Schopenhauer’s Encounter with Indian Thought

Representation and Will and Their Indian Parallels

STEPHEN CROSS
SCHOPENHAUER’S ENCOUNTER WITH INDIAN THOUGHT
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Stephen Cross
In memory of my father,
Noël John Cross,
and of
Kathleen Raine,
poet, scholar, and lover of India
When all desires that cling to the heart are cast away, then a mortal becomes immortal.
— *Katha Upaniṣad*

True salvation, deliverance from life and suffering, cannot even be imagined without complete denial of the will. Till then, everyone is nothing but this will itself.
— Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*
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IT IS A SOBERING THOUGHT that more than a century and a half after his death Arthur Schopenhauer remains, as Bryan Magee has pointed out, the only major Western philosopher to have shown a serious and sustained interest in the thought of Asia and to have consistently sought to relate it to his own philosophical ideas; he goes much further in this direction than does Heidegger, for example. His vigorous criticism of the use by H. T. Colebrooke, Rammohun Roy, and other nineteenth-century writers of Christian terminology in the translation of Indian texts—soul and capitalized He in place of ātman, God for Brahman, etc., “misleading the reader into quite false notions,” as he noted in the fifth volume of the Manuscript Remains—was far ahead of its time, and his steady insistence on the fact that significant common ground links the Western and Asian traditions of philosophical thought opened new perspectives.

It is hoped that the pages that follow will be of interest not just to Schopenhauer specialists and the growing number of scholars interested in Indian thought, but also to a wider range of readers—all those who seek to better understand the nature of our existence in this strange and mysterious world. To this end, I have sought at all times to make clear the meaning of the Sanskrit and German terms used in the text. I have nowhere added emphasis to quoted passages; these are given as they occur in standard translations (those of Payne in the case of Schopenhauer). Sanskrit words are cited throughout in the pratipādika or stem form, and names and technical terms are rendered in full transliteration in place of the conventional forms sometimes employed.

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Abbreviations

Works by Schopenhauer in German

GBr Gesammelte Briefe von Arthur Schopenhauer, ed. A. Hübscher (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978)


Works by Schopenhauer in English Translation

FR On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason

VC On Vision and Colours, ed. D. E. Cartwright

WWR The World as Will and Representation

WN On the Will in Nature

FW On the Freedom of the Will

BM On the Basis of Morality Berghahn

PP Parerga and Paralipomena

MSR Manuscript Remains

Hindu and Buddhist Texts

SSB Śaṃkara Source Book

BG Bhagavad Gītā

BGBh. Śaṃkara’s Bhāṣya on the Bhagavad Gītā

BSBh. Śaṃkara’s Bhāṣya on the Brahma Sūtra

GK Gauḍapāda’s Kārikā on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad

GKBh. Śaṃkara’s Bhāṣya on Gauḍapāda’s Kārikā on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad

MMK Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā

Pras. Candrakīrti’s Prasannapadā (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā-vṛtti)
Introduction

Those who have read Thomas Mann’s novel *Buddenbrooks* will remember the episode toward the end when the protagonist, Thomas, now sensing the approach of death and close to despair, takes from his shelf a volume of philosophy, purchased years before but never opened, and as he turns its pages for the first time is overwhelmed by its contents. That book, it is generally supposed (although Mann does not actually say as much), was Schopenhauer’s principal work, *The World as Will and Representation*, and the description of the powerful (if temporary) impact it has upon Thomas Buddenbrook tells us much about the effect it had upon the educated public of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe and America. The list of significant figures who at this time came under the influence of Schopenhauer’s thought—in some cases for a time only, in others lastingly—makes remarkable reading: not only Thomas Mann, but also Conrad, Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, Melville, Strindberg, Pirandello, D’Annunzio, Proust, Tur- genev, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Wagner, Mahler, Wittgenstein, Nishida, Freud, Schrödinger, and many others.

What drew people to Schopenhauer was his deeply felt concern with issues that matter not only to philosophers but to every man and woman: the nature of the world in which we find ourselves; the degree of reality it has; the cause of the suffering in it; the question of our own salvation and the meaning of our life. In Schopenhauer’s own words, “For if anything in the world is desirable . . . it is that a ray of light should fall on the obscurity of our existence, and that we should obtain some information about this enigmatical life of ours, in which nothing is clear except its misery and vanity.”

Schopenhauer was fascinated by Indian thought and the ways in which it seemed to anticipate and confirm his own ideas, and this book seeks to explore the relationship. In passages dating from all periods of his writing
he tells us of the importance that Indian philosophical thought had for him; to take only two examples, in the 1818 preface of his principal work he invites his readers to compare his teachings with those of the Indians, suggesting that such a comparison will assist in correctly grasping his own doctrines: “If, I say, the reader has already received and assimilated the divine inspiration of ancient Indian wisdom, then he is best of all prepared to hear what I have to say to him. It will not speak to him, as to many others, in a strange and even hostile tongue.”2 And toward the end of his life, referring to the Oupnek’hat—the translation of the Upaniṣads that was his lifelong reading—he writes in words that became widely known and did much to open the minds of Europeans and Americans to Asian thought: “With the exception of the original text, it is the most profitable and sublime reading that is possible in the world; it has been the consolation of my life and will be that of my death.”3

Since those words were written, many scholars have commented on the relation of Schopenhauer’s thought to Indian philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, a reassessment is overdue. It is well over a hundred years since the last comprehensive study of this kind, Max Hecker’s Schopenhauer und die indische Philosophie, was published.4 After a period of neglect, not least in the English-speaking world, the last few decades of the twentieth century witnessed a vigorous renewal of interest in Schopenhauer’s thought that raised new issues and brought with it fresh perspectives.5 During the same century research into the philosophical and religious thought of India made great advances. In the early decades scholars such as Sylvian Lévi, L. de La Vallée Poussin, T. Stcherbatsky, and E. Lamotte began to examine the Viññānāvāda and Yogācāra texts. The important contributions of Paul Hacker, H. von Glasenapp, Edward Conze, and T. R. V. Murti belong to the 1950s and ‘60s, and the studies of G. M. Nagao, C. Lindtner, L. Schmithausen, M. Sprung, J. L. Garfield, and others, aimed at clarifying the teachings of the Mahāyāna schools, to more recent decades. Very little of this considerable body of more recent knowledge has been utilized to reassess Schopenhauer’s position vis-à-vis Indian philosophical ideas. Thus new understandings are available on both sides of the equation—with regard to Schopenhauer and in relation to Indian thought—and must affect the results of any comparative study.
The relationship between Schopenhauer’s thought and that of India may be studied in two ways. One may seek to establish the extent to which the German philosopher was influenced by Indian ideas; this is a matter of historical inquiry, based upon dates and firm evidence of contact and resultant influence. Or one may take a comparative approach and examine the homologies that appear to exist between Schopenhauer’s thought and the philosophical and religious ideas of India, seeking to assess their significance; here philosophical judgment plays a greater part, although textual evidence is again important. The two approaches should not be confused, and this book adopts the second. It explores the extent and nature of the affinities between Schopenhauer’s philosophy and some significant aspects of Indian thought; it does not attempt, other than very occasionally and in passing, to enter into questions of influence. However, before we set aside this question, a few brief remarks should be made.

First, we need hardly doubt that Indian ideas exerted at least some influence upon Schopenhauer; he is not likely to have studied them throughout his working life without there being some purpose and result. The question of how significant that influence was lies outside the scope of the present work; we may note, however, that Douglas Berger has argued that the influence of the Oupnek’hāt, and in particular of the concept of māyā, was of fundamental importance for the development of the doctrine of representation. In the case of the other main pillar of Schopenhauer’s system, there is little in the major Upaniṣads that could have given rise to the idea of the will (there is far more in the thought of Jakob Böhme or of Greco-Roman antiquity). Attention has been drawn to a passage in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad —“That, whence all beings are produced . . . is Brahman”—as a possible source for the will. Schopenhauer copied this passage into his notebook, but his comment upon it—“The will-to-live is the source and essence of things”—clearly shows that the concept of the will was already formed in his mind and the Upaniṣadic passage regarded as confirmation.

There therefore appears to be little reason to doubt Schopenhauer’s own account of the genesis of the will: he states clearly that the starting point for his doctrine lies in Kant’s teaching of the empirical and intelligible characters. In any case, the whole question of the influence of Indian, and par-
ticularly Upaniṣadic, ideas upon Schopenhauer cannot be resolved until a thorough study of his personal copy of the Oupnek’hat, and of the many annotations he made in it, has been undertaken. This work is only now beginning, 150 years after the philosopher’s death,11 and until a substantial part of its results is known, speculation as to the extent to which Schopenhauer’s thought was influenced by his contact with Indian ideas must be of limited value.

The question of the affinities existing between Schopenhauer’s thought and that of India, upon which this book concentrates, is not restricted in this way. And it is, if anything, more, and not less, important than is the question of influence, interesting though the latter undoubtedly is; for the less Schopenhauer was influenced by Indian ideas, the more remarkable are the resemblances between these and his own philosophical conceptions. It is of course true that comparative studies may all too easily remain at the level of superficial resemblances since it will always be possible to find some analogy between the doctrine of a Western philosopher and one aspect or another of such rich and diverse traditions as those we find in India and elsewhere in Asia. Edward Conze, in a paper first published in 1963, commented on the unsatisfactory nature of most attempts to compare Eastern and Western thinkers.12 A mere coincidence of formulations, he argued, however striking, may mask fundamental divergences in the concepts underlying them; thus Berkeley and the Yogācārins may agree on the denial of matter, Kant and Nāgārjuna on the limitations of the mind, Hume and the Buddhists on the denial of any self. Yet all these are coincidences concerning a single point only; they are not true parallels, for which several such points are required. Although he does not enter into detail, Conze held that a true parallel of this sort exists between Schopenhauer’s thought and Buddhist philosophical ideas (he does not consider Hinduism), so much so that it provides a standard by which other alleged parallels may be judged.

Since the range of Indian thought is of course very great, our questions can be meaningfully discussed only in relation to specific schools and not to Indian thought in general—nor even to Hinduism or Buddhism in general, as has almost always been the case in the past where Schopenhauer is concerned. This book therefore concentrates on schools that are of major
significance within the religions to which they belong and are to some degree authoritative for Indian thought as a whole. The doctrines to be compared with the teaching of Schopenhauer must be of central importance for the school concerned and through the influence of that school have had a widespread and significant impact on Indian thought generally. These requirements are met in the following way. With regard to Hindu thought the discussion is confined to Advaita Vedānta (and especially the teaching of Śaṅkara) since this seeks to systematize earlier Hindu ideas and represents a very widely accepted interpretation of Upaniṣadic thought. In the case of Buddhism, the Madhyamaka is examined in relation to Schopenhauer’s doctrine of representation and Yogācāra thought in relation to that of will. The Mādhyamika philosophers provided the fullest examination within a Buddhist context of the reality-status of the world, and in this field their investigations are of central importance; the Yogācārins added to this an exploration of the subtle mental factors that bring about the arising of the world in consciousness. Since they shared and developed the epistemology of the Mādhyamikas, the two schools may be seen as part of a continuous development, with the Yogācārins supplying a further dimension relatively unexplored by the Mādhyamikas. Taken together, they represent the greater part of the philosophical thought associated with Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In confining the study to the above-mentioned Indian schools, it is inevitable that much has been excluded. Schopenhauer’s doctrine might have been compared with interesting results to the teachings of the Jain thinkers or, as was done to some extent by nineteenth-century writers, to the Buddhism of the Pāli texts. Even a different choice within the Vedānta would have yielded different results: had Schopenhauer been compared with Rāmānuja and the devotional schools, fundamental disagreements would have become evident. Nevertheless, the Advaita and Mahāyāna doctrines with which the teaching of Schopenhauer is compared in the present work are of great importance in the history of Indian thought, and their influence has spread widely.

