

Spiritual Narratives in Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 132

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What makes a story Buddhist or Christian, Hindu or Sikh? Is explicitly religious language necessary, or can the shape of a narrative suggest the paradigms of a particular faith? In literary studies both options are valid; for example, characters who willingly submit to unjust suffering for the sake of others are often seen as Christ figures, not only in works such as *The Power and the Glory*, in which Christian themes are prominent, but also in ones such as *A Separate Peace*, in which they are either submerged or absent.

In music the same issues play out, but at a higher level of abstraction. Listeners have long heard spiritual resonances in Beethoven's music—especially in the late music, and especially in the late quartets; these resonances have been explored particularly deeply by J. W. N. Sullivan, Martin Cooper, and Maynard Solomon.¹ In some cases scholars have focused on discrete musical features, showing how they function as signifiers that point to specifically religious concepts.² But it is also possible

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¹ J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927); Martin Cooper, *Beethoven: The Last Decade, 1817–1827* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); and Maynard Solomon, *Late Beethoven: Music, Thought, Imagination*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

² Warren Kirkendale, "New Roads to Old Ideas in Beethoven's *Missa solennis*," *Musical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1970): 665–701; and William Kinderman, "Beethoven's Symbol for the Deity in the *Missa solennis* and the Ninth Symphony," *19th-Century Music* 9, no. 2 (1985): 102–18.

to focus on the shape of an unfolding narrative. This is the approach taken here, an approach that listens for correspondences of narrative shape between stories of formal process in music and stories of a religion's understanding of the world. Beethoven's Quartet in A minor, op. 132, will reward this kind of inquiry because of the notoriously stark contrasts among the movements. Their radically different narrative shapes resist interpretation within the confines of a single religious tradition, prompting us to retrace some of the paths explored by Beethoven both in his Tagebuch of 1812–1818 and beyond, and in so doing to discover more about how the varied spiritual perspectives that captured his imagination may have found musical expression.³ Through the correlation of two kinds of stories—musical and spiritual—it will become possible to hear the quartet enacting narratives about the fundamental nature of life and being.

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The patient is recovering nicely, or so the heading of the Heiliger Dankgesang would have us believe: he (presumably) is a convalescent. But close attention to formal process reveals a very different story. Over the course of the movement the primary formal and thematic material undergoes a progressive dissolution that is never reversed; the Heiliger Dankgesang does not end with a restoration of its material to an original form but rather with its unraveling, and at the end the music seems to be losing itself, with floating motivic fragments untethered not only from form and theme but also from the norms of harmony and counterpoint. It is as if the music is enacting its own death.

The Lydian hymn material occurs three times, and each return brings with it a loss of structural integrity.⁴ The first section (mm. 1–30) is marked by a clear textural separation between imitative interludes moving in quarter notes and homophonic chorale phrases moving in half notes, with abrupt transitions in all four voices at once.⁵ This is the intact, original

³ Maynard Solomon, "Beethoven's Tagebuch," in *Beethoven Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 233–95; and Solomon, *Late Beethoven*. For narrative readings in light of the Tagebuch, both of which use generalizing frameworks (spiritual pilgrimage and myth) see Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, ch. 9; and Birgit Lodes, "'So träumte mir, ich reiste . . . nach Indien': Temporality and Mythology in Op. 127/I," in *The String Quartets of Beethoven*, ed. William Kinderman (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 168–213. I move beyond these precedents in looking at details of individual religious traditions and in considering Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*.

⁴ Eric McKee calls attention to a similar process of dissolution in the appearances of the maestoso material in the first movement of op. 127. Eric McKee, "Alternative Meanings in the First Movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in E♭ Major, Op. 127: Emergence and Growth from Stagnation and Decline," *Theory and Practice* 24 (1999): 1–27.

⁵ Readers who wish to follow the details of my argument will need a copy of the score with numbered measures.

form of the hymn section, the point of departure for the process of dissolution, and it includes a complete statement of the chorale melody.

The second hymn section (mm. 84–114) is a direct variation on the first, both melodically and harmonically;⁶ in terms of texture, though, the original arrangement is beginning to dissolve.⁷ Although there are still clear alternations between the exclusive use of imitative counterpoint and statements of the chorale phrases, now the chorale is present only in the first violin, the lower voices continuing with the more contrapuntal material of the chorale prelude's ritornellos.

In the final hymn section (mm. 168–211) imitative counterpoint pervades the texture completely; the chorale, formerly appearing in its entirety, has been reduced to only its first phrase—and then often only fragments of the first phrase—and the chorale itself is now treated imitatively. Joseph Kerman and Daniel Chua have noted the basic process governing the three hymn sections;⁸ to put it somewhat more pointedly than they did, the basic block of material as initially constituted in the first section is passing out of being. The textural division dissolves and the hymn tune dissolves; even conventional harmony and counterpoint seem to dissolve, judging by the strange harmonic progressions and dissonances.

Byron Almén, drawing on James Jakób Liszka and Northrop Frye, has developed a theory of narrative in music that helpfully illuminates the interpretation of the Heiliger Dankgesang being developed here.⁹ Following Liszka, Almén understands narrative in terms of the outcome of a conflict between a transgression and an order-imposing hierarchy, and he uses Frye's four narrative archetypes (romance, tragedy, irony, and comedy) to represent four possible scenarios based on two variables: 1) whether the primary focus is the transgression or the hierarchy; and 2) whether the conflict ends in victory or defeat. In Almén's view, narrative is never an objective attribute of the score because both variables depend on the perspective of an observer: personal judgment is required to answer the questions of where primary attention is given and how the outcome is understood.

In the present reading—at least as developed so far—the Heiliger Dankgesang is a tragedy. The process of formal dissolution is in conflict with the high rank value given to the intact and recognizable return of primary thematic material, and the thematic material succumbs entirely to the process of dissolution. In a romance (in which a hierarchy defeats

⁶ Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 258.

⁷ Daniel K. L. Chua, *The "Galitzin" Quartets of Beethoven: Opp. 127, 132, 130* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 75.

⁸ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 256–58, 260; and Chua, *"Galitzin" Quartets*, 143, 146.

⁹ Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

a transgression) the eventual return of the main thematic material in re-constituted form would signal a hero's victory over some form of adversity, whether external or internal. In this movement, however, the dissolution is never reversed, and this results in a tragic narrative: the hymn sections are defeated, unable to fulfill their normal function as primary material.

Almén's detailed approach also features other helpful parameters. Again following Liszka, Almén draws a contrast between agential and actantial levels, the former having to do with discrete features of the music and the latter with their interaction and development over time;¹⁰ the present reading focuses on the actantial level, concerned with the fate of a single block of material and not, for example, with conflicts among themes. And in terms of what Almén calls discursive strategy, the shape of the story is one of emergence, characterized by a gradual, inexorable process and not by sudden reversals.¹¹

Almén's use of the four narrative archetypes is helpful in part because it allows for variety in what he calls rhetorical mode, a term for the way in which the analyst connects the narrative archetypes with the larger, extramusical world; among other possibilities, narratives can take place within an individual psyche, among individuals, or among social groups.¹² The choice among these options is strongly influenced by the interpreter's perspective, though Almén points out that narratives that unfold in actantial terms are particularly well suited to intrapsychic narratives, whereas interpersonal narratives are a more obvious choice when agential "theme-actors" play roles similar to characters in a literary work. As the *Heiliger Dankgesang* lacks dynamic interplay among themes, it lends itself to being heard as a tragedy of an individual's dissolution or, more specifically, an individual's death. An initial pointer toward the more specific reading is the scenario described by the movement's heading. The movement makes no sense as a response to mild illness, and the topic of serious illness brings with it associations of death, drawing death into the conceptual space opened by the heading.¹³ But sickness and death are not the heading's sole concerns; it also makes explicit reference to spirituality and the divine, and this resonates strongly with a second narrative strand that runs through the *Heiliger Dankgesang*, in parallel with—and sometimes in conjunction with—the tragic narrative.

Throughout the movement, references to the spiritual become increasingly pervasive and intense, suggesting a comic narrative, the type

¹⁰ Ibid., 55–57, 74.

¹¹ Ibid., 188, 195.

¹² Ibid., 41, 162–63.

¹³ The contravening evidence of the stated convalescence does not concern me greatly, as, with the Jungians, I believe that narratives of the sort I trace are often particularly potent below the surface of conscious thought.

in which a transgression defeats an order-enforcing hierarchy. The victory of the spiritual is quite clear. Though references to the spiritual are present from the start, they conspicuously increase in prominence both by their quantity and by their salience, and they eventually take over the discourse, breaking out of the confines of their initial appearance in a conventional hymn. (The incremental nature of this process is a point of contact with the tragedy, as both employ discursive strategies of emergence.) Just why the spiritual should be identified with the transgression in this case requires more discussion.¹⁴ Simply and directly, the spiritual does in this movement break out of the limits that the style usually imposes. But the more important reason for seeing the narrative as comic is that the spiritual references undergo change that is both highly salient and unidirectional. If the spiritual did not markedly increase in the movement, the narrative of the spiritual could be considered a minimally dramatic romance in which the hierarchy (here represented by the spiritual) met no significant challenges. Or if the overall shape were a descent followed by a return (a high–low–high trajectory for the spiritual references) it could be seen as a romance in which the spiritual (again in the position of the hierarchy) was challenged but then regained its dominant position.¹⁵ But the dramatic increase in the prominence of the spiritual references over the course of the movement suggests an overall improvement of fortune, and this fits best with the comic archetype.

The two narrative patterns in the *Heiliger Dankgesang* do not simply coexist independently; instead they combine to form a meaningful whole. The tragic narrative is one of dissolution, of a passing out of being that is tied to an inability to satisfy conventional expectations. And the comic narrative is about the ascendancy of the spiritual, with a specific emphasis on transcendence. The combination of these narratives yields spiritual transcendence that is closely linked to dissolution and failure in worldly terms. Given that this narrative pattern is prominent in many of the world's religious traditions, it would seem that the combination of these particular forms of tragic and comic narrative archetypes may itself approach archetypality; it is certainly more than a chance conjunction in this one movement of Beethoven.¹⁶

¹⁴ If the spiritual is identified with the hierarchy, the victory of the hierarchy makes the narrative a romance.

¹⁵ For Almén, these questions are a matter of what he calls narrative phases; each narrative archetype contains a spectrum of phase, based on nearness to other closely related archetypes. In this case the first option (minimal conflict) would be a comic romance, whereas the second (strong conflict) would be a tragic romance. See Almén, *Musical Narrative*, 165–68.

¹⁶ Robert Hatten's narratives of spiritual abnegation are related to this kind of conjoined narrative. See Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

In tracing the conjoined narrative I will focus on the comic narrative but also point out the most significant points of intersection and interaction with the tragic narrative. Though the topical signifiers on which the analysis rests are for the most part straightforward, they do not have the same level of objectivity found in the analysis of the form. For this reason, the discussion will draw extensively on the secondary literature. The intent is to demonstrate that this interpretation does not advance an entirely new hearing but rather brings a new perspective to hearings that have been widespread in critical responses to the quartet.¹⁷

The initial hymn section sets the tone with a relatively overt, if dense, network of meanings. To a listener of Beethoven's day this music is clearly identified as a chorale: beyond the homophonic melody in equal note values, both the extremely slow (even unsingable) tempo and the textural alternation of hymn lines and interludes fit the norms of congregational singing at the time, and the use of a church mode, though hardly ubiquitous, was a standard option.¹⁸ Each of these features carries meaning beyond simply pointing to the congregational chorale. The combination of slow tempo, soft dynamics, and hymnlike texture can indicate contemplation or transcendence, as Robert Hatten has argued.¹⁹ The interludes and the tempo furthermore turn the hymn into an object of mediated contemplation, the interludes by creating a distancing frame, and the tempo by separating the hymn from any other genre of sung music, also imparting monumentality to the chorale.²⁰ This particular instance of Lydian writing could be perceived in multiple ways—if modal as archaic, if tonal as ambiguous—in either case reinforcing the awareness of distance and otherness while retaining the positive affective associations of the major mode.²¹ What sets this hymn apart from a sung chorale is the fact that the object of contemplation is an object of mystery—the hymn itself is unknown,

¹⁷ In the later movements I shall again rely on secondary literature to support the more hermeneutic points.

