

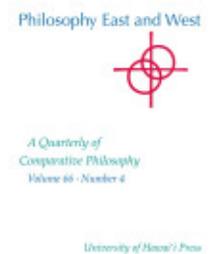


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Schopenhauer's Encounter with Indian Thought: Representation and Will and Their Indian Parallels
by Stephen Cross (review)

Stephan Atzert

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(Review)



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BOOK REVIEWS

Schopenhauer's Encounter with Indian Thought: Representation and Will and Their Indian Parallels. By Stephen Cross. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 287. Hardcover \$50.00, ISBN 978-0-8248-3735-8.



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From the first part of the title, *Schopenhauer's Encounter with Indian Thought*, the reader could expect a study of the influence that Indian philosophy had on Schopenhauer. And even though this expectation will be met, Stephen Cross primarily presents a well-documented analysis of parallels between Schopenhauer's philosophy and that of the Buddhist schools of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra (second and fourth centuries), of the early Advaita Vedānta (ca. seventh century), and those of other configurations of religious and philosophical ideas prevalent in India. Cross employs their philosophical deliberations to elucidate questions posed by Schopenhauer: in this sense a meeting of Schopenhauer with Indian thinking does take place, albeit one introduced by Cross. This is the major theme of the study, and it is complemented in later chapters by a consideration of Will and *śakti* through a close examination of the Will in view of its denial, and via an investigation, in the light of Cross' Indian sources, of the term "Better Consciousness," which occurs in the early sections of Schopenhauer's *Manuscript Remains*.

In his detailed and stylistically compelling study Cross masters the challenging task of representing several worldviews comprehensively and critically. Schopenhauer's reception of Indian sources is treated as part of this larger history of ideas. With reference to Douglas L. Berger's *The Veil of Māyā: Schopenhauer's System and Early Indian Thought* (Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publishing, 2004), Cross establishes that the concept of *māyā* in the *Oupnek'hat* (a translation of selected Upaniṣads interspersed with unmarked passages from Śaṅkara's commentary) determined Schopenhauer's understanding of the individual's perception as a conditioned phenomenon, but in relation to the Will the *Oupnek'hat* merely confirmed ideas he already had. On both counts Schopenhauer held the *Oupnek'hat* in high regard. The Persian blueprint of the *Oupnek'hat*, the *Sirr-i Akbar*, had been compiled by order of Dārā Shikūh (1615–1659), son of Shah Jahan, and was interwoven with Sufi motives of universal unity. As B. J. Hasrat (*Dārā Shikūh: Life and Works* [New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982]) has shown, unmarked passages from the commentaries of Śaṅkara (eighth century) were inserted into the text of the *Sirr-i Akbar*. Then, the translation from Persian by Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805), which constitutes the *Oupnek'hat*, emphasized universal similarities

rather than differentiation. As Cross explains, this adds to the problematic nature of a double translation (from Sanskrit to Persian—with change of terminology inspired by Sufism—and from Persian to Latin in the spirit of the Romantic notion of *philosophia perennis*), a reading of the Upaniṣads in the light of a particular Advaita Vedānta, namely one mediated by Sufi motives.

Schopenhauer first encountered the teachings of the Buddha through the *Asiatick Researches*, especially in an essay by Francis Buchanan in the sixth volume. What he read there confirmed his ethical stance and influenced his concept of the denial of the Will. Later on he studied the writings of Isaac Jakob Schmidt, who explained Mahāyāna Buddhism and the emptiness of all phenomena. One effect of this later influence was that Schopenhauer—probably as the first person in the West—referred to himself as a “Buddhaist” from 1845. Cross notes that the ideas of the Mahāyāna must have been most significant for Schopenhauer, as the “deeper and more interesting affinities between Schopenhauer’s doctrine and Buddhist thinking lie in the epistemological and metaphysical questions” (Cross, p. 45).

In order to trace these affinities systematically, Cross expertly summarizes Schopenhauer’s concept of the world as representation in chapter 5 and extrapolates its key notions (conditionality via causation, time, and space as forms of the mind) in comparison with the teaching of the Mādhyamika in chapter 6. In the Mādhyamika teachings the reformers Nāgārjuna (second century A.D.), Candrakīrti (seventh century)—and others—developed the conditioned nature of all elements through time, space, and causality from the earlier teaching of conditioned arising. Nāgārjuna called the resultant absence of inner essence *śūnyatā*, emptiness. Candrakīrti complemented this by teaching two truths: along with the ultimate truth of *śūnyatā* there indeed was the relative truth of name and form, which was empty, but not nonexistent.