The book falls into four sections and is arranged as follows. The initial group of chapters (chapters 1–4) examines the background to Schopenhauer’s interest in Indian thought and the growth and extent of his knowledge
of Hindu and Buddhist ideas. The two principal comparative sections of the study follow. They relate to the two questions that most concerned the philosopher—that of the reality-status of the world, and that of the nature of the underlying existence from which it arises; his answers to these questions are, of course, implied in the title of his principal work, *The World as Will and Representation*. The method used in these middle sections of the book is, first, to set out in separate chapters, and without any attempt at comparison, the teaching of Schopenhauer and that of the relevant Hindu and Buddhist schools and then to discuss in a further chapter the main points of convergence (or sometimes of divergence) that have become evident.

Thus chapters 5–8 are concerned with the doctrine of *representation* and related views found in India. That there are significant similarities here has long been recognized—indeed it was Schopenhauer himself who first drew attention to the fact. Nevertheless, there is considerably more to discover in this area, and in the light of twentieth-century scholarship (especially in the field of Mahāyāna Buddhism) it becomes apparent that the affinity with Indian thought is more, and not less, remarkable than previously supposed.

Chapters 9–13 explore in the same manner the doctrine of the *will* and its relation to Indian thought. Strangely enough, this has never been done in a systematic manner, and the relation of the second main pillar of Schopenhauer’s system to Indian ideas has remained virtually unexplored. This is the more surprising since the doctrine of the will presents problems that have appeared to some commentators almost insoluble. Wilhelm Halbfass, commenting on the ambivalence and problematic nature of Schopenhauer’s concept of the will, has suggested that Indian thought, and specifically Buddhism and Vedānta, can help to clarify Schopenhauer’s position in this respect;¹³ we shall find that this is indeed the case.

What has been noted ever since Schopenhauer’s writings came to prominence is the similarity of his ethical teaching to that of Buddhism and the evident, but largely unexplained, parallel between *denial of the will* and *nirvāṇa*. However, both the ethical and the soteriological features of Schopenhauer’s teaching derive from the doctrine of the will; they are, indeed, its effects. But what of the doctrine itself? Can we identify an aspect of Indian thought that corresponds to *will* and holds a place of comparable impor-
tance? As we shall see in a later chapter, Schopenhauer himself, late in life, suggested a similarity to the Buddhist idea of *upādāna*, or “clinging,” but took things no further than this. In the last century both H. Zimmer and H. von Glasenapp also suggested parallels (respectively *śakti* and *samskāras*), but neither followed up his insight, and the matter has not as yet received anything like the attention it merits. For if it is the case, as this book seeks to show, that each of the two principal pillars on which Schopenhauer’s philosophical system rests converges with important areas of Indian thought (both Buddhist and Hindu), then this indicates a parallel that is systematic in nature. It would show that there exists between a leading representative of the Western philosophical tradition and the thought of India—and ultimately of East Asia also—a significant area of common ground constituting a bridge by means of which these two great traditions may be brought into closer relation.

Chapters 14–17 conclude the book. They grow out of the preceding discussion of the will and lead on to the questions of its ontological status and the nature of final reality. According to the principles that Schopenhauer himself laid down (following the lead of Kant), this question does not fall within the range of philosophy, and one of his objections to the German thinkers of his own day was that they did not observe this limit. Yet in spite of this view, the question of final reality and its relation to *will* pervades Schopenhauer’s work. The question “from what this will has sprung,” which he was still asking himself in the Epiphilosophy of his principal work,14 lies behind almost all that he wrote, and his thought cannot be adequately grasped without some consideration of it. Here a comparison with Indian modes of thought is again of value. Indian thinkers, in attempting to grasp the relation of final reality to the principle of manifestation, faced essentially the same difficulties as did Schopenhauer and can, at least to some extent, help us to understand the issues he faced.

The value of cross-cultural philosophical comparison is sometimes questioned, but philosophy by its very nature cannot be constrained within cultural boundaries. Many scholars have expressed the conviction that there is much more to be gained by examining the relation between the Asian and Western traditions of thought than by studying each in isolation. Mircea
Eliade pointed many years ago to the danger of what he saw as a growing provincialism in Western philosophy. Similarly, F. Copleston suggested that “reflection on non-Western philosophical traditions can serve to remedy a certain myopia.” S. Radhakrishnan wrote that “we must recognize humbly the partial and defective character of our isolated traditions and seek their source in the generic tradition from which they have all sprung.” Hacker remarked that Indology can have a future only in living interaction with the spiritual and intellectual life of Europe. Heidegger called for “planetary thinking” and wrote, “Again and again it has seemed urgent to me that a dialogue take place with the thinkers of what is to us the Eastern world.” Halbfass devoted a major volume to this very purpose. More recently an American scholar, J. J. Kuppreman, has drawn attention to “the importance of classic Asian texts, not merely in their own right but also as openings to live philosophical problems,” and Garfield has undertaken the exploration of “cross-cultural philosophical themes,” writing, “Ignoring the philosophical traditions of other cultures in fact, whether we like it or not, continues the colonial project of subordinating those cultures to our own.” It is with such views in mind that the present study is undertaken.
Schopenhauer in Context: The “Oriental Renaissance”

_Schopenhauer’s interest_ in Indian thought was not an isolated phenomenon. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries many of the leading thinkers in Europe, like the Transcendentalists in New England some decades later, shared his enthusiasm for “the divine inspiration of ancient Indian wisdom.” Especially in Germany, it was believed that the Indian texts then becoming available had the potential to bring about a dramatic renewal of the West—an “Oriental Renaissance,” as the idea came to be called, which would revive the spirit of Europe in the same way that the Florentine Renaissance and the recovery of Greek texts had done some three centuries before.

The interest in Indian thought was the direct result of the discovery of an initial part of the riches contained in what had hitherto been for the West the closed book of Sanskrit literature—the very existence of which had until then been hardly suspected. The new knowledge flowed into Europe through two main channels. The first was a series of translations and scholarly essays on the thought and literature of India emanating from a small group of British enthusiasts and researchers based in Bengal and employed by the powerful East India Company. Under the enlightened patronage of Warren Hastings, the governor-general of the day, Charles Wilkins had become the first European to master the Sanskrit language and in 1784—four years before the birth of Schopenhauer—had published the first European translation of the _Bhagavad Gītā._ Five years later, Sir William Jones’s translation of a play by the fifth-century Indian poet Kālidāsa, _Śacontalā, or the Fatal Ring,_ amazed and delighted cultured circles in Europe with its unexpected depth and sophistication. Goethe, among others, fell in love with it and was loud in its praise. Further translations and essays, some of them rapidly retranslated into German or French, appeared in the journal _Asiatick_
Among these was Jones’s celebrated affirmation of the linguistic (and by implication historical) links between the Sanskrit language and Greek, Latin, Persian, and probably the Germanic and Celtic tongues. For a Europe hitherto tied to Biblical chronology and the view of early history that went with it, the implications were prodigious.

The second source for a knowledge of Indian ideas was a single work, the earliest translation into a European language (it was Latin) of the Upanisads. Published in 1801–1802, this was the work of the remarkable French scholar and traveler A. H. Anquetil-Duperron. It was known as the Oupnek’hat, a Persian corruption of the word Upanisad, for it was a double translation, made not from original Sanskrit texts but from a compilation of fifty Upanisads that had been assembled and translated into Persian in seventeenth-century India under the title Sirr-i Akbar (The Great Secret). The Sirr-i Akbar was in itself a remarkable production. The moving spirit behind it was Prince Dārā Shikūh, the eldest son and heir apparent of one of the greatest rulers in the world at that time, the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the builder of the Taj Mahal. Prince Dārā never attained the throne his father intended for him. Strongly drawn toward both Sufism and the mysticism of the Upaniṣads, he was defeated in a brief war of succession and executed by his younger brother, the emperor Aurangzeb, on the grounds of apostasy from Islam—“for the greater glory of God,” as Schopenhauer wryly remarks. The Oupnek’hat was of lifelong importance to Schopenhauer, his most valued single source for a knowledge of Indian thought. We will return to it in the next chapter.

When these writings and translations reached Europe, the effect was dramatic. In Germany especially the thinkers and poets of the Romantic Revival began to gaze with fascination, and indeed with yearning, toward the giant outlines of the ancient civilization of India as the first peaks began to appear through the haze of time and distance. Most of the leading figures of the Romantic movement were caught up in this—Herder and Goethe among the older writers; the two Schlegel brothers, Novalis, and Schelling and his disciples among the younger, to name but some. Friedrich Schlegel was the central figure during the initial phase of the Oriental Renaissance. While in Paris, he became in 1803 the first German to master the Sanskrit
language and to study the literature and thought of India on the basis of original sources. The book that resulted, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians), published in 1808, was a landmark in Europe’s discovery of India. Together with Novalis and Schelling, Schlegel shared the idea of a recovery in the Orient of the perennial wisdom of mankind: “It was there,” wrote an observer, “that they hoped to find the fullness of life, primitive mankind, the original religion that they are making every effort to trace. Friedrich Schlegel in particular works tirelessly in this direction.”

The discovery of the ancient thought of India, it was believed, would bring about a new era. It would bring to a close the centuries dominated by the study of Greek and Roman antiquity in the same way that the Renaissance had brought to a close the Middle Ages. Schelling, in 1806, wrote that “Open, free communication with [the Orient] must exist, so that the old life of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries may better return”; two years later Friedrich Schlegel wrote, “The Renaissance of antiquity promptly transformed and rejuvenated all the sciences . . . and transformed the world. We could even say that the effects of Indic studies, if these enterprises were taken up and introduced into learned circles with the same energy today, would be no less great and far-reaching.” Ten years after this we find the young Schopenhauer echoing the same idea in the preface to *The World as Will and Representation*, with the claim that access to the Vedic thought of India is “the greatest advantage which this still young century has to show over previous centuries, since I surmise that the influence of Sanskrit literature will penetrate no less deeply than did the revival of Greek literature in the fifteenth century.”

