematic differences are underscored, as Figure 3.4 shows, by deep divisions in this symphony between different musical syntaxes, each imbued with theological meaning in a distinct way.

Modal, tonal, and pan-triadic syntaxes each carry theological resonances: it is this interplay in particular that elevates the symphony beyond merely representing theological ideas to the level of theology. In interrogating the theological potential of diverse musical affordance structures, this symphony evokes a fraught natural theology which remains, simultaneously, convinced of the possibility of revelation and aware of its impossibility. In this way Vaughan Williams's perspective, almost perversely, seems to resonate with orthodox Christianity. Its lack of revelation and breakthrough from without, despite the potency of its natural theological

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<sup>172</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony With Writings on Other Musical Subjects", 151.

tone, seems congruent with theologies that, despite allowing space for natural theology, remain dependent on the self-disclosure of God in Christ. It seems to view nature, as McGrath does, as an *explicandum* – ‘something which requires or demands explication, but is not itself possessed of the intrinsic capacity or ability to offer such an explanation’, rather than an *explicans*: ‘an agent of explication with potentially revelatory status’.<sup>173</sup> In its searching, this music deeply suggests the reality of a transcendental realm, albeit one that, it appears, cannot be accessed without recourse to special revelation. Thus, the piece cannot constitute a ‘direct penetration of the mystery of life’,<sup>174</sup> nor does it attempt to render a vision of the ‘New Jerusalem.’<sup>175</sup> Here is the paradox that this music poses: by its inability to disclose something of the divine despite its evocation of the fervent search for the same, it points to transcendent concepts which it cannot disclose of its own accord.

Yet, somehow, the search does not leave the listener empty-handed. The doubt and ambiguity expressed by modal conflict at the outset is countered by an untroubled ending in D-Ionian; ultimately, the symphony ends peacefully, if not conclusively. This is no Beethovenian struggle to victory, yet it is still capable of expressing a certain contentment and fulfilment at its conclusion. There is no sense that any deep truth about the transcendent has been uncovered, yet Vaughan Williams’s natural theological inquiry has returned with a renewed sense of peace. Thus, in Symphony No. 5, the very idea of a search becomes an end in itself, especially in the context of intertextual connections with *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Having gone through pilgrimage, anxiety is resolved. The metaphysical questions posed might not be answered in a blaze of revelation, but there is an acceptance of ambiguity and willingness to carry on regardless. It is because this piece is rooted in an entirely human attempt to understand the transcendent – and is therefore incapable of finding answers in terms of human experience – that it has especial potency. This, perhaps, is the most significant reason behind its consistency and efficacy as an elicitor of both religious experience and theological discussion. As Whittall suggests, it is ‘all the more powerful for not offering a seamless synthesis between its various facets of meaning and form- for observing Elysium with both feet firmly on the ground’.<sup>176</sup> The *Sinfonia Antartica*, as Chapter 4 argues, occupies itself with a similar quest; however, its results are markedly different to the positive natural theology suggested in Symphony No. 5.

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<sup>173</sup> McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature*, 294.

<sup>174</sup> Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 42–43.

<sup>175</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 186.

<sup>176</sup> Whittall, “‘Symphony in D Major’: Models and Mutations”, 212.

## 4. Natural Theology and the *Sinfonia Antartica*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

#### Natural Theology and the *Sinfonia Antartica*

In describing Vaughan Williams oeuvre, Michael Kennedy identifies three compositions – *Scott of the Antarctic*, *A Sea Symphony* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* – as ‘[fixed] stars [...] by which he navigated his whole musical course’.<sup>2</sup> Kennedy’s allusions to exploration and journey are no accident: for him, this is a theme which is common to these pieces, as well as many others across the composer’s output:

The connecting links between those three works are fairly obvious but nonetheless important. In the first place, there is the idea of a journey or voyage. Added to this is the sense of man [sic] adventuring into the unknown against either natural or supernatural odds. Whitman’s strong appeal for Vaughan Williams lay in his imagery for this mysterious journey which the spirit of man undertakes: ‘Darest thou, O Soul, walk out with me toward the unknown?’<sup>3</sup>

The idea of spiritual journey, and of invoking concepts of the ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ is, as I argue in Chapter 3, at the root of Symphony No. 5. Here, natural theology becomes a central concern of the symphonic plot. The reception and literature surrounding Vaughan Williams’s seventh symphony, the *Sinfonia Antartica*, suggests that this piece directly addresses similar themes and tensions, albeit in distinct ways. Fuelled by the explicit connections between this piece and the story of Robert Scott, and by and the epigraphs attached to each movement, the reception of this piece has fixated on theologically significant elements of the relationship between humanity and nature. An early review of the premiere described the two main themes of the work as heroism and ‘[...] Nature– not Nature the kindly nurse of mankind, but brute nature, impersonal and implacable’.<sup>4</sup> These thoughts are echoed in a review

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this chapter were presented as “Natural Theology and the Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams” (paper presented at the Society for Christian Music and Scholarship, Baylor University, Texas, 8 February 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy, “The Unknown Vaughan Williams”, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, “A New Symphony. Vaughan Williams’s ‘Antartica’”, *The Times* (London), January 15 1953.

of the London premiere, which noted that the epigraphs ‘make it clear that the symphony [...] is an account of man’s heroic defiance of a desolate and inexorable nature.’<sup>5</sup> Writing a decade or so later, Michael Kennedy effuses about the middle movement, suggesting that its climax has ‘few parallels in music as an expression of man’s awe in the face of the unknown, natural or supernatural.’<sup>6</sup> For Wilfrid Mellers also, the piece is about the juxtaposition of humanity and nature, with the ending being ambiguously transcendent:

Aspiration, it seems has weathered – spiritually as well as physically – the pain that flesh is heir to: as it had, judging from Scott’s last words in his journal, in the case of this particular pilgrim through the unknown region. If the end is nirvana, or nothingness, this is a victory not for evil, but for Nature’s neutrality.<sup>7</sup>

Writing more recently, Julian Horton suggests a consistency of topic across the symphony, arguing that ‘each movement formulates the polarization of humanity and nature in a different way’.<sup>8</sup> The consistent juxtaposition of nature and humanity in the reception of this symphony underpins important points of contact with natural theological issues. The questions of humanity’s superior position in the natural order, human progress, the ‘nature’ of nature, and the transcendent properties of the natural world are essentially within the purview of natural theology. Vaughan Williams’s intellectual context, especially where science and religion interact, is saturated with these issues. The very existence and definition of ‘nature’ is at stake here: a prerequisite for ideas of progress and of natural theology. Thus, in a similar way to Symphony No. 5, this piece presents itself as a musical work full of theological signification even if relevant scholarship is rarely couched in theologically literate discussions. The theological perspective suggested by this symphony is, I argue, distinct from Symphony No. 5. Whilst it deals with similar issues, it comes to different conclusions. Despite this, there is significant commonality in the mode of theological presentation: both pieces are saturated with affordance structures. These layers of meaning add up to an ambiguous but potent complex; through musical structures and deep intertextuality, both pieces express theological ideas and perspectives. In the case of the *Sinfonia Antartica*, this primarily involves the invocation of one of the most culturally meaningful yet symbolically complex stories in twentieth-century Britain: that of Walter Scott’s failed expedition to the Antarctic pole.

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<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, “The “Sinfonia Antartica”: London Performance”, *The Times Educational Supplement* (London), January 30 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 361.

<sup>7</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 205.

<sup>8</sup> Horton, “The Later Symphonies”, 218.

## Intertextuality, The Scott Story, and Natural Theology

The intertextual relationships that form the hermeneutic context of the *Sinfonia* are particularly complex. In a similar way to Symphony No. 5's relationship to Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, the *Sinfonia* does not access Scott directly but rather through the intermediary of other music in Vaughan Williams's output. Several years before the conception of the *Sinfonia*, Vaughan Williams composed the music for Charles Friend's 1948 film *Scott of the Antarctic*: one of Kennedy's three 'fixed stars' as I note above. Vaughan Williams seems to have harboured a desire to rework this music into a symphony from at least December 1948; a letter to Ernest Irving reveals these intentions, triggered by the recording of the film score.<sup>9</sup>

In Chapter 2, I argue that the basic compositional *raison d'être* for Vaughan Williams is the expression of visions of the beyond, and that this is achieved in his own music by both intrinsic and extrinsic means. In addition to various immanent structures, Vaughan Williams's text selection and deliberate intertextuality express complex theological perspectives. An obvious question in the application of my thesis to *Sinfonia Antartica* would therefore be: why Scott? Why did Vaughan Williams find this decades-old story of a Victorian explorer's failure useful as a means of expressing his own personal vision of the beyond? What aspects of Vaughan Williams's natural theological context makes this a pertinent story? Given the reception of the piece in terms of natural theological issues, the following set of questions emerge as vital for a theological investigation of Vaughan Williams: How does the *Sinfonia* use the story of Scott to address issues of progress, nature, and natural theology? How does Vaughan Williams's appropriation of the Scott story relate to concurrent and older debates about the idea of progress, and the nature of 'nature'? What can the *Sinfonia Antartica* reveal about Vaughan Williams's natural theological perspective?

In order to answer these questions, I again survey the state of Vaughan Williams's intellectual context, this time focusing on the relationship between science and religion and on natural theology through the concepts of progress and of nature themselves. Next, I consider how the story of Scott became symbolic of the change in these concepts. Finally, I return to the *Sinfonia* and address how these concepts are expressed, and how the piece might be read in terms of natural theology. Overall, I suggest that the *Sinfonia* offers a dark reflection on the ambiguous positivity of Symphony No. 5: it explores the cracks inherent in the theology

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<sup>9</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 122; Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 439–40.

underpinning the conclusion of that symphony to more nihilistic ends. In the same way that the story of Scott became a multivalent symbol for various cultural anxieties, so Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia* expresses the same in terms of an ambiguous, negative natural theology.

## Ideas of Progress

### Progress, Evolution and Natural Theology

Since their inception, scientific theories of evolution have interacted with broader ideas of progress within contemporaneous cultural contexts. Peter Bowler suggests, for example, that 'at least until recently, evolution was usually seen as biological progress analogous to and perhaps helping to justify faith in the advancement of humanity.'<sup>10</sup> During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a crucial paradigm shift in ideas of progress occurred in parallel with significant new ideas in evolutionary theory. Bowler describes these ideas of progress at either end of the shift in terms of 'ladders' and 'trees': 'In the end', he suggests 'there is a crucial distinction that needs to be recognized: do you see development as the ascent of a linear scale, a ladder of perfection leading towards a predetermined goal, or as an open-ended process best represented by a branching tree?'<sup>11</sup> The ramifications of this question were felt throughout Vaughan Williams's cultural context, and impinge directly upon issues of natural theology in addition to beliefs in social and artistic progress. As I argue in Chapter 3, Vaughan Williams is implicated in the shifting sands of science and religion, partly through his investment in evolutionary ideas. In a similar way, his worldview and theology are saturated in debates surrounding contemporary ideas of progress. Once again, he can be viewed as embodying a somewhat conflicted and inconsistent worldview: as he does in terms of evolution, he does in terms of progress. These conflicts and inconsistencies intersect with issues of natural theology which, I argue, are expressed in the *Sinfonia*.

The idea of a great chain of being is old and highly influential. Bennett Zon, citing the anthropologist George W. Stocking, describes it as 'a recapitulatory ladder of development which "linked all forms of creation in a finely graduated hierarchical series".'<sup>12</sup> As Bowler

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<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Bowler, *Progress Unchained* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), vii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Zon, "The 'non-Darwinian' Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being", 201; George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 11.

notes, the idea of progress as a 'ladder' was essentially built upon natural theology: 'The chain of being observed in God's creation of nature served as the blueprint for this linear model of development through time, both in nature and in society.'<sup>13</sup> In other words, this formation of human progress was founded upon the observable patterns of God's ordering of the created world. Furthermore, the chain revealed the purposes and nature of God and, crucially, the placement of humanity at the top of the ladder. Bowler suggests that the ladder's regular structure was 'seen as evidence that the universe was designed by the Creator to a rational plan, a plan that also identified the crucial status of humankind.'<sup>14</sup> The effect of this aligned theologies of God's activity over history with linear progress, suggesting an ascent towards perfection. This mode of viewing the natural world underpins ideas of progress which exhibit predictable progression and a definite goal. Biologists such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, despite their atheistic leanings, exemplify this teleological 'ladder' of progress in an evolutionary guise.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, significant new theories of biological evolution in the nineteenth century suggested different models of progress. Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, for example, provoked images not of a ladder, but of an infinitely dividing tree:

Progress towards more complex states is certainly possible, but it is not inevitable because most adaptations have only local significance, and there can be no one goal towards which evolution as a whole is directed. The tree replaces the ladder as the 'shape' of evolution, and progress has to be defined as a general but haphazard increase in complexity or sophistication rather than an advance towards a predetermined goal.<sup>16</sup>

The effect of these theories on both ideas of progress and natural theology was marked: both become far less concrete in their Darwinian forms. As I describe in Chapter 3, the challenges of Darwin's theory caused a widespread 'non-Darwinian' revolution in thinking, which continued to protect important ideas in spite of their dissonance with orthodox Darwinism. Just as there was a separation between 'non-Darwinian' and 'Darwinian' evolution, so there was in terms progress. Bowler describes the rather complex shift in mindset:

The transition from the linear to the open-ended vision of progress was not a simple replacement of one idea by another. The linear, teleological model is certainly the original, yet it survived in one form or another through into the late twentieth-century expectations that liberal capitalism might represent the end of history. Recognition of diversity was a later development, routinely subverted by efforts to give the branching tree of evolution a central trunk

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<sup>13</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Conlin, *Evolution and the Victorians: Science, Culture and Politics in Darwin's Britain*, 47–49.

<sup>16</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 4–5.

representing the main line of progress. Small wonder that historians of the idea of progress have not been able to offer a coherent account of the debates it has engendered.<sup>17</sup>

Many non-Darwinian adaptations to the Darwinian tree foregrounded teleological progression as a basic principle; in doing so, they retained key concepts of the ‘ladder’. Whilst the origin of these ideas were scientific, they were applied broadly to all areas of society, not least music. As I argue in Chapter 3, natural theology adapted in light of these theories, and often did so in a way that preserved ideas of progress and human superiority. Not only did this have the effect of watering down new theories of evolution, it also, ironically, compromised the theological integrity of natural theology. Just as non-Darwinian evolution left the magisterium of science, non-Darwinian natural theology became detached from its original context as a partner to revealed theology. Natural theology, divorced from its Christian context, began to prove progress rather than God.

One of the more subtle and influential non-Darwinians in Vaughan Williams’s cultural context was Herbert Spencer. Spencer, like Darwin, implied a tree-like model, even if, as Bowler suggests, many of his followers did not grasp this.<sup>18</sup> However, whilst he supported the idea that progress could look different in different contexts, Spencer espouses the ever-advancing progression of simplicity to complexity, from primitive to sophisticated and intelligent. For him, degeneration was very much the exception.<sup>19</sup> Linked to this, Spencer’s conceptualisation of progress in terms of complexity and intelligence suggests a somewhat more teleological shape to evolutionary progress than Darwin. Increased complexity and sophistication were the hallmarks of progress in the natural world, and so they were elsewhere. Spencer applied these ideas liberally to various fields of study, not least musicology; his theory of musical evolution was hugely influential and forms the basis, as I argue in Chapter 3, for subsequent writings such as Hubert Parry’s.<sup>20</sup> Bennett Zon suggests that Parry’s writings encapsulated commonly-held views on the subject in late-Victorian Britain: ‘Parry voiced from the mid 1880s what much of the musical nation actually thought: music progressed from simplicity to complexity as it became more civilised; each of its stages recapitulated the previous one’.<sup>21</sup> Parry’s writings on musical progress, in turn, had a significant influence on his pupil, Vaughan Williams. However, as Chapter 3 describes Vaughan Williams’s status as a non-Darwinian is complicated by various Darwinian factors in his thinking on musical

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>20</sup> Zon, “The ‘non-Darwinian’ Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being”, 210–11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

evolution. The same is, unsurprisingly, true of his thoughts on musical progress. In many ways, Vaughan Williams embodies the tension between accepting tree-like and ladder-like progress.

Throughout his writings, Vaughan Williams turned to Parry to defend his ideas of musical evolution. Frequently, this involves a summary of the theory: that it shows ‘the line of succession from the simplest of folk tunes to the most elaborate symphony.’<sup>22</sup> This description betrays a Spencerian influence in its description of progress from ‘simple’ to ‘elaborate’. Vaughan Williams also describes the Spencerian ideal of recapitulation in form, using various folk tunes as an example:

It will not surprise those who realize that music is subject to the laws of evolution, to find that the form of the folk dance is in principle exactly that of a Beethoven sonata—namely (a) a melodic statement in which the tonal plane is constant, or, at most, changes once in the course of the section; (b) a period of suspense, in which the rhythmic element momentarily supersedes the melodic and in which the tonal plane is more shifting. This suspense is finally resolved by (c) a return, either in whole or in part, to the original melodic section.<sup>23</sup>

Like Spencer, Vaughan Williams made allowances for some form of tree in the evolution of music; for him, this was a heterogeneity on an essentially nationalist basis. Thus, ‘Beethoven is but a later stage in the development of those principles which actuated the primitive Teuton when he desired to make himself artistically intelligible.’<sup>24</sup> Arguably, Vaughan Williams proves to be more Spencerian than Parry himself who, like many Spencerites, tended to view progress as more ladder-like than tree-like. Whilst Parry noticed the differentiation in nationalities, some musics – notably, Germanic – were still further up the chain than others in his theory.<sup>25</sup> This belief is mirrored in the practice of Parry’s composition, which was heavily influenced by Germanic composers.<sup>26</sup> Vaughan Williams, on the other hand, believed that the distinctiveness of music on national terms was key to its expressive success: ‘It is because Palestrina and Verdi are essentially Italian and because Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner are essentially German that their message transcends their frontiers.’<sup>27</sup> As Bowler

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<sup>22</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “Cecil James Sharp (1859–1924)”, in *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1922–30 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 238.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “Dance Tunes”, *The Music Student* 11, no. 12 (1919). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 212.

<sup>24</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Parry’s *Studies of Great Composers* features, barring an initial chapter on Palestrina, a succession of Austro-German composers. In Parry view, ‘The pre-eminence which the Germans have gained by their thoroughness and clearness of judgment, and true nobility of thought in music, is still maintained by Johannes Brahms, a descendant in the direct line of Bach and Beethoven.’ See C. Hubert H. Parry, *Studies of Great Composers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1904] 2009), 361.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremy Dibble, “Parry, Sir (Charles) Hubert (Hastings)”, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 153.

<sup>27</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 9.

notes, ‘Cultural relativism is the social science equivalent of the evolutionary biologist’s tree of life.’<sup>28</sup> Additionally, as I describe in Chapter 3, Vaughan Williams’s insistence of the presence of a ‘beyond’ suggests a Spencerian retention of teleology within a tree-like form of progress. His views on the transcendent were similar to Spencer’s and link the idea of a transcendent to spiritual progress: if anything, his natural theology foregrounds the possibility of revelation – and therefore progression – in a stronger fashion.

In various ways, however, Vaughan Williams takes ideas of progress beyond Spencerian ideals. The source, lineage and nationality of music appears a more pertinent marker of ‘progress’ for Vaughan Williams than complexity or sophistication. These ideals can be traced in the *Tallis Fantasia* of 1910. Pople suggests that the opening of this piece implies ‘something exactly in line with Vaughan Williams’s ideas of musical “evolution”’, in which a succession of English music is depicted, into which Vaughan Williams weaves his own distinct musical language.<sup>29</sup> Whilst ideas of evolution are present, there is little in Vaughan Williams’s writings that suggest that his own music should be built on in the same way: in other words, he viewed his music as only one branch of a potentially infinite tree. The important aspect, for Vaughan Williams, was anchoring his music in its evolutionary precedents: a recapitulation of sorts, but not one that guaranteed Spencerian progress. For him, the ideal of a nation foregrounded, ‘above all, a continuity with the past’.<sup>30</sup>

Vaughan Williams’s reaction to his immediate musical predecessors is similarly shy of conforming to Spencerian teleological progress. His aversion to aping late Romanticism is evident from as early as 1897. In ‘The Romantic Movement and its Results’, he establishes the evolutionary nature of musical progression, whilst clearly adopting a branch-like shape for the Romantic movement.

Wagner, then, is not a freak of nature standing outside the line of evolution, but he is the logical outcome of the romantic movement in music: in this way he dealt it its death blow, and out of the tentative gropings of Schumann evolved a new art—a subtle blend of music and drama—the whole being entirely distinct from either of its component parts. This is the first result of the romantic movement. The second result is that no progressive musician can go on writing romantic music; that is over and done for, and the way has been cleared for pure music to resume its sway. The next musical pioneer after Wagner must be a man who will start again on the lines from which the romanticists broke away, and who will write pure music out of a purely musical heart [...]<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Pople, “Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle”, 60.

<sup>30</sup> Vaughan Williams, “National Music”, 68.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, “The Romantic Movement and Its Results”, *The Musician* 1, no. 23 (1897). Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 16.

These musical values are mirrored throughout the reception of Vaughan Williams own music. Alain Frogley, for example, speaks of the *Fantasia* in very similar terms:

The aura of mystery surrounding common chords in these works is by no means arbitrary: in an age of chromatic saturation, emergent atonality and Debussyan added-note chords, pure triadic harmony could become a thing of wonder (and the climax of the *Fantasia*, as intense as any of Wagner's or Tchaikovsky's, does not use a single appoggiatura). Rather than expunging non-diatonic elements, Vaughan Williams reintegrated them through modally enriched diatonic means, creating a musical tension not compromised by chromatic saturation.<sup>32</sup>

Vaughan Williams's prioritising of the 'niche' in which evolution acts is more pronounced – and therefore more Darwinian – than either Parry's or Spencer's. Vaughan Williams describes how chorales can: '[...] evolve like a folk-song, adapting [...] to new uses and new circumstances, surviving in that version which is the fittest for its purpose.'<sup>33</sup> This description of progress is thoroughly Darwinian: it subverts teleology for adapting to 'new circumstances' in exactly the same way that Darwin's tree does.

Julian Onderdonk describes Vaughan Williams's political philosophy as 'progressivist' and, whilst most of the composer's ideas of progress are to be found in his writings on music, it is clear that he was also committed to political and social ideas of progress.<sup>34</sup> Onderdonk describes the activity of progressives such as Vaughan Williams in terms of social reform:

Many [...] like Vaughan Williams, continued to seek ways to extend the professional ideals of meritocracy and equality of opportunity to society's poorest members. Their achievement was to construct a humane state apparatus that redistributed wealth and empowered the underprivileged while still managing to safeguard individual rights, protect private property and promote entrepreneurial activity.<sup>35</sup>

Vaughan Williams consistently 'voted either radical or labour' throughout his life, which, as Onderdonk notes, meant voting for progressive taxation and ambitious programmes of social reform.<sup>36</sup> These views are entirely consistent with his musical activity, much of which was focused on promoting 'progress' at various levels of music making in England.<sup>37</sup> Thus, there is a certain sense of teleology present in Vaughan Williams's ideas of societal progress that suggests a general trend towards an accepted good: as Bowler notes, this is a hallmark of ladder-like conceptualisations of progress.

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<sup>32</sup> Ottaway and Frogley, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph", 354.

<sup>33</sup> Vaughan Williams, "National Music", 79.

<sup>34</sup> Onderdonk, "The Composer and Society: Family, Politics, Nation", 16.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> See David Manning, "The Public Figure: Vaughan Williams as Writer and Activist", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 231–39.

However, the very activity of progressivists such as Vaughan Williams suggests an inherent fragility in such conceptualisations of progress. Vaughan Williams was more than aware that undesirable ‘progress’ could occur, not least in the domain of English music. Writing on its state in 1912, Vaughan Williams described a rather bleak outlook:

We are too fond in England of looking on music as a matter of detached appreciation. The English amateur believes with Rossini that there are only two kinds of music – good and bad – and if he can afford it, he prefers to import, together with the best brands of cigars and champagne, the best brands of music also. The connexion between music and every-day life is entirely severed.<sup>38</sup>

In Vaughan Williams’s view, an attempt at progress – the prioritisation of ‘good’ music – had actually resulted in a lack of progress. In other words, like Darwin’s tree, there were many possible ways to progress, but these might not be considered ‘progress’ by all people. Aidan Thompson points out the inherent dissonance between Vaughan Williams’s Victorian belief in evolutionary progress and his opinion on the state of music:

[...] like Trevelyan, Vaughan Williams was faced with trying to reconcile Victorian values with an age in which they seemed to have hit the buffers. For Vaughan Williams, the problem was that while he continued to subscribe to an evolutionary model of music history (as late as the mid-1950s, based on his *Making of Music* lectures), he was sceptical of much of the music to which this evolution had given rise.<sup>39</sup>

Bowler notes the proliferation of this kind of anxiety as Darwinian models of progress started to become more widely accepted.<sup>40</sup> Whilst the definition of progress was, in theory, at stake, Vaughan Williams sought actively to ensure particular forms of progress. As Onderdonk notes, he took his position as an influential composer seriously, and saw the stewardship of English music as part of his duty; for Onderdonk, this often strays into rather ‘paternalistic’ impulses towards musical culture and progress.<sup>41</sup> The precarity of progress in a Darwinian world – of both its nature and its likelihood – underpins this way of thinking. Throughout the twentieth century, world events and directions of ‘progress’ contributed to this anxiety: in the case of Vaughan Williams, and many others, these brought the idea of progress to the brink.