¹⁸ Sieghard Brandenburg, "The Historical Background to the 'Heiliger Dankgesang' in Beethoven's A-minor Quartet Op. 132," in *Beethoven Studies* 3, ed. Alan Tyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 173–74, 185–90, 176–77.

¹⁹ Hatten, *Musical Meaning*, 88–89.

²⁰ As one might expect, the glacial tempos—with predominant note values lasting as long as four seconds in one extreme example—were relatively shortlived. Georg Feder, "Decline and Restoration," trans. Reinhard G. Pauly, in *Protestant Church Music: A History*, ed. Friedrich Blume (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 340, 380–81. The extremely slow tempos fit into a general trend to ascribe to the genre "dignified solemnity," this coming from the belief that "its purpose is to induce reverence." Brandenburg, "Historical Background," 173.

²¹ The modal hearing is discussed by Kerman (*Beethoven Quartets*, 257), the tonal hearing by Chua ("*Galitzin*" *Quartets*, 138–41). The alterity of the hymn is emphasized by its ending; it concludes on the dominant of a foreign key that will turn out to be a chromatic mediant, D major.

an original melody.²² A familiar chorale melody would have domesticated the music by pointing toward a known range of meanings and practices; instead the alterity of this spiritual experience is emphasized, much as the alterity of the deity is proclaimed in lines that Beethoven kept on his desk: "I am everything that is, that was, that will be. No mortal man has lifted my veil."²³

One might argue that the "Neue Kraft fühlend" sections undermine my reading by pointing strongly—and explicitly—toward life and vitality. But I would counter that they do so only with a sense of veiling and distance. At different points in both sections, distancing effects are created by trills and registral extremes. The prominent trills frequently noted in late Beethoven create a shimmering frame that destroys any illusion of immediacy, and despite their rapidity and energy they also convey stillness, even immobility, adding to the sense that the action is unfolding at a distance.²⁴ Similarly, the use of registral contrast—whether by placing a melody in an extremely high register or by dispersing it across the entirety of the Beethovenian violin range—significantly undercuts the sense of visceral bodily engagement created by a simple dance with strong accents and syncopations. These sections seem more to reflect on vitality and strength than to participate in them.²⁵

The expansion of the contrapuntal texture into the chorale statements in the second hymn section has already been noted; though accompanying the hymn tune with contrapuntal lower voices was a standard option for later verses of a chorale,²⁶ the abandonment of homophonic texture nonetheless increases the distance between this passage and the most normative experience of singing a hymn. That distance is further increased by the range of the melody; in the first hymn section the melody sat comfortably within the typical ambitus of the chorale, and now it lies an octave higher. Hatten has observed that the use of high register can suggest a reference to the transcendent, and William Kinderman has argued persuasively for Beethoven's use of high register to reference the heavens in the *Missa solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony;²⁷ certainly the loss of a normal vocal register widens the sense of disparity

²² Brandenburg makes this point based on the sketch materials (Brandenburg, "Historical Background," 167).

²³ Solomon, *Beethoven Essays*, 225.

²⁴ Charles Rosen, "Ornament and Structure in Beethoven," *Musical Times* 111, no. 1534 (1970): 1201; see also Cooper, *Last Decade*, 424–25.

²⁵ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 254.

²⁶ Brandenburg, "Historical Background," 176.

²⁷ Hatten, *Musical Meaning*; Kinderman, "Symbol for the Deity;" and idem, "Beethoven's Compositional Models for the Choral Finale of the Ninth Symphony," in *Beethoven's Compositional Process*, ed. William Kinderman (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 160–88.

between the music and the everyday world. Given the spiritual associations of imitative counterpoint and the quotidian associations of homophony, it is easy to hear this second, higher and more contrapuntal statement of the hymn material as occupying a higher plane than the first.²⁸

The final hymn section presents the climax of the processes we have been tracing, and from the start the new variation of the imitative motive, marked “Mit innigster Empfindung,” makes clear that what is coming will be an apotheosis characterized by the utmost human tenderness. The music gradually increases in intensity over the first of the final hymn section’s three segments, beginning the first phrase of the hymn tune several times but never completing it; it then backs away for a concluding cadence in measure 182 that seems to pause to regather strength. In the climactic second segment, the first phrase tries to reassert itself with three complete statements, first separately and then in canon. This reassertion comes at tremendous cost. The strain is most evident in the achingly slow notes of the chorale; a sense of physical strain comes through especially in the canon between the first violin and the cello, as the challenges of the slow tempo are intensified by the registral extremes, forte dynamic, and sforzandos. But the more fundamental strains are against the norms of harmony and counterpoint themselves.²⁹ In Chua’s account, “the canon simply does not work: it is utterly wrong, producing an awkward and astringent harmony that flouts almost every law of counterpoint laid down from Fux to Albrechtsberger.”³⁰

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Given the openness of musical reference, it is of course possible that the struggle heard here could be a physical struggle, but considering the spiritual and transcendent associations created most straightforwardly by the heading, the hymn texture, and the use of register, a reading of this music as the climax of some spiritual process seems better grounded. There is no reason, after all, that a transcendent experience of death

²⁸ Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1980), 23; see also Birgit Lodes, “‘When I try, now and then, to give musical form to my turbulent feelings’: The Human and the Divine in the Gloria of Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*,” trans. Glenn Stanley, *Beethoven Forum* 6 (1998): 147.

²⁹ Joseph Kerman, “Beethoven: The Single Journey,” *Hudson Review* 5 (1952): 49.

³⁰ Chua, “*Galitzin*” *Quartets*, 149–50. Among the moments that he notes, particularly salient is measure 189, in which the bass resolves a dissonance to a dissonance, creating a very strange progression of consecutive four-two chords, in the second of which the seventh in the bass is a major seventh. Though the strains become extreme in the canon, they can be traced further back: in measures 187–88 the canon is introduced by the progression F–G₇–F, in which the seventh of the G chord is retained as a common tone into the F chord; and in measure 184, on the first note of the first complete statement of the hymn’s first phrase, what on paper seems to be merely a neighboring dominant within a prevailing F harmony acquires a quality that would seem more at home in Copland or Samuel Barber than in Beethoven.

should be unimpeded by obstacles.³¹ The correlation of features and processes found in this passage is suggestive: the very strange harmony and dissonance treatment work together to shred some of the most foundational principles of standard tonal composition; and these coincide with the reassertion of the first line of the hymn in complete form. For listeners who accept the reference to death, it seems natural to hear this climax as a final moment of struggle, striving vainly to hold on to a vestige of selfhood even as everything about life as it has been known is passing away.

As the music eases out of the climactic canon, Beethoven continues to foil expectations as the movement comes to an end; this is not surprising given the inability of previous hymn sections to reach closure.³² An apparent cadence in C in measure 201 is subverted in measure 202, as an F chord asserts itself as tonic in place of an expected further settling into C harmony, setting a new segment into motion with the rising sixth from the initial ritornello. When the cadence arrives in measure 209, there is no question that this provides the final tonic closure, and given the massive scale of our journey so far, a codetta seems in order—to confirm tonic and to allow the last remaining rhythmic energy to play out, presumably using the rising-sixth motive. But as the motion slows to half notes, staying on tonic harmony, we realize that the codetta is not to be. We have sensed for some time that the end was coming, and yet when it is upon us we are surprised. In the penultimate measure the high register is finally cut loose from the grounding of the cello's low F; the first violin moves up from the F already two octaves above the hymn's starting point, reaching to the striving third of the chord as the quartet plays two chords that could have been half notes but instead use the puzzling ties occasionally found in Beethoven's last works, ties that seem to call the players to full intensity through the note's full value—"hold on, hold on, just a little bit more . . ." The bright third is sublimated into the inner voices in the second of those chords, and the first violin sinks back to its place of completion for the final fermata as the sound seems

³¹ Kerman is dismissive of hearing this movement as a transcendent experience of death, rooting his objection in this final section; speaking of commentators who hear the music this way, he says, "I do not know what they can be hearing at the tremendous climax in the middle [of the section] . . . beside this strength the *Neue Kraft* pales" (Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 260). Certainly the *Neue Kraft* sections refer in some way to bodily vitality and health, but can Kerman be implying that the climax of the final section of the Heiliger Dankgesang suggests even greater vitality? This would seem especially odd given his description of the hymn of thanks as "whispered by a convalescent who has just, and barely, passed a supreme crisis. He still seems to be under oxygen" (*ibid.*, 254). This is music of enormous power, and this suggests some form of strength; but it is not clear that this is bodily strength, nor that this strength is prevailing in any normal sense.

³² Kerman, "Single Journey," 48; and Chua, "*Galitzin*" *Quartets*, 146.

to float away into the ether. Many have heard this ending, with its slowing of motion and extremely high register, as evoking timelessness or eternity;³³ it is this final passage, more than any other, that suggests a “distinct ontological realm,” a “transcendent divine world,”³⁴ that allows us to partake of “Beethoven’s ultimate meta-physical serenity,” that grants us a “foretaste of supernal beauty beyond life itself.”³⁵

My reading of the Heiliger Dankgesang in terms of a transcendent experience of death is rooted in two narrative processes that run through the movement, operating simultaneously and often in conjunction. The more straightforward one is a tragic narrative in which the main formal material of the movement gradually loses its structure. We find here a kind of dissolution that is familiar from earlier Beethoven (though generally applied to a theme rather than to a formal block); in this case, though, the dissolution lacks the expected restatement of the original material in reconstituted form. The second narrative is a comic one in which references to the spiritual become increasingly dense and pervasive, eventually dominating the discourse. Though the narratives operate on different levels, the one dealing with formal process and the other mainly with topic, both lend themselves well to intrapsychic interpretations, eschewing the kind of conflict between themes that so often tends toward interpersonal narratives. Because the tragedy unfolds in relation to conventional expectations of form, and because the specific topical references that take over in the comedy all point to spirituality and transcendence, it is an obvious step to link the two narratives, viewing the composite pattern in terms of spiritual narratives of transcendence through worldly defeat. And because the formal dissolution is so complete, spreading beyond form to musical syntax itself, it is easy to hear this defeat as death. In the context of the conjoined narrative it is clearly no shattered, despairing picture of death as dissolution but a transcendent experience of death—though difficult, a positive passing into some transcendent form of non-being.

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It is not uncommon to find references to the hymn of thanks as a prayer for healing of one kind or another.³⁶ This idea is often problematized or ironized in some way, and for good reason: beyond the obvious fact

³³ Chua, “Galitzin” *Quartets*, 151; and Karol Berger, *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 330.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, *Bach’s Cycle*, 329.

³⁵ Wilfrid Mellers, *Beethoven and the Voice of God* (New York: Oxford, 1983), 154; and Solomon, *Beethoven Essays*, 28.

³⁶ Warren Kirkendale, “New Roads,” 677; Chua, “Galitzin” *Quartets*, 152; Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 132; and Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, 61–62, 236.

that the heading indicates not petition but thanksgiving, the spiritual framework invoked does not fit—religions in which gods respond to such prayers by intervening in the world tend to have views of the afterlife in which personality and individuality are preserved, hardly what we encounter here if the movement is heard as a spiritually positive passing into transcendent non-being, or into being on radically different terms than those experienced in this life. The narrative trajectory of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* seems to harmonize not with the traditional Christianity of the West but with rough conceptions of Eastern religions and philosophy, which, as is now well known, are what Beethoven had on hand.