After establishing these significant parallels, Cross takes Advaita Vedānta into account in chapter 7. According to Cross, the emptiness of the Mādhyamika was by no means a static state to be attained, but refers to the gradual perfection of a spiritual attitude of Non-attachment, not unlike the *vairagya* of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and Advaita Vedānta. In this reviewer’s opinion, however, this apparent similarity may obscure the essential differences between the theocratical synthesis of the *Gītā* and the meditation psychology of the Mādhyamika. Similarly, the mention of Paul Deussen as the founding father of the Western reception of Advaita Vedānta (Cross, pp. 78, 95) deserves some critical qualification, because Deussen conflates Schopenhauer with Śaṅkara, the Will with *brahman*, and the denial of the Will with Kant’s categorical imperative. But these are two rather minor points, and in most instances the author supplements the systematic orientation of his commendable study with a historicizing perspective. Thus, the proximity of the monism espoused by Śaṅkara’s teacher Gaudapāda to Mādhyamika Buddhism is highlighted, and its struggle with the more or less dualistic Vedānta schools of Rāmānuja and Madhva (which had incorporated, like other *bhakti* movements, aspects of the social emancipation of the outcastes) is described: invoking the teachings of the *Brahma Sūtra*, according to

which the divine *brahman* permeates everything, a view that diverges from that of Advaita Vedānta, they accused Advaita Vedānta of being close to Buddhism.

In chapter 8 Cross describes the affinities pertaining to the relation of appearance to ultimate truth. Cross impressively summarizes the conceptual balancing act common to all schools, which contrasts an unconditioned highest truth with a palpable, firm, but only relative day-to-day reality. As Cross explains, empirical reality and transcendental ideality existed simultaneously for Schopenhauer, in great proximity to the two truths in the Indian systems. This is not a new observation, but all the more striking in view of the scholarship Cross brings to bear on the topic. Parallel to the comprehensive critical survey of Schopenhauer's notion of representation in chapter 5 and its Indian correlates in chapters 6 and 7, Cross presents the World as Will and the role of ideas for the objectivation of the Will in chapters 9 and 10. These philosophemes of Schopenhauer are contrasted in chapter 11 with the cosmology of the Advaita Vedānta, in which the subtle body and the causal body of the individual find their correlations in the Hiraṇyagarba, the subtle world of forces, and the *avyakta*, the unmanifest. Chapter 12 focuses on the development of *śūnyatā* into the teachings of the Yogācāra. The teachers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (fourth century A.D.) psychologized the teaching of conditioned origination of the older Buddhist schools— not as a scholastic exercise, but hand in hand with meditation experience—into the concept of *ālaya-vijñāna*, which has been translated as storehouse consciousness, because it determines the illusions and misconceptions of the individual, without being aware of itself. Thereby they explained the apparent continuity experienced by the individual, but also its suffering, because the storehouse consciousness generates the need to believe in the individual self, the *ātman*.

These comparative chapters show Cross' exemplary scholarship and prepare the ground for his conclusions. According to all of the aforementioned teachings, the world as representation does not possess a final reality, but instead consists of appearances in the perception of living beings. This world of illusions is sustained by a metaphysical principle that humans cannot control, a truth of a higher order. Cross explains the structural similarities of the teachings as those of (1) a metaphysical substrate, (2) apparent continuity, (3) suffering, (4) a reality that exists before knowledge, inaccessible to thought, and (5) assuming intermediate forms of the epistemological genesis of the world (Platonic Ideas, *saṃskāras*, *bījas*, etc.). While the relationship of reality to appearance is the common concern, there are differences in approach, for example that the Will, in spite of Paul Deussen's interpretation, does not have the status of a final principle in the manner accorded to the *brahman* by Śaṅkara, but is only a force that brings forth manifestations. Cross deems the storehouse consciousness of the Yogācāra and the causal body in the metaphysical psychology of Hinduism to be closer correlates of the Will.

In chapter 13 Cross explores *śakti*—the embodiment of the life principle—as a parallel to the Will: as Mario Piantelli (1986) has shown, this aspect also relates to the *Sirr-i Akbar*, because *avidyā* and the passive *māyā* of the Upaniṣads only became *mahāmāya*, that is, *śakti*, in the later Advaita Vedānta. At the time of Dārā Shikūh they