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<sup>38</sup> Vaughan Williams, “Who Wants the English Composer?”. Cited in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Aidan J. Thomson, “‘Es klang so alt und war doch so neu’: Vaughan Williams, Aesthetics and History”, in *British Musical Criticism and Intellectual Thought, 1850–1950*, ed. Jeremy Dibble and Julian Horton (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018), 268.

<sup>40</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 15–16.

<sup>41</sup> Onderdonk, “The Composer and Society: Family, Politics, Nation”, 20.

## The Myth of Progress?

Whilst accepting Darwinian theory did not necessarily entail full-blown pessimism, twentieth-century ideas of progress were greatly shaped by its influence.<sup>42</sup> As the non-Darwinian revolution started to reverse, the certainty of progress was undermined. Bowler describes the link between this change in evolutionary thought and broader conceptions of progress: ‘Humans were a contingent outcome of a complex process that had produced all the other species. Small wonder, then, that our own efforts to improve ourselves showed a similar lack of direction.’<sup>43</sup> The idea of a ‘myth of progress’ was a symptom of both changing paradigms of progress and of world events. Published in 1920, J.B. Bury’s *The Idea of Progress* predicts the end of the idea of progress itself:

[...] but if we accept the reasonings on which the dogma of Progress is based, must we not carry them to their full conclusion? In escaping from the illusion of finality, is it legitimate to exempt that dogma itself? Must not it, too, submit to its own negation of finality? Will not that process of change, for which Progress is the optimistic name, compel “Progress” too to fall from the commanding position in which it is now, with apparent security, enthroned?<sup>44</sup>

As Bowler notes, Bury’s book originates in a context ‘when war and economic depression had undermined the enthusiasm of the late Victorian era.’<sup>45</sup> An uncertainty regarding dependence upon technological developments was also present: ‘The problem for the optimists’, as Bowler suggests, ‘was that no one could be sure whether the results [of progress] would be beneficial or harmful to our aspirations [...] The optimists’ utopias were the pessimists’ nightmares, all the more worrying because no one could be sure what new innovation might catch on next.’<sup>46</sup>

Underpinning these reactions is the idea of teleology: as I discuss above, tree-like models do not preclude progress, but they do circumscribe the sorts of progress that can be achieved, and do not guarantee a consensus on the definition of progress. ‘When progress was reconfigured as a branching tree of opportunities,’ suggests Bowler, ‘progress had to be defined in utilitarian terms. Better control of the environment was the key – as in biological evolution – and there was much more room for disagreement over the moral value of what would

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<sup>42</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 149.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (New York, NY: Dover, [1920] 1960), 351.

<sup>45</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

emerge.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the very definition of progress, not just its shape, comes into question. Thus, the ‘myth’ of progress is something of a misnomer: it is not so much that progress became a ‘myth’ in the minds of many twentieth-century pessimists, but that a guaranteed progression towards an agreed goal did. As Vaughan Williams himself shows in his responses to trends in English musical culture, Darwinian conceptions of progress do not guarantee that progress is recognised as such by a given individual.

Whilst Vaughan Williams never opined on the subject of social progress in such pessimistic language, he was well aware of the horrors of war and remained sceptical about the direction of progress in various aspects of society. In 1934 he collaborated with E. M. Forster on the Abinger Pageant, which Byron Adams describes as ‘a prophetic protest against the misuse of England’s precious natural resources.’<sup>48</sup> At various points he took exception to changes in policy aimed at streamlining and efficiency that adversely affected, in his opinion, the chances of British music to flourish. For example, in 1944, he ‘bemoaned the replacement of personal contact by telephones and typewriters’ inherent in John Maynard Keynes’s reforms to the Committee for Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA).<sup>49</sup> As Onderdonk notes, he was also critical of the ‘the headlong expansion of centralized planning’ during the 1945–51 Attlee government.<sup>50</sup> Vaughan Williams held strong opinions as to the duty of the composer in wartime: his tendency to argue for a strong hand in shaping musical culture so that it might progress effectively is pronounced on such issues:

Is it then not worthwhile even for the most aloof artist to take some stock of the situation, to ensure at least that if and when the war ends he will be able to continue composing, to consider whether the new regime which will inevitably follow the war will be good for his art or bad and to bestir himself, even at the risk of losing a few hours from his manuscripts to help forward a desirable end?<sup>51</sup>

Such writings show Vaughan Williams’s reluctance to submit to pessimism: progress was still possible, after all, just not guaranteed. However, certain compositions with a history of being read through the lens of world conflict suggest that he harboured, at least internally, more pessimistic thoughts about human progress. The horror and futility of war is expressed

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Byron Adams, “Introduction”, in *Vaughan Williams Essays*, ed. Byron Adams and Robin Wells (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), xvii.

<sup>49</sup> F. M. Leventhal, “‘The Best for the Most’: CEMA and State Sponsorship of the Arts in Wartime, 1939–1945”, *Twentieth Century British History* 1, no. 3 (1990): 303.

<sup>50</sup> Onderdonk, “The Composer and Society: Family, Politics, Nation”, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Vaughan Williams, “The Composer in Wartime”. Cited in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 83.

poignantly in 1936's *Dona Nobis Pacem*.<sup>52</sup> Symphony No. 6 also stands out in this regard: as I discuss in Chapter 3, the composer himself suggests that its ending holds apocalyptic resonances, and some writers associate this movement with wartime and nuclear holocaust.<sup>53</sup> I argue that the *Sinfonia Antartica* taps into these ideas perhaps to a greater extent than any of Vaughan Williams pieces. Yet, the way in which it does so puts other issues of natural theology on the line besides progress: notably, the failure of progress inherent in the Scott story occurs in the face of nature. A failure of progress is, therefore, a failure of the supremacy of man over nature and, following the ideas incipit in Darwin's tree, the category of nature itself dissolves.

## Ideas of Nature

### Nature's Changeable Nature

Nature, like progress, is best understood as a mutable, socially constructed concept. Alister McGrath's description of nature as intellectually 'plastic' is underpinned by a more vital point: that ideas of nature and appeals to it are never value-neutral:<sup>54</sup>

The concept of 'nature' is thus profoundly ambivalent, reflecting the aspirations, longings and fears of those who appeal to it. These values, hopes and longings have been projected onto the essentially neutral canvas of 'nature' [...] there is no self-evidently correct definition of this term which can serve as the basis of any system of thought. The concept of nature is constructed by various groupings, largely to serve their own ends and lend intellectual legitimation to their enterprises.<sup>55</sup>

Whilst ideas of progress were in a state of post-Darwinian ferment, ideas of nature were similarly volatile: at various points, the change in these two concepts interacts with ideas of natural theology. John Holmes notes that the question posed in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* – 'Are God and Nature then at strife [...]?'<sup>56</sup> – provoked at least five different responses in the work of Victorian poets. These responses line up along a spectrum of acceptance of Darwinian evolution; some denied evolution; some denied that evolution affected theology; some saw

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<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of this piece, see McGuire, "'An Englishman and a Democrat': Vaughan Williams, Large Choral Works, and the British Festival Tradition", 129–30.

<sup>53</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 573; Anonymous, "Vaughan Williams's New Symphony", *The Times* (London), April 22 1948; Anonymous, "The Gramophone: Vaughan Williams's Last Symphony", *The Times* (London), August 9 1949.

<sup>54</sup> McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature*, 86–88.

<sup>56</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam", in *Alfred Lord Tennyson's In Memoriam: a Reading Guide*, ed. Anna Barton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, [1850] 2012), 62.

evolution as the unfolding of God's plan; some re-ascribed creative power to nature instead of God; and some accepted the brutality of Darwinian nature and rejected any idea of God.<sup>57</sup> It is possible to trace ideas of nature along a similar path to the development of natural theology in Chapter 3. Paley's natural theology was underscored by a particular view of nature, as McGrath describes: 'The increasing interest in machinery which resulted from the Industrial Revolution led to the final triumph of the metaphor of nature as a machine, forcing writers such as William Paley to develop mechanical apologetics in order to reassert the credibility of the Christian faith in this context.'<sup>58</sup> This approach to nature, already outdated by the time Paley was writing, was highly vulnerable to new scientific discoveries. McGrath describes the differences between Darwinian and Paleyan conceptions of nature in stark terms:

If one believes – as many did in the Middle Ages, and some continued to believe in the early seventeenth century – that the world is a harmonious living organism, in which all parts work together for the common good, one tends to adopt a perspective on the natural order which is rather different from that encouraged by a reading of Malthus and Darwin, in which the natural world tends to be seen as a bloody and wasteful struggle for survival, with victory going to the best adapted.<sup>59</sup>

As Chapter 3 describes, the non-Darwinian revolution characterised the initial broad response to such ideas. In doing so, the latent deism in Paley's natural theology was amplified into the full-blown deism found in the work of writers such as Spencer. In this view, the idea of evolutionary progress and God become easily confused: this natural theology ultimately lends weight to the idea of progress, not to the existence of a creator. This initially appeared to be a fitting solution: nature's rawness and dangerous transcendence is not a problem if the great chain is secure. If humans have emerged from the Darwinian soup and are distinct from it – as the non-Darwinians argued – then nature as 'red in tooth and claw' does not present existential problems.<sup>60</sup> However, scientific evidence increasingly supported tree-like progress, as opposed to ladder-like. Because humans lacked progress, they lacked dominance. The previously held category of nature – easily defined through an anthropocentric view of the world – collapsed. To describe nature as wild and unfeeling was one thing: to pair this with a failure in human progress was another. Humans become inescapably part of a morally empty nature.

Francis Spufford foregrounds these ideas in his work on the English fascination with polar exploration:

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<sup>57</sup> John Holmes, "The Challenge of Evolution in Victorian Poetry", in *Evolution and Victorian Culture*, ed. Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 50–52.

<sup>58</sup> McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature*, 109.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>60</sup> Tennyson, "In Memoriam", 63.

Nature had the importance attached to a contested subject, a subject whose disputed meaning was vital in Victorians' debates about themselves [...] The most prominent challenge to comfortable views of the natural order would come from Victorian biology. Darwinism would offer it as a rule of nature, rather than a shocking violation, that nature was indifferent to the outcome of the individual life. But Darwinism, and the new sciences in general, also offered a chance to settle humanity's place in nature on a new footing. Dealing in separable patterns of evidence, not in the assault of phenomena on the eye, they would let observers see a new sort of unity in nature, if not a kindly one.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, for natural theology, the real sting in the 'myth' of progress is its coupling with the changing nature of nature. Changes in nature and progress made natural theology a beleaguered project. As McGrath argues, natural theology, though natural in name, requires the more ontologically determined category of 'creation' to be an effective part of theological method.<sup>62</sup> Again, the divorce of natural theology from Christian contexts prevents it from being effective. Whilst the sense of nature as transcendent remained, this became completely unmoored to Christian theology.

### Vaughan Williams's Nature

The idea of nature appears in various guises and is used to various ends in Vaughan Williams's music. Walter Aaron Clark notes a disparity between common stereotypes of the composer regarding connections with nature – often based on pieces from the first part of the composer's career – and the complexity that his output exhibits as a whole:

Ralph Vaughan Williams is often characterized by commentators as a master of the musical pastoral. Among the scores that are often deemed 'pastoral' are the *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1* (1905–6), *In the Fen Country* (1904; rev. 1935), the *Third Symphony* (Pastoral) (1921), and *The Lark Ascending* (1914; rev. 1920). These works exhibit a diatonic, tonal (often modal) harmonic language and an evocative use of instrumental color. On their relatively placid surfaces, they exude a feeling of tranquil – at times mystic – reflection, tinged with melancholy, and are among the composer's most popular and enduring compositions. They have, however, inadvertently served to typecast him as a sort of bucolic bard, stubbornly resisting the encroachment of modernism and the eclipse of Albion. Vaughan Williams was, however, far too great an artist to be reduced to simple formulae, and his relationship with nature was much more complex.<sup>63</sup>

Whilst later compositions present obvious pitfalls to this characterisation, the nature of Vaughan Williams's relationship to the natural world is not always straightforward, even in

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<sup>61</sup> Francis Spufford, *I May be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 92.

<sup>62</sup> McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Walter Aaron Clark, "Vaughan Williams and the 'Night Side of Nature': Octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea*", in *Vaughan Williams Essays*, ed. Byron Adams and Robin Wells (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 55.

these ‘pastoral’ pieces. Grimley’s reading of *A Pastoral Symphony* is a case in point: for him, it is ‘one of his darkest large- scale works’.<sup>64</sup>

Writing on the conclusion to the Pastoral Symphony, Frogley suggests a somewhat more complex use of the idea of nature in this piece: ‘It is not difficult to hear in wordless female keening a lament for the war dead; yet there is a remote and ritualized quality to the expression that might suggest instead a natural world oblivious to human suffering.’<sup>65</sup> Frogley suggests that a similar opposition between nature and humanity is set up in the preceding symphony, the ‘London’:

Nevertheless, the Epilogue, which is based on the slow introduction to the symphony, is clearly the ‘coda’ the composer mentions in reference to Tono-Bungay; the Wells connection confirms what is already strongly hinted at in the musical material itself, namely that both the beginning and the ending of the symphony evoke the Thames, and eventually the sea: the speed and turmoil of urban human modernity are thus framed by a mystical and implicitly timeless natural world.<sup>66</sup>

As I argue in Chapter 3, Vaughan Williams’s Symphony No. 5 plays with the idea of nature as transcendent, again with somewhat ambiguous results. On the opposite end of the spectrum to Clark’s ‘pastoral’ pieces lie those in which Vaughan Williams explores the ‘night side of nature’.<sup>67</sup> As Clark argues, Vaughan Williams’s depiction of the sea across his output typifies his complex relationship with nature. The composer’s first symphonic effort, *A Sea Symphony*, depicts Walt Whitman’s transcendent ocean. Here, it becomes ‘a metaphor for the ocean of existence, on whose “limitless heaving breast” the reckless soul sails forth for deep waters, where no terrestrial mariner has dared yet to go.’ Clark posits this as a stark contrast to later pieces in the composer’s output:

Such transcendentalism posits nature as an emblem of a benign Eternal, ennobling and sublimating even violent death. This is an idealistic, if naïve, conception that did not survive the horrors of the First World War, a conflict the composer experienced directly. In the 1920s a darker side of nature came to the fore in Vaughan Williams’s music, giving rise to some of his most pessimistic works.<sup>68</sup>

Chief among these, for Clark, is the opera *Riders to the Sea* (1927). ‘No other composition by Vaughan Williams’, he suggests ‘provides a starker contrast with his “pastoral” style, or more effectively challenges all consequent stereotypes.’<sup>69</sup> Byron Adams takes this

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<sup>64</sup> Grimley, “Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral”, 174.

<sup>65</sup> Frogley, “History and Geography: the Early Orchestral Works and the First Three Symphonies”, 102.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>67</sup> Clark, “Vaughan Williams and the ‘Night Side of Nature’: Octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea*”, 55.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

view further, suggestion that the depiction of nature here is not removed from the idea of humanity: ‘What nature stands for in *Riders to the Sea*, however, includes what lies both without and within humankind, as the composer’s psychological penetration has darkened as well.’<sup>70</sup> In other words, the depiction of the ‘dark side’ of nature in a post-Darwinian context does not distance it from the idea of humanity. The collapse of progress intertwines humanity with nature: dark side and all. Thus, even within the depiction of the sea, Vaughan Williams exhibits a complex use and understanding of ‘nature’.

Clark’s ‘night side’ is anchored in German Romantic concepts. Vaughan Williams, for Clark, remains rooted to this previous period of thought and aesthetics: ‘As for most Romantics – and his aesthetic remained forever grounded in the nineteenth century – Vaughan Williams’s view of nature encompassed tragedy as well as beauty.’<sup>71</sup> As I discuss in the introduction, and in Chapter 1, some recent trends in Vaughan Williams scholarship paint the composer as a modernist: certainly, with regards to the two periods which Clark associates with the ‘night side of nature’, such arguments seem more compelling. Vaughan Williams’s different depictions and uses of ‘nature’ correspond to important trends in the volatile history of this concept. It is notable that both of the pieces Clark identifies as depicting nature in this way – *Riders to the Sea* and *Sinfonia Antartica* – are post-war: a point not considered to be coincidental by Clark.<sup>72</sup> Whilst Vaughan Williams’s worldview might, on the one hand, have precedents in the nineteenth century as Clark describes (and as I set out in Chapter 3), they were, to a large extent, tested and shaped by the events of the following century: the label of modernist is, in some cases, appropriate to Vaughan Williams, especially with regards to his symphonic aesthetics.<sup>73</sup> The story of Scott itself similarly occupies a potentially liminal position between romanticism and modernism: as I argue in the following section, its reception and malleable connection with meaning are complex in similar ways to the very ideas of progress and nature that it came to express.

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<sup>70</sup> Adams, “Vaughan Williams’s Musical Apprenticeship”, 50–51.

<sup>71</sup> Clark, “Vaughan Williams and the ‘Night Side of Nature’: Octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea*”, 55.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> There is some debate over the modernist status of Vaughan Williams’s symphonic output. J. P. E. Harper-Scott, “Vaughan Williams’s Antic Symphony”, in *British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960*, ed. Matthew Riley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 175–77; Grimley, “Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral”, 173.

## The Scott Story

### Context

The story of captain Robert Scott's 1912 mission to reach the Antarctic pole captured the imagination of twentieth-century Britain. By the time Vaughan Williams was composing the music for *Scott of the Antarctic*, the story had become widespread throughout British culture, as Beckerman notes:

By the mid-1940s the Scott legend was known by almost everyone in England. Throughout the country, schoolboys learned the story in hushed tones. The official record of the journey, Scott's Last Expedition, had been through more than a dozen editions, and books by the survivors joined a huge number of volumes on the subject, both popular and specialized.<sup>74</sup>

The story proved a vital touchstone for many perceived anxieties in twentieth-century Britain. Max Jones suggests:

Scott's story resonated in a society beset with anxieties about national decline, loss of religious faith, and the materialism of the modern world [...] Scott's story helps us understand the generation that endured the war, motivated [...] by codes of behaviour which placed comradeship and the endurance of adversity as the highest expression of manhood.<sup>75</sup>

There is a polyvalency to this story: it came to mean different things to different people. Jones lists several ways in which Scott himself was perceived: 'naval officer, family man, scientific martyr, imperial scout, national saviour, and icon for pacifists, socialists, and suffragettes.'<sup>76</sup> Jones's research has an overall aim of approaching the 'heroic icons' of the story 'not as blunt instruments for transmitting a simple ideological message, but as screens onto which a range of meanings could be projected. The dreams and desires of bygone ages flicker across the faces of the heroes of the past, offering a unique insight into a vanished world.'<sup>77</sup> Daniel Grimley suggests something similar: '[...] the story of Scott's adventure has since been retold many times, periodically re-inscribed so that it reflects the changing concerns and anxieties of a different generation.'<sup>78</sup>

The interrelated topics associated with the mission resonate strongly with upheavals in the concepts of both nature and progress I describe above. The story encapsulates anxieties

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<sup>74</sup> Michael Beckerman, "The Composer as Pole Seeker: Reading Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia Antartica*", *Current Musicology*, no. 69 (2000): 49.

<sup>75</sup> Max Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12–13.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 116.

relating to the abandonment of ladder-like progress, and the status and ‘nature’ of nature. Its reception signals the consequences of these developments for the pursuit of natural theology as it was understood by people such as Vaughan Williams.

### **Scott’s Progress**

Polar exploration was intimately tied into the convergence of evolutionary theories and ideas of human progress. Bowler describes Darwinian progress in terms of environmental survival: ‘we seek to control our environment for our own benefit but the environment itself is unpredictable, and opportunities and innovations have often emerged in response to external challenges.’<sup>79</sup> Thus, the idea of conquering the harsh conditions of the Antarctic wastes is linked in a direct sense to the idea of human progress. More parochial ideas of progress were also at stake in Scott’s expedition. As Jones notes, these were in the forefront of Scott’s mind at an early stage in planning: ‘Scott claimed that the conquest of the South Pole would serve as an “outward visible sign that we are still a nation able and willing to undertake difficult enterprises, still capable of standing in the van of the army of progress”.’<sup>80</sup> Even in failure and death, the early reception of Scott’s mission was dominated by affirmations of success in this regard, with the explorers’ ‘willingness to suffer in a noble cause and the bravery with which they faced death’ being ‘widely celebrated as affirmations of national virility in an age haunted by the spectre of decline.’<sup>81</sup>

Ideas of progress in terms of race were also implicated in the outcome of Scott’s mission. As Francis Spufford notes, the trust Scott placed in English Arctic exploration and his resistance to utilise Inuit techniques for polar survival were ideologically motivated:

A realism about means and methods was emerging which gave less and less scope to immaterial resources, to spiritual resources in the conquest of the snows. As exploration became more conditioned by Inuit precept and example, it seemed less self-evident that explorers’ success demonstrated virtues held in high esteem at home. Above all the sacrificial validity of exploration seemed to be slipping away, in favour of displays of competence. English Arctic exploration had been in abeyance since the failure of Nares in 1875. It was partly in a spirit of resistance towards the Inuit example that when polar activity in England revived, still in the hands of those faithful to the naval tradition, it was directed towards the truly empty, definitively personless Antarctic, where no natives complicated the performance of exploration, and penguins, the most human-seeming thing alive in the Great White South, only clustered comically around explorers’ knees. It is suggestive, too, that the men who most insisted on

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<sup>79</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott’s Antarctic Sacrifice*, 195.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

traditional means, when the English went south, were those least willing to countenance descriptions of the Inuit which allowed for imitation.<sup>82</sup>

The irony of Scott's failure was that its early reception, in some ways, provides both a reflection of the Darwinian, tree-like model of progress and an inverse reflection. Whilst Scott might have failed technically, he was viewed to have achieved morally and spiritually, at least in the early part of the twentieth century. As I discuss above, by contrast, Darwinian ideas of progress foregrounded technical advancements and improvements but were morally ambivalent: even potentially negative. On the other hand, the ultimately fruitless sacrifice of Scott in terms of measurable progress underpins severe doubt in the concept of progress, especially in a post-war context. The lack of teleology to the story – Scott both failed to reach the pole first, and then failed to return safely to One Ton Depot – mirrors the lack of teleological progress inherent in the Darwinian tree. The Scott story, as it appears in Vaughan Williams's music is, I argue, partly about the theological response to being confronted with the failure of teleological evolution and progress.

### Scott's Nature

Alistair McGrath exposes a tension at the root of definitions of nature: 'For some, nature is what humanity has failed to control: for others, it is the name applied to what humanity has conquered.'<sup>83</sup> The story of Scott strikes right at the core of this tension: on the one hand, the death of Scott and his men is a perfect image of the triumph of nature over humanity. As Grimley notes, an 'eco-critical' approach to the story 'allows the expedition to be read as allegory, a cautionary tale of the futility of the human attempt to conquer or control an unpopulated natural domain whose complex environmental processes factor primarily among the forces that drive and regulate the world's climate.'<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, the stoic defiance of the team in the face of adversity was seen as a testament to indomitable will and character. Jones depicts the reception of the expedition in terms of a repudiation of Darwinian nature:

In an age of anxiety, of geopolitical tension and social conflict, the idea of sacrifice, always a facet of the language of character, assumed particular prominence, energizing examples of martyrdom drawn from antiquity, chivalry, and the Christian tradition. Scott's sacrifice offered a beacon of idealism to dispel the darkness of modernity, to renew faith in a soulless Darwinian universe.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Spufford, *I May be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*, 234.

<sup>83</sup> McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature*, 86.

<sup>84</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 116–17.

<sup>85</sup> Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice*, 250.

In many ways, the reception of Scott's story eventually came to express a shift in the nature of nature towards Darwin and Malthus's unfeeling, uncontrollable notion. Most importantly, the story's embodiment of the change in ideas progress enmeshes humanity with nature, collapsing the distinction between the two. The Antarctic is the epitome of Tennyson's brutal nature that is 'red in tooth and claw': by failing to conquer it, Scott shows humanity's lack of progress, and the fallacy of the category of 'nature'.<sup>86</sup>

## A Theological Tripartition of the *Sinfonia Antartica*

### Esthesis–Poiesis Chains

That the *Sinfonia* is a theologically meaningful piece is strongly suggested by the recurrence of particular themes in its reception. Ideas of nature, progress, transcendence, and pilgrimage predominate, even where the merits of the piece are, for one reason or another, questioned.<sup>87</sup> Whilst its potency in signifying theological ideas is clear, however, the piece presents a particularly complex site of intertextual theological meaning. It is especially hard, perhaps ultimately futile, to unpick all the layers of meaning in this piece, and to ascertain their origins. As Michael Beckerman suggests: 'In both the film and the symphony, we encounter it through a virtual barrage of extramusical suggestions that raise more questions than they resolve.'<sup>88</sup> However, in cases such as this, the tripartition method I outline in Chapter 1 proves all the more important; this method foregrounds the contextual nature of these layers of meaning and allows for constructive analytical discourse.