Beethoven's *Tagebuch* of 1812-1818 records a significant interest in non-Western religions, and several quotations document a fascination with Indic and Brahmanic beliefs and practices. Two quotations come from a German translation of William Robertson's 1791 historical disquisition on India,³⁷ and just a few pages after the second of the passages Beethoven noted down, Robertson gives the following description of Brahmanic religion:

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They supposed the Deity to be a vivifying principle diffused through the whole creation, an universal soul that animated each part of it. Every intelligent nature, particularly the souls of men, they conceived to be portions separated from this great spirit, to which, after fulfilling their destiny on earth, and attaining the proper degree of purity, they would again be reunited . . . [Robertson describes the purification process, after which the soul] shall be so thoroughly refined from all pollution as to be rendered meet for being absorbed into the divine essence, and returns like a drop into that unbounded ocean from which it originally issued. These doctrines of the Brahmins, concerning the Deity, as the soul which pervades all nature, giving activity and vigour to every part of it, as well as the final re-union of all intelligent creatures to their

³⁷ The passages are found in entries 64 and 93b; the sources are found on pp. 307 and 337 in the translation Beethoven used and on pp. 300 and 328 in Robertson's original. Solomon, "Beethoven's *Tagebuch*," 268-69, 275-76; Georg Forster, trans., *Dr. Wilhelm Robertson's, Königlichen Historiographen von Schottland, Historische Untersuchung über die Kenntnisse der Alten von Indien, und die Fortschritte des Handels mit diesem Lande vor der Entdeckung des Weges dahin um das Vorgebirge der guten Hoffnung. Nebst einem Anhang, welcher Bemerkungen über die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, die Gesetze und gerichtlichen Verfahrensarten, die Künste, Wissenschaften und gottesdienstlichen Einrichtungen der Indier enthält* (Berlin: In der Vossischen Buchhandlung, 1792); and Robertson, *An Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India; and the Progress of Trade with that Country prior to the Discovery of the Passage to it by the Cape of Good Hope. With an Appendix containing Observations on the Civil Policy—the Laws and Judicial Proceedings—the Arts—the Sciences—and Religious Institutions, of the Indians* (London: A. Strahan, and T. Cadell, 1791). According to A. Leslie Willson, the edition published by Forster was actually translated by Dorothea Margarethe Liebeskind. A. Leslie Willson, *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1964), 79.

primaeval source, coincide perfectly with the tenets of the Stoical School.³⁸

Whether from this source or another, Beethoven was clearly familiar with this concept, as he paraphrased it in the *Tagebuch*, transposed to the present life:

All things flowed clear and pure from God. If afterwards I become darkened through passion for evil, I returned, after manifold repentance and purification, to the elevated and pure source, to the God-head.—And, to your art.³⁹

It would appear that two streams of religious/philosophical thought, in which Beethoven's interest has been well documented (Stoicism and Brahmanic religion), embrace a spiritual narrative whose contours are strikingly similar to the formal narrative of the *Heiliger Dankgesang*.⁴⁰

³⁸ Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, 330-31. The first part of the German translation used by Beethoven, through the words "great spirit" in the second sentence, is given in Lodes, "Temporality and Mythology," 211n107. The German continues, "mit dem sie nach Erfüllung ihrer irdischen Bestimmung, und wenn sie einen gehörigen Grad von Reinheit erlangt hätten, wieder vereinigt werden würden. . . so gänzlich von aller Befleckung gereinigt sey, daß sie mit dem göttlichen Wesen zusammenfließen könne; und dann kehre sie, gleich einem Tropfen, in den unbegrenzten Ocean zurück, aus welchem sie ursprünglich ausfloß. Diese Lehren der Braminen von der Gottheit als einer Seele, welche die ganze Natur durchdringe, und jedem Theile derselben Thätigkeit und Kraft verleihe, ingleichen von der endlichen Wiedervereinigung aller intellektuellen Wesen mit ihrem ersten Urquell, stimmen vollkommen mit den Lehrsätzen der Stoischen Schule überein." Forster, *Historische Untersuchung*, 339-40. Lodes discusses this passage in connection with op. 127, but her concern, as throughout her essay, is not with the specifics of individual religious traditions but with a more generalized conception of myth (Lodes, "Temporality and Mythology," 200).

³⁹ The inconsistency of tense follows the German original. Maynard Solomon, "Beethoven's *Tagebuch* of 1812-1818," in *Beethoven Studies* 3, 244.

⁴⁰ Solomon often speaks of Beethoven's affinity for stoicism, and a ready acceptance of connections between various world religions and philosophies was very much in the spirit of Beethoven's explorations in the *Tagebuch*; connections between ancient India and ancient Greece were furthermore quite prominent in the German discourse about India at this time. But for a precise understanding of the issue at play, it is important to recognize that the stoicism of which Solomon speaks seems to refer more to a stance of resignation to fate and commitment to virtue than to a knowledge of philosophical specifics. As an example of this, Plutarch, who Beethoven said "has shown me the path of resignation," could be seen as promoting stoicism in this looser sense despite the fact that his *Moralia* include three short essays against Stoicism as a philosophical movement. Thus when Robertson writes of a pantheistic world-soul connecting the Brahmins with the Stoics, he is referring to an aspect of Stoic thinking of which Beethoven might or might not have been aware. The issue of pantheism and Stoicism is furthermore a complex one, as Stoic thought could include theism, polytheism, and possibly also the use of divine metaphors for a general principle of rationality pervading the cosmos. A. A. Long, "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 365-92; Solomon, "Beethoven's *Tagebuch*," 272; and idem, *Late Beethoven*, 5, 175; Emily Anderson, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Beethoven* (London: MacMillan, 1961), 1:60 (emphasis removed); John M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), ch. 14; Michael Lapidge, "Stoic

Pantheism is a recurrent thread in the early-nineteenth-century German reception of Eastern religion and philosophy, and Goethe drew on the concept of merging with a depersonalized deity within two different spiritual frameworks in his *West-östlicher Divan*. The first passage is in the poem that comprises most of the penultimate book within the *Divan*, the *Buch des Parsen*; it represents the final words of a sun worshipper, and the narrator speaks of flying away to join the sun, from there sending blessings back to his family with every dawn.⁴¹ The second is from the final *Buch des Paradieses*, which is set in an Islamic paradise. This book mostly depicts an afterlife modeled after this one, but the end of the poem “Höheres und Höchstes” suggests that this will lead ultimately to a loss of selfhood through encountering a depersonalized deity:

Ungehemmt mit heißem Triebe
Läßt sich da kein Ende finden,
Bis im Anschau ewiger Liebe
Wir verschweben, wir verschwinden.⁴²

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On the basis of the music and of its heading, the Heiliger Dankgesang can be heard as depicting an experience of death as the passage into a transcendent form of depersonalized being. The passages from Robertson, from the Tagebuch, and from Goethe allow us to make the crucial connections between the conception of death suggested by the narrative of the music and similar conceptions of death in religious and philosophical traditions that held significant interest for Beethoven. What they all share is a narrative shape in which individuated identity decays to a place of undifferentiated dissolution, and in which this process has positive affective valence. In the religious traditions this is explicitly a narrative of death, while in the music the connection with death is implied by the combination of the heading, the formal process, and the specific ways in which formal dissolution interacts with topical signs.

Beethoven opened the door to reading the third movement of op. 132 in terms of spiritual narratives by giving it its lengthy heading. This approach will now be employed with the other movements, listening in

Cosmology,” in *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 161–85; A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 6; and Keimpe Algra, “Stoic Theology,” in *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, 153–78.

⁴¹ “Will dem Ufer Senderuds entsagen,/ Auf zum Darnavend die Flügel schlagen./ Wie sie tagt ihr freudig zu begegnen/ Und von dorthier ewig euch zu segnen.” Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan* (Stuttgart, in der Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1819), 221.

⁴² Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 234. My own rather literal (and unpoetic) translation is: “[Continuing to progress] Unhinderedly and with passionate drives/ There no end is to be found,/ Until in gazing upon eternal Love/ We float away, we disappear.”

each case for resonance between the narrative trajectory of the music and the dynamics of spiritual traditions that were explored by Beethoven.

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The fourth movement is probably the simplest to interpret; it serves mainly, as many have noted, as a strong contrast with the end of the *Heiliger Dankesang*, a contrast that works philosophically as well as musically. In the fourth movement we are back from the transcendent plane of the end of the third movement, back to human physical activities (marching) and to expressions of powerful human emotions (in the recitative). Aside from the content of the movement's two halves, the contrast itself between the march and the recitative puts the focus on human activity and agency, as it is so obviously the result of conscious intentionality; it is almost inevitable that listeners will anthropomorphize the interruption of the march by the recitative as an expression of human will and intentionality.⁴³ This music does not suggest the spiritual at all, unless it is the restlessly questing nature of the human spirit.⁴⁴

The spiritual and religious perspectives that I will deal with in this article may be sorted roughly into three categories: those in which humanity is, for all practical intents and purposes, on its own; those in which people can interact with a personal God; and those in which the telos of the individual is to return to unity with a depersonalized deity, a God like the ones Beethoven encountered in sources discussing Brahmanic religion and in Goethe's *Divan*. Having a fiercely independent nature, Beethoven often embraced a perspective of the first type, one in which he steered his destiny alone, locked in struggles with nature, fate, and the rest of mankind; his response to Moscheles's "Finished with God's help"—"O man, help thyself!"—comes to mind.⁴⁵ In putting the focus squarely on human agency in the fourth movement, Beethoven expresses an agonistic view of existence, and in doing so returns to a theme sounded earlier in the quartet.

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Jarring contrasts that bring human subjectivity to the fore have attracted the most attention in discussions of the first movement.⁴⁶ On the small

⁴³ Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel, "An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior," *American Journal of Psychology* 57, no. 2 (1944): 243-59. Drawing on a concept from Vera Micznik, Almén would say that the unexpected contrast between march and recitative gives the music a high degree of narrativity. Almén, *Musical Narrative*, 99, 163.

⁴⁴ The sense of the "Neue Kraft fühlend" sections of the *Heiliger Dankesang* as involving recollection or imagination is heightened when we compare them with the fourth movement, in which we experience *Kraft* in full immediacy.

⁴⁵ Solomon, *Beethoven Essays*, 221.

⁴⁶ Kerman *Beethoven Quartets*; V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Chua, "Galitzin" *Quartets*; and McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, 119-29.

scale, there are frequent changes of tempo and pace, interruptions, and startling juxtapositions. On a larger scale, the two theme groups present a contrast between expressive worlds. The suffering and pain Kerman hears as the main content of the movement come mainly from the first theme group, whose obsessively motivic construction receives extremely detailed treatment from Chua.⁴⁷ Against this stands the second theme, an aria with a vamping introduction, whose yearning lyricism is granted—uniquely in this movement—the space for a symmetrical, periodic exposition.⁴⁸ This longer-breathed construction is complemented by a ratcheting down in harmonic intensity; as Robert Hatten has pointed out, the choice of the submediant for the second theme, here as in some other minor-mode movements in Beethoven, achieves both reduced harmonic tension and the contrast of a more positive affect.⁴⁹ This oppositional relationship between first and second theme groups signifies something along the lines of a tormented present alleviated only briefly by unrealized hopes.⁵⁰

On a larger scale still, the form of the movement could be said to present a contrast between our expectations of sonata form and the actual course of the movement. The basic problem is well known: what seems a clear sonata-form exposition that moves from tonic to submediant is followed, after a very short development section, by a transposed statement of basically the same material in the dominant and mediant, before a final statement in tonic and tonic major. The layout of the material both invites and frustrates readings in terms of sonata form, as has often been noted.⁵¹ What has not to my knowledge been observed before is that this basic block of material undergoes a process of dissolution similar to that of the Lydian hymn sections in the Heiliger Dankgesang.