Behind the interest in India lay the passionate dissatisfaction of the Romantic thinkers with the condition of Europe. They believed that by turning its back on the past during the Enlightenment, Europe had bankrupted itself intellectually and spiritually. “All those subtle reasoners,” Friedrich Schlegel writes, “who live only in the present, and own no influence save that of the spirit of the day, have almost without exception embraced the ruinous and destructive opinion that all should be created anew, and produced, as it were, from nothing. All knowledge of ancient philosophy is, therefore,
fallen into contempt.”7 Recovery could only be had by turning back to the primordial roots of civilization. One must rediscover the earliest wisdom, from which later religion was derived. Of this India was the guardian; here lay at once the past and the future of humanity. “All, all springs from India without exception,” Schlegel wrote in a letter of 1803.8 And a few years later: “Without the continually renewed stimulus of this enlivening principle, the European spirit would probably never have raised itself so high, or it would have fallen back earlier.”9

Thus for the writers and poets of the Romantic movement the Orient, and India in particular, was not so much a matter of historical interest and philosophical inquiry as a source of spiritual renewal and sustenance. Nevertheless, other influences were also at work. Schlegel, while still in Paris and completing his book on Indian thought, came under the influence of the powerful Catholic revival that followed upon the defeat of revolutionary France. Within a few days of the publication of his book he and his wife, Dorothea (the daughter of Moses Mendlessohn), were received into the Catholic Church, and his leadership of the Oriental Renaissance came to an abrupt and uncomfortable end. Schopenhauer regarded it as a betrayal; his comment some years later was acid: “disgraceful obscurantism.”10

It is illuminating to compare Friedrich Schlegel with Schopenhauer, some sixteen years his junior. Schopenhauer was not the most extreme, but he proved to be the most tenacious holder of the attitudes characterizing the Oriental Renaissance. He was born too late to share in the initial excitement—Jones’s translation of Śacontalā was published in the year following his birth—and in any case he did not find the imaginative literature of India especially to his taste, opining that translators should devote their energies less to this and much more to the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and other philosophical works of India.11 Yet his commitment to the idea of an Oriental Renaissance, a rebirth of the spirit resulting from contact with Indian thought, is both specific and clear. While others made greater contributions to Indological scholarship, none of his contemporaries matched Schopenhauer as a champion of the value of Indian thought.

We cannot understand Schopenhauer’s commitment to India without pausing for a moment to consider his views regarding Christianity. While
Novalis, Schelling, and Friedrich Schlegel all, in various ways and to differing degrees, clung to the hope that Christianity could be restored as Europe’s source of spiritual life, Schopenhauer had no such expectation. He believed that in its essence—that is to say, in the twin doctrines of original sin and redemption—Christianity was profoundly true. We find him writing as follows:

Although, in essential respects, Christianity taught only what the whole of Asia knew already long before and even better, for Europe it was nevertheless a new and great revelation. In consequence of this, the spiritual tendency of European nations was entirely transformed. For it disclosed to them the metaphysical significance of existence, and accordingly taught them to look beyond the narrow, paltry, and ephemeral life on earth, and no longer to regard that as an end in itself, but as a state or condition of suffering, guilt, trial, struggle and purification, from which we can soar upwards to a better existence, inconceivable to us, by means of moral effort, severe renunciation, and the denial of our own self. Thus it taught the great truth of the affirmation and denial of the will-to-live in the garment of allegory by saying that, through the Fall of Adam, the curse had come upon all men, sin had come into the world, and guilt was inherited by all; but that through the sacrificial death of Jesus, on the other hand, all were purged of sin, the world was saved, guilt abolished, and justice appeased.¹²

Thus the doctrine of original sin (equated by Schopenhauer with affirmation of the will) and of salvation (denial of the will) is the great truth that forms the kernel of Christianity. The rest is for the most part “clothing and covering,”¹³ and so he writes: “Just because I value this kernel highly, I sometimes treat the shell with little ceremony; yet it is thicker than is often supposed.”¹⁴ But Christianity had lost its way. It had forgotten its true significance and degenerated into shallow optimism,¹⁵ which in the face of the all too evident suffering of the world clung to the idea of it as a theodicy, the work of a beneficent Creator. Luther had started the process; while honestly attacking the abuses of the Church, he had gone too far and undermined the essence of Christianity, the ascetic principle itself. This opened the door
to “optimism,” the false idea that happiness is to be found in the world, “the fundamental error that bars the way to all truth.” In consequence, Protestantism soon degenerated into superficial rationalism, and this, thinking itself exceedingly clever, set to work to measure with its tailor’s tape “the profound mysteries of Christianity over which centuries have brooded and disputed.” And so, Schopenhauer concludes, just as wolves begin to appear in neglected villages, materialism appeared upon the scene. Meanwhile, the comfortably employed professors of philosophy, having invented a fictitious faculty of reason supposed to give immediate access to metaphysical knowledge and fleeing from what is truly great and profound in Kant’s teaching, busily try to paper over the cracks in the crumbling structure of Christian thought: “But do these gentlemen know what time of day it is? A long predicted epoch has set in; the Church is tottering, indeed so badly, that it is doubtful whether it will recover its centre of gravity; for faith has been lost.” Thus, Schopenhauer concludes, Catholicism is a disgracefully abused Christianity, Protestantism a degenerate Christianity, and the Christian religion appears to have succumbed to the fate “of everything that is noble, sublime, and great” once it comes into the hands of mankind.

As a result of this estimate, Schopenhauer’s commitment to India as the source of philosophical knowledge and spiritual renewal is much more consistent than was that of his Romantic contemporaries. They had been attracted to Indian thought in part because they believed or imagined it harmonized with the esoteric truths of Christianity as they understood these to be. With Schopenhauer the position is reversed: what is true and great in Christianity results from its having “Indian blood in its veins,” and where it differs from the Indian standpoint (as on the question of a personal Creator-God or over the attitude to animals), it is Christianity that is in error. Consequently there is something definite and settled about Schopenhauer’s approach to India that we do not find in the Romantic writers. But even so, he shares a part of their attitude, and his belief in the Oriental Renaissance, and in India as the source of a primordial and original wisdom, is entirely at one with theirs. Nor is it limited to Schopenhauer’s early years, for in the 1844 edition of The World as Will and Representation we find him writing the following: “Those sublime authors of the Upanishads of the Vedas, who
can scarcely be conceived as mere human beings... we must ascribe this immediate illumination of their mind to the fact that, standing nearer to the origin of our race as regards time, these sages apprehended the inner essence of things more clearly and profoundly than the already enfeebled race, ‘as mortals now are,’ is capable of doing.”

And in the Parerga and Paralipomena of 1851 we read: “In particular, let us not forget India, that sacred soil, that cradle of the human race, or at any rate that part thereof to which we belong, where first Mohammedans and then Christians furiously and most cruelly attacked the followers of mankind’s sacred and original faith.” In this way the ideas of the Oriental Renaissance were carried forward by Schopenhauer long after the initial phase had drawn to a close. The initial blaze of Romantic enthusiasm had dimmed, but the fire that had been lit was by no means extinguished and the idea of India would glow steadily in the mind of Germany throughout the remainder of the century.

And yet we must not forget that Schopenhauer was also a very European thinker. He was proud of his place in the Western tradition, and in spite of his interest in Indian thought his understanding of philosophy was largely formed by European attitudes. He often reminds us that his thought is directly related to that of Kant and so to the tradition running back through Hume, Berkeley, and Locke, to Descartes and beyond. This, indeed, is one of the reasons why the affinities with Indian thought are interesting, for it means that Schopenhauer acts as a link between post-Cartesian Western thought and the philosophical and religious ideas of India and ultimately of the rest of Asia. Let us therefore briefly consider, before studying the homologies, some of the significant differences that exist between Schopenhauer’s European approach to philosophical questions and that of the Indians.

First of all, Schopenhauer and the Indians have different conceptions of philosophical thought. It is one of the merits of Schopenhauer that, basing himself on the teaching of Kant, he is extremely clear about what philosophy can and cannot do and keeps this always before him. Philosophy, in his view, is conceptual. Its merit is that it works with the forms of thought common to us all, and it is for this reason that it is able to persuade. But because it works with concepts, it is constrained within the circle of phenomena.
It can endeavor to tell us what the world in its inner nature is—and that is the task that Schopenhauer set himself—but it cannot go further than this; it cannot tell us why the world is or what lies beyond it. These latter tasks, he maintained, lie outside its range; to attempt them is to engage in a false metaphysics that tries to describe by means of the conceptual forms derived from the world that which is prior to the world. It is to fall into the trap of transcendent thinking. We can know only that which can be an object—namely, the representations that make up the world, the metaphysical Ideas from which these representations flow, and the network of relationships, ordered by the four forms of the principle of sufficient reason, which connects—and in fact brings into being—all phenomena. Like the figure of Vergil in Dante’s poem, philosophy can guide us only up to a certain point: “I have never professed to propound a philosophy that would leave no questions unanswered. . . . There is a limit up to which reflection can penetrate,” Schopenhauer writes.

For this reason he does not attempt (at least in the work he published) to take his philosophical investigations beyond the will. The discovery that the will is the inner essence of the world, and that the appearances among which we live are its phenomena, is as far as philosophy can go; it is the “single thought,” as he tells us, that it is his purpose to impart. As for what lies, or may lie, beyond the will, this is the territory not of philosophy but of mysticism (and to some extent of the poets and artists). Philosophy cannot go there. The mystic speaks from immediate experience; that experience is real enough, Schopenhauer suggests, but lacking the form of subject and object, it cannot be conceptualized, cannot be communicated, and therefore “cannot really be called knowledge.” Consequently the mystic cannot convince us as the philosopher can; what he or she tells us has simply to be believed or rejected.

For the Indian thinkers with whom we are concerned the picture is different. Serious thought, far from being confined to reason and the phenomena it grasps, must go beyond this. It must rest upon the basis of a direct experience of metaphysical realities. For Buddhists, this means primarily the experience and teaching of the Buddha. For the Vedānta it means the sacred texts (śruti)—that is, the experience of mystics as recorded in the Vedas. It is
always interior spiritual experience—in short, precisely what Schopenhauer
refers to as mysticism—that provides the basis for philosophical thought,
while the role of reason (tarka) is to clarify the meaning of this and thus
to confirm it. The interior experience may be one’s own obtained in medi-
tation or that of others communicated through tradition; hence the great
importance accorded to the sacred texts. Reason is held to be a valid means
of knowledge (pramāṇa) and of great use, but on its own it cannot establish
ultimate truth. In a vivid image, Śaṅkara likens those who try to answer the
ultimate questions of life on the basis of reason alone to a common sight in
India: the buckets at a well that circle endlessly around upon a wheel. Such
thinkers, in their metaphysical ignorance, revolve helplessly from birth to
birth, unable to advance in spiritual knowledge.28 Seen from this Indian
standpoint, Schopenhauer’s doctrine is therefore incomplete.

This different conception of philosophy is reflected in a difference of
purpose. Schopenhauer’s purpose is to discover what the world, in its inner
nature, is.29 It is the “imperishable and untiring force” by virtue of which the
world renews itself that he seeks to investigate and not the nature of what-
ever final reality may lie beyond this.30 This is the reason why will looms so
large in his work. If this limits the range of Schopenhauer’s thought as it
was published in his lifetime, it is also the source of its strength. Its power
to convince derives from the fact that he pictures the world not as we would
wish it to be, with its evils compensated by a metaphysical reality lying be-
yond it, but as we actually know it and experience it. Indian thinkers have a
quite different purpose: their objective is to guide us toward release (mokṣa,
nirvāṇa), and anything they have to tell us about the nature of the world is
incidental to this. Their aim is not to tell us what the world is but to help us
uncover and experience our own inner nature. In short, Schopenhauer’s pur-
pose is philosophical: to clarify the nature of empirical reality. The purpose
of Indian thought is soteriological and religious: to guide us to release from
rebirth and entrapment in the world-illusion.