The *Sinfonia Antartica* is, as I discuss above, an extensive, symphonic reworking of the material Vaughan Williams wrote for the 1948 film *Scott of the Antarctic*. The scholarly consensus is that Vaughan Williams's material was originally formed independently of the film's development. Grimley argues that 'Vaughan Williams would barely have needed to wait for stills from the film set, or even for a screenplay, since precise details of the expedition were already so prominent in the popular imagination—Vaughan Williams himself would have

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<sup>86</sup> Tennyson, "In Memoriam", 63.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Ottaway, *Vaughan Williams Symphonies*, 576.

<sup>88</sup> Beckerman, "The Composer as Pole Seeker", 43.

known the story well.’<sup>89</sup> Thus, for Beckerman, ‘the “meaning” of the opening music is [...] closely tied to his own conception of Scott, rather than any interpretation by the director of the film.’<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, even without this extra interpretative layer, the *Sinfonia* invokes the story of Scott at least three times removed. The original act of expedition – the first signifier, as it were – was only known to Vaughan Williams through reports and the retelling of the story, just as it was for the director of the film. In particular, as Ursula Vaughan Williams suggests, Cherry-Garrard’s account would have held sway.<sup>91</sup> The esthesis of these accounts becomes, in turn, part of the poiesis for both film and film score which, in turn again, becomes part of the poiesis for the symphony.

Even this is a simplification: in the gap between expedition and film score lie many potential linked chains of reception and creation of signifying forms. By the time Vaughan Williams composed the *Sinfonia*, the story of Scott had already accrued a complex web of interrelating esthetic strands, many of which impinge upon natural theology. Additionally, the poietic layer for any individual signifier need not only be limited to its immediate predecessor; each signifying form may be considered as potentially the product of any or all of its ancestors: Häckel’s idea of recapitulation – ‘ontology recapitulation phylogeny’ is an apposite model for the potential of poietic processes to involve the esthetic levels of multiple precedents.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the ways in which these theologically significant strands interact with the composition’s poietic, trace, and esthetic levels is implicated in the hugely complex reception history of the expedition: the piece’s relationship with natural theology is, I argue, equally ambiguous and pessimistic.

### **Poiesis: Vaughan Williams and Scott**

Vaughan Williams, as I discuss in chapters two and three, was notoriously reluctant to reveal his own compositional intent. However, the sheer number of intertextual connections contained within this piece makes it somewhat easier to suggest some important intentions. The generic ambiguity of the piece itself is suggestive: the very fact that this piece’s genre is a step closer to the model of a symphonic poem indicates that Vaughan Williams found something useful in the story of Scott for theological self-expression. His own thoughts on

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<sup>89</sup> Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 119.

<sup>90</sup> Beckerman, “The Composer as Pole Seeker”, 49.

<sup>91</sup> Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 279.

<sup>92</sup> Zon, “The ‘non-Darwinian’ Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being”, 200.

music directly inspired by extra-musical events are revealing: '[...] the true symphonic poem aims at bringing the transcendental imaginings of the composer into touch with human beings by connecting them with some story, some human character or some phenomenon of nature.'<sup>93</sup> It is reasonable to assume that, whilst the *Sinfonia* may not be a true symphonic poem, a similar aim lies behind its composition. In the story of Scott's expedition, I argue, Vaughan Williams found something helpful in expressing his own 'transcendental imaginings'.

By the time of the piece's composition, as I describe above, the story of Robert Scott, with all its national, natural, and religious associations, had been retold in many contexts and had developed complex layers of meaning.<sup>94</sup> As Grimley suggests, there are many reasons why Vaughan Williams might have chosen to take on the original film score:

For a composer as attuned to ideas of Englishness and as sensitive to notions of human subjectivity as Vaughan Williams was, it is little wonder that the complex cluster of images, symbols, and narratives presented by the Scott myth should have strongly appealed to him as a subject for musical treatment. Indeed, it is more surprising, given the publication of Apsley Cherry-Garrard's influential and stirring account of the expedition, *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922), and the immense popularity of the Scott voyage in the years following the First World War, that Vaughan Williams waited so long before composing something based on the story.<sup>95</sup>

Most of the symphony's material originates in this film score: Vaughan Williams even described the symphony, in a somewhat mischievous tone, as 'a mere bit of carpentry'.<sup>96</sup> Naturally, the original designation for these themes has a significant bearing upon their use and intended meaning in the symphony. Whilst the symphony translates the specifics of the film score to something more general, the context of the themes' inception is a potent layer of poetic meaning for the symphony. Grimley summarises the extent of the connections between the two pieces; many of these date back to the earliest sketches of the music, which contain important annotations alluding to an intended meaning.<sup>97</sup> Most notable in terms of exploring the natural theology of this piece through the ideas of progress and nature are annotations such as 'heroism' and 'nature-music', which are found attached to themes which became the key components of the symphony's opening movement. The latter is also noted as representing 'the terror and fascination of the S. Pole'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Romantic in Music: Some Thoughts on Brahms". Reprinted in Manning, *Vaughan Williams on Music*, 168–69.

<sup>94</sup> Beckerman, "The Composer as Pole Seeker", 49.

<sup>95</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 117.

<sup>96</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 499–500.

<sup>97</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 120–22.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

Thus, the music of the *Sinfonia Antartica* is already resonant with theological meaning from its original context. This suggests certain intentions on the part of the composer completely in line with his own view of expressing theologically significant ideas through symphonic-poetic music. For Vaughan Williams, the complex network of meaning associated with Scott also had things to say about common tropes in his own thinking— natural theology in particular. Despite providing a convincing reading (which I discuss below), Grimley suggests that the specific intentions surrounding Vaughan Williams’s decision to return to the Scott music in 1953 are ‘unclear’.<sup>99</sup> However, the general intention to invoke ideas of nature, progress, and transcendence seems to be apparent. Once again, Vaughan Williams’s propensity to create potent forms of theological expression that remain, to some extent, open to interpretation is striking.

## Trace

At the trace level of the score, many of these themes of nature and progress crystallise into discursive tropes. Each of the *Sinfonia*’s five movements features an epigraph ruminating on the essential inequality between humanity and a transcendent nature. These literary quotes, listed in Example 4.1, all bring issues of natural theology to the fore. As chapters two and three contend, a similar spirit permeates both the ending of Vaughan Williams’s previous symphony, and the third of his *Shakespeare Songs*, “The Cloud-capp’d Towers”; the literary connections between these two pieces are underscored by a shared preoccupation with ‘slide’ harmonic transformations. It is no coincidence, I argue, that the *Sinfonia Antartica* is, at points, similarly occupied with this same transformation. The last of the piece’s epigraphic quotes is taken from Scott’s diary – the core text behind all artistic engagements with the story – and is especially redolent of these themes suggesting, in spite of overwhelming odds, a pilgrim-like attitude which seems to have resonated with Vaughan Williams.

Regardless of the original cinematic context of the symphony’s musical ideas they are themselves independently redolent of theological symbolism. Many of the categories of affordance structures I outline in Chapter 2 can be found. Pan-triadic syntax, for example, predominates over large swathes of the music: as I discuss above, this imbues Vaughan Williams’s music with theological signification in complex ways. The complexity is even more pronounced here, as the primary location for this harmonic language is in the main theme itself,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 117.

dubbed ‘heroic’ in the original manuscript for the film score. There is also an inherent sense of transcendence in Vaughan Williams’s depictions of nature. The approach employed eschews the triadicism of the opening and seems to depict ideas of nature as a polar opposite to the main theme. Modern commentators have noted the ‘static’, ‘anti-symphonic’ nature of this so-called ‘nature music’.<sup>100</sup> Its distance from the *Sinfonia*’s apparently more human music – evident in texture, instrumentation, and pitch resources – evokes ideas of transcendence and natural theology in a fundamentally different way. Vaughan Williams’s co-opting of traditionally religious musical resources – most notably the organ in movement three and the choral forces in the first and last movements – underscores the transcendence of this ‘nature’. Beyond these independently theological ideas, their juxtaposition of different sources of transcendence forms a theological trope in a similar way to the divergent syntaxes present in the first movement of Symphony No. 5. Again, this is articulated through profoundly diverging musical material. The way in which these two musical structures play off against each other is, in itself, an affordance structure of theological meaning.

Like many of the choral pieces and Symphony No. 5, the *Sinfonia* is preoccupied with the resolution of tensions generated by pitch collections. The centrality of G major to this piece is set up in the early movements of the symphony, and it is articulated to varying degrees of stability throughout the first movement. Again, in a similar way to Symphony No. 5, this symphony sees most of this plot play out in the first and last movements: G major is present in the form of an ideal goal, though its articulation is ultimately thwarted by the nature music in the last movement. Such cyclic properties in Vaughan Williams’s output in general are often mapped onto the theologically significant ideas of pilgrimage, progression to the life beyond. Here, the cyclic nature of the symphony, like Symphony No. 5, ties the piece to transcendent tropes in a specifically natural theological context.

All of these affordance structures are, of course, magnified in the context of the Scott story. However, their presence at the trace level is significant. The sum total of the piece’s theological symbolism and investment in ideas of natural theology is not reducible to its connections with the story of Scott. Rather, the piece’s theological affordance structures allow a rather more open-ended engagement with these themes – and the story of Scott itself – than might be expected.

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<sup>100</sup> Horton, “The Later Symphonies”, 215–19; Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 132.

## Esthesis

Despite many interpretations of this piece which circle around ideas of natural theology, its reception history is far from secure. Beckerman attributes this to the legacy of Scott and the cultural context into which the piece entered: '[...] a work like *Sinfonia Antartica* [...] may change its identity depending on our evaluation of its hero, its composer, and the ideological worlds surrounding both of them.'<sup>101</sup> Individual reactions to the piece, he suggests, are distinctly polyvalent, and subject to various conditions:

[...] what is important is that depending on our attitudes towards such things as Scott, Antarctica, Amundsen, exploration, nationalism, semitones, Vaughan Williams, England, our momentary moods, whole tone scales, and countless other factors, we may find compelling reasons to hear the *Sinfonia Antartica* as exhilarating, stuffy, heroic, tragic, ambiguous, or downright silly. All of these depend on the interaction between a multiplicity of real-world scenarios and the fiction we sometimes call 'the music itself.'<sup>102</sup>

Whilst Beckerman rather underplays the importance of what he calls 'the music itself' – what might perhaps be better described by Nattiez's 'trace' level – it is hard to ignore the veracity in his observations. He outlines at least three trends in reception, each influenced by particular dispositions towards the story of Scott. On the one hand, as Beckerman argues, the initial reception of the piece occurred in a context that was broadly admiring of Scott:

the reviews indicate that the first listeners to *Sinfonia Antartica* were richly engaged with its context [...] The story of Scott and his men was well known everywhere in England, and the film had been playing in theatres several years earlier. More immediate information was provided by program notes and the passage from Shelley. Despite the tragic circumstances of his demise, Scott had become a kind of Napoleonic figure, a larger-than-life hero.<sup>103</sup>

Thus, particular theological resonances of pilgrimage and human sacrifice come to the fore. Frank Howes, for example, wrote of the 'unspoken moral' that the listener carries away from hearing the *Sinfonia*: 'the spirit of a man facing fearful odds and bravely accepting his loss of the battle'.<sup>104</sup> These are also suggested in much later appraisals, such as that by Wilfrid Mellers. Rather incongruously, he finds the ending of the symphony to constitute a rather more positive view of humanity – and of Scott – than it might first appear to do:

[...] they fade into the noise of the wind-machine, which is irremediably other than human. Even so, the pedal G on which the sighs are earthed is a tonic, of sorts; the triumphal G major triad with which the prelude has concluded is not totally forgotten, Man lives to fight another day: or, at least if Scott did not, Vaughan Williams did [...].<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Beckerman, "The Composer as Pole Seeker", 61.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>104</sup> Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 69.

<sup>105</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, 205.

Some years after the death of Vaughan Williams, however, the figure of Scott was regarded in rather different terms in some quarters; this trend is epitomised in Roland Huntford's 1979 publication *Scott and Amundsen*.<sup>106</sup> As Max Jones argues, this publication 'marked a turning-point in the development of Scott's reputation.' Huntford, according to Jones, was 'determined to correct an injustice, to expose Scott as a fraud [...] Huntford's Scott deserves contempt not admiration, pressuring Captain Oates into suicide, and preventing Bowers and Wilson from making a final attempt to reach One Ton Camp.'<sup>107</sup> With this view of Scott in mind, Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia* starts to look different. Beckerman argues that 'accepting Huntford's arguments fully, both about Scott and the English response to him, makes it difficult to listen the symphony's first bars without thinking of them as a bombastic and misplaced bit of national rhetoric [...] The notes haven't changed but we hear them differently, as a kind of soundtrack of a hackneyed newsreel about the glories of the English character.'<sup>108</sup>

Yet, Beckerman contends that the semiotic power of Vaughan Williams's music outstrips these criticisms of Scott. A more nuanced depiction of Scott is ultimately argued for by Beckerman:

'We can admit that much of what Huntford says about the expedition and its leader is true, while at the same time admiring the courage and pluck of those five men tramping some blindly and others with open eyes-to their deaths, and understand that Vaughan Williams responded strongly to them, even as we do today [...] Scott is a hero, but like us, he is massively flawed and complex.'<sup>109</sup>

Beckerman even places Vaughan Williams in this sort of receptive trend, pointing out the stark differences between the conclusions of the film and the symphony:

The former features a process analogous to Death and Transfiguration, ending with hymn-like fanfares of vindication. The symphony, however, concludes with the dark, enveloping death mask of nature: the "heroic" march of the opening yields to the wordless voice associated with the alien Antarctic terrain at the opening of the film, which the composer referred to as "the terror and fascination of the Pole" in his film scenario [...] Is this not a strange way to end a heroic symphony, unless one has, perhaps, realized that the hero has feet of clay?<sup>110</sup>

Ultimately, Beckerman views the symphony 'not simply [...] as a paean to the heroism of man and the massive power of nature, but [...] also [...] associated with the bitterness of

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<sup>106</sup> Roland Huntford, *Scott and Amundsen* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979).

<sup>107</sup> Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice*, 6.

<sup>108</sup> Beckerman, "The Composer as Pole Seeker", 58.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

human failure, the pessimism of dreams dashed, and the futility of fools fighting the wind and ice.’<sup>111</sup>

Beckerman, as described above, argues that knowledge and opinions on the figure of Scott are likely to affect the piece’s reception. Similarly, some interpretations of the piece are argued for in light of Vaughan Williams’s own biography. This symphony has a history of being read in terms of a reaction to wartime, and the concept of spiritual pilgrimage which occupies many of Vaughan Williams’s compositions – especially those inspired by Bunyan – is also present in its reception. The significance of the latter to the former can, again, be traced to the trenches, where, as Paul Fussell suggests, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was hugely influential.<sup>112</sup> In Grimley’s reading, ‘The symphony opens with a distinctly retrospective, or historicizing, gesture, one which seemingly portrays polar exploration as a form of pilgrimage or religious duty’.<sup>113</sup> In this reading, nature becomes an embodiment of the ultimate opponent to humanity’s progress. The huge popularity of Scott’s story in the First and Second World Wars, themselves redolent with the futility of human exploits and the exposing of the myth of progress, perhaps sheds some light on why the composer felt moved to not only agree to score the film but also to revisit the material afterwards. As Grimley argues: ‘For Vaughan Williams, the association of Scott with the First World War became one of the most powerful formative influences on the eventual design of the *Sinfonia*: like *A Pastoral Symphony*, 1922), it can be understood on several levels as a monument to the war dead.’<sup>114</sup> Grimley’s point is not merely that the piece is about war: rather it is about a reflection upon it from a removed, modern perspective shaped by contemporary events:

It reveals not only the complex layering of meanings, myths, and traditions embedded within the Scott story itself but points both to a deeper shift across the English cultural landscape at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the new decade; it was a change of tone to which Vaughan Williams, despite being a lauded “elder statesman” of the English musical establishment, felt compelled to respond.<sup>115</sup>

Whilst more specific interpretations of the piece such as those espoused by Grimley are convincing, I argue that these specifics are underpinned by more fundamental dynamics at play in the piece. Despite shifting trends in reception, the apparent juxtaposition of nature and humanity – and therefore the evocation of natural theological concerns – remains consistent,

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 2013), 149–55.

<sup>113</sup> Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 127.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 117–18.

even if this juxtaposition reflects poorly upon its protagonists. As I discuss above, this juxtaposition is prominent in the early reception of the piece. Similarly, recent analyses, such as that undertaken by Julian Horton, suggest that each movement ‘formulates the polarization of humanity and nature in a different way’.<sup>116</sup> The expression of natural theological issues, despite its absence in the literature surrounding the *Sinfonia*, proves to be an extremely significant factor at the esthetic level.

## Nature, Progress, and Natural Theology in the *Sinfonia Antartica*

### Genre and the Main Theme

The thorny question of how ‘symphonic’ the *Sinfonia Antartica* extends beyond the origins of some of its material in a film score. In reworking this material into a symphonic form, Vaughan Williams’s *Sinfonia* presents unique interpretive issues. These issues converge in discussions of the piece’s genre: the spectrum of attitudes towards this are summed up by Ottaway, who argues that the piece is ‘neither programmatic nor symphonic enough’.<sup>117</sup> The reviewer at the London premiere opined: ‘This [...] is programme music in which traditional symphonic forms play little part. It is indeed nearer to a Strauss tone poem than a symphony, and *a priori* none the worse for that.’<sup>118</sup> Kennedy notes that ‘There was much discussion at first whether this work was a symphony or a symphonic poem. What’s in a name? That it is programme-music is self-evident; but its nature is symphonic.’<sup>119</sup> More recently, Horton places this piece’s lineage ‘in the vein of Liszt’s *Dante*, Tchaikovsky’s *Manfred* and Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Antar*’; this interpretation grapples with the piece’s connections with extrinsic meaning more effectively.<sup>120</sup> As the reviewer of the first performance suggests, however, the symphony is more than just a retelling of Scott’s story, and the epigraphs show this: ‘The symphony is in five movements, each of which bears a superscription. It is thus a universalization of what in the film was particular and episodic.’<sup>121</sup> In the same way as many had done before, Vaughan Williams elevated the particulars of the Scott story to, if not a

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<sup>116</sup> Horton, “The Later Symphonies”, 218.

<sup>117</sup> Ottaway, *Vaughan Williams Symphonies*, 576.

<sup>118</sup> Anonymous, “The “Sinfonia Antartica”: London Performance”.

<sup>119</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 360.

<sup>120</sup> Horton, “The Later Symphonies”, 214.

<sup>121</sup> Anonymous, “A New Symphony. Vaughan Williams’s ‘Antartica’”.

‘universal’ level, then at least a broadly applied one. Each of the epigraphs, as Horton argues, seem to anchor the *Sinfonia* in well-established tropes of humanity-verses-nature. Once again, potency of meaning – as opposed to specificity of meaning – emerges as the most important principle.

Conferring the status of ‘symphonic’ to a piece has much to do with the form of the opening movement. To call the first movement form ‘symphonic’ is, traditionally, to suggest that it depends fundamentally upon tension and resolution in a way that puts the piece in dialogue with a sonata form.<sup>122</sup> This is most obviously established by articulating opposed tonal centres through delineated themes throughout the first section of the first movement. Many Vaughan Williams symphonies exhibit such features, though they appear in modern guises. Despite its unique take on the form, the opening movement of Symphony No. 5, as I discuss in Chapter 3, is significantly invested in the symphonic ideal of sonata form. Here, at the outset, a particular modal complex is articulated for a substantial period of time (albeit an initially ambiguous one), before being eventually contrasted with different material in a different key. However, as the reviews above indicate, the *Sinfonia* subverts sonata structures in various ways. The first movement of Symphony No. 5 is in dialogue with sonata form in ways which the first movement of the *Sinfonia* is not. Whilst the *Sinfonia* does not present this kind of sonata-like opening gambit, its opening section suggests various tensions to be resolved that serve to unify this piece and afford a theological interpretation.

One of the main barriers to considering this piece as ‘symphonic’ is the nature of both opening theme (1–5.5) and, as I argue below, the material that contrasts it. It is impossible to discern a traditional tonic or modal centre from the presentation of the main theme. Example 4.2 shows a harmonic analysis of this section. The music presents a very regular rate of harmonic change: one chord per bar. There are only two exceptions to this, at bar 3.7-3.8 and 5.1–5.2, where the three-beats of the bar are augmented to form a hemiola. Taking this approach, and removing any immediately adjacent duplicates, there are forty-five transformations in this presentation of the main thematic material. Given the six possible root transformations in twelve-tone music (semitone/major seventh, tone/minor seventh, minor third/major sixth, major third/minor sixth, fourth/fifth, tritone), the music shows a clear bias towards only three of them: of the forty-five, fifteen are semitones, fourteen are major thirds,

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<sup>122</sup> Julian Horton, “Introduction: Understanding the Symphony”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Symphony*, ed. Julian Horton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 183.

and fourteen are minor thirds. The notably equal abundance of these transformations is also highlighted by Horton, who further suggests their origins:

In one sense, the harmony here can be understood as employing three kinds of chord transformation:  $e\flat-G$  and  $b\flat-D$  are fragments of major-third cycles, and as such have hexatonic origins;  $G-b\flat$  is a minor-third transformation, having an octatonic basis; and  $G-ab-G$  is a semitonal shift, which David Lewin has termed a ‘SLIDE’ transformation.<sup>123</sup>

The three transformations I describe here form the basis of Vaughan Williams’s pan-triadic syntax in general; as I discuss in Chapter 2, this syntax outstrips any tonal or modal measure despite its reliance on harmonically consonant entities. This lack of tonal gravity contrasts strongly with triads in diatonic space which articulate tonal or modal centres through directional voice leading and harmonic hierarchies seen most obviously in cadential patterns. In Vaughan Williams’s music, pan-triadic syntax is often used in juxtaposition with tonal or modal resources, resulting in a ‘double syntax’.<sup>124</sup> In cases such as *Valiant for Truth* and some parts of *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, predominately pan-triadic music receives formal articulation through these other resources (see Figure 2.22 and Figure 2.15). However, in the *Sinfonia*’s case, such resources are absent. These opening fifty-six bars are some of the most starkly pan-triadic music Vaughan Williams ever wrote, perhaps only rivalled by the third of the *Three Shakespeare Songs* (see Example 2.9). In such cases, it is impossible to identify a tonic. In fact, as Harrison suggests, such music expresses no tonic because it suggests so many possible tonal centres.<sup>125</sup> As I describe with regards to parts of *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, no single collection underpins the form of this pan-triadic music. Rather, as Figure 4.1 shows, and as Horton alludes to, it requires the interaction of discrete collections: it is the recurring path through these collections, allied to the contours of the main theme itself, that establishes and articulates formal units.

The theme is presented as a seven-bar phrase, as shown in Example 4.3. Predominately, it contains melodic material built of ascending major seconds, accompanied by third progressions; slide progressions articulate its mid-point (at end of bar 3) and closure, in tandem with the melody’s insistence on oscillating semitones at these junctures. That this seven-bar phrase is an important formal unit is suggested by its immediate repetition with only one substantive change: the substitution of the initial  $E\flat$  minor triad with B major. Given the lack of tonal or modal resources, any sense of key is elusive. However, the particular pan-triadic

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<sup>123</sup> Horton, “The Later Symphonies”, 217.

<sup>124</sup> Cohn, *Audacious Euphony*, 11–13.

<sup>125</sup> Harrison, “Three Short Essays on neo-Riemannian Theory”, 572–73.

paths chosen by Vaughan Williams, suggest two important features: firstly, the dominance of both E $\flat$  and G triads and, secondly, the pre-eminence of the slide transformation. All these appear in the first half of the theme's initial presentation, which constitutes the first three bars of the piece. The germinal nature of these first three bars to the rest of the piece's form and plot is agreed upon by multiple commentators. Grimley expresses this clearly: 'The harmonic progression of the opening three measures of the Prelude serves as the germinal motif of the whole work and provide ample evidence of the work's much-disputed structural unity.'<sup>126</sup> Beckerman suggest something similar, using this theme as guide for his analysis.<sup>127</sup> In a similar way to Symphony No. 5, then, Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia* sets out its central musical concerns early-on. Exactly how this music coheres, however, and what its underlying musical tension is remains unclear. The way in which these aspects are understood has important ramifications for analysing the piece's natural theological tropes and plots.

### Collections and Syntax

The question of how the opening three bars cohere is, essentially, a question of collection: what pitch resources do these transformations, shown in Example 4.3, draw from? The possibility that the collection is straightforwardly tonal, or modal is immediately ruled out by the observation that there is no instance of set-class 7–35 which is capable of housing all three chords. Even Manning's CMS, because it is sensitive to scale-degrees, cannot accommodate them.<sup>128</sup> In fact, G major does not coexist in any such collection with either of the chords adjacent to it, let alone both of them.