were *mahāmāya*, and accordingly he had *māyā* translated as *isq*. Comparable to the *amor* of renaissance literature, *isq* was similar in meaning, but this meaning had little in common with the *māyā* of the Upaniṣads. This proximity to the Will can be seen in popular forms of *śakti*, for example in Bhairavi and her capacity for destruction. However, *śakti* is always understood as an aspect of Śiva, while the Will is constructed more intricately, an observation that leads Cross to pose the question, in chapter 14, whether Will was final reality or only first illusion. If something were to lie beyond the Will, if suspension of the Will ought to be possible, the Thing-in-Itself must encompass more than just the Will. In Schopenhauer's writings the relationship between Will and Thing-in-Itself is ambiguous: in many passages they are taken as synonyms when they should be complements, since Schopenhauer states, in chapter 18, "On the Cognizability of the Thing in Itself," in the second volume of his main work *World as Will and Idea*, that the Will is merely that aspect of the Thing-in-Itself that is experienced by the individual. Thus, Schopenhauer's position, according to Cross, was not unlike that of Buddhism: the highest truth is a truth of a different order, of a changed perspective, not of two principles in a dualistic opposition. The obsolete rhetorical question of how the Will could deny itself became possible only due to the erroneous conflation of Will and Thing-in-Itself in Schopenhauer's main work, intentional insofar as Schopenhauer wanted his philosophy to stay close to empirical experience.

In chapter 15 Cross relates that which lies beyond the Will to the concept of "Better Consciousness" from Schopenhauer's *Manuscript Remains*. Better Consciousness does not recognize itself; because it lies beyond subject and object, it does not belong to the empirical world. When Schopenhauer begins to use the term "Pure Subject of Knowing" in the *Manuscript Remains*, the term Better Consciousness disappears, but without being replaced by the Pure Subject of Knowing, whose perception only extends to the Platonic Ideas. Here Cross observes that even though Schopenhauer's reference to a Better Consciousness precedes his encounter with the *Oupnek'hat*, it is similar to the *ātman*, and that it was replaced by the denial of the Will, a concept whose proximity to the *nirvāṇa* and the *śūnyatā* of Buddhist teachings is obvious. Thus, Schopenhauer's closeness to Buddhism is confirmed, because Schopenhauer distanced himself from theistic interpretations by giving up the earlier conception of the Better Consciousness and, wanting to remain based in empirical consciousness, intentionally and systematically wrote about that which is indescribable, with a negative prefix, as an absence of illusion.

Stephen Cross ably elucidates the problems common to the above-mentioned traditions in their attempts to gauge the spectrum of human experience. By illustrating the respective convergences with hermeneutically considered sources, his diachronic intercultural encounter possesses an invaluable anthropological dimension. As a consequence, Cross can provide clear contours to the otherwise murky relationship between the Will and its denial. Schopenhauer's Will also casts a new light on the teaching of the Buddha, if one were to take motivation as having to result in action, and not as volition constituting an action: "Body and mind, [Schopenhauer] asserts, are simply the will made manifest and their activities the expression of its

inward movement; we may compare this with the words of the Buddha recorded in the *Anguttara Nikāya*: Volition is action, thus I say, O monks; for as soon as volition arises, one does the action" (Cross, p. 168).

Reference

Piantelli, M. 1986. "La Māyā nelle Upanisad di Schopenhauer." *Annuario Filosofico* 2 (1986): 163–207.

Kritik der symbolischen Formen I: Symbolische Form und Funktion (Critique of symbolic forms I: Symbolic forms and function). By Raji C. Steineck. Philosophie Interkulturell, Band 3. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2014. Pp. 148. Paper €38. ISBN 978-3-7728-2673-3.



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For any reader with knowledge of the works of Ernst Cassirer, the question that will come to mind on approaching Raji C. Steineck's *Kritik der symbolischen Formen I: Symbolische Form und Funktion* is: Why Japan? Cassirer's great range of writings on the history of thought, culture, and symbol involves no sustained attention to Japanese culture. Cassirer also never addresses problems of East-West philosophy, nor did he, unlike some other German thinkers in the twentieth century, engage in correspondence with Japanese thinkers. In the first volume of *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Cassirer does make reference in several places to the Japanese language based on Johann Joseph Hoffmann's *Japanische Sprachlehre* (Leiden: Brill, 1877), along with references to a great many other languages.

Considered from the other direction today, Cassirer's works are of interest to Japanese readers. For example, after Donald Phillip Verene published *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979)—the first volume of writings from Cassirer's *Nachlass* (housed in Yale University's Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library)—the first translation of it was into Japanese, which appeared in 1985.

With this context considered, the purpose of Steineck's study is the systematic presentation of Cassirer's philosophical themes considered at various points from Japanese perspectives and sources. As he makes clear for the reader at the beginning of his work, Steineck expressly acknowledges that symbolic forms as articulated in Japanese culture exhibit significant differences from the European background of Cassirer's analysis. But he also asserts that this difference is to be considered as a way to probe the dimensions and correctness of Cassirer's theory and that these are an advantage to this study, not a disadvantage (pp. 7–8).