This is most clearly evident in the first part of the movement's basic block of material. At first the opening seems like a slow introduction, but it later becomes clear that this is really the start of the body of the movement; this music will return at a faster tempo but with doubled note values (suggesting that the opening *assai sostenuto* should be half

⁴⁷ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 242-43; and Chua, "Galitzin" *Quartets*, 55-73.

⁴⁸ "Of all the manifold contrasts in the piece . . . the second theme is certainly the most haunting and the most moving." Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 250.

⁴⁹ Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 273-75.

⁵⁰ McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, 119-23; and Hatten, *Musical Gestures*, 270-75.

⁵¹ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 245-47; Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 118; Chua, "Galitzin" *Quartets*, 66-67; and Robert P. Morgan, "The Concept of Unity and Musical Analysis," *Music Analysis* 22, no. 1/2 (2003): 30-42. In Robin Wallace's reading, the problem of the form and a question about governing tonal center that he perceives function together to make deliberate ambiguity a major premise of the movement. Robin Wallace, "Background and Expression in the First Movement of Beethoven's Op. 132," *Journal of Musicology* 7, no. 1 (1989): 3-20.

the tempo of the allegro that follows), and it will do so at the beginning of each subsequent statement of the basic block.⁵² This apparent introduction is set apart from what follows by an interruptive arpeggio, the first of this music's many violent contrasts; the arpeggio serves as a clear boundary, separating the apparent introduction from the material that follows. As many commentators have noted, what comes next is an elaboration of the opening four-note motive, now taking the form of a strange march-like quasi-theme that never achieves closure.⁵³

When this music returns in E minor, starting in measure 103, the arpeggio is still there, and it retains aspects of its original demarcating role, as the music following the arpeggio is only minimally altered from its initial appearance. But the arpeggio has become a more permeable barrier: the head motive of the march theme has begun to seep through, accompanying the initial slow statements of the basic motive.⁵⁴

When the main material returns for the third time starting in measure 193, now back in the tonic, the arpeggio is gone, as is any solid statement of the theme. At first we have only the head motive, treated contrapuntally, and though, as Morgan emphasizes, a decent amount of the original theme will eventually appear contiguously,⁵⁵ it breaks off at just about the point at which it might have begun to sound like a convincing thematic statement. The listener has the impression of motives floating in a largely putrefied structure. The superficial resemblance to passages such as the false recapitulation in the final movement (mm. 166–75) or the recapitulation of the second theme in the first movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 104 (mm. 247–57), both cases in which imitative play with the head motive leads to a fully recognizable thematic statement, only reinforces the stark differences between those passages and this one. Beyond detailed matters of content, the basic block of material is also shortened, as it is interrupted in measure 232 just as the second theme was about to cadence.⁵⁶

⁵² Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Quartets of Beethoven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 184–88; Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 244–47; and Daniel K. L. Chua, “Rethinking Unity,” *Music Analysis* 23, no. 2/3 (2004): 357. Ambiguities of introductory vs. body material also feature in the first movements of the other two “Galitzin” quartets, op. 127 and op. 130. Lodes, “Temporality and Mythology,” 169; Sterling Lambert, “Beethoven in B♭: Op. 130 and the *Hammerklavier*,” *Journal of Musicology* 25, no. 4 (2009): 434–72; and Chua, “Galitzin” *Quartets*, 201–5. Lodes’s analysis also highlights block construction in the first movement of op. 127.

⁵³ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 244–45.

⁵⁴ Chua, “Galitzin” *Quartets*, 83–86.

⁵⁵ Morgan, “Unity and Musical Analysis,” 37–38.

⁵⁶ A progressive shortening of the blocks is seen if the basic block is understood to include the music that follows it: after the initial exposition there is some semblance of a development section; after the second there is merely a transitional extension following the final cadence; and the final statement is interrupted.

We see then a very strong parallel in formal process between the Heiliger Dankgesang and the first movement. This parallel involves three statements of a block of material whose original formal properties gradually dissolve, with material failing to stay contained within the original boundaries. We can also see a parallel in texture. If we are willing to understand the march theme in the first movement as a complex instance of homophony,⁵⁷ then we can see a similar progression to the Heiliger Dankgesang in the alternations between imitative polyphony and homophony,⁵⁸ and in the way in which the imitative counterpoint gradually takes over the texture as part of the process of dissolution. Furthermore, in each case the failure of the contrapuntal texture to remain within its original bounds leads to the dissolution of the musical objects that had had the strongest sense of identity as bounded, self-contained units—that is, the main themes (march and chorale) from the homophonic sections.

Given the associations already noted of homophony and polyphony with the quotidian and the spiritual, respectively, this pattern reinforces the interpretive framework employed in discussing the third movement. A process of formal dissolution that operates at the largest level of structure has as one consequence the disintegration of the (homophonic) music that seemed most linked to personal subjectivity and earthly life; and as this music dissolves, music that is both less suggestive of personal agency and more spiritual (polyphonic) seems to take over. The whole process suggests a spiritual perspective on death. Again, this is a typically Beethovenian developmental process, but now applied to a formal block instead of a theme. Schoenberg called this “liquidation,” a term Kerman applied to the final statement of the hymn material in the third movement.⁵⁹ In the present context, the near-cognate “liquefaction” seems particularly suggestive; it is as if the music were decomposing before our ears.

As discussed so far, the basic formal processes of both movements are the same—but of course the first movement ends very differently. Instead of ending as the third movement does at a point of dissolution, the interruption of the third statement of the basic block of material brings back the march theme in measure 232, now seeming to strive with increased urgency for cadence, newly infused with some of the operatic lyricism of the second theme. Despite its intensity, this drive toward cadence is frustrated as it reaches a climax in measure 247 that is not

⁵⁷ The theme would be complex as homophony because it is shared among multiple instruments and because the supporting texture is suffused with the basic motive in ways that elevate it above mere accompaniment.

⁵⁸ Chua, “Galitzin” *Quartets*, 152-54.

⁵⁹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 58; and Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 258.

a cadence but the start of a final, expanded statement of the opening four-note motive. At the appearance of the main motive, the music seems to collapse—in dynamics, register, and pacing—until a tense dominant leads to a new version of the march theme in measure 258. This new version is more aggressive: as Agawu points out, it has a proper downbeat, and it has a strong emphasis on quarter-note beats where most of the rest of the movement has the half note as the primary metrical level.⁶⁰ On its earlier appearances this theme had only beginning and middle;⁶¹ now it has a decisive ending, but that is all that it has. It reaches cadence, but only by being reduced to a mere cadential gesture, a Pyrrhic victory to be sure.⁶²

Though I view the first movement, like the third, in terms of the tragic narrative archetype, there are also two very significant ways in which the movements differ at a narrative level. First, the first movement lacks a comic narrative trajectory that is coordinated with the tragic. And second, the discursive strategy employed in the first movement is quite different from the strategy of emergence that characterizes the Heiliger Dankgesang. Instead of allowing the formal process to run its course inexorably, Beethoven inserts a final, determined attempt at self-assertion. Though it cannot break out of the tragic narrative archetype, this last attempt at a more positive outcome nevertheless drastically alters the dynamics of the story. The Heiliger Dankgesang had a last attempt of sorts when the first line of the chorale reasserted itself for the last time, but it was subsumed within the final hymn section, and it lacked the agency and the degree of narrativity of the coda of the first movement; it was a small wrinkle in a trajectory of dissolution that was overwhelmingly unidirectional. With the many indications of positive affect, the end of the Heiliger Dankgesang suggested a yielding to a transcendence found in death. The coda of the first movement, with its determination to struggle at all costs, clearly indicates that the will to resist dissolution is as strong as ever, even if the outcome is sure. Invoking “‘poetic criticism’ in Schumann’s sense,” Hatten imagines in the coda a “tragic-heroic protagonist singing in passionate extremity before impending doom, then marching implacably to utter annihilation.”⁶³ Willed agency is as clear as in the fourth movement; it is almost as if we were back in earlier heroic music, with the simple emphasis on tonic and dominant harmony

⁶⁰ Agawu, *Playing with Signs*, 124-25. The term “primary metrical level” comes from Joel Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).

⁶¹ Morgan, “Unity and Musical Analysis.” Morgan argues that the beginning is also problematic.

⁶² Chua, “Galitzin” *Quartets*, 98-102.

⁶³ Hatten, *Musical Gestures*, 277.

and the clear, even aggressive, rhythmic profile. It is somewhat like the arrival of the final movement of the Fifth Symphony—but without the triumph. It sounds rather like willful defiance in the face of inevitable decay, embracing an agonistic view of existence even in the face of death. This is the Beethoven of the popular imagination, Burnham's Beethoven Hero,⁶⁴ the one whose final, dying gesture was to raise a single, clenched fist.

* * *

Like the fourth movement, the second offers a radical contrast with what came before. It is amiable and (but for one exception) extremely consistent; Kerman emphasized its minimization of contrast, and Mason went so far as to judge it monotonous.⁶⁵ Far from agonistic, it seems much closer to the sorts of change and variation displayed by the inanimate aspects of the natural world. Inanimate natural changes can be abrupt—a sudden strong gust of wind, an unexpected clap of thunder—and the second movement's few contrasts can be similarly vivid, especially when distant tonal areas are explored in the outer sections. But these contrasts are not mined for drama—indeed, they pass rather uneventfully.⁶⁶ In terms of narrative archetypes, this seems a very clear romance; there is very little conflict or contrast to disturb the stable main sections, and the one instance of a clear transgression against the prevailing order—the C#-minor passage that contrasts in mode, meter, texture, and character—is rapidly dispatched.⁶⁷

If we read this movement in terms of worldview, we would seem to be back to the sense of detachment of the stoics and (according to Robertson) the Hindus; certainly this world is not being anthropomorphized. But the prevalence of pastoral topical signs suggests another possibility: Christoph Christian Sturm's somewhat deistically leaning observations on the works of God in the realm of nature, one of Beethoven's favorites.⁶⁸

As a Lutheran minister Sturm was not a deist himself, but his *Betrachtungen* share with many other works of eighteenth-century Christian

⁶⁴ Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁶⁵ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 227–28; and Mason, *Quartets of Beethoven*, 190.

⁶⁶ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 251–52; and Chua, "Galitzin" *Quartets*, 110, 131–38.

⁶⁷ In Almén's terms, this would be an example of the comic phase of the romance archetype. Almén, *Musical Narrative*, 165–68.

⁶⁸ Christoph Christian Sturm, *Betrachtungen über die Werke Gottes im Reiche der Natur und der Vorsehung auf alle Tage des Jahres*, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Reutlingen, 1811); and Sturm, same title, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Halle: in der hemmerdeschen Buchhandlung, 1785). Entries for the second half of the year are found in vol. 2, which I was unable to consult in the 1811 edition that Beethoven owned; therefore references for the first half of the year will refer to the 1811 edition, those for the second half to the 1785 edition. In all passages that I have compared from vol. 1, the differences between the 1811 edition and the 1785 edition are few and quite minor, mainly variants of spelling.

literature a tendency to back away from those claims of theism that were most sharply disputed by deists and by rationalists more generally, especially claims about the validity of revelation and about God's continuing activity in the world.⁶⁹ At a narrative level, the most significant point of contention between theists and deists was the second of these—did a loving God grant all that the world needed through the initial act of creation, or does he continue to intervene actively in its affairs? Though Sturm affirmed such continuing involvement in other works, the *Betrachtungen* are strikingly open to deistic readings in that when providence is seen it is seen in creation; there are exceedingly few indications of God's continuing work in the world, no signs of *deus ex machina*.⁷⁰ Again and again the reader is asked to consider God's graceful care for all of humankind, but the care always comes via the disposition of the created order. Even when the reader is asked to bear in mind that many troubles and adversities are ultimately beneficial to us, the purpose is to arouse thankfulness for adversities in general and not to suggest that God may have ordained a specific difficulty to further his purposes in a specific person's life. Similarly, although Sturm often emphasizes God's loving and detailed care for each person, the will of God in specific situations is generally taken to be inscrutable.⁷¹ The meditations often conclude either with exhortations to himself or else with prayers of thanksgiving;

⁶⁹ There are a number of ways of presenting the central tenets of deism; for present purposes, a rational reconstruction of sorts is most helpful, one in which the most basic proposition is that a benevolent, omniscient, omnipotent God created the world, but that God's involvement with the world ended with the work of creation; this results in the exclusion of miracles, of revelation, and of a clerical class. Theism, the term for which arose in response to deism as a way of generalizing the central philosophical tenets mainly of Christianity but also of the other major monotheistic religions, also affirms the nature and creational work of God but, insisting on God's continued involvement with the world, opposes deism on all of the other points.