One option is to begin with a pair of these transformations and consider whether its resulting collection might be viewed as germinal to the rest of the theme and, indeed, the movement. This is the tactic Grimley employs; he starts with the observation that the sum of the semitonal 'slide' relation between G major and A $\flat$  minor is, as shown in Figure 4.2, the interval collection 01478 and, thus, is set-class 5–22. This, as Grimley notes, is also the collection which concludes Symphony No. 6.<sup>129</sup> Grimley's solution has significant explanatory

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<sup>126</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 128.

<sup>127</sup> Beckerman, "The Composer as Pole Seeker", 43.

<sup>128</sup> Manning, "Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams's Music", 77–78.

<sup>129</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 2, Grimley erroneously refers to the set as "5–2"—its Forte name is 5–22. Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 129.

power: as he convincingly shows, much of the content of the first section of the piece can be derived from this progression.

Thus set class 5–2 [sic] provides a template for much of the music in the symphony, even when it does not appear literally. For example, the opening paragraph of the Prelude swiftly modulates away from the basic pattern of the initial measures, the progression transposing and extending itself so that it forms an asymmetrical 7- (rather than 6-) measure period. The importance of set class 5–2 [sic] is immediately reinforced, however, first by the local cadence at rehearsal number 2, and then in more spectacular fashion by the climactic *Largamente* after rehearsal number 4.<sup>130</sup>

Even beyond the scope of the first section, Grimley provides compelling evidence of the centrality of 5–22 both in terms of its literal and inferred presence:

One of the properties of this set is its symmetrical structure—with that symmetry in mind, the design of the germinal motif can be mapped onto the five-movement design of the symphony as a whole. This symmetrical set can also be used, as in Vaughan Williams’s earlier music, to generate larger modal or diatonic pitch collections. In the *Sinfonia Antartica*, set class 5–2 [sic] is particularly notable for the ways in which it generates pairs of octatonic scales in contrary motion—although the set itself is not purely octatonic, its chains of thirds and semitones can be partitioned to produce ascending and descending octatonic collections I and II, a property that Vaughan Williams exploits throughout the symphony. A further important subdivision is the subset 4–19 [0148], a sonority that Vaughan Williams uses with particular frequency.<sup>131</sup>

Figure 4.2 shows how 4–19 and 4–18 (the importance of which I explore later) derive from 5–22. Set-class 4–19 is important in Grimley’s analysis, as it links 5–22 with what he terms the ‘tonic’ of the piece. As I describe above, there is no traditional ‘tonic’ to *Sinfonia Antartica*. However, various triads – most notably G major – are invoked as potential destinations of resolution which might, retrospectively, confer G-as-tonic status. Whilst Grimley acknowledges the centrality of ‘G’, most readily seen in what he terms a ‘cadence’ in bars 4.9–5.5, he proposes a different candidate for ‘tonic’:

[...] the symphony’s proper “tonic,” as established at rehearsal number 4, might be conceived as an unstable form of set class 4–19 ([01458]), a troubled G triad plus raised sixth degree (e-flat) that rocks between G- and E-flat major: an even more abstract version of this set, the dyad G–E-flat, brings the work to an unsettling close. The symphonic tension generated is therefore between different intervallic components of set class 5–2 [sic], in particular semitones versus major/minor thirds, rather than between opposed (“polarized”) key centers in the manner of earlier large-scale symphonic structures.<sup>132</sup>

Unlike many symphonies, then, the basic harmonic centre is itself dissonant and unstable according to Grimley. There is much to glean from Grimley’s approach; it locks onto

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 132.

a key part of the piece's musical plot in a way which facilitates vital connections to idea of natural theology. However, Grimley does not offer a completely compelling account of the main theme's coherence. Whilst he does not name it, this 'unstable form of set class 4–19' appears to be set-class 5–21: importantly, as Figure 4.3 shows, 4–19 is a subset of both this and 5–22. Thus, there exists some confusion in Grimley's analysis – or at least an unspoken relationship – between the 'tonic' 5–21 (the combination of G and E $\flat$  major triads) and 5–22, the set which 'ultimately governs' the music (the combination of G major and A $\flat$  minor triads).<sup>133</sup> This unspoken tension between G–E $\flat$  and G–A $\flat$  lies at the root of Grimley's somewhat unsatisfactory explanation for the opening three bars. The E $\flat$  minor that begins the piece becomes something of an afterthought here; in Grimley's diagram, it is included in parenthesis, which belies its local and global importance.<sup>134</sup> Implicitly, it could be understood as finding its origin in the common subset of 5–22 and 5–21: 4–19. Grimley notes that a subset of 4–19 finishes the entire symphony – a lone G and E $\flat$  – and, whilst he does not explicitly make this connection, this observation could provide some explanation for E $\flat$ 's presence in bar 1. However, it seems unsatisfactory to suggest that the initial chord of the piece, which then goes on to form a key part of the movement's musical plot at multiple structural levels, and also appears prominently in the symphony's central movement, is not a core part of the underlying process of the movement.

The approach adopted by Julian Horton integrates the initial three chords in a more effective manner. As noted above, Horton exposes the underlying pan-triadic syntax as the interaction of hexatonic, octatonic, and slide transformations. 'At the same time,' he suggests, 'the passage also projects a kind of bitonality, alternating between E $\flat$  minor and G major.'<sup>135</sup> These chords form a hexatonic pole, giving a distinctly hexatonic flavour to Horton's bitonality. In this model, A $\flat$  is considered as part of the E $\flat$  network by virtue of its proximity to E $\flat$  in terms of the pitch-class intersection of their projected major scales. Horton's explanation proves effective for more than just the first three bars: it gives a sense of logic to the harmonic processes seen throughout the entire 7-bar phrase, despite the three different types of transformation. The transposition of the opening progression by a fifth in bar 4 – linked by a minor third – means that the chords map neatly into the same bitonality, as transposition of

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<sup>133</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 2, Grimley erroneously refers to the set as "5–2" – its Forte name is 5–22. *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>135</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 217.

instances of 7–35 by a fifth or fourth involves minimal displacement of constituent tones.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, because this transposition leads the music back to Eb, Horton’s prioritising of Eb as a counter-pole to G is more satisfactory. Whilst Grimley’s 5–22 approach operates in both transpositions, focussing on this set-class to the exclusion of pan-triadicism eschews grappling with the overarching cyclicity of the theme. Horton’s model has additional, further-reaching ramifications: ‘[...] the *Sinfonia*’s framing tonality is G; but Eb and its relations often intrude as a counter-pole. Tellingly, and in a manner redolent of the end of Symphony no. 5’s Preludio, the work ends not by confirming G, but by juxtaposing a G bass pedal and a melody that comes to rest on an Eb.’<sup>137</sup> Thus, interpreting G major–Eb major as the germinal tension in the piece not only makes sense of the initial phrase: it also connects the opening to the ending neatly and, as outlined below, interacts more readily with hermeneutical interpretations. Whilst, in theory either 5–22 or Horton’s bitonality could be considered a generator for the other, the bitonal approach appears to have greater explanatory powers.

However, the promotion of this bitonal structure to the entire thematic presentation would undermine the presence of important hexatonic and octatonic structures. Whilst the Eb–G pole works very well as an underpinning tension throughout the first 7-bar statement, as the music continues its explanatory powers wane. The first stumbling block is the very next triad: as shown in Figure 4.1, Eb minor is substituted by its hexatonic ‘L’ neighbour, B major. The fact that this substitution occurs shows the importance of hexatonicism to this music: this is further suggested by the return of B after this repetition of the main theme. B’s independence from either pole of the initial bitonality is suggested by its placement as equidistant from G and Eb on the circle of fifths. It could, in theory, be understood as G’s mediant, or as Eb’s submediant. Both are relatively distant and, moreover, both equally proximal to their respective tonics. A third option would be to incorporate B as a third pole: less important than G or Eb, but still present. Accepting this model would, in fact, be in dialogue with Horton’s idea of ‘orbital tonality’, which he suggests as an analytical framework for understanding Bruckner’s pan-triadic language.<sup>138</sup> Horton’s orbital tonalities have a hexatonic basis, as this music does: whilst the tonal articulation seen in Bruckner is absent from Vaughan Williams’s *Sinfonia*, the principle of three underlying centres works well here as a unifying principle for the first fifteen bars. This is shown in Figure 4.4.

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<sup>136</sup> Cohn discusses the 7–35’s ability to participate in maximally smooth cycles. See Cohn, “Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions”, 16.

<sup>137</sup> Horton, “The Later Symphonies”, 217.

<sup>138</sup> Horton, “Form and Orbital Tonality in the Finale of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony”, 280.

The same principle can be applied to much of the rest of the opening section. Just as there are four unique hexatonic collections, as I describe in Chapter 2, there are four possible systems of hexatonic orbital tonality. Just as the Western hexatonic collection underpins the transformations of the first fifteen bars and bars 4.4–5.3, so the Eastern collection does for bars 1.6–2.5, and the Northern collection does for bars 3.5–4.2. These sections of orbital tonality are shown in Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7; they coincide more or less with the phrasing of the main theme. However, one section evades this model. Bars 2.6–3.4, whose transformations are shown in Figure 4.1, clearly constitute a formal unit, but no hexatonic collection accommodates them well. The transformations skip across systems of hexatonic orbital tonality. This apparent inverse of hexatonicism is, however, amenable to octatonic analysis. It transpires that this music articulates a co-cycle of octatonic set 3, mostly incorporating RP transformations. This flagrant moment of triadic octatonicism is the only time such consistency of transformation is observed in the pan-triadic language of this piece. As the quotes above show, Grimley invokes the idea of octatonicism as a resource for this piece, particularly with regard to the pitch-class intersection of 5–22 and 8–28. However, his analysis of the piece’s octatonic structures misses out this significant passage. Whilst it would be perfectly possible in theory to conceive of octatonic orbital tonalities, such an approach would work less well in this particular context. The very regular and cyclical nature of this passage, along with the restricted triadic resources and equal weighting afforded to each constituent harmonic member, means that it is better understood through the well-established ideas of transformational cycles and co-cycles.<sup>139</sup>

Thus, the pan-triadic language of the main theme is best understood through a combination of orbital hexatonic tonality – featuring both major-third and slide transformations – and octatonic co-cycles. Embedded within these contexts, it is still possible to conceive of both Horton’s and Grimley’s approach as being part of the whole. They act as subsets of the overall pan-triadic milieu. Both ideas are intimately connected to theologically meaningful ideas, as is the broader harmonic language of pan-triadicism itself.

### **Natural Theology and the Main Theme**

The centrality of G remains common to the differing methods of analysing the main theme. The fact that G is present near the outset, asserted over A $\flat$  at the dramatic closure of the

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<sup>139</sup> Cohn, “Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions”, 16–21.

main theme (bar 5.3), and again against A at the closing of the movement (bars 17.5–17.6) provides obvious evidence for this. Both Horton and Grimley foreground G as an aspirational goal of the symphony, an ideal which is contested by the intrusion of Eb in the former’s analysis, and the tendency for G major to revert to its containing set of 5–22 in the latter’s. The nature of G as a goal is outlined by Grimley as follows: ‘G exists as a tonal centre only as an abstraction, as an ideal to be evoked (or alluded to) from among a wide range of different modal and intervallic collections.’<sup>140</sup> The programmatic relevance of this tendency is obvious, especially in the context of the epigraphs. The sense of ‘heroism’ – the label originally attached to this music by its composer – is fragile and requires strong musical rhetoric to enforce even locally. However, there are details in the theme which anchor this music – and therefore the broader ideas implied by the source material – in more specifically theological concerns. Once again, theological affordance structures overlap, forming complex tropes that maximise the potential of theological engagement whilst simultaneously undercutting certainty in specific meaning.

Far from establishing ‘heroism’ in a straightforward way, the first theme, in the words of Michael Beckerman, is ‘ambivalent, ominous and unremittingly tragic.’<sup>141</sup> But there is more going on here than simple tragedy. Grimley begins to outline the ways in which this music connects with theological ideas:

[...] the aspirational rising contour of the processional theme and “noble” scoring (brass doubling woodwind with string and harp accompaniment) suggests an introtit to a sacred or civic ritual, while the melody’s heavy triple meter suggests the solemn step of a sarabande [...] The sarabande might well be heard as a vivid (symbolically choreographed) portrayal of the sledge marches undertaken by Scott’s party on their journey to the pole—as Alain Frogley has suggested, the physical act of pulling the sledge may have sparked memories for the composer of his work with the ambulance corps as a stretcher bearer on the Western Front in 1916 [...] The symphony opens with a distinctly retrospective, or historicizing, gesture, one which seemingly portrays polar exploration as a form of pilgrimage or religious duty, an interpretative stance entirely consonant with the mood of energetic spiritual endeavor developed by Cherry-Garrard and his post-First World War vision of the 1910–13 expedition in *The Worst Journey in the World* as ‘an age in geological time, so many hundreds of years ago, when we were artistic Christians.’<sup>142</sup>

There are specific affordance structures at play here that surely add to the picture Grimley paints, though he does not mention them. Most obviously, the pan-triadic syntax of this section itself evokes theological ideas. As Chapter 2 discusses, this harmonic language signifies theological ideas. Pan-triadicism often functions as a signifier in the context of tonal

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<sup>140</sup> Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 131–32.

<sup>141</sup> Beckerman, “The Composer as Pole Seeker”, 59.

<sup>142</sup> Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 127.

music, where its sense of ‘extraordinary’ is located in its lack of tonal gravity in an otherwise tonal landscape. Here, however, there is a complete absence of tonal context. Perhaps the only obvious point of contact in terms of choral music is the third of the *Shakespeare Songs*: “The Cloud-Capp’d Towers”, and sections of *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, as Chapter 2 discusses. The connection with the former is, I argue, not incidental to the piece’s theological resonance. Purely pan-triadic syntax allows free movement between tonally distant harmonies, but any sense of teleology is thwarted by the same freedom. The overwhelming sense of multiple possible tonal centres leads to none being asserted, and thus the sense of transcendence evoked, like the central section of *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, has a feel of distance and inscrutability to it: already there is a sense of potent transcendence yet absent progress.

Even within this pan-triadic syntax, various details suggest divergent ideas of transcendence. The opening half-phrase presents the listener with two distinct progressions: hexatonic pole and slide. These progressions are, essentially, the source of Horton’s and Grimley’s analytical approaches respectively. Both, however, have distinct intertextual connections in Vaughan Williams’s symphonies that relate to theology beyond the broad sense in which all pan-triadic harmony does. The *Sinfonia*’s opening hexatonic pole forms a seemingly unlikely intertextual connection with the composer’s first, *A Sea Symphony* which, as Example 4.4 shows, also begins with a hexatonic pole. The connection with *A Sea Symphony* is particularly strong, given the primal placement the pole receives in both; furthermore, similar ideas of transcendence are explored through ideas of nature. The Antarctic is, of course, merely a frozen sea itself, with no land mass to anchor it. As Frogley notes, this transformation is ‘recalled at several junctures’ in *A Sea Symphony* and, in fact, goes on to be important in other symphonic works.<sup>143</sup> In the opening movement of Symphony No. 5, as I discuss in Chapter 3, the hexatonic pole works to usher in a direct sense of transcendence at the point of the exposition’s secondary theme. Hexatonic poles, in examples preceding the *Sinfonia Antartica*, thus evoke ideas of awesome yet not inscrutable transcendence. A sense of optimism pervades these natural theological symbols, which suggests that the ‘beyond’ has something to offer, something which can be grasped.

The second, ‘slide’ transformation, however, has different connotations in Vaughan Williams symphonic world. The *Sinfonia* shares a preoccupation with this transformation with Symphony No. 6, particularly at their endings. Example 4.5 compares the final statement of

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<sup>143</sup> Frogley, “History and Geography: the Early Orchestral Works and the First Three Symphonies”, 104, note 31.

the *Sinfonia*'s main theme with the ending of Symphony No. 6. Grimley makes much of the relationship forged by this transformation between the *Sinfonia* and its symphonic predecessor. Building on the work of Hugh Ottoway, he extends some common interpretative strategies of that piece to the *Sinfonia*:

[...] another of the striking features of the *Sinfonia Antartica* is the way in which the opening measures of the first movement appear to evolve directly out of the closing measures of the Sixth Symphony. The uneasy and insistent rocking alternation of second inversion triads with which the earlier work concludes—E-flat major and E minor—vacillating between heroism and tragic nihilism, prompted much speculation, vigorously challenged by Vaughan Williams, as to the score's possible apocalyptic significance. In the succeeding symphony, this octatonic complex (transposed) becomes the semitonal progression in the second and third measures. In this way, the Seventh Symphony may well have been born from the musical representation of an earlier wasteland, drifting toward nothingness before the symphony has properly begun. Even the chord in the very opening measure of the Seventh, E-flat minor, might be heard in this context as a symbolic attempt to regain the musical territory and expressive domain of the ending of the earlier work in modally shadowed form.<sup>144</sup>

Grimley makes a vital link here, placing the *Sinfonia*'s theological resonances in dialogue with both Symphony No. 6 and, by extension, "The Cloud-Capp'd Towers". As recounted in Chapter 2, Shakespeare's musings on the impermanence of human life in this text were also used by Vaughan Williams, in a rare moment of candour regarding the meaning of his music, to explain to Kennedy the meaning of the bleak ending to Symphony No. 6: 'we are such dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep'.<sup>145</sup> The predominance of the slide transformation in all three instances (compare Example 4.5 with the bars 9–14 and 22–25 of "The Cloud-Capp'd Towers, shown in Example 2.9) places this transcendent sign in somewhat more murky theological waters than the hexatonic pole. With the benefit of these intertextual links, it expresses an utterly inscrutable transcendent, perhaps even relating it to ideas of annihilation.<sup>146</sup> Thus, even in the first two bars, multiple theologically significant topics start to form a trope in the main theme.

These details anchor the plot points of the original story in a somewhat more theologically charged interpretive complex than has been previously suggested. Thus, it is reductive to consider the goal of the *Sinfonia*'s protagonist as merely a set of geographical coordinates. Rather, it is burdened with natural theological purpose, seeking to comprehend transcendence in a natural context. The success or failure of the mission here is made spiritual, as well as physical; the quest to assert G couched in a theologically rich hermeneutic complex.

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<sup>144</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 128.

<sup>145</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 573.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*; Anonymous, "Vaughan Williams's New Symphony"; Anonymous, "The Gramophone: Vaughan Williams's Last Symphony".

## Nature Music

The battle between G and its other (whether 5–22, 5–21 or Eb) in a pan-triadic context is, however, not the only source of structural tension in the symphony. Much like the first movement of Symphony No. 5, which pits an already contested musical complex in the first theme – with regards to its true tonal centre – against a different sort of music in the second, there is a juxtaposition of the initial tension with something entirely different. Once again, the difference is at the base level of music syntax; however, the juxtaposition in the *Sinfonia* is starker than that of Symphony No. 5's Preludio. Example 4.6 shows the music that occurs directly after the main theme. Music in this vein goes on to dominate the middle part of this movement, as well as large parts of the second, third, and last movements. The contrast with the opening is obvious: the instrumentation has changed radically, any sense of melody is hard to locate and, most notably, the symphony has dispensed with the triad as an important subset. Much has been made of this so-called 'nature' music, which initially finds its origin in the film score's 'Antarctic Prelude'. Horton describes it as ultimately 'collection based': 'Unlike the opening,' he suggests 'where melodic material elaborates a triadic scheme, here harmony results from the vertical projection of a pitch collection.'<sup>147</sup> Grimley emphasises the 'sharp shift of instrumental color' over anything else, whilst also highlighting the diametrically opposed nature of this music in terms of its 'symphonic' qualities:

The shift at this point of the movement's proceedings to a hard, metallic percussion-based timbre, together with the subdued dynamic level and layered ostinato figuration, suggests the evocation of distant nature sounds, comparable in some respects to the "alpine" interludes in Mahler's symphonies or Webern's early orchestral works. As in Webern's music, such "environmental noises" are essentially unsymphonic, in that they are almost entirely static and resist any attempt at development or change. In their fixed, seemingly frigid form, they effectively freeze any sense of regular musical time and create instead a structural "iciness," an inability to generate any dynamic forward momentum.<sup>148</sup>

This music requires a different analytical method; whilst most 12-tone music is, to use Horton's phrase, 'collection based', the specifics of this particular music necessitate a purer application of set-theory than that which underpins my analysis of Vaughan Williams's pan-triadic music. Both Grimley and Horton identify particular sets that feature prominently in this music. Grimley's foregrounding of 5–22 in the main theme – and in particular its subset 4–19 – pays dividends here, as it seems to underpin much of the 'nature' music as well. The most obvious example is found in the music which immediately follows the main theme: here, as

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<sup>147</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 217.

<sup>148</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 132.

Example 4.6 shows, two different transpositions of 4–19 appear in alternation at the surface of the texture. Grimley provides other examples of 4–19’s centrality to the piece, such as the ‘Death of Oates’ passage in the fourth movement.<sup>149</sup> Grimley also asserts the octatonic properties of this music; he grounds this in in 5–22’s propensity to ‘produce ascending and descending octatonic collections I and II’. The string part in bars 5.8–6.8, for example, is said to be comprised of ‘an eerie combination of two overlapping octatonic collections (II and III).’<sup>150</sup> Horton suggests that this part – along with the alternating transposed sets of 4–19 – is underpinned by set-class 9–8: this is shown in Example 4.6. Horton points out that, whilst the 4–19 subset is ‘redolent’ of certain passages of Stravinsky, the overall effect is ‘not [...] octatonic’.<sup>151</sup> The only compellingly octatonic section (besides the RP chain in the main theme) occurs, as noted by Grimley, from bar 12.9; ironically, this proves to be one of the only larger sets used in this piece which does not contain 4–19 as a subset.<sup>152</sup>

Much of the music draws from larger sets, especially 8- and 9-note sets. After the 9–8 string material, a soprano solo follows, and is contained within set-class 9–4, as Example 4.7 shows; it is not ‘principally’ octatonic collection III, as argued by Grimley.<sup>153</sup> After a brief intrusion of the main theme from bars 8.7–8.13, the music returns to another self-contained section of nature music, which runs from bars 8.14–9.3. As Example 4.8 shows, these large set-classes contain important recurrent subsets. Yet again, 4–19 appears prominently, though it does so here alongside two other prominent subsets: 4–18 and 4–20. The oscillations between 4–19 and 4–18 in bars 8.14–9.3 lend weight to 5–22 centrality; though Grimley does not make this clear, 4–18 is another subset of 5–22 (see Figure 4.2) and it appears throughout this symphony as well. Whilst 4–20 is not a subset of 5–22, it is a subset of 5–21 (see Figure 4.3): as noted above, this is the composite of the hexatonic pole which opens the piece and lies at the heart of Horton’s reading. Vaughan Williams draws from a large number of distinct set-class resources in this movement; however, subsets of 5–21 and 5–22 remain a common thread through many of them, often presented at the ‘surface of the music’. Thus, the collections of the nature music are not so very far removed from the opening, even if their articulation is starkly different: the subsets of 5–21 and 5–22 can be seen as sources of both sorts of music. I explore the hermeneutical implications of this below.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>151</sup> Horton, “The Later Symphonies”, 217.

<sup>152</sup> Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 133–34.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 132.

Whereas the opening movement seems to directly juxtapose the human and the natural, the middle movement, entitled “Landscape”, focusses only on the latter. Yet, in this movement, there are new links forged between the apparently demarked depictions of nature and humanity. Whilst, as Grimley notes, set-class 4–19 continues to be prominent throughout this movement, the central dramatic moments refer back to the ‘heroism’ theme in a more direct way.<sup>154</sup> Pan-triadic syntax, in a chorale-like texture, pokes through the ‘collection based’ music of ‘Landscape’ at various points, though in a different guise to the opening movement. This material first appears in bar 4.1, where it is heard pianissimo in the woodwinds against a background of ‘nature’ noises. Example 4.9 shows this statement. Two strains of the first phrase of this material are heard a few bars later from 5.8–5.14; here, as Example 4.9 shows, the material is transposed up a tone and juxtaposed against a flute melody. The fullest statement of this material occurs from bars 9.1–10.7, which repeats the material at the same transposition as its original statement whilst adding and repeating several extra transformations near its end. Like the original statement, this is followed by a short statement transposed up a major second from bars 10.8–11.1. Example 4.10 shows this passage. These last two statements are also shown in harmonic reduction in Figure 4.8, which highlights and details the pan-triadic transformations in this material.

Like the main theme, this material is built of three different types of transformation. Major and minor thirds remain an important part of the syntax: slide relationships are, however, absent, whilst major seconds come to the fore. A similar lack of tonal gravity pervades this music, with each subsequent third progression introducing a possible candidate for tonic. However, unlike the main theme, there is no sense of ongoing melody to the progressions. Each triad appears as a more or less separate entity. This sense is increased by the total pitch resources used: by the third unique transformation, in only the second bar of the material (A+ to E $\flat$ + in bar 9.1), the pitch total has amassed ten distinct notes; a collection which, being too close to the full complement of twelve, has no set-class name. The full complement of twelve is reached when this series of transformations is augmented by two consecutive major-seconds, forming a filled-in major third between E $\flat$ + and G+. By contrast, the main theme is much more restricted in scope. The initial half phrase of three transformations, plus the following one which returns the music to G, only requires 7 notes: the hexatonic set formed by the pole, with

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 136.

the addition of the  $A_b$  from the following  $A_b$ - chord, giving set-class 7–21. After a minor third progression, 7–21 is again heard in a different transformation.