We may say, then, that for Indians philosophy is essentially a practical
matter, while for Schopenhauer it is a theoretical undertaking. The phi-
losopher’s purpose, he tells us, is “to inquire, not to prescribe”;31 he seeks
to discover the truth, but he is not called upon to live it any more than the
sculptor is called upon to himself be handsome. It is the mystic and the 
saint who live the truth; the philosopher’s task is only to describe and com-
municate it insofar as this is possible by means of concepts. This is very much 
a Western attitude rooted in early modern thought—for Socrates or the 
philosophers of the Middle Ages things were otherwise. Indian traditions 
of thought are not theoretical in this sense. They seek to produce a result, a 
“fruit” (phalam); something meaningful, a benefit, an amelioration of our 
condition is the purpose. They seek to lead us out of ignorance, and the 
philosopher or religious thinker (they are not separated) tries not only to 
know the truth but also to live it—indeed, one might say to be it. Unless he 
does so, it is held, his mind will not attain the refinement needed to grasp 
the subtle levels of being.

In the light of these differences, the degree of convergence between Scho-
penhauer’s thought and that of the Indian philosophers we shall explore in 
the pages that follow is all the more remarkable. He himself, because of the 
limited knowledge of Indian thought then available, was aware of only a few 
of these convergences—in the main, those relating to the doctrine of repre-
sentation. Even so, he draws attention to what he held to be a deep affinity 
between himself and the thinkers of India, and during the latter part of the 
nineteenth century the idea that a significant congruence existed between 
certain of Schopenhauer’s ideas and the thought of India came to be widely 
accepted. The most influential writer in this respect was Paul Deussen— 
“Schopenhauer’s most glowing admirer and spokesman,” as Nietzsche re-
marked of him. Deussen, widely learned in both European and Indian 
thought, often draws attention to the similarity between the epistemologi-
cal and ethical aspects of Schopenhauer’s philosophy (and to some extent 
that of Kant) and that of the Upaniṣads. The significance of this for the 
subsequent development in the West of interest in Asian thought should 
not be underestimated. Up until World War I, Western culture still rested 
upon the twin pillars of classical antiquity and Christian thought; the gulf 
between it and the civilizations of such lands as India and China, which had 
experienced neither of these to a significant degree, was seen as very wide 
indeed. The fact that Schopenhauer, then the most influential thinker of 
the day, was apparently in agreement with the thought of India in impor-
tant respects did much to bridge this gap and to obtain for Asian thought a respectful hearing. It is worth noting the words of previous researchers in this respect. Franz Mockrauer writes that with Schopenhauer “the stream of Indian thought flows into the spirit of Europe with an unprecedented force and depth”; Dorothea Dauer, that “with Schopenhauer Buddhism began to become a power in the intellectual life of Germany”; Wilhelm Halbfass, that “no other Western philosopher so signalizes the turn towards India as does Schopenhauer”; Bryan Magee, that “Schopenhauer remains the only great Western philosopher to have been genuinely well-versed in Eastern thought, and to have related it to his own work”; Peter Abelsen, that considering the state of Indology at the time, Schopenhauer’s comments on Buddhism “astonish the present-day reader with their adequacy”; and Edward Conze, that Schopenhauer’s thought “exhibits numerous, and almost miraculous, coincidences with the basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy.”
Schopenhauer himself tells us of the origin of his interest in Indian thought. In a letter written in 1851 and after speaking of his friendship with Goethe in Weimar during the winter of 1813–1814, he writes, “At the same time, the orientalist Friedrich Majer introduced me, without solicitation, to Indian antiquity, and this had an essential influence on me.”

Friedrich Majer was a friend and disciple of J. G. Herder. The author of several books (one with an introduction by Herder) in which Indian antiquity is accorded much attention, he was perhaps the most active figure within the Romantic movement promoting the idea of an Oriental Renaissance. Schopenhauer met with him in Weimar, where his mother, the novelist Johanna Schopenhauer, was a resident and friend of Goethe. It is usually assumed that the “Indian antiquity” mentioned in the letter refers to the Oupnek’hat, the translation of the Upaniṣads into Latin mentioned in the previous chapter. However, attention has been drawn to the fact that it was not this work but the Bhagavad Gītā that provided Schopenhauer’s first contact with an important Indian text. Let us see how this came about.

Schopenhauer’s Initial Contact with the “Oriental Renaissance”: Das Asiatische Magazin

In October 1813, having received his doctorate from the University of Jena, Schopenhauer had five hundred copies of his dissertation printed—his first published work, The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. He sent a copy to Goethe, and when at the beginning of November he joined his mother in Weimar, the great poet, finding Schopenhauer “a strange and interesting man,” showed an interest in the book and invited its author to
his home on several occasions, discussing with him its ideas and his own optical experiments.3

Some years earlier Goethe had fallen in love with William Jones’s translation of the play Śacontalā; he had modeled his own prologue to Faust upon its opening scene, and he continued to show a marked interest in India—something that may have carried some weight with the young Schopenhauer. Weimar was at this time one of the principal centers of the Oriental Renaissance, together with Jena and Heidelberg. Majer was resident there, and at the time of Schopenhauer’s arrival a third significant figure, Julius Klaproth, was also present on an extended visit. The latter, only five years older than Schopenhauer, was already a celebrated Orientalist, having edited in 1802, when only nineteen, Das Asiatische Magazin (much of it contributed by Majer), intended as Germany’s equivalent to the British Asiatick Researches. From the records of Goethe’s activity we know that he was in touch with both Klaproth and Majer, as well as with Schopenhauer, during the final months of 1813. Since the latter had already shown an interest in Asian thought when at Göttingen University, it is very possible that the subject of India arose during the friendly discussions in which, as Schopenhauer later put it, “Goethe educated me anew.”4 Did the poet convey to him something of his own interest in India, perhaps recommending the writings of Majer in Das Asiatische Magazin?

We do not know how Schopenhauer met with Majer, but it would not have been difficult in a small town like Weimar. It may have been through Goethe or at one of the soirées at Johanna Schopenhauer’s residence. Such a gathering took place on December 3, 1813; Goethe was there until past midnight;5 we may certainly assume that Schopenhauer was present and very possibly Mayer and Klaproth also. At all events, something significant must have occurred around this time, for on the following day Schopenhauer withdrew the two volumes containing Das Asiatische Magazin from the Ducal Library at Weimar, retaining them for almost four months.6 His lifelong study of the thought of India had begun.

It was not until late March that he borrowed the Oupnek’hat from the same library and thus came into contact with the thought of the Upaniṣads.
In the intervening months—a difficult time for Schopenhauer, leading to the final break with his mother—it seems likely he met with Majer, perhaps on a number of occasions, and that it was essentially these meetings that formed the “introduction to Indian antiquity.” Majer shows in his writings a strong belief in the significance of the Oupnek’h’at. He considered that it was of the highest value since by making available the Upaniṣads, and thus the essence of Vedic thought, it was a step in the recovery of the ancient wisdom of Asia. In his book Brahma oder die Religion der Indier als Brahmaismus he describes the history of the seventeenth-century Persian translation of the Upaniṣads on which the Oupnek’h’at is based. He tells us, in words that Schopenhauer would echo more than three decades later, how Anquetil-Duperron, with profound veneration and during years of dedicated seclusion, had rendered this into Latin with the greatest care, translating word for word while accurately preserving the Persian construction, with the result that until such time as a direct translation from the Sanskrit should be made, this book constitutes our primary source for the thought of ancient India.7

Thus it was probably Majer who steered Schopenhauer toward the book that was to be so important to him. Nevertheless, it was not the Oupnek’h’at but Das Asiatische Magazin that provided the young philosopher with his earliest sustained contact with Asian thought. Two articles were of most importance. The first was an essay entitled “Ueber die Fo-Religion in China,” which is almost certainly the first consequential description of Buddhist thought read by Schopenhauer; more will be said of it in chapter 4. The second was Wilkins’s translation of the Bhagavad Gītā, as retranslated into German by Majer with the addition of a preface and notes.8 Since Schopenhauer retained Das Asiatische Magazin for four months before he took out the Oupnek’h’at, it is reasonable to suppose that he read Majer’s German version of the Bhagavad Gītā at this time—not, of course, the same thing as reading a modern rendering but surprisingly accurate for a double translation. It is therefore this work, and not the Oupnek’h’at, that constituted Schopenhauer’s first encounter with a significant Indian text.9 But before going further, let us note the general character of Das Asiatische Magazin and the effect this is likely to have had on the young philosopher.

Most of the Magazin was written by Majer (contributing the articles
on India) or Klaproth (concentrating on China), and much of the text is pervaded by the atmosphere of excited discovery characteristic of the Oriental Renaissance. In his preface to the Gītā Majer writes of “these ideas and dreams, which are at least four thousand years old and constitute the wisdom of the remote Orient,” combining “wondrous tales and impressions with highly abstract speculation” and standing in a “marvellous connection” with the ideas of Plato, Spinoza, and Böhme. In such passages we find the central ideas of the Oriental Renaissance: the concepts of an ancient wisdom glimpsed by the greatest thinkers of the West, and of India as the homeland of this primordial knowledge, the rediscovery of which now seems immanent.

We can therefore conclude that during late 1813 and early 1814, with Das Asiatische Magazin in his hands, Schopenhauer came into contact with the ideas of the Oriental Renaissance. The notion of India as the source of the earliest wisdom of mankind, the inspiration of what was best in the thought of other lands, took permanent root in the mind of the philosopher. We find him writing, much later in life, that Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Christianity are “sacred vessels in which the great truth, recognized and expressed for thousands of years, possibly indeed since the beginning of the human race” is taught, and referring to “those sublime authors of the Upanishads of the Vedas, who can scarcely be conceived as mere human beings.”

Schopenhauer’s Encounter with the Bhagavad Gītā

What effect did his early encounter with the Bhagavad Gītā have upon Schopenhauer? The question has been investigated by the Swiss scholar Urs App, who draws attention to a sheet of paper preserved in the Schopenhauer Archive containing two excerpts from Majer’s translation copied out by the philosopher. App argues that it belongs to December 1813 or the first months of 1814 and “can be regarded as a trace of Schopenhauer’s initial encounter with Indian thought.” Schopenhauer himself records the source of the excerpts he has copied: “Aus dem Asiatischen Magazin. Theil II p. 287 Baguat-Geeta. Dialog 13,” and the two passages are Bhagavad Gītā 13. 1–2 and 13. 29–34. The first passage, as copied by Schopenhauer and translated by App
with the original emphasis preserved, reads as follows: “Krishna or God says: Realize that the word Kshetra signifies body, and Kshetra-gna [means] him who perceives it. Realize that I am this Kshetra-gna in all its mortal forms. The knowledge of Kshetra and Kshetra-gna I call Gnan or wisdom.”

The second passage is longer and states, in paraphrase, that prakṛti (or nature) performs all actions while “Atma or the soul (die Seele)” does not act. All the beings in nature are comprised in Brahma, the highest being. This lofty spirit (erhabene Geist) and unchangeable essence does not act “even when it is in the body,” having neither beginning nor characteristics. Like the ether, it pervades everywhere without itself being moved. As the sun illuminates the world, this world-soul (Weltseele) illumines all bodies. Those who perceive the distinction between body and spirit (Geist), and that for man there is a final separation from animal nature, unite with the highest being.