⁷⁰ Arnold Schmitz also argues that Sturm was not a deist, but he overstates the case for theism in the *Betrachtungen*; certainly there are very few passages at all similar to the one quoted by Schmitz in which Sturm enthuses about the birth of Jesus, a passage that is hardly representative of the work as a whole. In general Schmitz seriously overplays his hand in trying to depict Beethoven as a relatively traditional Christian, both in the chapter on religion in *Das romantische Beethovenbild* and in a later essay. Arnold Schmitz, *Das romantische Beethovenbild: Darstellung und Kritik* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1927; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 91–93; idem, "Zur Frage nach Beethovens Weltanschauung und ihrem musikalischen Ausdruck," in *Beethoven und die Gegenwart: Festschrift des Beethovenhauses Bonn; Ludwig Schiedermair zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Arnold Schmitz (Berlin: Dümmler, 1937), 266–93.

⁷¹ See for example the entry for 19 March: "In seiner Hand stehen alle Bewegungen des Blutes und die ganze Wirksamkeit deines Herzens. Wenn er es will, so hört das Herz auf, sich zusammenzuziehen und auszudehnen." Sturm, *Betrachtungen*, 1:220. The end of the entry for 11 July in the second volume of the *Betrachtungen* is particularly revealing (30–31); Sturm affirms God's sovereignty over earthly affairs via the weather, but at just the point at which a plea for mercy might be expected he returns to his theme of theodicy and thanks God that devastating storms are meant for our blessing.

when the prayers can be construed as petitionary, they tend to combine the two other ending forms, with Sturm asking for help in remembering and responding to that of which he has just reminded himself.⁷² Prayers of this sort are compatible with theism, but as the prayers themselves can be seen as the means through which they are answered, they do not require a conception of relating to God that is perceptibly transactional, in which God's working in the world in the present time can be meaningfully recognized as such.⁷³

The world Sturm depicts is one in which there is nothing new under the sun and in which nothing ever passes completely out of being.⁷⁴ Governed by the regular rhythms of the seasons and pleasantly balanced for ultimate good by a beneficent creator, it resonates easily with the music of the second movement, especially at a narrative level; a discursive strategy that features minimal contrast and a token conflict that is summarily dispatched does not suggest a theistic God intervening to restore order so much as an order that is by design impervious to transgression.⁷⁵ In this light, the striking disruption of the C#-minor section, the one point at which conscious agency clearly intrudes, seems reminiscent of Sturm's reflections on the transitory nature of life and the futility of discontentment,⁷⁶ especially given that the music returns to normal after this outburst—exactly back to normal with a da capo repeat.

If this reading seems thin compared with the readings of the first and third movements, this underscores my point—this music has a very low degree of narrativity, lacking the dramatic turns that so strongly evoke narrative interpretations. It does not invite a blow-by-blow account, but rather treatment as a relatively undifferentiated whole. Few religions offer such an undramatic view of life, and because of this Sturm's *Betrachtungen* are a remarkably good fit for the narrative dynamics of this movement. Much of the force of Voltaire's devastating parody of Leibnitz in *Candide* also applies to Sturm: an unrelentingly positive theodicy has in

⁷² The conclusion of the entry for 12 July is representative: "Herr, die Erde ist voll deiner Güter. Alles, was über und unter der Erde ist, auch den Staub nicht ausgenommen, hast du weislich geordnet. So lange schon wandle ich auf dem Erdboden einher, und bin ein Augenzeuge deiner grossen Güte. Mache es doch zu meiner angelegentlichsten Pflicht, dich immer besser zu erkennen und für das Güte, welches mir die Erde bringt, immer mehr zu lieben." Sturm, *Betrachtungen*, 2:33.

⁷³ Though Sturm is centrally concerned with recognizing God's working in the world, I take this recognition to be only questionably meaningful, undercut by a theodicy that, by arguing that *everything* reflects God's goodness, becomes more a matter of general belief than of specific recognition.

⁷⁴ Sturm, *Betrachtungen*, entries for 24 March (1:232–34), 16 April (1:292–94), and 3 May (1:338–40).

⁷⁵ Ibid., entries for 20 February (1:142–44), 27 February (1:160–62), 14 April (1:288–90), 3 May (1:338–40), and 13 December (2:477–80).

⁷⁶ Ibid., entries for 20 March (1:221–23), 27 March (1:240–42), 24 May (1:397–400), and 20 August (2:138–41).

the end only one thing to say, no matter what circumstances it encounters, like a motive repeated over and over and over . . .

* * *

Like the second movement, the final movement has a very straightforward narrative pattern, and this pattern even comes with a spiritual interpretation that has become standard to the point of cliché. This movement will challenge the present approach, however, in that its very straightforward reading does not connect in obvious ways with Beethoven's spiritual interests.

Formally and expressively, the movement seems trapped in a cycle of futility until a sudden reversal just before the end brings about a state of joy and fulfillment. The narrative archetype is clearly that of comedy, with a foreign element disrupting and defeating the originally prevailing (dysphoric) order. When the denouement of a comedy is dramatized through an abrupt *volte-face* in this way, Almén speaks of a discursive strategy of epiphany, also invoking the *deus ex machina*, a concept that seems particularly apt in this case.⁷⁷ Although this term is often used to express incredulity, in this case it may be applied without sarcasm: the abrupt change seems to result from the action of an unseen (and unheard) actor, opening the door to a theistic narrative in which a God intervenes in the world (or possibly ushers the protagonist into another).

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The final movement has a number of straightforward connections with the rest of the quartet, and especially with the first movement. As a rondo, the final movement continues the pattern of the juxtaposition of relatively static blocks of material that characterizes this quartet on so many levels.⁷⁸ Its affect seems very carefully balanced; for Hatten the minor mode generally carries tragic associations in the classical period,⁷⁹ and some can be heard here, but if this is a response to tragedy it is a rather restrained one. It is by no means happy, but it lacks the passionate and even unbalanced intensity of so many other minor passages in the quartet—the first movement, the C#-minor episode in the second, and the recitative in the fourth. Following Hatten again, the main material suggests yearning in its upward motions, as well as in its never-consummated moves to the relative major (note the medial half cadence in the relative major, immediately followed by a return to the original key). Similarly, the downward motion that ends this theme may seem like resignation, but if we observe the intensifications of downward motion in the post-cadential extensions that follow the theme proper, failure may seem

⁷⁷ Almén, *Musical Narrative*, 191, 195.

⁷⁸ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 250; and Chua, "Galitzin" *Quartets*, 55, 129–38, 141–43, 153–60.

⁷⁹ Hatten, *Musical Meaning*, 11–13.

closer to the mark.⁸⁰ As has often been noted, this theme integrates both technical and expressive features from the two main themes of the first movement: something of the suffering of the first theme,⁸¹ together with its movement from A to C and back, followed by a half-step descent to G \sharp , all over repeated F-E motions in the accompaniment;⁸² and the yearning quality of the second theme together with a hint of its major mode,⁸³ its symmetrical, periodic construction (here manifest as a small binary form because of the written-out repeats), and even its vamping accompaniment.⁸⁴

The main theme also showcases two features that will reappear throughout the movement; this is unsurprising given how thoroughly the theme dominates the discourse, with none of the episodes succeeding in establishing a solidly convincing contrast.⁸⁵ The features are downward chromatic alteration and a tendency for subdominant harmony to exert a strong pull, even subverting global and local tonics. These features often occur in conjunction, as they do when first heard in the theme in measure 7. This is the place in the opening phrase at which the subtonic replaces the leading tone in the bass, steering the music toward the relative major with a V $\frac{4}{3}$ /IV, thus also connecting the subdominant emphasis with the striving toward the major mode. Unusual as the harmonic progression is, the chromatic alteration is nonetheless rationalized by its participation in a larger stepwise descent in the bass.⁸⁶

The downward chromatic alterations in the second half of the theme are less readily explained. The second half of the theme begins in measure 27 with a very strange harmonic progression that is probably best viewed as iv – v – i with each chord followed by a back-relating dominant. The minor dominant in the middle of the progression resonates with the

⁸⁰ Hatten compares the sonority that initiates the phrase extension to a primal scream (Hatten, *Musical Meaning*, 55).

⁸¹ Sullivan, *Spiritual Development*, 247; Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 263; and Hatten, *Musical Gestures*, 279–80.

⁸² Chua, “Galitzin” *Quartets*, 158; and Hatten, *Musical Gestures*, 279–80.

⁸³ Theodor Helm, “[Beethoven:] String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132,” trans. Ian Bent, in *Music Analysis in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2, *Hermeneutic Approaches*, ed. Ian Bent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 261.

⁸⁴ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 263.

⁸⁵ Kerman “Single Journey,” 52.

⁸⁶ It is well known that this theme originated among the sketches for the final movement of the Ninth Symphony. Given the emphasis on the subdominant in the final movement of op. 132, it seems significant that in the three versions of the theme from the sketches of the Ninth Symphony shown by Solomon, two place the medial cadence on the (major) subdominant, and the other makes that harmonization a possibility; one even prolongs the chord of arrival with a plagal motion to its own subdominant (Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, 222–23). That plagal extension makes a tantalizing connection with the final version of the theme used in op. 132 because it is only context that distinguishes the chord of cadential arrival in measure 10, V/III, from IV/IV.

theme of downward chromatic inflections, inflections that are heavily emphasized in this passage as each of the two secondary dominants are transformed in their final eighth notes into minor triads via half-step motion in the bass. This makes the most sense in measure 22, where the chromatic alteration can also be interpreted as a chromatic passing tone. In measure 20, though one could imagine a passing motion into an inner voice, the strangeness of the cello's leap away from the C-natural emphasizes the motivic nature of the chromaticism.

These issues return in the first interlude. In measure 59 the music seems to have arrived solidly in E minor from its initial G major, but this key is consistently weakened by harmonic events that gesture toward its subdominant, A minor: an augmented-sixth chord with D \sharp and F in measure 63; and the withholding of root-position tonic harmony in measures 64–67 while giving A minor in root position.⁸⁷ The real return to A minor occurs in measure 82 with an arrival on a clear dominant, and now Beethoven plays structural implications against one another in a new way. In terms of harmonic function, the music that follows serves to prolong this dominant, and thus seems to hold out more promise for articulation of dominant harmony than anything coming before, the preceding E minor having been consistently undercut. But in expressive effect, this chromatically searching music (again involving tonicization of the subdominant and downward chromatic alterations) seems to offer the movement's first hope of real change, as one senses the possibility that it could lead to something truly different, breaking out of the narrow expressive confines that have enclosed the music so far. The return of the rondo theme is therefore a disappointment on two seemingly contradictory counts: it disappoints hopes for a true affective contrast, but because those hopes were raised at the expense of the clarity of the dominant prolongation, it also represents a failure to give this theme a greater sense of energy and determination by approaching it from a truly convincing dominant.