It is from this highly ordered complex which Horton and Grimley derive key structures that motivate the piece's form: it would be challenging to find such structures in the organ entry in 'Landscape'. This difference in set-class resource is largely due to differences in chord roots. As Figure 4.9 shows, despite their varied transformations, the roots of the triads in the organ chorale form a regular whole tone scale (set-class 6–35): the roots of the main theme's opening chords, meanwhile, form set-class 5–20. The interval vectors of these sets are included in Figure 4.9: these show that 5–20 contains all six possible intervals, whereas 6–25 only contains three types of interval.<sup>155</sup> Because the whole tone scale is a mode of limited transposition – with only two unique transpositions – this also means that, when this material is transposed by a whole tone a few bars later, it ends up using similar chords. Set-class 5–20, by contrast, has the maximum twelve unique transpositions. Thus, distinctly different pan-triadic routes are traced by this music which subvert the prominence of any given subset or bitonal clash.

Yet, despite this different feel, certain harmonic entities are given prominence. As Figure 4.8 shows, all the major triads from the West hexatonic system which dominate the opening of the main theme occur in structurally weighted moments. In the main statement,  $E_b^+$  is initially foregrounded as the culmination of the progression in bar 9.1 before, in a varied repetition, it is ultimately supplanted by a filled-in LP transformation to  $G^+$  in bar 9.4. Given the whole-tone nature of the root relationships in this material, it is no surprise to find these chords in the following, reduced instance of this material at bar 10.8, which is transposed up by a major-second transposition. However, Vaughan Williams emphasises these chords additionally in a way which subverts literal transposition. A literal transposition by a major second would foreground  $F^+$  and  $A^+$  in place of  $E_b^+$  and  $G^+$ . Yet, as Figure 4.8 shows, this is not what happens. This first phrase is indeed a direct transposition beginning on  $E_b^+$  and ending on  $F^+$  but the second phrase, which should augment this progression by a hexatonic LP transformation from  $F^+$  to  $A^+$ , instead fails to escape the orbit of  $E_b^+$ . Thus, in some ways,  $E_b^+$  is confirmed as the key of 'opposition' by the way this chorale ends, even if, as Grimley notes, the rhetoric is far from stable due to the intrusion of various other set collections at this point.<sup>156</sup> This ultimately lends more weight to Horton's assertion that  $G-E_b$  is the central concern of the

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<sup>155</sup> Interval class vectors list the number of each type of interval for a given set. For example, the  $I_c$  vector for 7–35 (the modal set) is [254361]: this means it contains two semitones, five tones, four minor thirds, three major thirds, six major fourths and one tritone.

<sup>156</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 140–41.

main theme; Eb+, through the organ chorale at the centre of the *Sinfonia*'s 'Landscape', becomes further associated with the 'other' which the symphony's protagonist aims to subdue.

### **Nature Music and Natural Theology**

The nature of Vaughan Williams's nature music has significant hermeneutical implications for the plot. However, upon attempting to investigate this music, important divisions and categorisations seen in the reception of this piece start to crumble and converge. Whilst the contrast between the natural and human remains a pervasive way of reading this piece, the links between them imply more than the simple 'opposition' that Horton suggests as a motivation for the programme. As Grimley's analysis shows, there are significant elements of musical unity, even between contrasting materials. Moreover, the distinction in the categories of 'nature' and 'humanity' prove difficult to maintain in a broader sense. Horton's and Grimley's description of this music as 'unsymphonic', 'ecological noise' and its status as 'other' to the 'heroic' music implicitly suggests something approaching an objective view of Antarctica, in comparison to the idealised view suggested in the 'heroism' theme.<sup>157</sup> Yet, as McGrath, points out, 'The concept of "nature" is [...] profoundly ambivalent, reflecting the aspirations, longings and fears of those who appeal to it.'<sup>158</sup> As I argue above, 'nature' is, fundamentally, a concept susceptible to the whims of ideology. Truly, this music is well-named: even in this symphony's most stark depictions of Antarctica it is still, fundamentally, depicting 'nature': that is, it is depicting an idea which McGrath so accurately calls 'intellectually plastic'.<sup>159</sup> The 'nature' music is just as much an anthropocentric construction as the main theme's ideals of heroism. In a similar way, the shared musical structures undermine the distinctiveness of the 'human' as articulated in the main theme. Elements of 'nature', seen most obviously in the intrusion of Eb, are bound up in its presentation. Thus, an extra dichotomy emerges in this music: it is not just concerned with pitting humanity against nature, but rather different 'natures' against each other. This is the core of the piece's natural theological resonance.

The main theme represents one pole in this dichotomy: the nature music presents another. Here, as elsewhere in Vaughan Williams's music, nature is coded as transcendent. The

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 132; Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 217–18.

<sup>158</sup> McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Volume 1 – Nature*, 86.

<sup>159</sup> McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 9.

choir and soprano solo music, first heard from bars 7.2–8.8, are a good example of the tone adopted here. Its origins in the film score suggest an allusion to sirens; Grimley describes its nature as ‘coldly seductive’.<sup>160</sup> The choral forces are used to transcend, if not ultimately human, ends here; Vaughan Williams prioritises their disorientating properties later on in the piece by having the soprano sing at distance. This material goes on to become a recurring idea in the symphony and represents the transcendent nature of Vaughan Williams’s nature music very well. Like Symphony No. 5, the category of ‘nature’ is a potential source for natural theology. However, nature’s transcendence is depicted in a fundamentally different way to that of Symphony No. 5. The horn call which initiates the *Sinfonia*’s second movement provides a revealing parallel to the similar pastoral trope which opens Symphony No. 5, as shown in Example 4.11. Here, as elsewhere, the presence of set-class 4–19 articulates a dark side of nature through its dissonant sense of “troubled” diatonicism’.<sup>161</sup> Nature’s transcendence as depicted in much of this symphony is harsh, impassive, brutal, and inscrutable. Its interaction with other elements in this symphony reveals a fundamentally Darwinian, even Malthusian view of nature which seems un conducive to a successful natural theology. Its transcendence ultimately counts for nothing, as it remains inscrutable and irreconcilable to the human condition.

This sense of potent yet inaccessible transcendence permeates the organ chorale at the centre of the piece. Here, the transcendence of pan-triadic syntax is affirmed, though the unique properties of this particular section render this in a manner distinct from the main theme. As Grimley notes, the use of the organ in such dramatic, transcendent terms has precedents elsewhere in Vaughan Williams’s music, most notably in *Job: A Masque for Dancing* (1930).<sup>162</sup> The associations of the organ deepen the piece’s engagement with theological ideas:

A [...] sense of sacred space inhabits the third movement of the *Sinfonia Antartica* [...] The passage becomes a moment of indomitable defiance, the apotheosis of human duty, sacred sacrifice and endeavor, as well as a musical symbol of the spirit of adventure canonized by contemporary reports of Scott’s party and exemplified in the character of expedition members such as Wilson. The appropriation of the Romantic sublime is therefore complete: the organ seems at first to have regained its original liturgical associations and, by so doing, deepens Vaughan Williams’s engagement with the construction of the Scott voyage as a myth of nationhood and Christian moral virtue.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear””, 121.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 129–30.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

Grimley acknowledges the inherent ambiguity of this statement: once again, Vaughan Williams constructs a theologically potent musical structure which evades specific meaning.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, Grimley explicitly links this central part of ‘Landscape’ to natural theological ideas. In his words: ‘the possibility of metaphysical transcendence [...] is denied both by the overwhelmingly harsh physicality of the landscape itself and also by the shifting nature of the Pole.’<sup>165</sup> Thus, the natural theology evoked in this piece is beholden to its divergent ideas of nature. I explore the ramifications of this for the overall plot of the symphony and its natural theology below.

### **The Plot**

The Sinfonia presents two poles of ‘nature’ in its main ‘heroism’ theme and subsequent ‘nature’ music. The main theme itself, as I argue above, evokes a tension between ideals of nature as transcendent yet potentially revelatory, and the fragile nature of humanity’s progress. The main musical structures complicit in this theological complex are found in the differing types of pan-triadic transformation, and the assertion of G major as a teleological goal. In a simplified way: the initial Eb- pole comes to be associated with nature, this is countered by a dramatic hexatonic pole transformation to the ‘heroic’ G before the endeavour crashes in the cataclysmic Ab minor slide transformation. This complex suggests the centrality of set classes 5–22 and 5–21; perhaps more primally, it juxtaposes the pitches G and Eb. According to Horton’s approach, the central tension of the opening (and concluding) sections of this piece can be viewed as the attempted assertion of G over Eb; or, in other words, the cementing of the hexatonic pole. The overall result is an ambiguous sense of transcendence, teetering on the edge between revelation and failure.

The nature music which follows, in its various guises, articulates an inscrutable transcendence which remains inaccessible. It is best understood as an expansion upon and depiction of the ‘other’ that G is required to overcome to reach teleological fulfilment. Thus, the symphony places two different *natures* in opposition to each other as much as it does humanity itself with the idea of nature. The interaction between these two creates a natural theological trope, which articulates broader natural theological concerns regarding shifts in conceptions of nature and progress. The plot primarily concerns the fate of the main theme: the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 140–41.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 141.

nature material is impervious to development or attempts at synthesis. In many senses, as Grimley and Horton describe, the nature music does not really enter into the ‘symphonic’ part of the symphony. Nevertheless, its presence is what creates the crisis in the first place: the overall plot can be considered as, ultimately, a reaction to the nature music. The symphony presents irreconcilable views of nature, irredeemably opposed, in which only one can emerge as victorious. These are the stakes of the *Sinfonia*’s plot. Which ‘nature’ is asserted? Can the adversity of an inscrutably transcendent nature be overcome and subordinated?

The germinal progression, of course, suggests not: E $\flat$  is initially countered by heroic G major, before failing through its transformation to A $\flat$  through the apocalyptic slide transformation. As Grimley notes, the resultant set-class of these two chords – set-class 5–22 – becomes emblematic of the failure of progress. At the end of the main theme’s first statement, the juxtaposition of A $\flat$ - and G is articulated in dramatic terms. Whilst G emerges at the final statement of this interaction, there is no real resolution of the issue. This initial attempt from bars 48–56 is followed by unremittingly dissonant nature music which has, at its core, the same set class. Depictions of nature proliferate in this section, each seemingly self-contained and impervious to development. The main theme is never revisited directly again in this movement. As Grimley notes, ‘the remainder of the first movement attempts to break out of this circular pattern of mechanical nature-stasis through a staged series of increasingly energized sequences that strive to regain the heroic momentum of the opening paragraphs.’<sup>166</sup> Eventually, a fanfare theme breaks through at bar 13.13, which goes on to dominate the last portion of the movement. Set-class 4–19 remains present in this music, though sections of it owe more to the modal set-class 7–35, as Example 4.12 shows. This music is, thus, much closer to the more ‘typical’ modal symphonic music present in earlier Vaughan Williams symphonies. This is also due, in part, to the whole-tone root progressions which dominate in the absence of the semitonal transformations that beset the opening material. As such, whilst the movement does attain G major at the end – and allusions to the opening material are present, most prominently at bars 13.17 and 15.1 – the fanfare offers nothing by way of a satisfying conclusion to the germinal tension. As Grimley notes:

[...] the concluding measures, with their brashly diatonic II–I close, can be heard as a futile attempt to reconfigure and resolve the more troubling chromaticized triadic clash ([ $\flat$ ]ii–I) of the germinal set class, 5–2 [sic], with which the symphony began. For all its energy and sheer volume, the coda is unable to provide any sense of definitive closure and the basic tensions and oppositions unfolded in the opening measures remain unresolved’<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 134.

The interior movements of this symphony are not directly implicated in the machinations of the main theme's plot. Movements II and III ('Scherzo' and 'Landscape') focus on depicting nature; whilst this, of course, forms one pole of the symphony's natural theological tension, the static nature of Vaughan Williams's nature music means that there is no real development of this material. Movement IV ('Intermezzo'), as Horton notes, 'attends to a dichotomy within the human pole' by invoking the wives of the protagonists in a 'juxtaposition of love and death'.<sup>168</sup> The final movement, ('Epilogue') in a manner not dissimilar from the finale of Symphony No. 5, picks up the main thread of the plot again in a direct way from bar 13.8 by restating the opening theme. Immediately prior to this, from bar 11.1, material from the central part of the first movement heralds its return. Despite the fact that, before 13.8, the music does not engage directly in the juxtaposition outlined in the first movement, the 'heroism' theme itself appears at various points and undergoes some changes. Horton depicts a process of 'dissolution' across these instances, which he reads as an erosion of the heroism expressed at the outset.<sup>169</sup>

When the opening theme is restated in the final movement, it is done so with minimal changes. There are no 'new' transformations or pan-triadic routes taken by this music. It merely truncates the form of the initial statement and arrives at the same juxtaposition of G<sup>+</sup> and A<sup>b</sup>- at bar 16.1. A comparable moment, though its musical rhetoric is vastly different, occurs at the restatement of the initial modal complex in the fourth movement of Symphony No. 5: here, the initial tension is resolved by a confirmation of D as tonic. However, like the doomed expedition they aptly depict, the attempts to secure G<sup>+</sup> in the *Sinfonia* fail for the last time. The idea of nature promoted by the main theme is trumped by that of the nature music. In fact, they fail at an even earlier stage than the initial insecure attainment of G<sup>+</sup> at the end of the main theme in the first movement; the oscillation of A<sup>b</sup>- and G<sup>+</sup> fades out before either can be asserted. In its place, as seen in Example 4.13, the soprano and female chorus music returns to swallow up the last vestiges of the expedition. At the very end, as Horton notes, it is simplified, stripped-down version of the germinal tension – G–E<sup>b</sup> – which wins out:

The ultimate collapse back into the Prelude's main theme and vocalise [sic] nature music confirms a tragic circularity, which circumscribes human endeavour: Scott's failure does nothing to quell human folly and has no effect on impassive nature. In symphonic terms, there is ultimately no teleological fulfilment, simply the reassertion of the germinal dichotomy.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Horton, "The Later Symphonies", 217.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 219.

The root of this failure is, of course, inherent in the first moments of the symphony. As Grimley compellingly points out, there are commonalities in the set-class construction of both the opening and the nature music. These shared musical structures – in particular the set-class 4–19 – problematise the boundaries of ‘nature’ as an ‘other’ to humanity. Taken on its own, the theme shows a lack of progress, and failure in the context of a natural opposition. The *Sinfonia* articulates something of the precarity in ideas of progress that was commonplace in Vaughan Williams’s cultural context. Horton rightly compares the trajectory of the whole symphony to the first movement of Symphony No. 5. It ends in uncertainty, with no articulation of teleology from the initial state: ‘Tellingly, and in a manner redolent of the end of Symphony no. 5’s Preludio, the work ends not by confirming G, but by juxtaposing a G bass pedal and a melody that comes to rest on an Eb.’<sup>171</sup> In this way, Symphony No. 5 expresses a more positive idea of natural theological ‘progress’ than the *Sinfonia*, in which doubts as to the direction and likelihood of progress receive a very literal musical embodiment.

However, the fact that nature is the obstacle to progress is also hugely significant. This symphony does not just articulate humanity’s failure to progress beyond its current situation; it undermines any progress beyond the humanly constructed, semiologically shifting category of ‘nature’. In this story, humanity fails to prove its ‘progress’ in the context of a transcendent nature, and thus is revealed to be inextricable from the nature which it tries to objectify. The existence of 5–22’s and 5–21’s subsets in both ‘nature’ and ‘heroism’ underpins this interpretation. Because of this, as the organ chorale of the middle movement suggests, nature’s transcendence remains inaccessible and, thus, natural theology becomes impossible. Because humanity becomes inextricable from ‘nature’ there is no theological ‘object’ to work with that humanity can extricate itself above: thus, the category of ‘nature’ disappears completely. This ensures the failure of the piece’s natural theology. Like Symphony No. 5, there is no ultimate sense of revelation. Unlike Symphony No. 5, however, the *Sinfonia* refutes any possibility of natural theology in the strongest possible terms: it is a failed pilgrimage in every sense. In this way it forms something a ‘shadow’ to Symphony No. 5, perhaps achieving more honesty in the process. It evokes a ‘negative’ natural theology steeped in concurrent debates in the science-religion discourse, which fully lays bare the shortcomings of a deistic theology.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 217.

## A Failed Natural Theology

Viewed in terms of its connections with natural theological idea, the *Sinfonia* emerges as a complicated expression of Vaughan Williams's vision of the beyond which, if anything, reveals more about Vaughan Williams's undetermined theological standpoint than it does about any asserted idea of transcendence. It is, fundamentally, a musical expression of a failed natural theology. Its articulation of shifts in ideas of nature and progress reveal the shaky theological foundations of Vaughan Williams's deistic natural theology; in this way, it fully explores the cracks exposed in the ambiguously positive conclusion to Symphony No. 5.

In much the same way as scientific advances endangered existing modes of natural theology, changes in the idea of progress endangered the sequestered position of natural theology expressed by people such as Vaughan Williams. As I argue in Chapter 3, in order for ideas of human superiority and progress to be maintained, natural theology took as its axiom a deistic god. The creative God of Christian orthodoxy became, in this mode of natural theology, inactive. Divorced from the concept of revealed theology and a created order, natural theology ceased to interrogate the natural world with reference to a creator and, instead, attempted to reveal the idea of progress itself. In a deistic theology, there is no longer a link between created and creator. In this corruption of Christian time, faith in God's work of progress from creation to new creation – along with ladder-like conceptions of progress steeped in natural theology – is replaced with faith in human endeavour. The agent of progress becomes human exploration, technology, and science. This worldview, as I describe above, had a crisis of faith of its own in the twentieth century. Bauckham and Hart put it in succinct terms: 'the civilization that [...] made the idea of historical progress the myth by which it lives has itself increased both the horror and the terror of history.'<sup>172</sup>

In its depiction of the expedition's failure, the *Sinfonia* shows the frailty and uncertainty of material progress inherent in abandoning ladder-like conceptions of progress in favour of tree-like ones. The idea of a 'great chain of being', with God at its summit, is entirely absent from this vision of the beyond. There is, thus, no sense of two-way traffic between God and nature that provides workable conditions for natural theology in practice. There is no possibility of revelation through natural means. This shift in ideas of progress has far-reaching implications for the preconceptions of deistic natural theology. A lack of progress undermines

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<sup>172</sup> Richard Bauckham and Trevor A. Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1999), 15.

evidence for humanity's superiority, expressed in theological terms as *Imageo dei*: being made in the image of God.<sup>173</sup> This is a prerequisite for natural theology: there is no such thing as 'natural' if humanity cannot distinguish itself from nature. The dissolution of the category of nature, in tandem with the exposing of the myth of progress, guarantee the theological 'failure' expressed in Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia*.

Vaughan Williams's entanglement with Victorian natural theology underscores his deistic theology. The musical stylings and cultural context of the *Sinfonia* might well be inherently modernist; Vaughan Williams, however, does not offer a modernist natural theology. Rather, the conflicting influences of later nineteenth-century natural theology are exposed in the light of a modern condition. This is seen most obviously in Vaughan Williams's continued assumption of the transcendent nature of music in the face of a harsh nature and tree-shaped progress. He thus articulates a conflicted view, where Spencerian ideals of deism and an autonomously transcendent nature jostle for position against Darwinian conceptions of nature and progress.

Writing during the period in which Vaughan Williams was composing the *Sinfonia*, the literary critic Cyril Connolly describes this segment of the history of ideas in bleak terms as '[the] desperate struggle of the modern movement, between man, betrayed by science, bereft of religion, deserted by the pleasant imaginings of humanism against the blind fate of which he is now so expertly conscious.'<sup>174</sup> I argue that the *Sinfonia Antartica* captures a similar spirit by means of various affordance structures which embody the shifting concepts of nature and progress. The rhetoric of an exploratory spiritual journey – of a reaching into the infinite – is well and truly present in the music. Yet the result is negative; nothing is revealed, no progress is made, and the pilgrimage ends with brutal tragedy. The theology expressed in this piece, therefore, is a failed natural theology. It is congruent with a futile attempt to cling to deistic transcendence in the face of a loss of faith; faith in the transcendent but shifting ideas of both nature and progress. Vaughan Williams's goal of 'reaching into the infinite', like Scott's of reaching the pole, becomes a chimaera.<sup>175</sup> Approaching music theologically, as Heaney suggests, can indeed form a comprehension of faith, however flawed that faith might be.

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<sup>173</sup> Gen 1:26-28

<sup>174</sup> Cyril Connolly, "Comment", *Horizon* 20, no. 120–21 (1950): 362.

<sup>175</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"", 141.

# Conclusion

## Theology and the Music of Vaughan Williams

### Reaching Out Again

This thesis begins with Vaughan Williams's own belief that music is defined as 'reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound'.<sup>1</sup> This assertion provides the thesis's basic interrogative principle: overall, I argue that Vaughan Williams's music affords theological interpretation. Due to the evocation of the ideas of nature and revelation, Vaughan Williams's music creates dialogue with ideas of natural theology and, as such, recapitulates contested ideas in the science-religion discourse that dominated his intellectual context.

In many ways, therefore, Vaughan Williams's music is what it represents, and what he himself claims it to be. Though Vaughan Williams himself was certainly indebted to various nineteenth-century formulations of music and transcendence, the concerns of contemporary musicology with regard to this topic can be effectively assuaged. The conflict between music's social and transcendent meaning is a fallacy; this is exposed both in Vaughan Williams's beliefs, and in the approach I adopt to interrogate how his music expresses theology. Jean-Jacques Nattiez's tripartition theory posits that musical meaning resides in the interaction of esthetic, poietic, and trace levels.<sup>2</sup> As I show in chapters two, three, and four, theological meaning emerges in situated, socially contextual ways at all three levels. Vaughan Williams's intentions themselves create a high likelihood that his music is read theologically in certain contexts. The way in which he engages with other texts – be that Bunyan's *The Pilgrims' Progress* or Scott's diary – suggests a high level of awareness of his social and intellectual context, and a desire to communicate theologically also attested to in his writings. Similarly, the ways in which Vaughan Williams's music has been received theologically are also bound up in the mechanics of culturally specific musical semiotics and interpretative strategies. Yet, theological engagements with Vaughan Williams's music are not reducible to the sum-total of these levels. Nattiez's 'neutral' level emerges as the vital link between poiesis and esthesis,

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<sup>1</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Making of Music", 206.

<sup>2</sup> Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, 3–40.

and the irreducible connection with the musical trace. At this trace level, Vaughan Williams's music displays what Gavin Hopps terms theological 'affordance structures'.<sup>3</sup> These structures provide a way of interrogating the theological capacity of Vaughan Williams's music without subscribing to suspect claims of music's autonomy or appeals to musical universalism. As such, music analysis becomes an indispensable tool for the interrogation of the links between theology and Vaughan Williams's music.

### **Theology and the Vocal Pieces**

By focusing on a corpus of Vaughan Williams's music which sets texts with significant theological import, I isolate, analyse, and discuss several key theological affordance structures in Chapter 2. These structures, and the analytical methods associated with them, form a toolkit for the reading of Vaughan Williams's music as theological in general. The first of these is text: Vaughan Williams considered the selection and editing of text to be an important means of compositional self-expression. In many vocal pieces, he shows a preponderance for texts which maximises potential theological resonance whilst eschewing the specifics of Christian dogma. Transcendence emerges as a ubiquitous theme, often in the context of adversity, and almost always at the expense of immanence. The presence of such text, furthermore, provides a semiotic 'base layer' over which more purely musical affordance structures are layered. The link between this text and its musical expression provides clarification as to the semiotic capabilities of various musical structures.

In the first instance, modality emerges as a theological signifier. In the context of Vaughan Williams and his music, modality signifies theological ideas through several interrelated means including its iconic connection to ecclesiastical music, its indexical representation of ideas of nature, and its indexical expression of a national spirituality. Furthermore, Vaughan Williams's use of this musical parameter – in particular his tendency to foreground modal resolution or progression across the span of a piece – generates a hermeneutically rich affordance structure in the context of theological text. *The Souls of the Righteous* resonates with theological ideas of the beyond in this way. In Vaughan Williams scholarship, harmony is often discussed as a symbol of something 'beyond'. The pan-triadic syntax often invoked contains pre-existing iconic, indexical, and symbolic links to ideas of transcendence in the wider corpus of Western classical music, especially in the case of romantic

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 178.

music. In Chapter 2, I go further, identifying this musical parameter as a potent theological affordance structure. Vaughan Williams's harmonic writing exceeds the capabilities of modal explanations despite their ideological attractiveness. Instead, I posit neo-Riemannian theory as the best way of analysing such progressions. I thoroughly explore the ability of this syntax to signify theological concepts – whether as a point of difference to tonality or modality, or in isolation – in my analysis of *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*. This piece is shown to evoke ideas of an inscrutable transcendent deity consistent with a deistic theology.