App makes the interesting suggestion that these and other passages in Majer’s Gītā translation point in the direction of the metaphysics of the will and may have been important for the genesis of Schopenhauer’s doctrine. It is certainly the case that the first passage copied out by Schopenhauer, clearly distinguishing between the “knower of the body” and the “body,” has a bearing on the doctrine of representation, the starting point for which is a separation between the subject and the objects of consciousness (including the body). Moreover, in the second of the two passages, it is but a short step from the “nature” (prakṛti) that is said to perform all actions to the principle of sufficient reason, to which Schopenhauer attributes the same role, and we can well imagine that he would have been interested to discover in the Gītā the ideas related to those he had presented only a short time before in his first published work. The principle of sufficient reason expresses the activity of the will, and we shall see below, in chapter 13, that there are certainly concepts in the Gītā that relate to will, but Schopenhauer realized this only later. In general, it must be said that the evidence of Schopenhauer’s interest in the Bhagavad Gītā is somewhat nugatory. It receives comparatively little mention in his writings, even after the direct translation from Sanskrit into Latin by A. W. Schlegel became available. It is possible that its theistic orientation and mythic forms of expression did not appeal to Schopenhauer so that his interest in Hindu thought was held somewhat in check until he
came upon the *Oupnek’hat*; this would explain the four months’ delay between his withdrawal of *Das Asiatische Magazin* and that of the *Oupnek’hat*.

Be that as it may, the months between late November 1813 and his departure for Dresden the following May constitute the critical period during which Schopenhauer became convinced of the importance of Indian thought and of the ideas associated with the Oriental Renaissance. He never looked back from this position, believing that in Brahmanism and Buddhism, “those first and original religions,” there was preserved “the ancient, true, and sublime faith of mankind,” which in his own philosophy was now restated with a new clarity and completeness.

Schopenhauer and Upaniṣadic Thought: The *Oupnek’hat*

The records of the Anna-Amalia Library in Weimar (unfortunately lost in the fire of 2004) showed that on March 26, 1814, Schopenhauer withdrew the *Oupnek’hat* for the first time, returning it on May 18 just before he left Weimar for Dresden. As soon as he was settled in Dresden, he again borrowed the *Oupnek’hat* from the library of that city, keeping it for six weeks, at which point it is probable he acquired his own copy. With its promise of the esoteric knowledge of the Vedas, and thus of the most ancient wisdom, Anquetil-Duperron’s work seemed to fulfill the hopes of the Indophiles of Germany: Joseph Görres, reviewing it in 1811, wrote, “We conclude that in the Upnek’hat [sic] we really possess the System of the ancient Vedams; that the entire Asian mythology rests on it . . . and that the book itself is thus of infinite importance for the religious and philosophical history of the Orient.” For Schopenhauer too the *Oupnek’hat* seemed to provide convincing evidence that the ideas motivating the growing interest in India were fundamentally correct, and his high regard for the book and the philosophical content he found in the Upaniṣadic literature it contains was maintained for the rest of his life.

The *Oupnek’hat* consists of two heavy quarto volumes containing more than sixteen hundred pages. About half of this total follows the text of the Persian translation, the *Sirr-i Akbar*, and contains the fifty Upaniṣads assembled by Prince Dārā Shikūh. The remainder—more than eight hundred
pages—contains supplementary material supplied by Anquetil-Duperron. This is intended to explain and place in context the Upaniṣad texts while relating the ideas they contain both to the thought of Greco-Roman antiquity and to that of contemporary Europe. Passages from other writers on India, both French and English, are quoted at length and, as Halbfass has pointed out, a significant section is devoted to the relationship between the Upaniṣads and the teaching of Kant. Anquetil argues that in the emphasis they place upon man’s discovery of his own inner reality, these two sources, so distant from each other in time and cultural milieu, do not greatly differ, and in support of this point he draws the thought of Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Humboldt, Jacobi, Reinhold, and others into his discussion. Thus the work is not only a translation of the fifty Upaniṣads, or rather of the Sirr-i Akbar—which is not, of course, entirely the same thing—but it amounts in addition to an extensive discussion of their content and the relation it bears to European thought, both ancient and contemporary.

The Oupnek’hat, then, was much more than a piece of scholarly philological research and was meant to be seen in relation to contemporary philosophical issues. Moreover, Anquetil’s activities, from first to last, were impelled by the guiding idea we have already encountered among the Romantic thinkers of Germany: the rediscovery in the Orient of an ancient wisdom of the greatest importance, once known but now obscured and lost. This was the whole purpose of his travels in India as a young man; of his discovery and translation of the Zoroastrian texts; and, when these proved to be disappointing, of his subsequent translation of the Oupnek’hat. The same idea of a recovery and renewal of ancient wisdom was shared by Schopenhauer.

Halbfass writes: “All too frequently, the fact is overlooked that [Schopenhauer’s] encounter with the Oupnek’hat was by no means a purely ‘Indian’ encounter. It was also an encounter with Anquetil Duperron’s own ways of thinking and interpreting. . . . Anquetil himself had repeatedly asserted and attempted to demonstrate that the sages of all countries and all times had basically ‘always said the same’ or at least meant the same, and that the Upaniṣads in particular have parallels in European doctrines.” Without taking these facts into account we can hardly explain why Schopenhauer should have seized upon the Oupnek’hat in the manner he did. While there
is little doubt that he was influenced by Indian ideas—although to what extent is at present unclear—this is really to miss the main point. For the Upaniṣadic thought contained in Anquetil’s book was important to him primarily because it confirmed conclusions regarding the nature of the empirical world that he, following the lead of Kant, had already arrived at in his first published work, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. To him the *Oupnek’hat* came not so much as a revelation of ideas that were new as an almost miraculous confirmation, from a remote time and place, of his own insights. To a considerable degree, it was not new knowledge that the *Oupnek’hat* brought to Schopenhauer but confirmation that he was on the right path, the path of ancient and universal truth. Magee summarizes in these words:

> Working entirely within the central tradition of Western philosophy—before all else continuing and completing, as he believed, the work of Kant—he arrived at positions which he then almost immediately discovered were similar to some of the doctrines central to Hinduism and Buddhism. The discovery came to him as a revelation. . . . The profoundest thinkers of East and West, working unknown to each other in virtually unrelated traditions and languages—evolved quite separately over huge stretches of time, indeed in different historical epochs and completely different kinds of society—had been led to the same fundamental conclusions about the nature of the world.23

We find, then, that whatever his reservations about their philosophical thought, Schopenhauer was at one with the poets and thinkers of the Romantic movement in his belief in the existence of a primordial wisdom of the highest value that might, in part at least, be rediscovered in the remote Orient. Neither Anquetil’s activities nor Schopenhauer’s attitude to the *Oupnek’hat* can be understood without reference to this idea. Temporarily eclipsed for much of the eighteenth century, it is nonetheless a recurring theme with deep roots in European culture. Schopenhauer’s commitment to it has many precedents, but for our present purposes it will suffice to glance briefly at its role during the Renaissance.

> For the men of the Renaissance, as for those of classical antiquity, human
history was not an evolution upward toward an ever-brighter future but a degeneration from a more glorious past. Truth, beauty, and goodness were to be found by rediscovering the divine principles upon which this Golden Age had rested and so bringing it to a rebirth, a *renaissance*. The quest for truth was therefore of necessity a search for the ancient and the remote, and from its earliest days in Florence the Renaissance was inspired by the longing to rediscover the primordial wisdom of humankind, in search of which philosophy, it was held, is always, though often blindly, striving. This was the motive that led Cosimo de Medici to commission Marsilio Ficino to translate the works of Plato; and Ficino tells us that he believed himself divinely inspired to present to his contemporaries the philosophy of Plato and Plotinus. But beyond Plato, it was thought—beyond even Pythagoras—lay other yet more primary and inspired sources, if only they could be recovered. “They say,” wrote Ficino’s friend Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “that the words of Pythagoras are called holy only because they flowed from the teachings of Orpheus.” Orpheus, it was believed, had been in contact with the ancient wisdom of Egypt, and besides him there were other equally imposing figures such as Hermes Trismegistus (identified with Mercurius and with the Egyptian god Thoth), Aglaophemus, and Zoroaster. Thus when texts that were believed to be by Hermes were found, Cosimo instructed Ficino to lay aside the works of Plato and concentrate all his efforts on this still more pristine source. Ficino did so, approaching his new task with an attitude of profound awe and wonder and writing, “There is one ancient theology (*prisca theologia*) . . . taking its origin in Mercurius and culminating in the Divine Plato.”

Such figures, the Renaissance believed, were the *prisci theologi*, the primordial religious teachers of mankind and fully the equals of Moses. Their teachings, it was held, belonged to an unbroken tradition, a perennial philosophy going back to earliest times, and were not in conflict with one another nor with the deepest truths of Christianity. Such was the theme of many Renaissance writings. Prominent among them was Agostino Steuco’s book of 1540, *De Perenni Philosophia*; this same expression was given further currency by Leibniz and echoed even as late as the twentieth century by Aldous Huxley. The *philosophia perennis* was not for the Renaissance a marginal
interest. It was a central feature of the thought of the period, and during the religious strife of the sixteenth century it was seen by many thoughtful persons as offering a solution, a third way that could transcend the fratricidal struggle between Protestant and Catholic.32

Although the importance attributed to the Hermetic texts was made untenable by later scholarship, the central idea of an ancient wisdom, and that the convergence of the thought of widely different times and cultures must point to an underlying truth, survived in Europe with remarkable persistence.33 It reemerged with fresh vigor during the Romantic era. We find Joseph de Maistre, for example, writing in 1810: “Listen to what wise antiquity has to say about the first men: it will tell you that they were marvellous men, and that beings of a superior order deigned to favour them with the most precious communications. On this point there is no discord: initiates, philosophers, poets, history, fable, Asia and Europe, speak with one voice.”34 The same idea, this time with specific reference to India, is found in the writings of William Jones. In his essay “On the Hindus” he writes: “Nor is it possible to read the Vedanta, or the many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India. The Scythian and Hyperborean doctrines and mythology may also be traced in every part of these eastern regions.”35

We have seen that Anquetil-Duperron was strongly influenced by such ideas. When a rare manuscript of the Sirr-i Akbar came into his hands, he turned to its translation with the same sense of profound responsibility that Ficino had shown in relation to the Hermetic texts. The Vedic literature collected in the Sirr-i Akbar represented for him the primordial wisdom he had sought all his life, for which European scholars had thirsted during the Renaissance, and which he had been unable to find in the surviving fragments of the Zoroastrian scriptures. For Anquetil, as for other adherents of the philosophia perennis, there was no conflict between the truths of Christianity and the insights of other great religious traditions, provided always that both were grasped at a sufficiently profound level. While remaining throughout his life a committed Catholic,36 he could engage in Zoroastrian rites while among the Parsis in India and spend years of loving labor on the
Oupnek’hāt, in just the same way that during the Renaissance the powerful image of Hermes Trismegistus could be placed without qualm in the great mosaic pavement at the principal entrance of Siena Cathedral. It is this tradition of a primordial wisdom of the highest value surviving in the East that lies behind such passages in Schopenhauer’s writing as the following:

Yet it will appear that, in the early ages of the present surface of the earth, things were different, and those who stood considerably nearer to the beginning of the human race and to the original source of organic nature than we do, also possessed both greater energy of the intuitive faculty of knowledge, and a more genuine disposition of mind. They were thus capable of a purer and more direct comprehension of the inner essence of nature, and were thus in a position to satisfy the need for metaphysics in a more estimable manner. Thus there originated in those primitive ancestors of the Brahmans, the Rishis, the almost superhuman conceptions recorded in the Upanishads of the Vedas.