The strongest move to the subdominant occurs at the end of the second episode, which as usual takes the role of the development section within the sonata rondo: it is the false recapitulation in D minor mentioned in connection with the first movement. This makes an intriguing connection with the theme's origins in the sketches for the Ninth Symphony, as of course it originated in D minor. More significantly, it underscores the fact that Beethoven's emphasis on the subdominant places the subdominant in an oppositional relationship with the dominant; in this passage, at least, it is a zero-sum game. Because the second episode takes

⁸⁷ Ironically, the F \sharp in measure 69 is part of a Neapolitan chord that progresses normally to a strong dominant, thus helping to stave off the uncertainty about E minor.

the place of a development section, we expect the false recapitulation to lead to a strong dominant; if we have been nurturing any hopes of a powerful motion from dominant to tonic, they have been focused on the retransition that we now expect. But there is no retransition; for a moment the phrase modulation in measure 176 sounds like part of a developmental sequence, but we quickly realize that this is the true recapitulation.⁸⁸ The expected dominant of the retransition has been replaced by the subdominant of the false recapitulation.

The story of the movement is acquiring a grim clarity. Despite the yearning quality of the theme, the intensity with which it desires release from the expressive world of the first movement, and the hopeful implications of its unconsummated moves to the relative major,⁸⁹ the music seems trapped in its own obsessions, unable to escape to a different affective place. The implications of the theme's emphasis on the subdominant and of its many downward chromatic inflections are realized as the movement continues: like a debtor trapped by a cycle of payday loans, the music is constantly falling down into the harmonic well of the subdominant and constantly exerting itself to climb back out, never achieving the strong dominant that would allow a return to tonic to come with a powerful release of energy.

Of course the movement does reach a different affective place at its end; how it gets there is the crux of my reading. Kerman says that the sudden reversal that ushers in the coda is earned or achieved.⁹⁰ I take this to mean that the ending seems fitting, not arbitrary or unmotivated—that Beethoven the composer has earned and achieved this ending. But this aesthetic judgment about the ending's motivation does not imply that it has been prepared by previous action within the movement, for it seems quite clear that it has not: in terms of discursive strategy, we are dealing with one of Almén's epiphanic comedies.

Though the *deus ex machina* connotations of the epiphanic discursive strategy support my theistic reading of the movement, the question of the agency behind the reversal is ultimately more central to the interpretation. One possible scenario for a sudden reversal would involve some local preparation, giving the sense that the reversal was envisioned in advance, with some stretch of music having deliberately brought it about; the brief preparation for the final, aggressive march theme in the last few measures of the first movement is an example of this. If the preparatory passage were short in comparison to the portion of the movement preceding the reversal, the design could still be compatible with an

⁸⁸ This modulation is ushered in by another dominant whose third collapses via chromatic alteration.

⁸⁹ Hatten, *Musical Gestures*, 279–80.

⁹⁰ Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 184.

epiphanic discursive strategy. In a case like that, the preparation could be heard as an audible trace of agency, making the agency evident within the discourse itself; in an intrapsychic reading of the kind proposed here, this might represent the self-willing of a protagonist to a different internal state. In a different scenario, the reversal could lack preparation, but the clearly defined profile of the new material could similarly suggest an agent that is present within the discourse. In an intrapsychic reading, this could be a protagonist having a sudden change of mind or heart; it might look like a person suddenly jolted out of a previous activity by an unexpected realization. The first movement contained a reversal like this in the interruption of the final statement of the second theme by the newly vital first theme.

The ending of the final movement of op. 132 fits neither of these patterns. As we approach the coda, the first hint that change might be in the air comes in measure 340, which, breaking the parallel with the first episode, arrives in F major instead of D minor, thus returning to the key in which the hopeful and yearning second theme of the first movement was originally heard. The transitional passage in the first episode had seemed to hold out the best prospect of bringing us to a different place, and now the same material, much expanded, seems even more promising, in part because upward chromatic inflections become prevalent for the first time in the movement. This material reaches fever pitch, escalating in both tempo and dynamics, until the almost delirious statement of the main theme, *presto*, in measure 280.

Clearly, something is afoot; were major changes to coincide with the moment of cadential arrival, this would be the kind of sudden change that is prepared within the discourse. But instead the change comes too soon, interrupting the discourse: the changes of texture, dynamics, and pacing all occur with the arrival of what we expected to be the cadential dominant (m. 294), so that the agitated, *presto* statement of the main theme never gets to cadence. This interruption is not driven by any perceivable agency; no new activity begins at the moment of disruption. Instead motion is arrested as the frantic action of the *presto* suddenly halts; harmonic rhythm basically stops, and surface figuration dies away with the sudden decrescendo from *forte* to *piano*. The main melodic tone freezes in place as a new thematic idea assembles itself in the cello part, only gradually building momentum. Tellingly, the change of mode, so crucial to the expressive effect of this reversal, enters unobtrusively as inner voices bring about a six-four through passing motion as they shift voicing in the dominant chord; the shift to major is not audible at the moment of interruption, nor is it announced by the new theme. In this passage we find harmonic stasis and a melody that does not seem to drive the arrival of the tonic major so much as respond to it.

Whether we read the interruption that begins the coda of the first movement in terms of a protagonist having a sudden change of mind or heart or in some other way, at a more general level it is clearly a disjunction whose agency is apparent within the discourse. In the final movement there is no such perceptible agency; it seems more as if the protagonist has suddenly and unexpectedly arrived at a very different place. In this new place, when downward chromatic inflections lead to subdominants, the subdominants lead directly to strong cadential progressions, breaking the cycle of futility, and upward chromatic drives are salient in the final cadences both times that the new material concludes (mm. 347–51, 395–400). Exactly what this place may be is open to interpretation; it could be linked metaphorically to anything from new circumstances to new states of being. But for our purposes the identity of this place is less important than the manner in which it arrives, for it is clear that in relation to the protagonist this conclusion is neither earned nor achieved; it is, rather, a gift—grace, if you will.⁹¹ The idea that this happy reversal results from the intervention of a benevolent (theistic) deity is reinforced by the particular flavor of happiness, as the gesturally-closing celebration seems more delighted thanksgiving than triumph following personal victory.⁹²

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The interpretation of this movement as enacting a theistic narrative hinges on the character of the sudden reversal at the end. The drama of this reversal suggests conscious agency, but the agent is inferred only from the act—there is nothing in the music that we might identify with the agent because all of the gestures seem more reactive than proactive. Focusing only on the reversal itself (and not on the specifics of the expressive states that preceded it) it is as if a ship were out on a dangerously stormy sea, and just at the moment that all appeared lost, the storm vanished, the seas were calmed, and the sun came out. The phrase *deus ex machina* reveals that religious meanings lurk around the edges of reversals of this sort, even when those meanings are not ultimately viable; here, given the correlations in the other movements with spiritual perspectives known to interest Beethoven, correlations cued in part by the

⁹¹ Hatten, *Musical Gestures*, 284.

⁹² Sullivan also heard a lack of triumph in this music; for him the music conveyed “slightly incredulous relief [and] thankfulness still tinged with doubt” (Sullivan, *Spiritual Development*, 247). But he attributed it—rather implausibly, to my ears—to fatigue from the long path that had led to the victory. There are intriguing connections between my reading of this movement in terms of theism and Karol Berger’s suggestion that an emphasis on cyclical temporality is correlated with a Christian worldview in pre-modern music (Berger, *Bach’s Cycle*). For in this movement we find an oppressive cycle of futility (the body of the rondo, particularly static because of the minimization of contrast and the absence of strong, form-punctuating dominants) giving way to a cycle of delighted thanksgiving (the coda, whose twice-experienced material seems capable of indefinite extension), with the manner of transformation pointing to divine agency.

explicit reference to spirituality in the heading of the *Heiliger Dankgesang*, a reading of this movement in theistic terms—with God mercifully intervening by transforming circumstances in this world or drawing the protagonist to another—seems thoroughly reasonable.

If we look only at the *kind* of place this ending has brought us to, we find an arcadian Elysium, a familiar place for a work by Beethoven to end. But the particular manner of this arrival in Elysium stands out as unusual among Beethoven's endings in its suggestion of divine intervention.⁹³ With a deity who is active in the world and a subject who retains personality and individuality—no detached deistic creator here, no merging with a world-soul—the fifth movement suggests a theistic narrative. But can this theistic reading of the fifth movement be connected more specifically with anything in Beethoven's spiritual explorations?

The first step in answering this question is to examine Beethoven's interests and readings in Christianity, and especially in his own Catholicism, as these were both the source of his familiarity with theism and the most obvious place for that familiarity to be deepened. Scholarly discussions of Beethoven's spiritual interests do not generally support a strong interest in theism, but Beethoven's readings within Christianity were quite diverse, and commentators have sometimes at least left open the possibility of some significant engagement with theism on Beethoven's part. Given the many issues at play in the Christian texts in Beethoven's library, it seems quite possible that divine agency, the central focus of the theism seen in the final movement, might upon closer examination emerge as a prominent thread in some of those books, a common theme that had not previously been detected. This possibility, and the support it would lend to the reading of the fifth movement, motivates the survey that follows. Looking at each of the Christian books in Beethoven's library, and also at some other evidence of his own spirituality, I look for an affirmation of divine agency, and where this can be found I also ask what evidence there is that Beethoven might have agreed with the author.

The Christian text in which Beethoven had the most well-documented interest, Sturm's *Betrachtungen*, has been dealt with above; *pace* Arnold Schmitz, it is only minimally theistic. Martin Cooper and Lewis Lockwood have both suggested that Johann Michael Sailer, the Bavarian theologian and later bishop, may have provided Beethoven with a more palatable way to engage with Catholicism (and thus with

⁹³ Hatten's narratives of spiritual abnegation in *Musical Meaning* are somewhat similar, but in most cases crucially different in that transcendence functions as a consequence of abnegation, so that the favor seems somewhat more merited. There are cases, especially in op. 106, in which Hatten detects the working of providence, but these tend to be less overtly dramatic than the arrival of the coda of the fifth movement in op. 132.

theism);⁹⁴ unfortunately this is also not borne out. I examine this question in detail elsewhere;⁹⁵ for present purposes there are two points to be made. First, Sailer was a complex figure, but he was more traditionally conservative than he has been portrayed in the Beethoven literature, almost certainly too conservative for Beethoven (confusion on this point also being due largely to Arnold Schmitz). Second, there is no evidence that Sailer held interest for Beethoven beyond the question of his nephew Karl's education. Like Sturm, Sailer can be ruled out as a possible link between Beethoven and theism.

Three other works that Beethoven owned may be treated quite briefly. The *Ansichten von Religion und Kirchenthum* of Ignaz Aurelius Fessler, a Catholic-turned-freemason-turned-Lutheran, resonates strongly with Beethoven's Tagebuch project.⁹⁶ Fessler describes a spiritual pilgrimage from darkness to illumination involving wide-ranging reading in theology and philosophy, and he speaks of the myths of all cultures as indispensable symbols of religious experience.⁹⁷ He employs Christian terms and concepts, but he interprets them very freely.⁹⁸ Fessler as a bridge to theism is excluded most explicitly by his view of God as not only beyond human conceptions but as virtually unapproachable by human thought; this view does not lend itself to narratives of God's interaction with the world.⁹⁹ Peucer's *Commentarius de praecipuis divinationum generibus*, written from a Melanchthonian Lutheran perspective, deals with what would be seen today as a rather free mixture of science, religion, and the occult.¹⁰⁰ It does not speak explicitly either way on the question of Beethoven's theism, and,

⁹⁴ Cooper, *Last Decade*, 112–14, 119; and Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 403–5, 423.

⁹⁵ John Paul Ito, "Johann Michael Sailer and Beethoven," forthcoming, *Bonner Beethoven-Studien*, vol. 11.

⁹⁶ Beethoven would probably have been interested mainly in the first volume; the long discussions of church history and of contemporary church affairs that fill the second and third volumes seem much less likely to have appealed to him. Ignaz Aurelius Fessler, *Ansichten von Religion und Kirchenthum* (Berlin: Johann Daniel Sander, 1805).