Vaughan Williams's musical style is remarkably consistent across his output: a feature which extends to theological affordance structures. However, beyond this, I argue that Vaughan Williams's output contains significant and specific intertextual connections that reference and modify theological meaning accrued elsewhere. In terms of Peirce's trichotomy, such moments reference other music iconically, and therefore indexically signify the meaning which this other music expresses. An extensive example of this can be observed in a harmonic opening gambit first heard in "From Far, from Eve and Morning", then subsequently across various compositions which are all invested with theological meaning through contact with texts. Whilst I introduce these affordance structures as distinct entities, in practice they exist in combination. I argue that the interaction of these structures in any given piece creates additional layers for theological engagement, often evoking complex theological tropes that engage in musical discourse. Through my analysis of *Valiant for Truth*, I show how harmony and modality interact to form a musical structure rich in hermeneutical promise for theological readings. Again, ideas of transcendence and adversity are present, with the musical structure suggesting a plot of ascension to heaven and triumph over death, albeit without the specifics of a Christian soteriology. My analysis of these affordance structures through their use in various choral pieces shows a consistent articulation of a theology congruent with an ambiguous deism.

### **Natural Theology and Symphony No. 5**

Having established this toolkit of theological affordance structures, I further explore the theological ideas evoked by Vaughan Williams's music by engaging with his intellectual context and by analysing Symphony No. 5, arguing that natural theology is central to the comprehension of both. Evolutionary ideas in Vaughan Williams's context adhere to Bowler's 'non-Darwinian revolution';<sup>4</sup> the non-Darwinian prioritisation of a transcendent nature and

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<sup>4</sup> Bowler, *The non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth*, 5.

human teleology brings natural theology out of an explicitly Christian theology and into deistic territory. Music is implicated in these discussions, especially in the case of Darwin's and Spencer's conflicting theories on the origin of music.<sup>5</sup> The evidence offered by Vaughan Williams's writings suggest a deep investment in these ideas; I consider how Vaughan Williams recapitulates various positions in the science-religion discourse, ultimately confirming Brooke's thesis of 'complexity' instead of 'conflict'.<sup>6</sup> Vaughan Williams is described in my research as a 'pic-n'-mix' Darwinian,<sup>7</sup> who typifies the non-Darwinian revolution by augmenting orthodox Darwinian beliefs with Spencerian ideals of teleology and the transcendent. Similarly, I argue that his writings show the permeation of this natural-theological debate into musicological concerns. He articulates a conflicted yet stubborn belief in the transcendence of music and nature, drawing from non-complementary ideas sourced from both Darwin and Spencer. The result is a deistic natural theology with no certainty of revelation.

Symphony No. 5 is saturated in meaning relating to the 'beyond' in some way at all three levels of the tripartition. Whilst Symphony No. 5 is perhaps the most consistently cited of Vaughan Williams's pieces in terms of transcendence, I go further in arguing for a theological reading. Building on Whittall's analysis,<sup>8</sup> I argue that Symphony No. 5 expresses the ambiguous, deistic natural theology seen in Vaughan Williams's context and writings, whilst embracing a positive attitude towards this inherent ambiguity. The main plot of the piece is established in the opening movement and is concluded in the last; it evokes distinct theological perspectives through contrasted musical syntaxes which embody theological meaning in different ways. The way in which the resolution of the initial modal complex is achieved, I argue, foregrounds the absence of a doctrine of revelation in deistic theology whilst simultaneously retaining a positive open attitude towards an ambiguous 'natural' transcendence.

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<sup>5</sup> Spencer, "On the Origin and Function of Music", 318; Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 218.

<sup>6</sup> Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Zon, "The 'non-Darwinian' Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being", 211–19.

<sup>8</sup> Whittall, "'Symphony in D Major': Models and Mutations".

## Natural Theology and the *Sinfonia Antartica*

Having established a theological reading of Symphony No. 5, I argue in a similar fashion for a theological reading of the *Sinfonia Antartica*. Despite the *Sinfonia*'s radically divergent musical language and genre, I argue that some of the affordance structures and theological perspectives are similar to Symphony No. 5. However, the theological conclusions drawn by this symphony are distinct: in many ways, they expose the insecurity found in the ambiguous yet positive closing section of Symphony No. 5. The *Sinfonia* tackles the concepts of nature and progress more directly, exposing the relation between these mutable concepts and the natural theology of Vaughan Williams's context. The story of Scott's failed mission to the Antarctic pole, which provided the inspiration this symphony, is a cultural touchstone for the discussion of these issues.

Continuing my investigation of Vaughan Williams's intellectual context, I engage with Bowler's work to argue that broad ideas of human progress were in a state of flux due to the changing state of evolutionary ideas and the unravelling legacy of the non-Darwinian revolution.<sup>9</sup> As the previously held tenets of non-Darwinians became eroded by both scientific factors, geo-political events and war, the idea of progress became contested. Progress, in this context, began to look less 'ladder-like' and more 'tree-like'. Whilst the results of this are often described as the 'myth of progress', I argue with Bowler that the conception of progress more broadly became unstable due to these factors, and that this trajectory can be seen in the thought of Vaughan Williams. Ideas of nature mutated under similar circumstances. I argue, along with McGrath, that nature is an essentially plastic concept that is peculiarly susceptible to ideology.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, like progress, nature remains a vital part of the construction of natural theology as ideas of nature's transcendence persisted into the twentieth century. I consider Vaughan Williams's own thoughts on nature, arguing that he expressed a dogged belief in its transcendence, even if this was sometimes couched in terms of its 'night side'.<sup>11</sup>

The reception of the story of Scott itself, I argue, foregrounds issues of nature and progress. The twin issues of nature and progress intertwine in Scott discourse: the story's testament to the uncertainty of progress in general challenges the category of 'nature' itself and humanity's position in regard to it, whilst simultaneously encouraging readings of nature as

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<sup>9</sup> Bowler, *Progress Unchained*, 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, "Vaughan Williams and the 'Night Side of Nature': Octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea*", 55.

inscrutably transcendent. Vaughan Williams's engagement with this framework, itself modulated through his own film score, makes use of this pre-existing entanglement with issues of natural theology to create a theologically potent symphonic form with complex, conflicting layers of meaning. Building on Grimley's analysis,<sup>12</sup> I argue that the symphony resonates with different theological perspectives on the transcendence of nature through its divergent syntaxes. The pan-triadic syntax of the main theme contrasts with the collection-based 'nature' music, contributing to a theological discourse over the nature of nature's transcendence. Neo-Riemannian theory and set theory provide indispensable tools for the analysis of this music. Overall, I argue that the *Sinfonia* explores the cracks in Vaughan Williams's deistic theology, ultimately expressing a failed natural theology which contains no certain link to revelation, and which collapses the categories of both nature and progress. Thus, I contend that Vaughan Williams's theological perspective is congruent with the natural theological concerns of his context.

### **Vaughan Williams's Music and Theology**

Vaughan Williams's music can be read through the ideas of natural theology. As such, it stands as a testament to the conflicted position of certain strains of deistic natural theology: strains that expressed strong influences from the non-Darwinian revolution of the nineteenth century. Vaughan Williams emerges as both a cause and effect of this legacy: his relationship to natural theology defines his visions of the beyond, and his music bears witness to this. Vaughan Williams embodies the conflicted positions of non-Darwinian natural theology and is caught up in the dissolving of these ideals in the first half of the twentieth century: in doing so, he articulates the complex interaction of science and theology.

In taking this approach, my research provides a new way of studying the much-discussed themes of transcendence and spirituality that pervade Vaughan Williams scholarship. I provide causal answers as to how his music carries theological meaning, and contextual research which underpins why this music has been read as such. I provide music-analytical evidence to support my claims: something that is rarely the case in Vaughan Williams scholarship. Where other accounts have focused efforts on ideas of 'religion' or 'spirituality', I give attention to the theology which underpins these issues. Similarly, my research thoroughly explores Vaughan Williams's connection to the science-religion discourse that dominated his

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<sup>12</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the "Geometry of Fear"".

intellectual context: up to now, such issues have been discussed only in the briefest sense. More broadly, in interrogating the theological dimensions of Vaughan Williams's music, my research paves the way for wider perspectives on how art, science and theology interacted in the milieu of late-Victorian and modernist ideas. Such an approach might be extended to any number of composers, writers, artists, or filmmakers in the same period.

## **Music, Theology, and Analysis**

### **Musicology and Theology**

In Chapter 1, I place claims of a link between Vaughan Williams and theology in the context of music theology more broadly. I argue that music's relationship to theology might take various forms, but that it always requires interdisciplinary research to explore. The central difficulty in this field remains how to relate the contextual, fluid nature of musical meaning and the specific, rationale approach that theology takes to claims of the transcendent: in short, the negotiation of how music means and how theology works. Building on Zon's work,<sup>13</sup> I argue that musicology is always an interdiscipline and that, despite disciplinary bias, theology presents as a useful dialogue partner. In particular, I seek to negotiate between analysis, theology, and musicology in order to interrogate the theological meaningfulness of music; to this end, I build on Heaney's engagement with Nattiez's tripartition theory.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on the work of Hopps and Brown, I argue against the bifurcation of music's social and theological meaning.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, I suggest that neither theology nor analysis, despite concerns to the contrary, are dependent upon autonomous conceptions of music's meaning. I posit music theology as the overarching field of my research project; I also discuss the lack of engagement with analysis in this field, and the inclination towards theological questions and approaches in its method. My approach, by contrast, seeks to ask theological, musicological, and music-analytical questions of music.

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<sup>13</sup> Zon, "Music Theology as the Mouthpiece of Science: Proving It Through Congregational Music Studies", 107.

<sup>14</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 27–135.

<sup>15</sup> Brown and Hopps, *The Extravagance of Music*, 1–9.

## Interdisciplinarity and Music's Theological Meaning

Having established this basis, I argue that the fields of music analysis and theology offer distinct but complementary ontologies of music. Comprehending religious experiences of music requires theological and analytical interaction. However, this is belied by a lack of discussion between scholars in these fields: interaction of analysis and theology is often implicit and undetermined. Through recourse to the science-religion discourse, I propose that theology and music analysis share a commitment to critical realism, intelligibility, and belief in the emergent properties of music that constitute its partial autonomy. Furthermore, both fields employ elements of a scientific method to understand the emergent properties of music. These points of contact provide a framework for interaction between these fields. However, theology and music analysis differ in various ways which enhance their potential complementarity. Their conception of the emergent properties of music, their understanding of the origins of music, and their underlying assumptions diverge in ways that attend to different levels of musical reality. Their bifurcated approaches intersect at the point of musical religious experience: a phenomenon that their interaction has the potential to investigate successfully. Both, in their own way, are more than capable of attending to the culturally embodied nature of musical meaning. I argue that the interdiscipline formed by the further addition of broader musicological techniques regarding the contextual and embodied nature of musical meaning results in a successful approach to the relationship between music and theology. The intersection of these fields has the potential to begin to explain, both causally and metaphysically, how and why music is able to elicit a religious response in addition to critically engaging with theological readings of music.

There are important limitations to my method, as I discuss in Chapter 1. However, the importance of my approach lies in the disconnect between the widespread experience of music in theological terms and the comparative lack of thorough musicological scholarship on the subject. As Brown and Hopps note, religious responses and experiences relating to music are a widespread phenomenon, and demand theological attention.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Maeve Heaney raises the intriguing possibility that music might be theological.<sup>17</sup> So far academic scholarship on this issue has, in the main, lacked the methodological rigour required to do justice both to how music means and how theology works. The approach detailed here, whilst incomplete,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 1.

begins to address this gap and has implications for current areas of study. Theology and music analysis emerge here as complementary ways of engaging with musical reality as it is experienced: as theological and cultural. For composers such as Vaughan Williams, who bridge these two ancient ways of approaching music, musical reality is both essentially transcendent, and transcendently essential. He offers a fascinating insight into the interactions of science, theology, and music, nowhere more succinctly expressed than in a message written to the pupils of Swaffham Primary School:

I am myself a musician, and I believe that all the arts, and especially music, are necessary to a full life. The practical side of living of course is important, and this, I feel sure is well taught in your school: such things teach you how to make your living. But music will show you what to do with your life. It is necessary to know facts, but music will enable you to see past facts to the very essence of things in a way which science cannot do. The arts are the means by which we can look through the magic casements and see what lies beyond.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 639.

# Figures, Tables, and Examples

## 2. Theology and Vocal Music

**Example 2.1.** *Towards the Unknown Region*, text.

*Darest thou now O Soul,  
Walk out with me toward the Unknown Region,  
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?*

*No map there, nor guide,  
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,  
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.*

*I know it not O Soul;  
Nor dost thou — all is a blank before us,  
All waits, undreamed of, in that region, that inaccessible land.*

*Till when the ties loosen,  
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,  
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bounding us.*

*Then we burst forth, we float,  
In Time and Space, O Soul, prepared for them,  
Equal, equip at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil O Soul.*

Whitman: “Darest Thou Now O Soul”, *Leaves of Grass*

**Example 2.2.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, text.

*O radiant luminary of light interminable,  
Celestial Father, potential God of might,  
Of heaven and earth O Lord incomparable,  
Of all perfections the essential most perfite!  
O maker of mankind, that formēd day and night,  
Whose power imperial comprehendeth every place:  
Mine heart, my mind, my thought, my whole delight  
Is after this life to see thy glorious face.*

*Whose magnificense is incomprehensible,  
All arguments of reason which far doth exceed,  
Whose deity doubtless is indivisible,  
From whom all goodness and virtue doth proceed;  
Of thy support all creätures have need:  
Assist me, good Lord, and grant my of thy grace  
To live to thy pleasure in word, thought, and deed,  
And after this life to see thy glorious face.*

Skelton: *A Prayer to the Father of Heaven*

**Example 2.3.** “From Far, From Eve and Morning”, text.

*From far, from eve and morning  
And yon twelve-winded sky,  
The stuff of life to knit me  
Blew hither: here am I.*

*Now for a breath I tarry  
Nor yet disperse apart.  
Take my hand quick and tell me,  
What have you in your heart.*

*Speak now, and I will answer;  
How shall I help you, say;  
Ere to the wind's twelve quarters  
I take my endless way.*

Housman: “From Far, from Eve and Morning”, *A Shropshire Lad*

**Example 2.4.** *The Souls of the Righteous*, text.

*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.  
In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery;  
And their going from us to be utter destruction.  
But they are in peace,  
For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality;  
And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded;  
For God proved them and found them worthy for himself.*

Wisdom 3:1-9 (BCP)

**Example 2.5.** *Valiant for Truth*, Text.

*After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-for-truth was taken with a summons ...; and had this for a token that the summons was true, 'That his pitcher was broken at the fountain.' When he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then, said he, 'I am going to my Father's, and though there with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword, I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill, to him who can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles, who now will be my rewarder.' When the day that he must go hence, was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which, as he went, he said, 'Death, where is thy sting?' And as he went down deeper, he said, 'Grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.*

Bunyan: *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come*

**Example 2.6.** "The Cloud-Capp'd Towers", Text.

*The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind: We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.*

Shakespeare: *The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene 1

**Example 2.7.** *The Voice out of the Whirlwind*, Text.

*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundation of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who has laid the measurements thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness for a swaddlingband for it, and established it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? Or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? Gird up thy loins like a man; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgement? Wilt thou condemn me that thou mayest be righteous? Hast thou an arm like God? Or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.*

Job 38: 1–11, 16–17; 40: 7–10, 14 (KJV)

**Example 2.8.** *The Souls of the Righteous*, modal analysis.

The musical score consists of three systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a treble and bass clef staff. Modal analysis labels are placed above the notes in the treble staff, with brackets indicating the mode for specific measures.

- System 1:** Measure 1 is labeled **F#-Aeolian**. Measures 2, 3, and 4 are unlabeled.
- System 2:** Measures 5 and 6 are labeled **F#-Aeolian**. Measures 7, 8, and 9 are unlabeled. Measure 10 is labeled **F-Aeolian**.
- System 3:** Measure 11 is labeled **F-Aeolian**. Measure 12 is labeled **A-CMS**. Measure 13 is labeled **A-Mixolydian**. Measure 14 is labeled **E-CMS**. Measure 15 is labeled **E-Dorian**. Measure 16 is labeled **C-Aeolian**. Measures 17 and 18 are labeled **A-Aeolian/Phrygian**.

19 20 21 22 23 24

A-CMS  
A-Aeolian/Phrygian A-Ionian C-Aeolian A-Ionian Eb-CMS

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

Eb-CMS  
Eb-Aeolian C-Ionian A-CMS A-Lydian

33 34 35 36 37 38 39

A-CMS  
A-Lydian A-Mixolydian F#-CMS F#-Aeolian A-CMS A-Ionian

Example 2.9. “The Cloud-Capp’d Towers”, harmonic analysis.

1 2 3 4

The cloud - capp'd towers, the gor - geous pal - a - ces,

F#- Eb+ Eb- B- F+

5 6 7 8

The sol - emn tem - ples, the great globe it - self,

C#- B- A- F<sup>7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> D<sup>7</sup>

9 shall dis - solve, 10 11 12 And, like this

it - self shall dis - solve, shall dis - solve,

self yea, all which it in - her - it shall dis - solve,

F- F-7 Ab+ A- Ab+

13 in - sub - stan - tial 14 pag - eant fa - ded, 15 16

and leave not a rack be - hind:

G+ G-

17 18 19 20

We are such stuff as dreams are made on, And our

F#+ F#- D#+

21 22 23 24 25

lit - tle life is round - ed with a sleep.

B- G#7 F+ F#- F+ F-

**Example 2.10.** *Mass in G Minor, "Gloria", bars 1–5, harmonic analysis.*

1 2 3 4 5

Et in ter - ra pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo - nae vo - lun - ta - tis.

G+ E+ D+ A+ D+ E- A+ B- E- F+ E- A+

**Example 2.11.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven, bars 1–9, harmonic analysis.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

O ra-diant Lum-in-a-ry of light in-ter-min-a-ble, Ce-les-tial  
Fath-er, po-ten-tial God of might. Of

C- Eb+ F+ G+ F+ G+ A- G+ Eb- G+ C- G+ F+ G+ Eb- Bb- Eb- Db+ Cb+ Db+ Eb- C°7 F#°7 E C-

**Example 2.12.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven, instances of the initial progression.*

1 2 9 10 31 32 64 65

O ra-diant Lum-in-a-ry of might. Of heav'n and earth, O  
Is, af-ter this life, to deed, And, af-ter this life,

C- Eb+ F+ G+ E+ C- Eb+ F+ G+ G+ C- G+ C- G+ F+ G+

**Example 2.13.** Symphony No. 6, bars 11.4–11.11, harmonic analysis.

11.4                      11.5                      11.6                      11.7                      11.8

11.9                      11.10                      11.11

D#+ E-                      D#+ E-                      D#+ E-                      D#+ E-                      D#+

E-                      D#+                      E-                      D#+                      E-

**Example 2.14.** *Toward the Unknown Region*, bars 1–6, harmonic analysis.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

E<sup>7</sup> A<sup>-7</sup>                      D<sup>-7</sup> E<sup>7</sup>                      A(+)                      E<sup>7</sup> A<sup>-7</sup>                      D<sup>-7</sup> E<sup>7</sup>                      A(+)

**Example 2.15.** *Valiant for Truth*, bars 8–25, harmonic analysis.

8                      9                      10

D-Dorian

at the foun - tain' \_\_\_\_\_

'That his                      pitcher was bro - ken                      bro - ken                      at the

E-                      C-                      B-                      D-

LP                      S3                      RP

D-Dorian

When he un - der - stood it, he called\_ for his friends, and told them of it

foun - tain'

14 15 16

Then said he,

B-Aeolian

'I am go - ing to my Fa - ther's,

D- PR B-

17 18 19

I am go - - ing

B-Aeolian A-Dorian

and though with great dif - fi - cil - ty I am got hi - ther,

A-

20 21 22

I am go - - ing

A-Dorian

yet now I do not re - pent me of all the trou - ble I have

B- A-



29

30

31

B $\flat$ -Ionian

and my cour - age and skill, to him that can get it. My marks and

B $\flat$ + Eb+ B $\flat$ + C- B $\flat$ + F- Eb+ B $\flat$ + Eb+ C-

Example 2.18. *Valiant for Truth*, 68–73, harmonic analysis.

68

69

70

71

B $\flat$ -Ionian

G-CMS

G-Ionian

sounded for him all the trumpets\_ sound - ed for him on the

B $\flat$ + Eb+ B $\flat$ + C- G+

72

73

G-CMS

G-Ionian

o - ther side.

C+ G+ A- G+

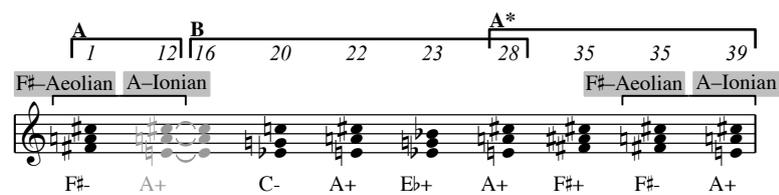
**Table 2.1.** Modal Relationships.

	Lochrian							Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian
	Phrygian	Lochrian							Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian
	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian							Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian
	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian								Lydian	Ionian
	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian								Lydian
	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian							
	Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian						
		Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian					
			Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian				
				Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian			
					Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian		
						Lydian	Ionian	Mixolydian	Dorian	Aeolian	Phrygian	Lochrian	
	C	G	D	A	E	B	F#	Db	Ab	Eb	Bb	F	
	Tonic												

**Figure 2.1.** C-CMS.

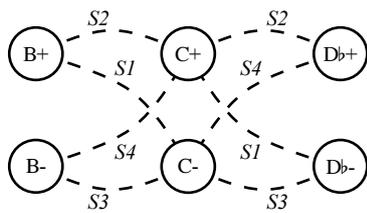


**Figure 2.2.** *The Souls of the Righteous*, background structure.

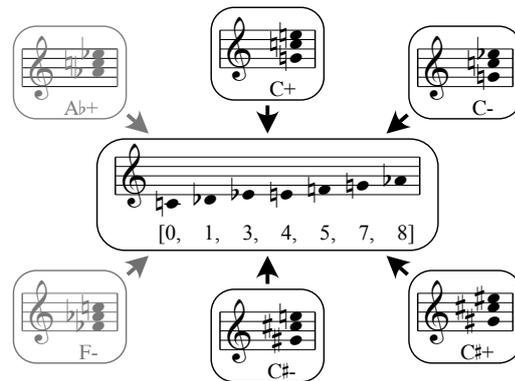




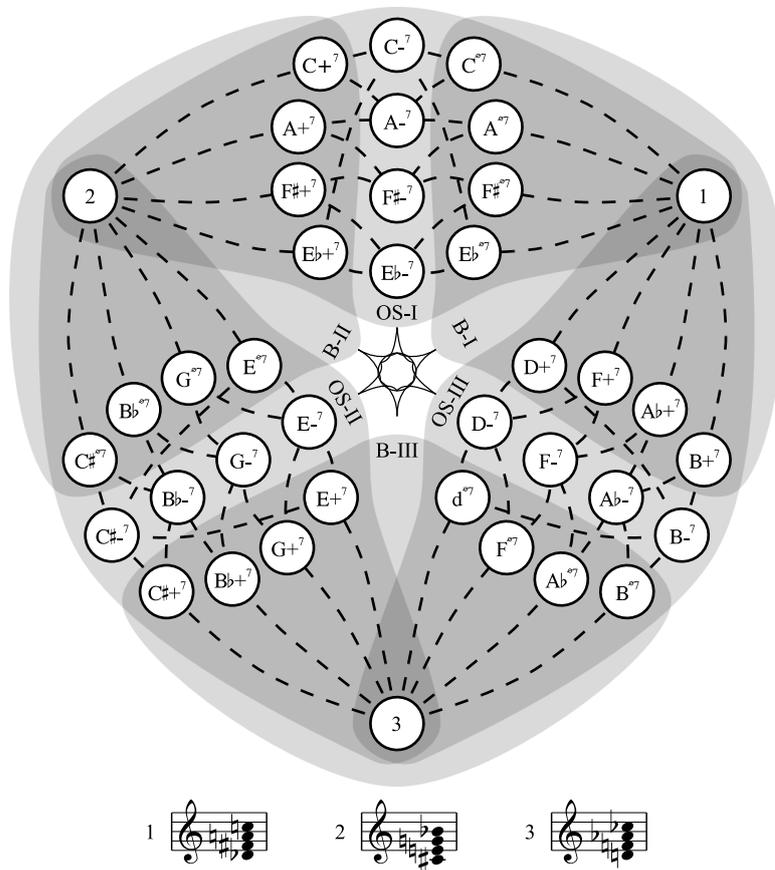
**Figure 2.5.** Slide transformations.