It is of interest—and it was certainly of interest both to Anquetil-Duperron and to Schopenhauer—that the conception of a philosophia perennis was not confined to the scholars of Europe. For in the Sirr-i Akbar Anquetil had evidence of an equivalent tradition in the Orient: Prince Dārā Shikhūh and the Sufis and Vedāntins with whom he mixed based their position on the belief that, understood in their inward and mystical significance, the truths of Islam and of Hindu mysticism were at one. Dārā writes in his preface to the Sirr-i Akbar that he “was impressed with a longing to behold the gnostics of every sect, and . . . desirous of bringing in view all the heavenly books.” For Anquetil, all such correspondences were an uncovering of the one deep and universal wisdom, the lost birthright of mankind that now at last could be recovered in the East. In the margin of one of his books he wrote, “The Zend books and the Oupnek’hāt present the same truths as the works of the Platonic philosophers, and perhaps these philosophers received them from the oriental philosophers.” With Dārā, he held that the truths of one religion may help to illuminate another, and he believed that in making available to Europe the ancient wisdom of the Upaniṣads, he was contributing to
“the cause of humanity,” showing a way out of what he called “the European malaise,” and offering “an incentive to general concord and love.”

Thus, as the Enlightenment lost its hold at the end of the eighteenth century, while leaving on the field of battle a fatally wounded Christianity, the idea of a primordial wisdom preserved somewhere in the East reemerged and came into contact with the rapidly expanding knowledge of Indian thought. For Schopenhauer this was of central importance. All through his life he drew strength from the belief that the ideas he had formulated were essentially at one with the ancient wisdom of India, as well as with that of Plato. Time and again he draws attention to this in his writings. Why is this? It is because it meant that his doctrines were unlikely to be merely his own subjective inventions but belonged to the great tradition of human wisdom; that the European philosophical tradition, after centuries of wandering in the dark, had, in the persons first of Kant and then of Schopenhauer himself, come at last, and with a new and startling clarity, upon the same fundamental insights—that all plurality is apparent, that all individuals are manifestations of a single, uniquely real essence—that had in distant ages been perceived by Plato, by the sages of the Upanishads, and by other great minds of the past:

Such a doctrine, of course, existed long before Kant; indeed it might be said to have existed from time immemorial. In the first place, it is the main and fundamental teaching of the oldest book in the world, the sacred Vedas, whose dogmatic part or rather esoteric teaching is to be found in the Upanishads. There we find that great teaching on almost every page. . . . There is absolutely no doubt that it was also the basis of the wisdom of Pythagoras. . . . It is also well known that practically the whole philosophy of the Eleatic School was contained solely in it. Later it pervaded the Neoplatonists. . . . In the ninth century we see it unexpectedly appear in Europe through Scotus Erigena. . . . Among the Mohammedans we again find it, as the inspired mysticism of the Sufis. But in the West, Giordano Bruno had to suffer an ignominious and agonizing death for not being able to resist the impulse to express this truth.
Here we find Schopenhauer asserting in no uncertain terms, and quite consciously (as the reference to the Renaissance philosopher Bruno shows), his adherence to the *philosophia perennis* and specifically relating it both to the Upaniṣads and to the Sufi mysticism that had guided Dārā Shikūh. This does much to explain Schopenhauer’s attitude to the *Oupnek’hat*, which had about it something of the quasi-religious enthusiasm of the Oriental Renaissance. Schopenhauer’s earliest biographer, W. von Gwinner, wrote in a well-known passage, “Before he went to bed, he would not infrequently open his Bible, the *Oupnek’hat*, in order to perform there his devotions.”

The *Oupnek’hat*: How Reliable a Source?

Schopenhauer considered the *Oupnek’hat* “the greatest gift to the nineteenth century,” and there can be no doubt that, despite the fact that he subsequently studied the work of such excellent early Indologists as H. T. Colebrooke and A. W. Schlegel, the *Oupnek’hat* was throughout his life his main source for a knowledge of Hindu religious and philosophical thought. Urs App, after examining Schopenhauer’s own copy of the book in the Schopenhauer Archive at Frankfurt, tells us that “These two magnificent volumes literally teem with traces of Schopenhauer’s interest, so much so that on occasion the notes in the margins almost surpass the volume of the printed text.” Much therefore turns on the question of how reliable a source the *Oupnek’hat* is for a knowledge of Hindu thought. Was Schopenhauer able to obtain a reasonably accurate understanding of the main outlines of Upaniṣadic thought from its pages? Was his prolonged study of it likely to result in a broadly correct understanding or, on the contrary, one that was distorted?

Two points have to be considered here: what is the content of the *Oupnek’hat*, and how reliable is the translation? The first question can be quickly disposed of: Anquetil-Duperron’s book contains fifty Upaniṣads brought together by Prince Dārā Shikūh with the help of the most learned *pandits* of Benares; these include the twelve principal Upaniṣads, so that the *Oupnek’hat* is primarily a document of the Vedānta. As to the translation, the *Oupnek’hat* must, at first sight, be regarded as a very imperfect and unreliable source. To begin with, it is a double translation and therefore by the
standards of modern scholarship beyond the pale; later Indologists naturally turned away from it in favor of direct translations. A second difficulty is that Anquetil-Duperron, since he did not have access to Sanskrit—he was working at a time when no one in Europe did—retained the Persianized forms of Sanskrit names and technical terms that had been used by Dārā because he had nothing with which to replace them. Thus, just as the word Upanisad became Oupnek’hat, so too Rg Veda became Rak Beid, puruṣa became porsch, avidyā became aoudia, achārya became tscharedj, and so forth. It is true that Anquetil explains the meaning of these terms in a glossary, but nevertheless their frequent occurrence in the text makes it at first almost unintelligible and gives to the entire book a strange and outlandish quality. It seems remote from the Upaniṣads as we now know them, so that when we first turn its pages today, it is hard to credit the impact it had. Even the formidable Max Müller paled before it! He speaks of it as “fearful jargon” and says that it was “written in so utterly unintelligible a style, that it required the lynxlike perspicacity of an intrepid philosopher, such as Schopenhauer, to discover a thread through such a labyrinth.”

But against these drawbacks we must set the arguments advanced by Schopenhauer in favor of the Oupnek’hat. He considered that it had great virtues, deriving first, of course, from the ancient texts on which it is based and second, from the attitudes of the two principal figures involved in the work of translation. Schopenhauer’s most comprehensive defense of the Oupnek’hat was set out late in life in the Parerga and Paralipomena. Here he argues, first, that Dārā Shikūh was a scholar and thinker who craved knowledge, was born and raised in India and “probably understood Sanskrit as well as we understand Latin,” and that extremely learned Hindu pundits collaborated with him on the translation; and second, that Anquetil-Duperron made his translation from the Persian text with great care and concern for accuracy and the purest motivation, and that the result is therefore likely to be far superior to the translations from Sanskrit subsequently offered by European scholars. The latter works, with rare exceptions (showing good judgment, Schopenhauer names A. W. Schlegel’s Bhagavad Gītā and some of Colebrooke’s translations) inspire little confidence. The work of both Dārā and Anquetil was guided by a strong commitment, a living and per-
sonal interest in the texts that made them intensely meaningful to them, and a keen awareness of the great significance of the philosophical ideas they contain. It therefore provides a better guarantee, he argues, of real understanding and accuracy than the work of “disinterested” European scholars, men whose involvement is merely of a scholarly and professional nature and who are in essentials groping in the dark. Schopenhauer hazards a guess that with few exceptions, “our Sanskrit scholars do not understand their texts any better than do the fifth-form boys of our own schools their Greek texts.”

For these scholars not only Sanskrit but the entire cultural context to which the Upaniṣadic texts belong is something strange, distant, and remote, with the result that the fruit of their labors is a text that is dull, flat, destitute of meaning, and frequently Europeanized. It is even much worse, Schopenhauer adds, in the case of China, where European sinologists often grope in total darkness.

If we accept Schopenhauer’s arguments for the accuracy of Anquetil’s translation from the Persian, there nevertheless remains the question of the reliability of the Persian text of the Sirr-i Akbar. Is it an accurate rendering of the Upaniṣads it translates? Is Dārā Shikūh’s claim in his preface to have made “without any worldly motive, in a clear style, an exact and literal translation” justified? This question has been answered by the Indian scholar B. J. Hasrat in his informative study of Dārā Shikūh’s writings. Hasrat, himself familiar with both Sanskrit and Persian, tells us that after comparing the Sanskrit texts of the major Upaniṣads with the Sirr-i Akbar, he finds that the latter is faithful to the original, “simple and unaffected” in style, and nowhere tries to take liberties with the texts it translates. Negative factors are that in places the translation is too literal or vague, metrical portions of the Sanskrit text are not distinguished from the nonmetrical sections, the divisions into adhyāyas and khandās are not preserved, and on a few occasions a section of the Upaniṣadic text has been omitted (for instance, the first Āranyaka of the Aitareya Upaniṣad). But the most evident defect of the Sirr-i Akbar (and one that, as we have seen, carries over to the Oupnek’hāt) is the manner in which Sanskrit terms have been Persianized so that the original word is hardly recognizable. Furthermore, in an effort to make the text intelligible to Muslims, Hindu religious and philosophical terms, as well as
the names of gods, have been rendered by means of equivalents drawn from Islamic phraseology; thus, for example, Mahādeva becomes Isrāfīl, Viṣṇu becomes Mikā’īl, and Brahmaloka is rendered as Sadrat-ul-Muntahā.57

These difficulties can be overcome by a dedicated reader. But more important and, as Hasrat writes, “a very substantial defect,” is the fact that in certain places sections of commentaries by Śaṅkara (and possibly others) on the major Upaniṣads are incorporated along with the Upaniṣadic text, without there being any indication of such an incorporation or any means of distinguishing between the two.58 Hasrat affirms that after making a careful comparison of the Persian text with Śaṅkara’s commentaries, he has found that the interpolated passages follow the latter “most faithfully.”59 Nevertheless, from a scholarly standpoint such interpolations are clearly unfortunate since the reader of the Sirr-i Akbar (and therefore of the Oupnek’hat) has no way of knowing that parts of the text are drawn from commentaries and not from the original Upaniṣad. Schopenhauer himself was deceived by this, as is evident when he writes with reference to the work of Colebrooke and others: “It also appears that Sultan Dara Shikoh had at his disposal much better and more complete Sanskrit manuscripts than had the English scholars.”60 And yet for someone concerned to discover with as much clarity and accuracy as possible the philosophical meaning of the Upaniṣadic texts, as was Schopenhauer, even this defect is not as great as it may seem, for the commentaries by Śaṅkara and others are often of much assistance in elucidating the obscurities of the Upaniṣadic texts, and it was of course for this reason that Dārā and his collaborators included them.