⁹⁷ Fessler, *Ansichten*, 1:55.

⁹⁸ Fessler's conception of the second person of the trinity ("das ewige Gesetz der geistigen Welt, wodurch der heiligste Wille [d.i. der Vater] im Universo sich ausspricht, versinnbildet der Sohn," *ibid.*, 57) could potentially be helpful in bridging the gap between the musical depiction of the divinity of Jesus in the *Missa solemnis* and Beethoven's own lack of belief in that doctrine, discussed below. Kinderman, "Symbol for the Deity"; Lodes, "Human and the Divine."

⁹⁹ This understanding of God does increase the likely appeal for Beethoven, however, because so many of the quotations in the Tagebuch emphasize the deity's transcendence.

¹⁰⁰ Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 6 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1941), 493–501. Given the limitations of Beethoven's Latin, in evidence in his correspondence and in Lodes's discussion of his study of the Latin mass texts, it is not clear how easily Beethoven would have made headway with this book. Lodes, "Human and the Divine," 146.

like Fessler's work, its more obvious connection is to the widely ranging spiritual explorations of Masonic initiatory practices. Beethoven also owned Thomas à Kempis's classic *De imitatione Christi*, but his interest in this book could have come from its emphasis on virtue and asceticism just as easily as from its theistic theology.

Beethoven's own beliefs and practices do not strengthen a case for his interest in theism. His heartfelt prayers—*cris de cœur* as Cooper calls them—are much closer to Sturm's than to Sailer's.¹⁰¹ Paralleling some of the passages in Sturm's writings, Beethoven often expresses great confidence that he is intimately known by God, a belief that was clearly very important to him. But his knowledge of God is restricted to general characteristics and does not include God's perspectives or intentions regarding his specific circumstances. He cries out to God in distress, but there is nothing that suggests an expectation of God's intervention.¹⁰²

Though theism can take many forms, for someone of Beethoven's time and place it tended to correlate with traditional doctrinal orthodoxy, and there is general agreement that Beethoven was not an orthodox believer.¹⁰³ Since Schmitz's weakly supported work in the earlier part of the last century, no Beethoven scholar has offered a vigorous case for Beethoven as a theologically traditional Christian or as a theist. Taken

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¹⁰¹ Sailer's *Kleine Bibel*, one of the works owned by Beethoven, is extremely explicit about God interacting with the world and with individuals on a personal basis. When Sailer prays he expects an answer, and he discusses how answers may be sought and perceived (6–8); he also gives examples in which God speaks through a mix of quotation and paraphrase of various thematically linked passages from the Bible, examples that belong to a tradition in which such amalgamations are understood to represent the voice of God speaking personally to an individual. Theistic conceptions of God's active involvement in death, and of death as the passage to new—conscious, individual—life are also made very explicit, as in the following extended quotation (264–65): “Harre noch, theure Seele, etliche Augenblicke! Bald, bald ist's ausgelitten!—Bald leuchtet dir ein besseres Licht!—Bald bist du in einem schöneren Lande, im Lande des Friedens! Bald ist's ausgekämpft auf ewig! Bald rufen dir die Engel Gottes entgegen: Heil dir! Sieger! komm, mende dich in unsere Chöre! Geh ein in die Freude deines Herrn!” Johann Michael Sailer, *Kleine Bibel für Kranke und Sterbende und ihre Freunde*, rev. ed. (Sulzbach: in der J. E. v. Seidelschen Buchhandlung, 1848).

¹⁰² Cooper, *Last Decade*, 115. The following prayer from the Tagebuch is representative: “God, God, my refuge, my rock, O my all, Thou seest my innermost heart and knowest how it pains me to have to make somebody suffer through my good works for my dear Karl!!! O hear, ever ineffable One, hear me, your unhappy, most unhappy of all mortals.” Solomon, “Beethoven's Tagebuch,” 292.

¹⁰³ Cooper, *Last Decade*, 118–19; and Solomon, *Beethoven Essays*, 220–21. My own examination of the sources has turned up one additional piece of evidence, relating to Beethoven's rejection of the divinity of Jesus. The case usually rests on the reports of members of his circle, but we can add a series of conversation book entries by Karl Holz, in which Holz seems to backtrack repeatedly on the status of Jesus, presumably in response to critical comments from Beethoven; in Beethoven's first inferable response, it seems that he argued that calling Jesus (merely) the greatest of humans would be to accord him too much honor. Dagmar Beck, ed., *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1993), 117–18.

together, the evidence from Beethoven's library and about his own views does not suggest a significant interest in Christian theism. The question stands: is it possible to connect a theistic reading of the final movement with Beethoven's spiritual interests?

It is possible, but it requires two shifts—a shift of interpretive paradigm, moving away from the focus on divine agency, and a shift in religious tradition, moving from the Christian sources surveyed here to the (highly filtered) Islam of Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*. Though much of the *Divan* plays out against a backdrop of Islamic theism, divine agency is not overtly present in the original edition of 1819 owned by Beethoven;¹⁰⁴ the connection with the *Divan* is instead a matter of the next life as a continuation of this one. This is evident throughout the concluding *Buch des Paradieses*, with many of the poems being dialogues between the poet and a feminine spirit (called a Houri) who takes the form of his beloved Suleika. The relationship between life and afterlife is made particularly explicit in the poem "Höheres und Höchstes."

Und mein liebes Ich bedürfte
Mancherlei Bequemlichkeiten,
Freuden wie ich hier sie schlürfte
Wünscht' ich auch für ew'ge Zeiten.¹⁰⁵

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Where the Heiliger Dankgesang ends on some kind of higher plane, the final movement ends in a major-mode pastoral dance that is clearly of this world—but with the totality of the fulfillment and the hints of divine agency in bringing it about suggesting a setting in the next one. And if it contrasts strongly with the extreme alterity of the end of the Heiliger Dankgesang, it contrasts equally strongly with the dysphoric fate of the first movement; again cadence is postponed, but now we hear not failure and unattainability but rather the heightened satisfaction that comes with the delay of inevitable gratification. The final section of the last movement resonates strongly with the final book of Goethe's *Divan*, suggesting the ultimate fulfillment of earthly desires in a (very similar) world beyond.

The final book of the *Divan* fits very well with the final movement of the quartet; nonetheless, we may wonder if this work has as deep a biographical

¹⁰⁴ According to Nohl, the imprint Beethoven owned was dated 1820. Ludwig Nohl, *Beethovens Brevier: Sammlung der von ihm selbst ausgezogenen oder angemarkten Stellen aus Dichtern und Schriftstellern alter und neuer Zeit* (Leipzig: Ernst Julius Günther, 1870), cvi. The complete *Divan* makes divine agency explicit only in the poem "Wunderglaube," which was added to the *Buch der Parabeln* for the 1827 *Ausgabe letzter Hand*.

¹⁰⁵ Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, 232. "And my dear 'I' would need/ Many sorts of comforts,/ Joys just as savored here/ I would wish also for eternal times."

connection as the sources drawn on previously. Addressing this will require a widening of interpretive scope.

* * *

All of the traditions invoked in interpreting the earlier movements have had significant resonance for Beethoven: the merging with a pantheistic world-soul that can be heard in the *Heiliger Dankgesang* can be traced to multiple sources known to Beethoven and to his own writings in the *Tagebuch*; the agonistic conception of life that was drawn on in interpreting the first movement is one of the major strands in Beethoven's life and personality; and it is very well documented that Beethoven held Sturm in high regard, connecting the *Betrachtungen* with his own experience of the divine through nature. In contrast with these, Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* is often neglected in discussions of Beethoven's inner life in his later years (perhaps in part because it postdates the *Tagebuch* project).¹⁰⁶ I have argued that an implicit theism is evident in the final movement of op. 132; but if theism had rich associations within Beethoven's spiritual imagination, they have not yet been adequately brought to light.

For the faithful theism begins with God. But for the skeptic, theism begins with wish fulfillment, and this may be the best starting point as we explore the possible associations that theism may have had for Beethoven. It seems clear that Beethoven was striving for transcendence in his later years, and it is also clear that he had a strong orientation toward positive outcomes, toward the comfort and assurance of happy endings. On the agonistic view, happy endings just don't seem to be in the cards, at least not for Beethoven, and much as he admired a stoic focus on virtue and resignation, he also yearned for more, as was perhaps most evident when he cried out to Wegeler, "Resignation—what a wretched resource!"¹⁰⁷ If the agonistic view had shortcomings, what of the view of merging with a depersonalized deity? This offers transcendence, but at a steep cost: can we really see Beethoven—so aware of his individuality, his uniqueness—ultimately satisfied with union with a world-soul if in the

¹⁰⁶ Schindler reports that the *Divan* was among Beethoven's favorites. In this case his credibility is bolstered by the annotations in Beethoven's copy (though the volume shows far less wear than the *Betrachtungen*). Anton Felix Schindler, *Beethoven as I Knew Him*, ed. Donald W. MacArdle, trans. Constance S. Jolly (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 34–35, 378; and Nohl, *Beethoven's Brevier*, cvi–cvii, 73–88.

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, *Letters of Beethoven*, 1:60. Cooper argues that this remark of 1801 reflects a perspective on resignation that would mature and deepen in later years (Cooper, *Last Decade*, 116). Though that seems very likely correct, the intemperate outbursts to which Beethoven was prone until the end of his life suggest a man not entirely resigned to resignation.

process his individuality must be stripped away?¹⁰⁸ As a narrative shape, then, the positive ending with individual identity preserved (if also transfigured) could have been profoundly appealing; the fact that this narrative happened to correspond to that of theism—not, as far as we know, something that ever held compelling interest for Beethoven—would under this view be primarily coincidental. Wish fulfillment may also account for some of the appeal of the Book of Paradise from the *Divan*, because it offered a personality-preserving afterlife unconnected to the Christian theism that Beethoven seems to have rejected.¹⁰⁹

The idea of the narrative shape arising in this way highlights another of its features, one that resonates with Beethoven's own beliefs, for the deity is largely absent: we have theism's story without theism's God. In contrast with the third movement, the scale is entirely human: human struggle is followed not by God's arrival but by human rejoicing. God's action and agency may be inferred from the chain of events, but God does not put in an appearance. This is just what we would expect if Beethoven rejected traditional Christian trinitarian accounts or if, like Fessler, he believed God to be utterly beyond human conceptualization. And it represents another point of resonance with the *Divan*, because God is central to its conceptual systems but absent as a character, there being no direct accounts of God or of God's voice.

The picture so far is of theism as wish fulfillment with a deity who stays in the background, more premise than presence. But if a narrative pattern that coincides with theism originated in wish fulfillment, this raises a question about the order of the movements: like the recitative of the Ninth Symphony, could the fourth movement of the quartet announce a turning away, a *nicht diese Töne*,¹¹⁰ with the final movement serving to override what came before? As indicated near the outset, the connecting of narrative patterns in music and in spirituality seems most defensible at a preconscious level, and this is very much the case here; certainly there was no original narrative plan for the quartet as a whole in these or any other terms—as Brandenburg has pointed out, the earliest sketches show some very different ways in which the quartet might have ended.¹¹¹ But could the formal design of the rondo and its position as

¹⁰⁸ The Stoic picture of the afterlife was a good bit more complex than this, but there is no reason to think that Beethoven would have known that; certainly Robertson seems not to have. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, 256–58.

¹⁰⁹ According to Solomon, wish-fulfillment was a major shaping force in Beethoven's inner life. Solomon, *Beethoven Essays*; and *Beethoven*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Schirmer, 1998). Note also that the *Divan's* conception of paradise is itself shaped by wish fulfillment; this is made quite explicit in the stanza quoted in connection with the final movement.

¹¹⁰ Chua, "Galitzin" *Quartets*, 108.