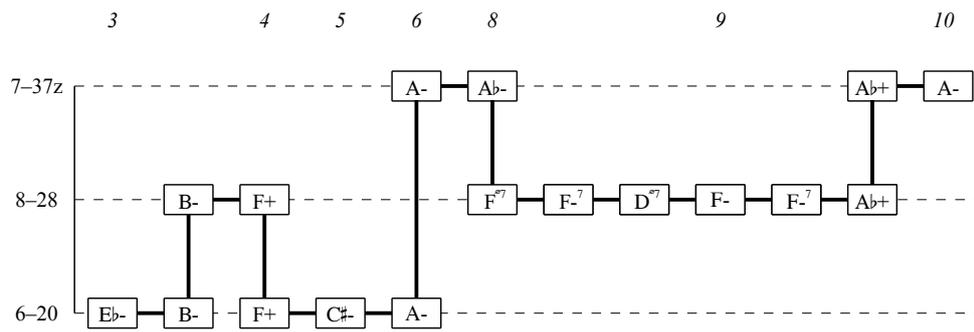
**Figure 2.6.** Derivation of set-class 7-z37 from slide-related triads.



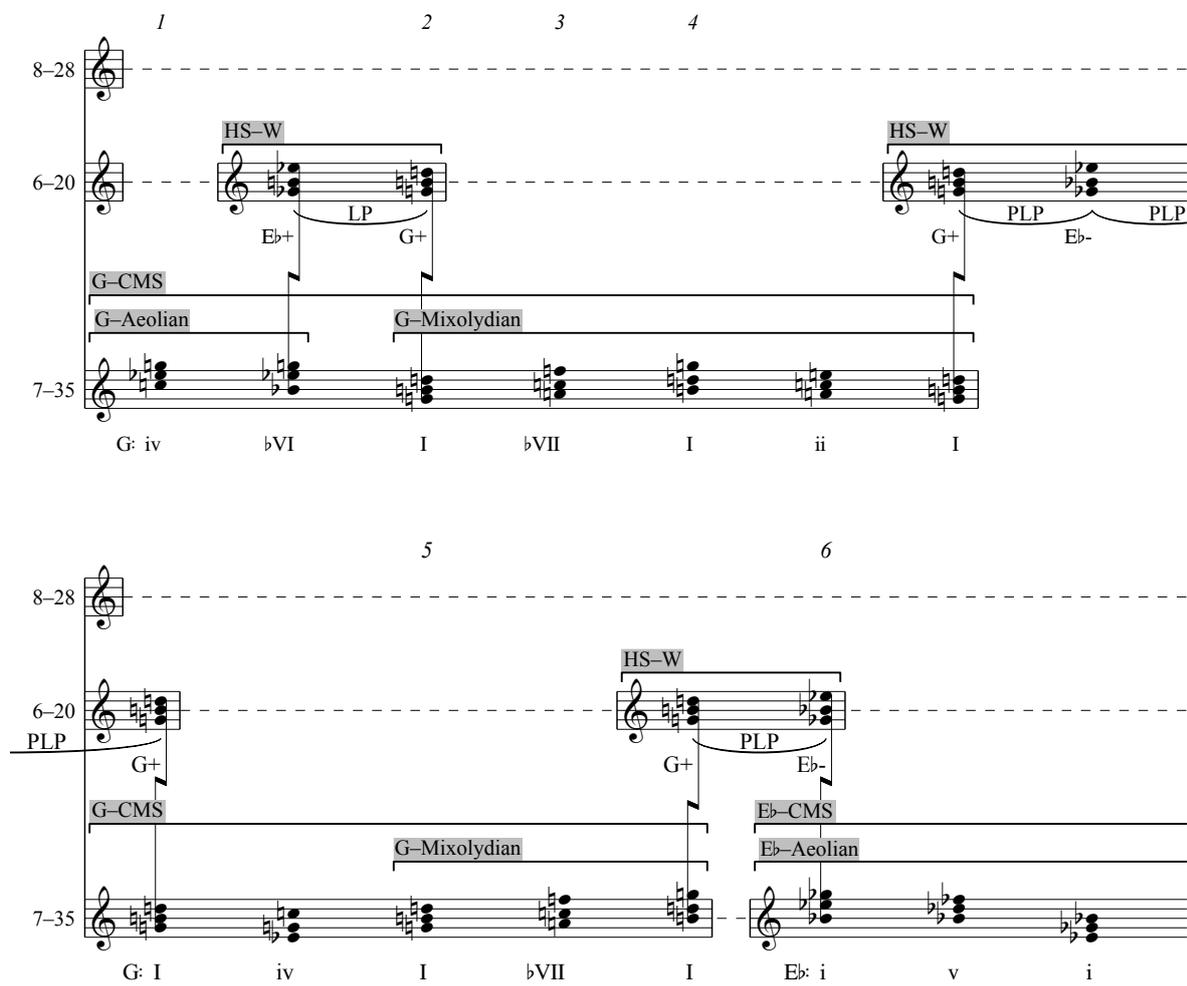
**Figure 2.7.** 4-Cube Trio: triads and octatonic regions.



**Figure 2.8.** “The Cloud-Capp’d Towers”, bars 3–10, harmonic map.



**Figure 2.9.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, bars 1–9, harmonic map.



7 8 9

OS-I

8-28

6-20

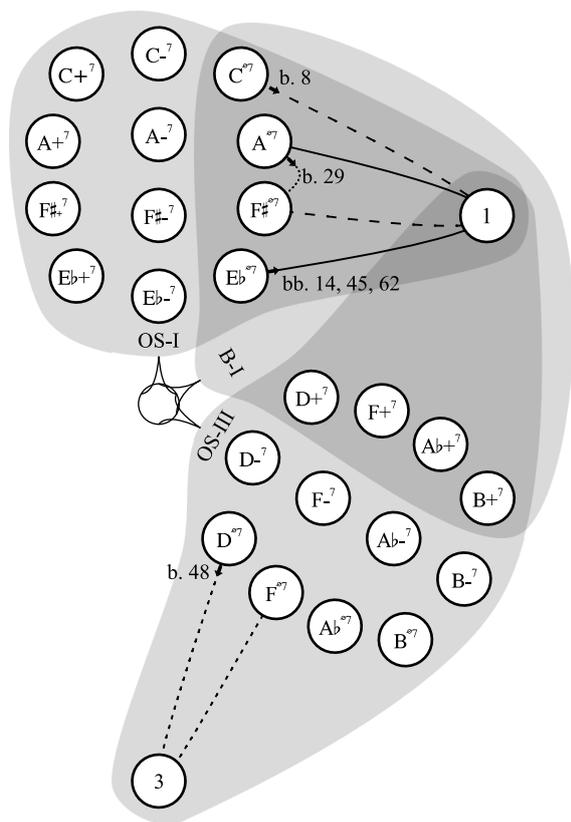
7-35

$\flat VII$   $\flat VI$   $\flat VII$   $i$   $i^6$   $E: iv^6$   $I$

$E\flat$   $C^{m7}$   $1$   $F\sharp^{m7}$   $E+$

E-CMS

**Figure 2.10.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, cadential passages mapped onto 4-Cube Trio.



**Figure 2.11.** Prayer to the Father of Heaven, bars 9–17, harmonic map.

The harmonic map is organized into three systems of staves, each with four staves (7-37z, 8-28, 6-20, 7-35). The progression is as follows:

- System 1 (Bars 9-11):**
  - Staff 6-20: Chords Eb+ and G+ (LP) in bar 9; G+ and Eb- (PLP) in bar 10; G+ and Eb- (PLP) in bar 11.
  - Staff 7-35: Chords G: iv,  $\flat$ VI, I, ii, I, Eb: i,  $\flat$ VII, i.
  - Annotations: G-CMS, G-Aeolian, G-Mixolydian/Ionian, Eb-Aeolian, HS-W.
- System 2 (Bars 12-14):**
  - Staff 6-20: Chords G+ (PLP) in bar 12; G+ and Eb+ (PL) in bar 13; F- and Gb- (S3) in bar 14.
  - Staff 7-35: Chords G: I, IV, I, Eb: I, ii<sup>6</sup>, Gb: i, 6.
  - Annotations: G-Mixolydian/Ionian, Eb-Ionian, F#-CMS, OS-I.
- System 3 (Bars 15-17):**
  - Staff 6-20: Chords A<sup>7</sup> in bar 15.
  - Staff 7-35: Chords G: iv<sup>6</sup>, I, iv, I.
  - Annotation: G-CMS.

**Figure 2.12.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, bars 17–30, harmonic map.

17                      18                      19                      22                      23                      26                      29

8-28 OS-I  
D#- RP F#- RP A- RP C-

6-20 HS-W  
G+ PLP D# LP B LP D#

7-35 G-CMS D#-Aeolian B-Dorian D#-Aeolian F#-CMS A-Dorian C-CMS

I D#: i B: i D#: i F#: i A: i C: i i<sup>6</sup>

30

8-28 OS-I  
A<sup>7</sup> F#<sup>7</sup>

6-20 HS-N  
E+

7-35 C-CMS E-CMS I

i<sup>6</sup> E: iv<sup>6</sup> I

**Figure 2.13.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, bars 49–54, harmonic map.

49 50 51 53 54

7-37z

8-28

6-20

7-35

OS-III

RP D- RP F-

HS-W

P D# L B+ P B-

D#-CMS B-CMS D-Dorian F-CMS G-CMS

Eb+ D# B+ B- D- F- G-

Eb: I i B: I i D: i F: i G: I

**Figure 2.14.** *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, bars 42–49, harmonic map.

42 43 44 46 47 48

7-37z

8-28

6-20

7-35

S3 Ab- G- S3 Gb- F-

OS-II OS-I OS-III

RP G- Bb- RP Eb- Gb- F- D<sup>7</sup>

Bb-CMS Ab-CMS Eb-CMS Gb-Aeolian F-CMS

Bb: i Ab: i Eb: i Gb: i F: i

7-37z

OS-III

8-28

3 F<sup>7</sup>

6-20

D#-CMS

7-35

Eb: iv<sup>6</sup> I

Figure 2.15. *Prayer to the Father of Heaven*, background structure.

**A** 2 6 9 | **A\*** 13 14 15 | **B1** 18 19 22 23 26 29 30

7-37z

8-28

6-20

7-35

**A\*** 32 35 36 38 | **C** 42 43 44 46 47 48 | **B2** 49 51

7-37z

OS-II

8-28

6-20

7-35



61 62

7-37z  
8-28  
6-20  
Eb-Ionian  
7-35  
Eb: I IV iii IV I Gb: i 6  
PRP  
OS-I  
66 67

**Figure 2.17.** “From Far, from Eve and Morning”, bars 1–3, interval and harmonic analysis.

**Figure 2.18.** *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, bars 1–3, interval and harmonic analysis.

7-37z  
OS-I  
8-28  
6-20  
G-CMS  
7-35  
G: iv<sup>6</sup> I bVII I  
A<sup>7</sup>

1                      2                      3

E+ G+ F+ G+ E+  
PR RLRL LRLR PR

1                      2                      3

G+ F+ G- Ab+ Gb+ D-  
PRLR RLR LRL LRPR PLP

**Figure 2.19.** *Mass in G Minor*, “Gloria”, bars 1–6, interval and harmonic analysis.

**Figure 2.20.** *Symphony No. 5*, third movement, bars 1–6, interval and harmonic analysis.

**Figure 2.21.** *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Act I, Scene 2, “The House Beautiful”, bars 1–6, interval and harmonic analysis.

**Figure 2.22.** *Valiant for Truth*, harmonic map.

**A**

**A1** | **A1\*** | **A2\*** | 18 | 23 | 24 | **B** | **B1** | 26 | 29 |

7-37z S3 B- Bb+ S1

8-28 B- D- B- G+ PR Bb+

6-20

7-35 B- A- E- D+ G+

**B**

**B2** | 31 | 32 | 34 | 36 | **A\*** | **A\*1** | 42 | 46 | 47 | **A\*3** | 48 |

7-37z S1 B- Bb+ S4 A-

8-28 B- D- F+ D+ RP

6-20

7-35 D- F+ D+ D- Bb+ A- E-

**A\***

**A\*3** | 56 | **A\*4** | 60 | 66 | 71 |

7-37z

8-28

6-20 B- G- L

7-35 B- G- Bb+ G+

### 3. Natural Theology and Symphony No. 5

Example 3.1. Symphony No. 5, first movement, bars 1–9.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

C-Lydian/D-Mixolydian

6                      7                      8                      9

C-Lydian/D-Mixolydian

Example 3.2. Symphony No. 5, third movement, bars 1–6, harmonic analysis.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

C+                      A+                      G-                      A+                      G-                      A+

Example 3.3. Symphony No. 5, first movement, bars 4.13–6.6, roman numeral analysis.

4.13                      4.14                      4.15                      5.1                      5.2                      5.3

(C i)                      H                      E I                      ii<sup>7</sup> I<sub>3</sub><sup>6</sup>                      IV                      IV<sup>9</sup> <sup>8</sup>                      ii<sup>9</sup> <sup>8</sup> <sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup> <sub>4</sub>                      I

5.4                      5.5                      5.6                      5.7                      6.1

E I                      IV<sub>3</sub><sup>6</sup> I                      IV I                      V<sub>45</sub><sup>9</sup> vi<sup>7</sup>                      vi<sub>2</sub><sup>4</sup> IV                      ii<sup>9</sup> <sup>8</sup> <sub>2</sub> <sup>6</sup> <sub>4</sub>                      I                      ii<sup>7</sup> <sub>3</sub><sup>6</sup>                      IV

6.2                      6.3                      6.4                      6.5                      6.6

I<sub>3</sub><sup>6</sup>                      ii<sup>7</sup> vi<sub>2</sub><sup>6</sup>                      ii<sub>2</sub><sup>6</sup>                      I                      iv                      G: ii<sup>7</sup>                      V<sub>4</sub><sup>7</sup> <sub>5</sub>                      I                      IV<sub>4</sub><sup>7</sup> <sub>3</sub> <sup>6</sup> <sub>5</sub>                      vii<sup>9</sup>                      vi<sub>3</sub><sup>6</sup>                      ii<sup>7</sup>                      iii<sub>3</sub><sup>4</sup>                      E: i                      iv<sup>7</sup>                      v<sub>4</sub><sup>7</sup> <sub>3</sub>                      I                      <sup>6</sup> <sub>2</sub> <sub>4</sub>                      <sup>7</sup> <sub>5</sub>                      <sup>6</sup> <sub>2</sub> <sub>4</sub>                      <sup>5</sup> <sub>3</sub>                      ii<sub>5</sub><sup>6</sup>



6a.11

6a.12

6a.13

6a.14

6a.15

C-Aeolian

A musical score for piano in C-Aeolian mode, spanning five measures (6a.11-6a.15). The score is written in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody in the treble clef consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

LP

Example 3.5. Symphony No. 5, first movement, bars 12.10–13.2, roman numeral analysis.

A musical score for piano in 4/4 time, showing Roman numeral analysis for bars 12.10 through 13.2. The score is in G major. The analysis is as follows:

12.10	12.11	12.12	12.13	12.14	12.15	12.16	12.17	12.18	12.19	13.1	13.2
Bb: I	IV <sup>9</sup>	8	ii <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>	iii <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>	iii <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>	iii <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>	iii <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>	iii <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>	iii <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>	I	I
			G: iv <sub>6</sub> <sup>9</sup>								

Example 3.6. Symphony No. 5, first movement, bars 14.1–16.8, modal analysis.

A musical score for piano in G-Aeolian mode, spanning eight measures (14.1-16.8). The score is written in a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody in the treble clef features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

14.7

14.8

14.9

14.10

14.11

14.12

G–Aeolian

E $\flat$ –Aeolian

D–Aeolian

Musical score for measures 14.7-14.12. The score is written for piano in a 3/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music is divided into three systems: measures 14.7-14.8 (G–Aeolian), 14.9-14.10 (E $\flat$ –Aeolian), and 14.11-14.12 (D–Aeolian). The right hand features a melodic line with some rests, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

14.13

14.14

14.15

15.1

15.2

15.3

D–Aeolian

F–Aeolian

Musical score for measures 14.13-15.3. The score is written for piano in a 3/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats. The music is divided into two systems: measures 14.13-14.15 (D–Aeolian) and measures 15.1-15.3 (F–Aeolian). The right hand has a melodic line with some rests, and the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

15.4

15.5

15.6

15.7

15.8

15.9

F–Aeolian

C–Lydian/D–Mixolydian

F–Aeolian

Musical score for measures 15.4-15.9. The score is written for piano in a 3/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats. The music is divided into two systems: measures 15.4-15.6 (F–Aeolian) and measures 15.7-15.9 (C–Lydian/D–Mixolydian and F–Aeolian). The right hand has a melodic line with some rests, and the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

15.10

15.11

15.12

16.1

16.2

F–Aeolian

C–Lydian/D–Mixolydian

F–Aeolian

C–Lydian/D–Mixolydian

Musical score for measures 15.10-16.2. The score is written for piano in a 3/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats. The music is divided into two systems: measures 15.10-15.12 (F–Aeolian) and measures 16.1-16.2 (F–Aeolian and C–Lydian/D–Mixolydian). The right hand has a melodic line with some rests, and the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

16.3                      16.4                      16.5                      16.6                      16.7                      16.8

F–Aeolian                      C–Lydian/D–Mixolydian

**Example 3.7.** Symphony No. 5, first movement, bars 3.8–3.12, modal analysis.

3.8                      3.9                      3.10                      3.11                      3.12

F–Aeolian

**Example 3.8.** Symphony No. 5, fourth movement, bars 13.1–14.10, modal analysis.

13.1                      13.2                      13.3                      13.4                      13.5                      13.6

13.7

13.8

13.9

13.10

C-Lydian/D-Mixolydian

13.11

13.12

13.13

14.1

14.2

C-Lydian/D-Mixolydian

14.3

14.4

14.5

14.6

C-Lydian/D-Mixolydian

C-Ionian/D-Dorian

14.7

14.8

14.9

14.10

C-Ionian/D-Dorian

**Example 3.9.** Symphony No. 5, fourth movement, bars 14.11–15.10, modal analysis.

14.11                      14.12                      14.13                      14.14                      14.15                      14.16

C-Ionian/D-Dorian

15.1                      15.2                      15.3                      15.4                      15.5

C-Ionian/D-Dorian → D-Ionian

15.6                      15.7                      15.8                      15.9                      15.10

D-Ionian

**Example 3.10.** Symphony No. 5, fourth movement, bars 15.11–18.9.

15.11

15.12

15.13

15.14

15.15

15.16

Musical score for bars 15.11–15.16. The score is in 2/4 time and D major. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass staff. The melody in the treble staff consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes.

16.1

16.2

16.3

16.4

16.5

16.6

Musical score for bars 16.1–16.6. The score continues in 2/4 time and D major. The piano accompaniment features a treble staff with chords and a bass staff with a melodic line. A large brace spans across the bottom of the bass staff from bar 16.3 to 16.6, indicating a specific performance instruction or fingering.

16.7

16.8

16.9

16.10

17.1

17.2

Musical score for bars 16.7–17.2. The score continues in 2/4 time and D major. The piano accompaniment features a treble staff with chords and a bass staff with a melodic line. The bass staff has a large brace from bar 16.7 to 17.2, similar to the one in the previous system.

17.3

17.4

17.5

17.6

17.7

17.8

Musical score for measures 17.3 through 17.8. The score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef system. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines. Measure 17.8 ends with a fermata over a whole note chord.

17.9

17.10

17.11

18.1

18.2

18.3

Musical score for measures 17.9 through 18.3. The score continues from the previous system. The right hand features more complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The left hand maintains a steady accompaniment with chords and moving lines. Measure 18.3 ends with a fermata over a whole note chord.

18.4

18.5

18.6

18.7

18.8

18.9

Musical score for measures 18.4 through 18.9. The score continues from the previous system. The right hand has a melodic line with some grace notes and slurs. The left hand provides a consistent accompaniment. Measure 18.9 ends with a fermata over a whole note chord.

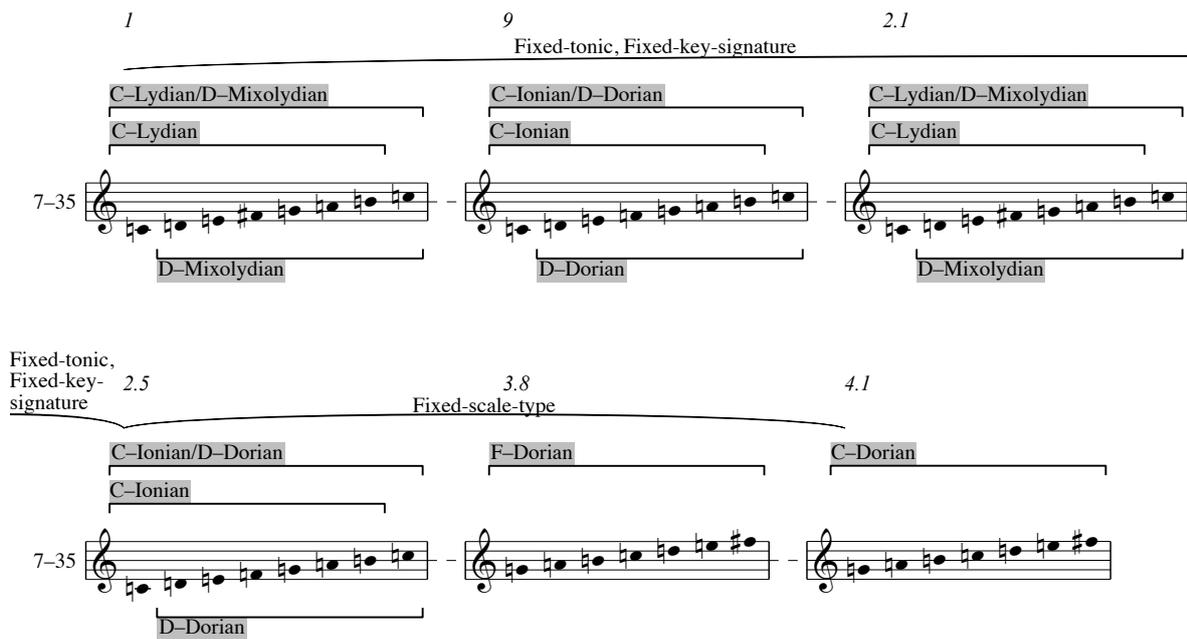
Figure 3.1. Symphony No. 5, first movement, different configurations of the main theme.

The musical score for Figure 3.1 is organized into three main sections, each with numbered measures:

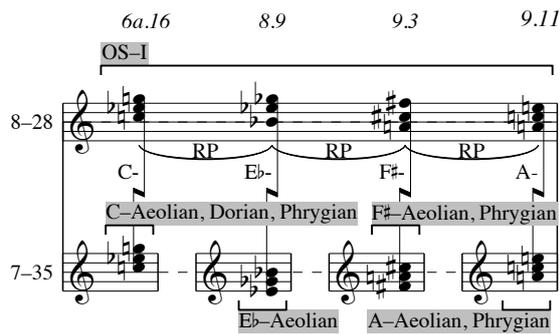
- Section 1:** Measures 1-9, 1.1-1.4, 1.4-2.1, and 2.1-2.5.
- Section 2:** Measures 2.5-2.9.
- Section 3:** Measures 3.1-3.7.