In summary, we may say that while the Sirr-i Akbar, and consequently the Oupnek’hat, certainly cannot be regarded as a satisfactory word-for-word translation of the Upaniṣadic texts, it nevertheless presents a reasonably accurate rendering of their content according to the interpretation of Śaṅkara and the Advaita Vedānta. When, in addition to this, we remember the fact that the Sirr-i Akbar and the Oupnek’hat were vastly more comprehensive than any other collection of Upaniṣadic texts in translation right up to the time of Deussen’s Sechzig Upanishad’s des Veda in 1897 (itself based in part on the Oupnek’hat), it becomes difficult to quarrel with Schopenhauer’s own assessment that in spite of being a double translation, Anquetil-Duperron’s
text provided him with a source for the philosophical and religious thought of Hindu India that was much superior to any other available during his lifetime. He writes in 1851: “I am firmly convinced that a real knowledge of the *Upanishads* and thus of the true and esoteric dogmas of the *Vedas*, can at present be obtained only from the *Oupnekhat*; we may have read through the other translations and yet have no idea of the subject.”

Dorothea Dauer, in her study of Schopenhauer and Buddhist ideas, writes that Schopenhauer was probably the first German who thoroughly understood Upaniṣadic thought, and this may well be the truth. At all events, Schopenhauer never wavered in his belief in the value of Anquetil’s translation. His words, written not in the first flush of enthusiasm but late in life and after many years of consideration, still echo those Friedrich Majer had penned when writing of the *Oupnek’hat* thirty-three years earlier:

> When I see with what profound veneration, in keeping with the subject, Anquetil-Duperron handled this Persian translation, rendering it word for word into Latin, accurately keeping to the Persian syntax in spite of the Latin grammar, and content merely to accept the Sanskrit words left untranslated by the Sultan in order to explain these in a glossary, I read this translation with the fullest confidence, which is at once delightfully confirmed. For how thoroughly redolent of the holy spirit of the Vedas is the *Oupnekhat*! How deeply stirred is he who, by diligent and careful reading, is now conversant with the Persian-Latin rendering of this incomparable book! How imbued is every line with firm, definite, and harmonious significance! On every page we come across profound, original, and sublime thoughts, whilst a lofty and sacred earnestness pervades the whole. Here everything breathes the air of India.
Schopenhauer’s Indian Sources: Buddhism

Schopenhauer’s Earliest Contacts with Buddhism

Reliable sources for a knowledge of Buddhism became available to Europe later than did those for Hinduism. Wilkins’s translation of the Bhagavad Gītā was published in 1784; William Jones’s translation of the Gītā Govinda appeared in 1792 and his translation of the Hindu legal code (Manusmṛti) in 1794; the Oupnek’hat appeared in 1801–1802, Colebrooke’s essay “On the Vedas” in volume 8 of Asiatick Researches in 1805, and Friedrich Schlegel’s On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians in 1808. In contrast, the first substantial works on Buddhism did not appear until the middle of the 1820s. As a result, it has been widely assumed that Schopenhauer’s encounter with this religion did not begin until that time. This, however, is not correct. We saw in the previous chapter that in 1811 Schopenhauer was attending the ethnography lectures of Arnold Heeren at Göttingen and showing a marked interest in the information he received on Eastern religion. Almost fifty pages of Schopenhauer’s notes from these lectures survive, and among them can be found references to the Buddha, Lamaism in China and Tibet, the religion of Fo (i.e., Buddha) in China, the Pāli language and texts, and Japanese religion.¹

A second common misunderstanding regarding Schopenhauer’s knowledge of Buddhism has its origin in the emphasis placed by nineteenth-century scholars (sometimes under the influence of the Protestant preference for early religious forms as against later and more developed stages) on the Pāli texts and the Theravāda tradition. This has carried over to later times; for example, Arthur Hübscher, in his study of Schopenhauer, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in Its Intellectual Context: Thinker against the Tide, asserts that even when, later in life, Schopenhauer had access to the works of
Abel Rémusat, Schmidt, Burnouf, and Spence Hardy, his knowledge of Buddhism remained very imperfect since these works conveyed “only a vague understanding of Buddhism in its distorted variant, extant in Nepal, Tibet and China.” They do not provide, Hübscher continues, a clear insight into “the original Buddhism” and fail to make “a clean separation” between Buddhism and Brahmanism. Such a view is hardly acceptable today, and the fact that much of Schopenhauer’s knowledge of Buddhism relates to the Mahāyāna rather than to the Pāli tradition in no way invalidates it. Moreover, while it is true that Schopenhauer sometimes (but certainly not always) does not make a “clean separation” between Brahmanism and Buddhism, there is ample evidence that he understood the distinction and could apply it with precision when he wished. It was, rather, that he considered what the two religions held in common to be of greater importance and interest than what separated them, and his failure to engage in the “boundary thinking” of a later generation may be accounted as much a merit as a demerit.

Schopenhauer’s next encounter with Buddhism, so far as we know, took place some two years after Heeren’s lectures, while he was staying in Weimar. Here, while moving in the circle of Goethe at the end of 1813, and possibly at the latter’s suggestion, he withdrew from the Ducal Library the two volumes of the Das Asiatische Magazin of 1802. Besides extensive material relating to Hinduism, these contained an article entitled “On the Religion of Fo in China.” “Fo” was a Chinese corruption of the name “Buddha,” and the article was a German version of a Chinese Buddhist text known as The Forty-two Chapter Sūtra. A reference to this text occurs in the 1818 edition of The World as Will and Representation and shows beyond doubt that Schopenhauer had access to at least one Buddhist text prior to that date. Most probably, it was the first Buddhist text that he read. It was believed at the time to be the oldest Buddhist work known to the Chinese, for the text claims to be the translation of an Indian original brought to China in AD 65; in reality, however, this was not the case, and The Forty-two Chapter Sūtra was a Ch’an (i.e., Zen) text, composed in fifteenth-century China. Consequently, Schopenhauer’s—and the whole of Germany’s—earliest contact with an original Buddhist source had about it a definite Zen flavor.
Two years later, while in Dresden, Schopenhauer withdrew from the library of that city the first nine volumes of *Asiatick Researches*, retaining them for six months. These volumes cover the years 1788–1807 and include important articles by Jones, Colebrooke, Francis Buchanan, and others. Some forty-five pages of notes preserved in the Schopenhauer Archive and written in English (with which Schopenhauer was familiar) are evidence of his interest. They are records of passages that drew his attention, and there is generally no comment, other than underlining of significant passages and a few brief marginal remarks. These provide indications of the direction and extent of Schopenhauer’s interest and belong to a critical period during the formative stage of his philosophy. In accordance with the character of the early volumes of *Asiatick Researches*, most of these notes concern Hinduism. However, volume 6 (1799) contained a discussion of Buddhism in the form of Buchanan’s long essay “On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas.” Schopenhauer found this work of considerable interest, and his notes show that he drew the following conclusions:

1. Gotama and Buddha, and probably also the Chinese Fo and Shaka, are the same god.
2. The doctrine of transmigration is held by the Buddhists of Burma.
3. Buddhists (“The Sect of Gotama”) consider the belief in a divine being who created the universe to be highly impious. This note is emphasized by Schopenhauer with double vertical lines and a marginal comment, “This is the teaching of the Buddha” (*d. ist die Lehre des Buddha*).
4. The Burmese religion knows of no supreme Being who is creator and preserver of the universe (similar emphasis by Schopenhauer).
5. Their system of morals is as good as that of any religion.
6. The Buddha’s followers are atheists (emphasized).
7. *Nirvāṇa* is the most perfect of all states and consists in a kind of annihilation. Nothing can give us an adequate idea of it. It is salvation and freedom from the miseries attaching to old age, disease, and death.
8. Theism is mentioned among the heresies.
9. The followers of Buddha have many valuable books and apparently Vedas and Puranas of their own.8

We see from these conclusions that three years before the publication of his principal work Schopenhauer was forming a view of Buddhism that, if still very approximate, was correct as far as it went and that he had focused his attention on three aspects that were to remain of high importance to him: Buddhism is atheistic and admits no Creator-God; its moral code is admirable; and nirvāṇa is a kind of annihilation, the positive nature of which lies beyond the possibility of description.9

No further information of importance with regard to Buddhism became available to Schopenhauer for almost a decade, but from 1825 on there began to appear significant new studies. In that year the first volume of Jean-Pierre Abel Rémusat’s Mélanges Asiatiques was published, and in connection with this a long and informative essay on Buddhism in China by the French scholar M. Deshauterayes. A third significant study, I. J. Schmidt’s History of the East-Mongolians, appeared in 1829.10 These three works were important to Schopenhauer, and in the original (i.e., 1836) version of the bibliographical note he added to the chapter on “Sinology” in On the Will in Nature they are the only works on Buddhism he recommends.11 It will therefore be useful to examine briefly their nature.

Rémusat, Deshauterayes, and I. J. Schmidt:
Schopenhauer and the Mahāyāna

Rémusat, Deshauterayes, and Schmidt were all describing forms of Buddhism belonging to East Asia, so that it was essentially a Mahāyāna view that Schopenhauer obtained at this time. Of the three, the least important to him was the work of Rémusat.12 This famous scholar was the first professor of Chinese at the University of Paris. Seeking to establish a chronology for India, he explored in Mélanges Asiatiques the lists he had found in Ch’ān and Zen literature of the thirty-three Patriarchs, stretching back through Bodhidharma to the Buddha.13 In the course of these inquiries he had come
upon, in the former Bibliothèque Royale in Paris, an unpublished essay by Deshauterayes. Rémusat arranged for the publication of this work in the *Journal Asiatique*, the organ of the Société Asiatique established in Paris a few years earlier. It appeared in two parts, the first under the title “Recherches sur la religion de Fo.” It was this part that interested Schopenhauer; he read it in 1826, shortly after its publication, and it remained of much significance to him.

Deshauterayes had been a professor of Arabic at the Collège de France and died in 1795; his essay was a substantial work far ahead of its time. In it he writes: “The religion we are about to describe originates in India; its author is that Boud or Bouda who is known in China under the name of Fo, and in Japan under that of Chaka. This sect, having several centuries earlier extended beyond the Ganges, spread as far as Japan, embracing the vast area of Tartary to the north, the kingdom of Siam to the south, several other kingdoms between the Ganges and China, China itself and Japan.”

The first part of Deshauterayes’s long essay describes the “esoteric doctrine” of Buddhism. Schopenhauer was strongly impressed by it, and it played an important part in the growth of his understanding of Asian thought. In his manuscript notes he describes it as “a pretty detailed and exceedingly fine exposition of the life and esoteric teaching of Fo or Budda [sic], or Schige-Muni, Schakia-Muni, which corresponds wonderfully with my System.”

The exoteric doctrine and mythology of Buddhism in China—“much less interesting,” as Schopenhauer noted—was described in the second part of the essay.