¹¹¹ Brandenburg, "Historical Background," 164.

the final movement nonetheless suggest that the previous narrative patterns were in some sense less satisfactory?

Our initial impulse must surely be to answer this question in the negative. Because of the often stark contrasts between adjacent movements, together with the neutral pauses between all movements except the final two and the lack of overt thematic connections, each movement stands on its own as a self-contained entity, so much so that the unity of the quartet as a whole has come into question;¹¹² the music does not seem to invite the kind of overarching reading that would turn it into a sort of pilgrim's progress. A negative reaction is further strengthened by Solomon's case that the embrace of irreconcilable opposites characterized Beethoven's late period; in Solomon's view Beethoven "achieved the unachievable, mapped the infinite, [and] synthesized chaos and order . . . and even as he participated in a project that privileged the unattainable [the initiatory project of which the *Tagebuch* is a record], he reached what in principle cannot be reached."¹¹³ Solomon has also suggested that for Beethoven endings were frequently open to revision, sanctioning multiple, radically different versions.¹¹⁴ It is entirely consistent with this picture that in both musical and spiritual domains, multiple narratives could stand on equal footing, side by side.

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And yet if wish fulfillment seems at all credible as a driving force behind the narrative shape of the final movement, then the question of a *nicht diese Töne* cannot simply be dismissed, for wish fulfillment is centrally about creating new possibilities in the face of unsatisfactory options. This impasse may appear to reveal a weakness in the interpretive approach, but I shall argue that it is actually a strength; for if we expand our hermeneutic circle to include the Ninth Symphony, we shall find that this impasse participates in a pattern of striking parallels between the two works, a pattern that reinforces the interpretation explored here.

Both the quartet and the symphony offer the possibility of a turning point after the first three movements, a potential rejection of what has come before in favor of a fourth option. As we have already seen in the quartet, it is a rejection that we can neither believe nor entirely dismiss. In the symphony we cannot dismiss the rejection because it is stated explicitly (and forcefully) by the bass soloist, and we cannot believe it because it is simply not credible that the first three movements serve merely as elaborate straw men, set up only to be knocked down by the glory of the fourth movement, existing only so that the finale's majesty and power might be dramatically displayed.

¹¹² Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 267; and Chua, "*Galitzin*" *Quartets*, 107, 153–56, 161–62.

¹¹³ Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, 131.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 213–28.

In both cases wish fulfillment is strongly implicated in the paradoxical rejection, with Schiller's utopian language the key evidence in the symphony. In a further parallel with the quartet, the deity puts in no direct appearance in the finale of the symphony, as Solomon has persuasively argued ("über'm Sternenzelt muß...").¹¹⁵ And in yet another parallel this same line makes the deity an inference that helps explain observed events.

In proposing that questions of wish fulfillment and theism in the quartet and the symphony be understood in relation to one another, I am of course simply adding a new twist to an old story. The similarities between the works have often been noted: a first movement that is filled with conflict and tension, in which the contrasting key is the submediant and in which recapitulation is problematized; a long and somewhat repetitive scherzo; a deeply expressive slow movement in a double variation form; and a final, continuous stretch of music (two movements in the quartet, one in the symphony) that is at first episodic, involving the interruptive use of recitative. The episodic portions, which both turn away from the sublime to the this-worldly, have been particularly rich sources of parallels,¹¹⁶ and as noted above the rondo theme from the quartet had its origin in the sketches for the finale of the symphony.¹¹⁷

It is even possible that parallels between the two works relating to theism include resonances with the final book of Goethe's *Divan*: like the final movement of the quartet, the finale of the symphony has often been heard as simultaneously eschatological and exalting the here-and-now; the "Tochter aus Elysium" could easily be associated with the Houri of the *Buch des Paradieses*; and a setting in an Islamic paradise for faithful warriors (a clear theme of that book) could help to answer the often vexed question of why Janissary music accompanies the "Held zum Siegen."

If in the quartet Beethoven was returning to issues similar to those explored in the symphony, a *nicht diese Töne* in the quartet might even refer beyond the preceding movements to the Ninth Symphony itself. A significant support for Solomon's argument about Beethoven's openness to multiple endings is his remark to Czerny that he thought he might have made a mistake with the choral finale for the Ninth and that he was considering replacing it, already having an idea in mind (surely the theme that wound up in op. 132).¹¹⁸ Solomon surmises that one reason for

¹¹⁵ Solomon, *Beethoven Essays*, 30.

¹¹⁶ Cooper, *Last Decade*, 367–68; and Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 262.

¹¹⁷ For other parallels see Philip Radcliffe, *Beethoven's String Quartets* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 115; Kerman, *Beethoven Quartets*, 257; Cooper, *Last Decade*, 362; and Kerman, "Single Journey."

¹¹⁸ Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, 216–17.

Beethoven's failure to act on this idea was his eagerness to put the symphony behind him and move on to the quartets; could op. 132 have presented Beethoven with the best of both worlds, a new work to pursue as well as the opportunity to correct his "blunder" with the Ninth?¹¹⁹ This could be a potentially attractive notion for those who sympathize with reservations voiced regarding the finale of the Ninth, whether on account of populism, coercion, or violence.¹²⁰

But here we must pause; surely this takes the argument too far. Persuaded as I am by Solomon's case that Beethoven was radically open to multiple forms for his works, that his apparent rejections and revisions are better seen as accepting valid alternatives than as choosing the new over the old, I cannot now claim that *this time* Beethoven really meant to reject the earlier option, especially when the rejection is such a tentative conjecture. It would be more fruitful to suggest that any hint of the quartet rejecting the symphony functions more like a flirtatious invitation, seeming to push away but really drawing in more deeply. Viewed from this perspective, the quartet and the symphony stand in some sort of mutual intertextuality, the two works having had a partially shared genesis, with the quartet realizing possibilities that were envisioned but (actually) rejected for the symphony. This would turn technical and expressive differences between the two works into contrasts by virtue of a relationship in which the identity of each is understood to involve the other.

It is this mutually intertextual relationship, this dynamic interdependence and reciprocity between the Ninth Symphony and op. 132, that gives contextual weight to the possibility of a theistic narrative in the final movement of the quartet, as the symphony reinforces the reading of the quartet. Under the interpretation offered here, the finale of the quartet enacts a theistic *deus ex machina* that arises from the particular details of execution of an epiphanic discursive strategy; the epiphanic comedy is then traced interpretively to two related sources, Beethoven's (presumably subconscious) wish fulfillment and the Islamic paradise that concludes Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*. The Ninth Symphony then presents a number of parallels: a theistic finale whose theism can be traced to wish fulfillment; a God who is not observable but whose existence must be inferred; a rejection by the finale of the previous movements, a rejection that can neither be believed nor dismissed; and even the possibility that Beethoven read Schiller's poem through the lens of Goethe's *Divan*. That these connections exist between op. 132 and the Ninth Symphony is particularly significant because of the many clear and well-documented

¹¹⁹ Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, 217.

¹²⁰ Sullivan, *Beethoven*, 213–18; and Solomon, *Late Beethoven*, 224–27, 297n28.

connections between the two works, connections that include form, expressive quality, and compositional history. And the interpretive perspective offered here in turn deepens the sense of parallel between those works, suggesting that they may draw on some common territory within Beethoven's complex and contradictory psyche.

If the Ninth Symphony and op. 132 are linked in a special way they are hardly alone, as the literature on late Beethoven is filled with connections between and within works—though the music seems to present a constant stream of idiosyncrasies, it seems that the same idiosyncrasies keep coming up.¹²¹ In one of his discussions of the *Missa solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony, also involving the Quartet, op. 127, William Kinderman observes that connections among Beethoven's works—and especially among texted and untexted works—can point to “the presence in his instrumental music of layers of symbolic and associative meaning beyond the reach of a merely formalistic aesthetic.”¹²² In suggesting a special kind of intertextuality between the Ninth Symphony and the Quartet, op. 132, I am drawing two often-connected works more deeply into a multivalent web of associations involving narrativity, temporality, spirituality, and the divine.¹²³

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In this article I have taken a confluence between form and heading in the Heiliger Dankgesang as a license to read each movement of the quartet in terms of spiritual worldviews. I have suggested that various movements of the quartet reflect narratives of an agonistic conception of life, of a deistically leaning Christianity, of Eastern-influenced conceptions of a world-soul, and even of theism.

As portrayed by Solomon, in pursuing spiritual interests Beethoven seems to have followed the Masonic fashion of the time of his youth, painting a harmonious picture of religious traditions with a broad brush and tending to gloss over points of difference and contrast; Lodes argues

¹²¹ A connection that is both obvious and close at hand is the similarity of the chromatic motives in opp. 132, 133, and 131. For a few other examples among many, see Lambert, “Beethoven in B \flat ,” and Barbara R. Barry, “Recycling the End of the ‘Leibquartett’: Models, Meaning and Propriety in Beethoven's Quartet in B \flat Major, Opus 130,” *Journal of Musicology* 13, no. 3 (1995): 355–76. Of course, these kinds of connections also occurred before the late period, as can be seen from the relationship between the final movement of op. 10, no. 1, and the first movement of the Fifth Symphony.

¹²² Kinderman, “Beethoven's Compositional Models,” 186.

¹²³ Just how this mutually intertextual relationship might be understood remains to be further clarified. I hope to address this question in a future study, drawing on theologian Colin Gunton's suggestion (hints of which have already appeared) that relationality be construed in perichoretic terms, with the being and identity of the one constituted in part by its relationship of dynamic interdependence and reciprocity with the other. Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*, The Bampton Lectures, 1992 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

that the same tendencies could also have come from early Romantic influences.¹²⁴ It seems therefore unlikely that Beethoven would have found the teasing apart of different religious strands that I have undertaken to be a very interesting exercise. It is for this reason that narrative is so crucial to my argument. Even if Beethoven lacked interest in theological details, as a masterful musical story teller he must surely have been aware at some level that these various religious perspectives carried rather different narrative implications, especially when those narratives concern the one story in which we all participate: life and death, a story then very much on Beethoven's mind.

Opus 132 is of course a late work, and lateness is often understood to encompass much more than proximity to the end of the composer's life. But the very proximity seems to issue an invitation: should we choose to conflate creator with protagonist, we could perhaps hear Beethoven rehearsing in this quartet four versions of his own death. It is well established that Beethoven sensed for several years around the time of the composition of op. 132 that his time was short. I doubt very much that he was consciously working through his various conflicting worldviews in the quartet, whatever his intentions regarding the *Missa solemnis* or the Ninth Symphony may have been. Nonetheless, it seems entirely reasonable that the general contours of the spiritual grapplings recorded in the Tagebuch could have become inscribed in the quartet's narrative patterns, opening the possibility of hearing behind its tones multiple ways of conceiving of life and of the end of life.

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ABSTRACT

This paper, taking its cue from the movement's heading, reads the "Heiliger Dankgesang" from Beethoven's String Quartet, op. 132, in terms of spirituality, divinity, and death, following a formal narrative understood in terms of Eastern-influenced conceptions of death and afterlife found in Beethoven's Tagebuch. It has often been noted that the movements of op. 132 present extremely strong contrasts with one another, and this paper draws connections between the narrative shapes

¹²⁴ Solomon, *Late Beethoven*; and Lodes, "Temporality and Mythology," 169, 185, 201.

of the various movements and several of the quite varied spiritual perspectives explored by Beethoven. Viewed in this way, op. 132 synthesizes two of the areas in which Maynard Solomon has argued that Beethoven was open to multiple contrasting and even contradictory possibilities—the musical and the spiritual. The contrasts and conflicts among the movements and among the spiritual narratives that they suggest add new dimensions to inter-opus connections as well, giving new depth to the intertextual relationship between the String Quartet, op. 132, and the Ninth Symphony.

Keywords: Beethoven's String Quartet, op. 132; analysis; narrative; spiritual; Tagebuch