The score is written in G major and 4/4 time. It features various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Some measures contain triplets, indicated by a '3' and a bracket. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

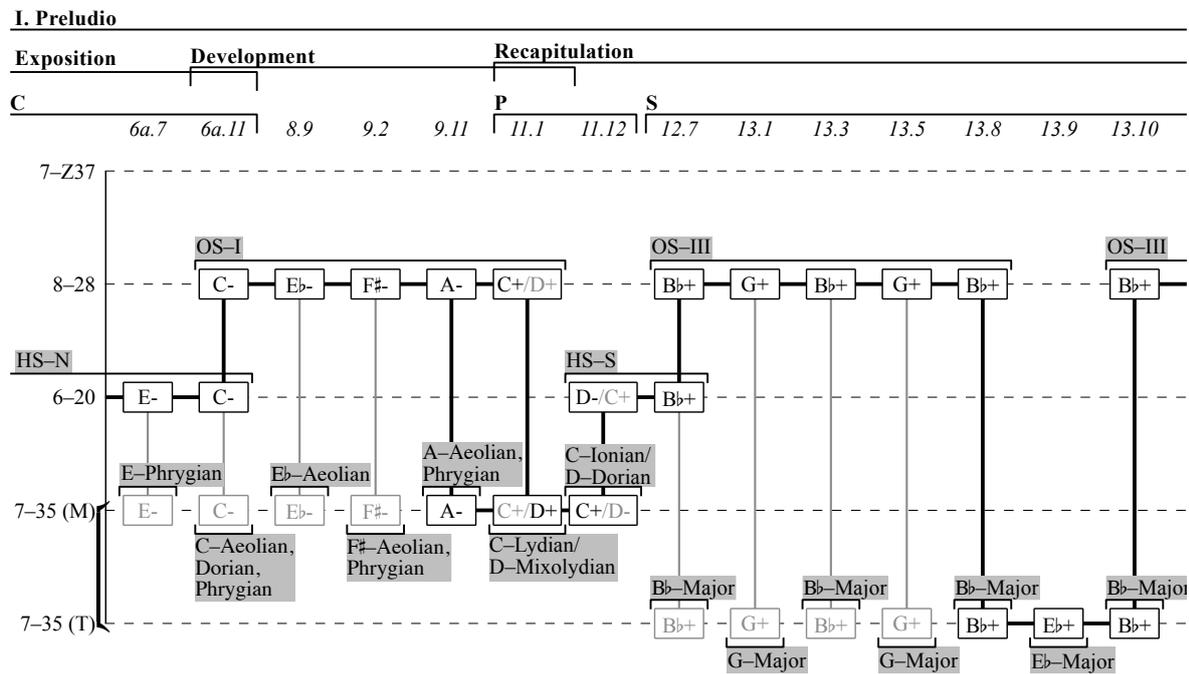
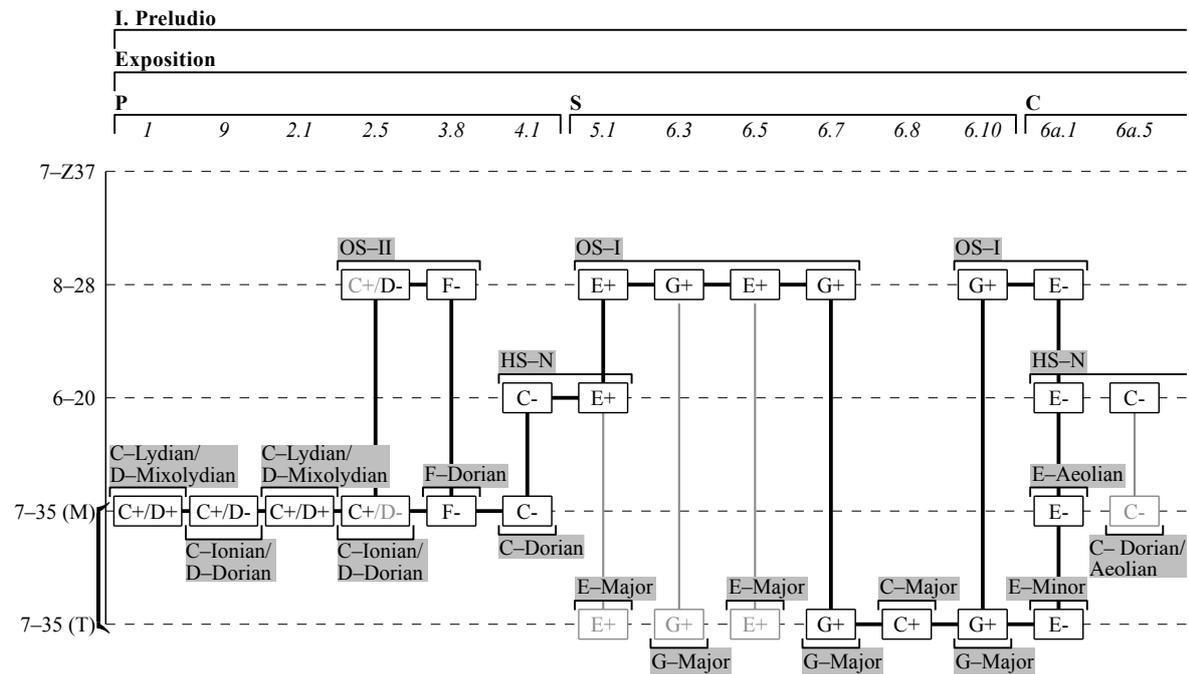
**Figure 3.2.** Symphony No. 5, first movement, exposition modal map.

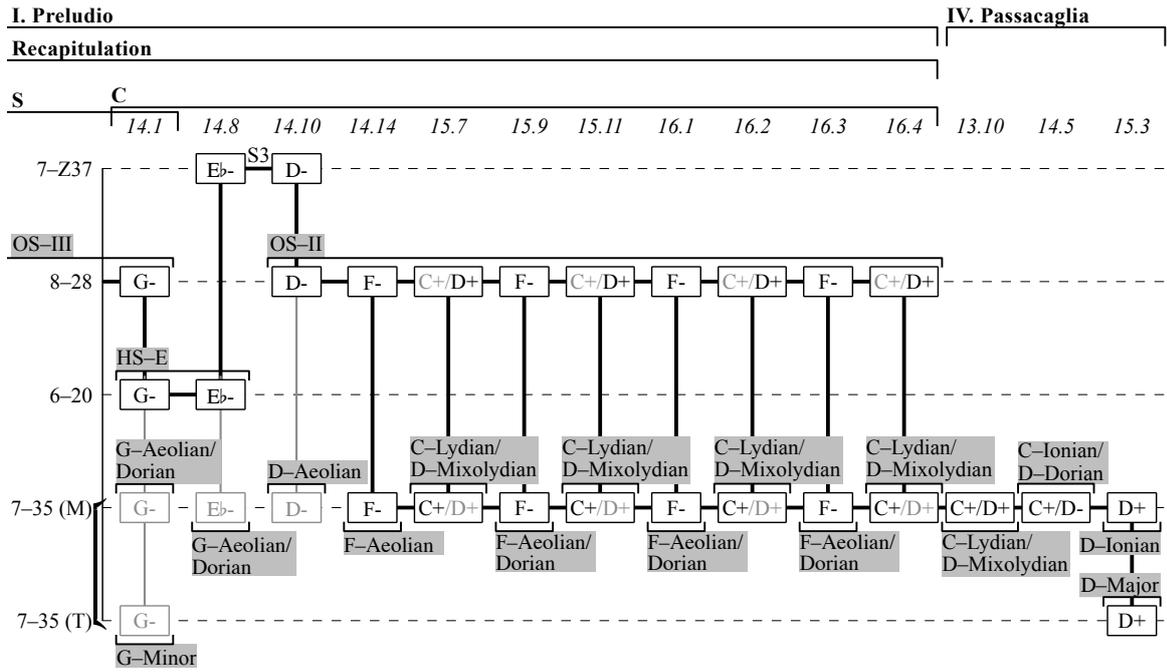


**Figure 3.3.** Symphony No. 5, first movement, bars 6a.16–9.11, harmonic map.



**Figure 3.4.** Symphony No. 5, background harmonic map.





## 4. Natural Theology and the *Sinfonia Antartica*

**Example 4.1.** *Sinfonia Antartica* epigraphs.

### **Prelude: Andante maestoso**

*To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent...  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This... is to be  
Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.*

Shelley: *Prometheus Unbound*

### **Scherzo: Moderato**

*There go the ships,  
and there is that Leviathan:  
whom thou hast made to take his pastime therein.*

Psalm 104 (BCP)

### **Landscape: Lento**

*Ye Ice-falls! ye that from the mountain's brow  
Adown enormous ravines slope amain—  
Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice,  
And stopped at once amid their maddest plunge!  
Motionless torrents! silent cataracts!*

Coleridge: *Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of the Chamouni*

### **Intermezzo: Andante sostenuto**

*Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,  
Not hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.*

Donne: *The Sun Rising*

### **Epilogue: Alla Marcia, moderato (non troppo allegro)**

*I do not regret this journey... We took risks, we knew we took  
them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have  
no cause for complaint.*

Captain Scott's Last Journal

**Example 4.2.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 1–5.5, harmonic analysis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E<sub>b</sub>-
G+
A<sub>b</sub>-
G+
B<sub>b</sub>-
D+
E<sub>b</sub>-

8 9 10 1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4

C<sub>b</sub>+
G+
A<sub>b</sub>-
G+
B<sub>b</sub>-
D+
E<sub>b</sub>-

1.5 1.6 1.7 1.8 1.9 1.10 2.1

B-
A-
D<sub>b</sub>+
D-
F-
F-
A+

2.2

2.3

2.4

2.5

2.6

2.7

2.8

Musical score for measures 2.2 through 2.8. The score is written for piano with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is B-flat major. The melody is in the right hand, and the accompaniment is in the left hand. The notes are as follows:

- 2.2: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.3: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.4: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.5: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.6: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.7: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.8: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2

Chord symbols below the staff: Bb-, A+, Bb-, F#, D-, F-, Ab-

2.9

2.10

2.11

3.1

3.2

3.3

3.4

3.5

Musical score for measures 2.9 through 3.5. The score is written for piano with a grand staff. The key signature is B-flat major. The notes are as follows:

- 2.9: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.10: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 2.11: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 3.1: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 3.2: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 3.3: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 3.4: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 3.5: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2

Chord symbols below the staff: Cb-, D-, F-, Ab-, Cb+, D-, F-, Fb+

3.6

3.7

3.8

4.1

4.2

4.3

4.4

4.5

Musical score for measures 3.6 through 4.5. The score is written for piano with a grand staff. The key signature is B-flat major. The notes are as follows:

- 3.6: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 3.7: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 3.8: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 4.1: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 4.2: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 4.3: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 4.4: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2
- 4.5: Treble: G4, A4, B4; Bass: G2, A2, B2

Chord symbols below the staff: G#-, Eb-, C-, Ab-, G+, Ab-

4.6 4.7 4.8 4.9

B+ Eb+ G+

4.10 4.11

Ab- G+

4.12 5.1 5.2 5.3 5.4 5.5

Ab- G+ Ab- G+

**Example 4.3.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 1–7, harmonic analysis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E $\flat$ - G+ A $\flat$ - G+ B $\flat$ - D+ E $\flat$ -

**Example 4.4.** Comparison of hexatonic poles in *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 1–2 and *A Sea Symphony*, first movement, bars 1–5.

1 2

E $\flat$ - H G+

1 2 3 4 5

B $\flat$ - H D+

**Example 4.5.** Comparison of slide transformations in *Sinfonia Antartica*, fifth movement, bars 16.1–16.6 and *Symphony No. 6*, fourth movement, bars 11.1–11.11.

16.1 16.2

6 7 6 6 6

G+ S1 A $\flat$ - S1

16.3 16.4

S1 S1 S1

G+ Ab-

16.5 16.6

S1 S1 S1

G+ Ab-

11.1 11.2 11.3 11.4 11.5

D#+ E- D#+ E- D#+

11.6 11.7 11.8 11.9 11.10 11.11

E- D#+ E- D#+ E- D#+ E-

Example 4.6. *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 5.6–6.8, set-class analysis.

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of *Sinfonia Antartica*, focusing on bars 5.6 through 6.8. The score is presented in a grand staff format, with treble, middle, and bass clefs. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Two specific set classes are highlighted with shaded boxes and labeled '4-19'. The first '4-19' set class is located in the treble clef of bar 5.6, and the second is in the middle clef of bar 5.6. A large shaded area covers the right side of the score, encompassing bars 5.8 and 6.1, indicating a continuation of the set-class analysis. The page number '9-8' is printed at the bottom right of the score.

6.2

6.3

6.4

6.5

6.6

6.7 6.8

**Example 4.7.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 7.3–8.5, set-class analysis.

7.3 7.4 7.5 7.6 7.7

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system, labeled with measure numbers 7.8 through 7.12, features a treble staff with a melodic line containing triplets and slurs, and a bass staff with a more rhythmic accompaniment. The second system, labeled with measure numbers 7.13 through 8.5, continues the melodic line in the treble staff and introduces a more complex bass line with slurs and dynamic markings. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4.

**Example 4.8.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 8.14–9.3, set-class analysis.

8.14

4-19 4-18 4-19

4-19 4-18 4-19

4-19 4-18 4-19

8.15

4-18 4-19 4-18

4-18 4-19 4-18

4-18 4-19 4-18

8.16

4-18 4-18 4-18

4-18 4-18 4-18

4-18 4-18 4-18

8.17

4-19 4-18 4-19

4-18 4-19

8.18

4-18 4-18

4-18 4-19 4-18

9.1

4-18 4-18 4-20 4-18 4-20

4-18 4-20 4-18 4-20

9.2

4-20      4-18      4-18

4-20      4-18      4-18

9.3

4-18      4-18      4-18

4-18      4-18      4-18

**Example 4.9.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, third movement, bars 4.1–5.1, 5.8–5.15, harmonic analysis.

4.1      4.2      4.3      4.4      4.5

Db+   Cb+   Db+      A+   Eb+      Db+   B+      Db+   A+   Eb+      F+   G+

4.6 4.7 4.8 4.9

E+ G+ Bb+ A+ G+ E+ Gb+ A-

4.10 4.11 5.1

Ab- F# Ab- F#

5.8 5.9 5.10 5.11

Eb+ Db+ Eb+ B+ F+



9.3 9.4

Db+ Cb+ Db+ Bbb+

9.5 9.6

Eb+ F+ G+

9.7 9.8 9.9

E+ G+ Bb+ A+ G+ E+ G+

10.1 10.2 10.3

E+ Gb+ A- Gb+ A-

10.4 10.5 10.6

Ab- Gb- Ab- Gb- Cb+ F+

10.7 10.8 10.9

Eb+ Db+ Eb+ Cb+ F+



Example 4.12. *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 13.12–14.12, modal analysis.

13.12      13.13      13.14      13.15      13.16      13.17      13.18

A-Mixolydian/G-Lydian

13.19      13.20      13.21      13.22      13.23      13.24

C#-Aeolian      C#-Aeolian

13.25      14.1      14.2      14.3      14.4      14.5

C#-Aeolian      C#-Aeolian

14.6 14.7 14.8 14.9

C#-Aeolian E-Lydian/B-Ionian

14.10 14.11 14.12

E-Lydian/B-Ionian E-Lydian/B-Ionian E-Lydian/B-Ionian

**Example 4.13.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, fifth movement, bars 17.1–18.12.

17.1 17.2 17.3 17.4 17.5 17.6 17.7

Soprano

17.8 17.9 17.10

Voices

17.11 18.1 18.2 18.3 18.4

18.5 18.6 18.7 18.8 18.9 18.10 18.11 18.12

Figure 4.1. Sinfonia Antartica, first movement, bars 1–5.3, harmonic map.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

7-37z

8-28

6-20

7-35

G+ Ab- G+ D+ Eb-

G+ Bb- G+

Eb- G+ Bb- D+ Eb- B+

S1 S1 PRP PLP L PL

9 10 1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 1.5 1.6

1.7 1.8 1.9 2.1 2.2 2.3 2.4 2.5

2.6 2.7 2.8 2.9 2.10 2.11 3.1 3.2

3.3 3.4 3.5 3.6 3.7 4.1 4.2 4.4

7-37z  
8-28  
6-20  
7-35

PRP LP F- E+ S1  
D- LP F- E+ G# L LP  
E+ G# C- LP Ab-  
G# Eb- LP Ab- S1

4.5 4.6 4.7 4.9 4.10 4.11 4.12 5.1

7-37z  
8-28  
6-20  
7-35

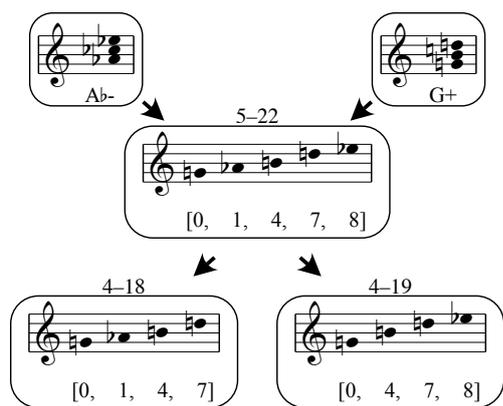
S1 Ab- B+ R  
Ab- B+ LP LP G+  
G+ S1 Ab- S1 G+ S1 Ab- S1 G+ S1

5.2 5.3

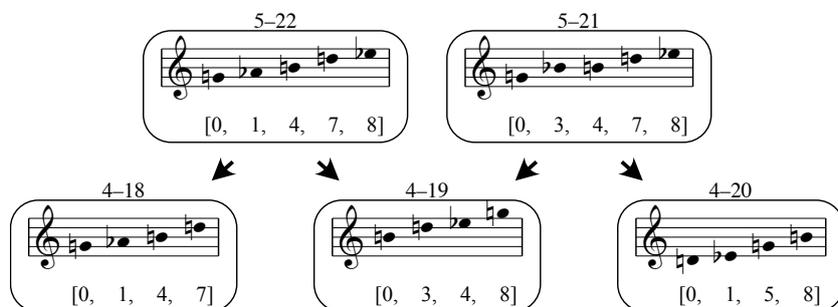
7-37z  
8-28  
6-20  
7-35

S1 Ab- G+ S1

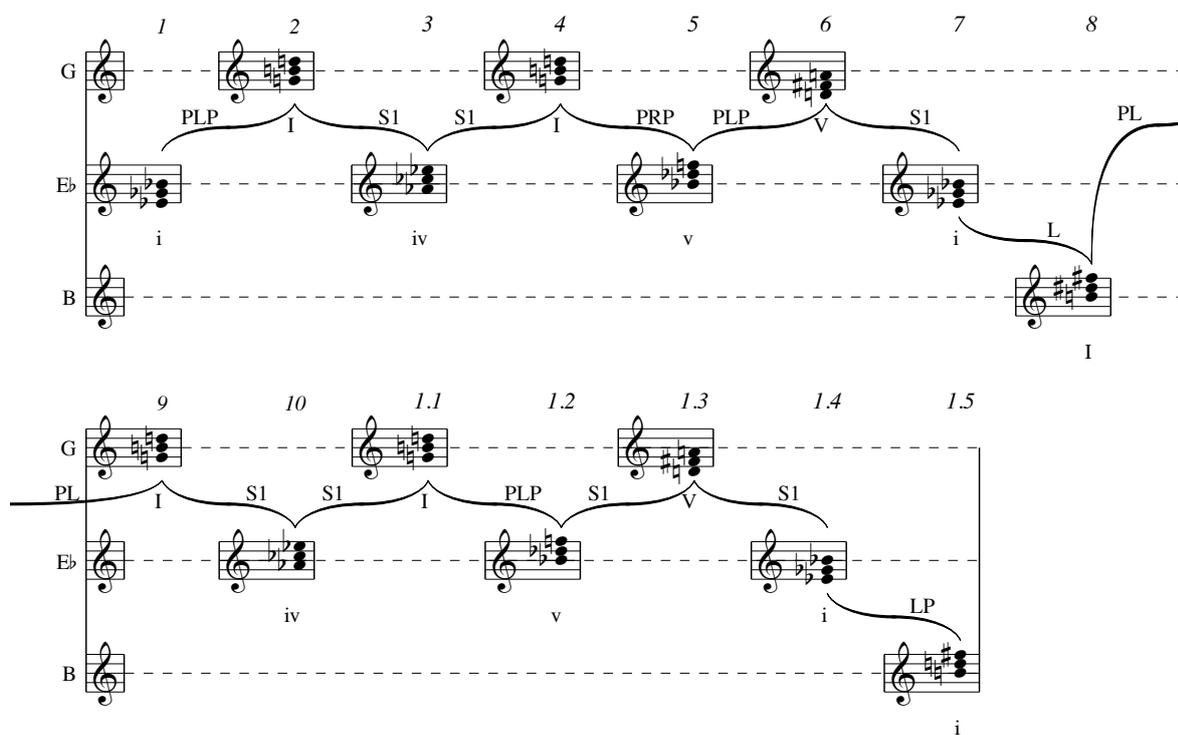
**Figure 4.2.** Set-class 5-22: derivation from triads and important subsets.



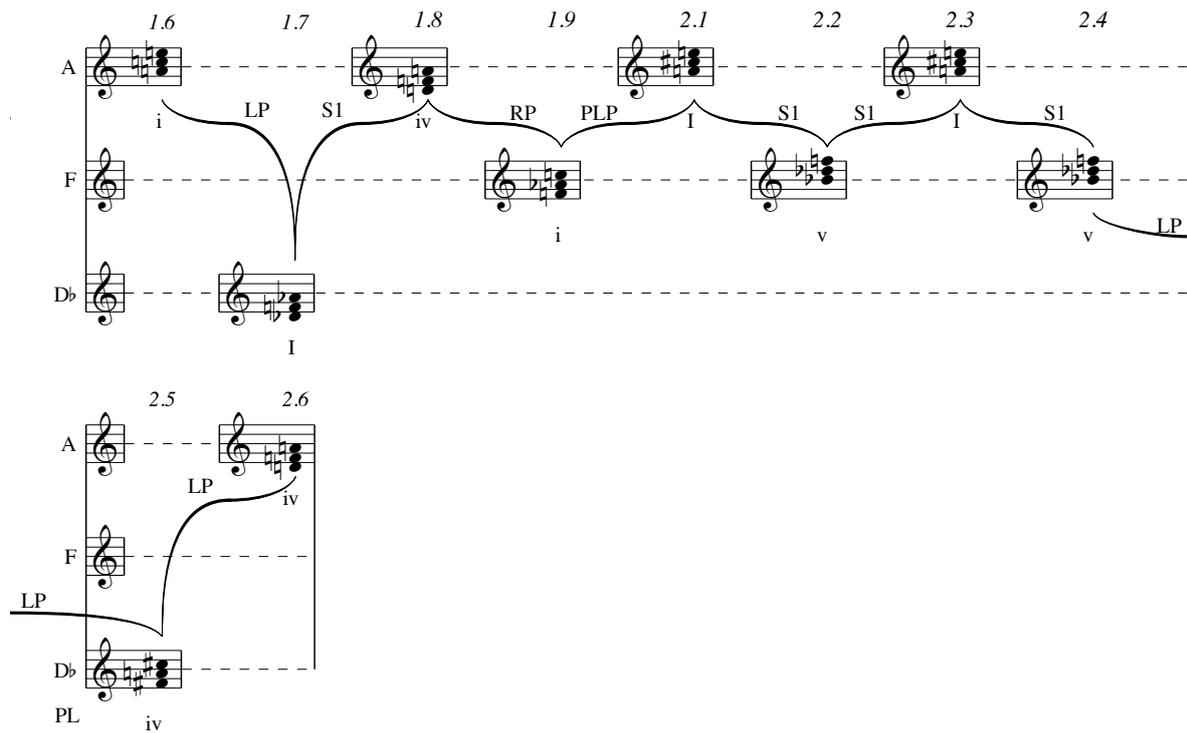
**Figure 4.3.** 5-22 and 5-21: comparison of their properties and subsets



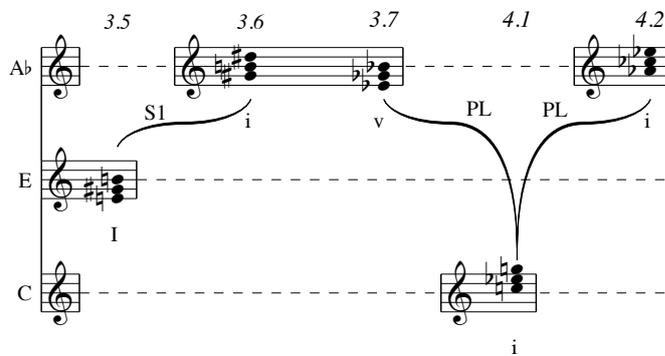
**Figure 4.4.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 1–1.5, orbital tonality map.



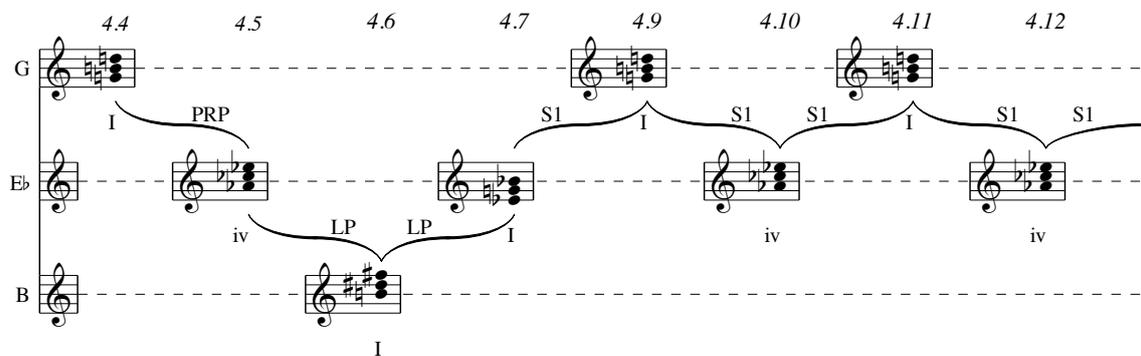
**Figure 4.5.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 1.6–2.5, orbital tonality map.



**Figure 4.6.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 3.5–4.2, orbital tonality map.



**Figure 4.7.** *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 4.4–5.1, orbital tonality map.





**Figure 4.9.** Comparison of root resources in *Sinfonia Antartica*, first movement, bars 1–7 with *Sinfonia Antartica*, third movement, bars 9.4–9.6.

$E_b^-$     $G^+$     $A_b^-$     $G^+$     $B_b^-$     $D^+$     $E_b^-$

5-20

[0, 1, 5, 6, 8]  
Ic Vector: [211231]

$D_b^+$     $C_b^+$     $D_b^+$     $A^+$     $E_b^+$     $F^+$     $G^+$

6-35

[0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10]  
Ic Vector: [060603]

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## Notes on Vaughan Williams's Letters

When referencing Vaughan Williams's personal correspondence I have, wherever possible, used letters published in Hugh Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and have cited these in a regular manner. In three cases, on page sixty-seven, this was not possible since the relevant letters are not published in this book; in lieu of regular citations, I have cited the letters as they appear in the Vaughan Williams Foundation online database (<https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/discover/letters/>). I have provided the relevant URL in the footnote reference for each individual letter, along with the letter's date, title, author, and recipient. In accordance with the foundation's copyright statement, I have not reproduced any of the material cited from this source.

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