Deshauterayes’s study of the esoteric teaching was based upon Chinese texts belonging to a tradition of Ch’an literature originating early in the ninth century and known as “the Light-transmission texts.” These works trace the tradition back through the thirty-three masters of the school to its origin with the Buddha, and they played a considerable part in winning recognition for the Ch’an school in China. The Buddha’s life is movingly described, and into his mouth Ch’an teachings—and consequently the ideas of the Mahāyāna, from which they are developed—are placed. Here Schopenhauer was able to discover concepts distinctly similar to his doctrine of *representation*. Deshauterayes writes that the Buddhists could not reconcile
the existence of matter with that of spiritual being or see how it would be possible to relate the two; they therefore began to question the real existence of matter and came to look upon material things as an illusion of the understanding. And so “matter disappeared to make way for a single and unique intelligent nature which exists for itself and of necessity, which alone has being and which is all of being.” On another page we find something very close to Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will and, strikingly, to the idea of the close relationship this bears to sexuality:

From all eternity attachment to [one’s own] well-being, along with sexual love (l’amour), desire and lust are naturally present in all which takes birth. All which is born, in whatever manner it is born . . . draws its nature and its life from lust, to which desire leads love: thus it is from love that the transmigration of souls arises. Love, stimulated by desires of every kind which lead it on to lust, is the reason why life and death follow each other in succession on the path of transmigration. From love arises lust, and from lust, life. All living beings, in loving life, love also its origin. Love leads to lust and is the cause of life; love of life is its result.

And finally, in addition to teachings approximating his own doctrines of representation and will, Schopenhauer was able to discover in Deshauterayes’s description of the Chinese Buddhist teachings his own doctrine of the denial of the will—or “soul” (l’âme), as it is called in the language of Deshauterayes. It is given unmistakable expression in these words:

Every other spiritual existence is necessarily denied . . . so that according to them the soul is nothing . . . . Understanding, imagination, will, the faculty of knowing, of imagining, of desiring, all are done away with, so that the soul completely loses its existence and Fo exists in its place: this is to say that the soul is nothing and that only Fo exists. . . . That, it seems to me, is the inner and secret doctrine of Fo and of his followers, a visionary teaching if ever there was one.

Schopenhauer’s high opinion of Deshauterayes’s biography of the Buddha—which evidently was much more than a biography—lasted to the end of his life. It is reported that when he spoke of it to visitors, his voice would break
with emotion and his eyes glisten with tears. And yet it was the writings on Buddhism of Isaac Jakob Schmidt that Schopenhauer admired most of all and perhaps was able to draw most from. These were published between 1824 and 1843, and Schopenhauer discovered them when he read Schmidt’s *History of the East-Mongolians* during or shortly before 1830. He continued to read Schmidt’s works up until his death and consistently and repeatedly praised them.

Schmidt was a German scholar resident in St. Petersburg, where he was attached to the Imperial Academy. He was interested in philosophical questions and specialized in the investigation of Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhism, being able to read and translate both languages. Schmidt owned at least ten of his works; five of them form the first five recommended works in the revised “Sinology” note of 1854. In this note he describes Schmidt’s lectures on Buddhism of 1829–1832 to the St. Petersburg Academy as “extremely valuable for a knowledge of this religion” and writes that the *History of the East-Mongolians* includes “long extracts from religious writings in which many passages clearly expound the profound meaning of Buddhism and breathe its genuine spirit.” In the revised second edition (1847) of *On the Fourfold Root of the Principal of Sufficient Reason* Schopenhauer calls Schmidt “a first rate scholar who in my opinion is undoubtedly the greatest European expert on Buddhism” and cites three different works by Schmidt, one of them at length, in support of the claim that Buddhism knows neither a Supreme Being nor a creation of the world. He writes that it was chiefly through “the profound and instructive articles” of Schmidt, and subsequently several English and French scholars, that better information about Buddhism became available. It is probably no exaggeration to say that Schmidt’s works formed the backbone of Schopenhauer’s knowledge of Buddhism.

In a lecture published in 1840, into which the text of the *Diamond Sūtra* was incorporated, Schmidt draws attention to the *Prajñāpāramitā* (highest wisdom) teachings. These, he writes, “must be regarded as the keystone of the entire building of Buddhism.” He explains that the Mahāyāna finds that the whole of nature, every separate being or essence, all that has a form or a name, in a word all that manifests the idea of “I-ness,” is empty, and it “ac-
cepts only the great Unity outside all the borders of nature, in which every ‘I’ disappears, [only] this ‘beyond all knowledge’ (Jenseits aller Erkenntniss), as the true and undeceptive Being.” A few pages later he writes: “Here, in this Beyond, nothing is reflected, here there is nothing more to know, here there is no relation to some object, here there is consequently no I, no subject, here is the true, changeless Being in contrast to the seeming being of shapes and forms in the world of appearances.”29 We need not wonder that Schopenhauer wrote of Buddhism in a letter of 1856, “Altogether the agreement with my doctrine is wonderful.”30 He acknowledges that it is this lecture by Schmidt that lies behind the celebrated footnote, added at the end of his life, with which the main argument of The World as Will and Representation closes, and in which he equates the abolition of the will with the Prajñāpāramitā of the Buddhists, the “beyond all knowledge” in which the duality of subject and object is finally overcome.31

We may conclude that the writings of Deshauterayes and Schmidt played a role in Schopenhauer’s encounter with Buddhism that is comparable to that which, a decade earlier, the Oupnek’hat had played with respect to Hinduism. From the work of these two scholars he formed a view of Buddhism that did not change in its essentials when, in the following years, the work of later writers such as Burnouf came to his attention.

One further researcher much admired by Schopenhauer should be mentioned. This is the Hungarian, Csoma Körösi, who, Schopenhauer notes approvingly, “in order to study the language and sacred writings of Buddhism, spent many years in Tibet and particularly in Buddhist monasteries.”32 Unhappily, Körösi died before he was able to publish the greater part of his findings, but he did leave a preliminary account in three essays published in Asiatic Researches in 1839. These were highly regarded by Schopenhauer. He tells us with relish that they include a discussion between the dying Buddha and the god Brahmā, in the course of which creation and all changes in the world are attributed, in Körösi’s words, “to the moral works of animal beings, and it is stated that in the world all is illusion, there is no reality in the things; all is empty.”33 This is clearly the Mādhyamika doctrine of emptiness (śūnyatā), to which we will turn our attention in a later chapter.
Schopenhauer’s Personal Attitude to Buddhism

From what has been said, it is evident that Schopenhauer’s contact with Buddhism was in the main a contact with the Mahāyāna. When, later in the nineteenth century, his philosophy was coming to be widely known in Europe and America, this fact was not sufficiently grasped, for at that time the Pāli canon was receiving great attention while the Mahāyāna remained relatively unexplored. For the investigators of the Pāli Text Society the Pāli canon was Buddhism, and it was mistakenly assumed that when Schopenhauer likened his doctrine to the teachings of Buddhism, it was this tradition that he meant. The emphasis the philosopher placed upon the similarity of his ethical teaching to that of Buddhism, and on the analogy between nirvāṇa and denial of the will, tended to reinforce this impression, so we often find that when Schopenhauer’s philosophy is compared with Buddhism, it is the earlier forms of that religion that are in question. That there are similarities here is undeniable, but the deeper and more interesting affinities between Schopenhauer’s doctrine and Buddhist thought lie in the underlying epistemological and metaphysical issues; both the similarity of the ethical teaching and that between denial of the will and nirvāṇa ultimately rest on these. Here it was the ideas of the Mahāyāna that mattered to Schopenhauer, while the doctrines of the earlier period, in which the theory of the dharmas plays a significant part, have much less in common with his thought.

It is true that both before and after the encounter with the work of Deshauterayes and Schmidt, Schopenhauer had access to and studied with care writers covering other aspects of Buddhism—not only Buchanan in 1816, but also Edward Upham in 1829, V. Sangermano in 1833, and Burnouf, R. Spence Hardy, and C. F. Köppen during the 1850s. From these too he learned much, but it was the relatively early contact with Mahāyāna thought, and the “wonderful correspondence” with his own ideas he found in this, that determined his view of Buddhism. It was the esoteric teachings of the Mahāyāna that he thought of as “the true Buddhism,” and it is no surprise to find him describing Tibet as “the principal seat of the Buddhist church.”
Schopenhauer was no dilettante with respect to Buddhism. He was a serious and committed scholar who kept continually abreast of significant new research on the subject; App writes that “Schopenhauer kept himself very widely informed about Buddhism, in several languages and over five decades.” His library bears witness to the extent of his scholarship, as do many learned remarks and notes found in his writings. Moreover, this interest was not simply theoretical; it went well beyond the issue of similarities to his own doctrine, as the following incident, which has been left to us by a visitor to Schopenhauer, Karl Bähr, demonstrates:

“If we are speaking of revelation, I must show you something extremely unusual and interesting.” With these words Schopenhauer brought a small sitting figure, about a foot high, from a corner of the room. It was of iron or brass, but blackened, and at first glance not unlike a Chinese pagoda. He placed it before us on the table, while asking mysteriously if I could guess what it represented. I supposed it to be something Chinese, but he said that it probably came from Tibet, was very likely a hundred years old, and represented the Buddha. He emphasized that it was a rare object that he had obtained from Paris, and the like of which I would scarcely encounter elsewhere. He told me that this figure was for Buddhists what a crucifix is for Christians and that it portrayed the Buddha as a beggar. . . . When I asked him why the Buddha was shown here as a beggar, he began to tell me the legend of the Buddha, but in such a way that I have never been able to forget it. This was not a bookworm, not some German philosophy professor, but a philosopher by the grace of God, a sage of antiquity who spoke to me. I could not help listening to him with awe and devotion.

This incident took place in 1856, and soon after this Schopenhauer had the statue of the Buddha carefully gilded. It was important to him during the last years of his life, and he described it as the “greatest happiness” of his old age. He would draw the attention of visitors to it and mentioned it in letters to friends. Writing to Adam von Doss in March 1857, he concludes as follows: “In the corner of my room there sits upon a console a genuine Tibetan Buddha, at least a hundred years old. It is one foot high and of bronze, which
I have had gilded. He bestows upon you his benediction, and my heart-felt wishes for your well-being come with it.”41

A number of writers have raised the question of whether Schopenhauer, in his later life, may be regarded as a Buddhist. Urs App writes that the philosopher could not get over his admiration for Deshauterayes’s biography of the Buddha, and that from 1845 on he was in the habit of describing himself to friends as a Buddhist—perhaps the first Westerner to do so.42 Heinrich Dumoulin in his carefully considered paper on “Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy” contrasts Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, writing of the latter that “Eastern wisdom did not touch his heart as it did that of Schopenhauer.”43 Roger-Pol Droit considers it “not so certain” that Schopenhauer was a Buddhist since there are important aspects of Buddhist teaching that are incompatible with his philosophy.44 Von Glasenapp also thinks there is agreement only between certain phases of Buddhism and Schopenhauer’s metaphysics but holds that the kernel of Buddhism (i.e., the teachings of ahimsā and nirvāṇa) is “in full harmony” with the kernel of Schopenhauer’s doctrine.45 Conze writes that Schopenhauer’s thought, “partly under Indian influence, exhibits numerous, and almost miraculous, coincidences with the basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy.”46 Dorothea Dauer believes that Schopenhauer “can well be considered a duly labeled Buddhist” and writes that even though his teaching differs in some respects from that of the Buddha, it does so much less than does, for example, the Tantric branch of Buddhism. She concludes: “Schopenhauer once called Buddhists his ‘fellow-believers’; the Buddhists of the East, if they knew his theory, would certainly not hesitate to reciprocate his appellation.”47 Schopenhauer’s own remark is well known: “If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I should have to concede to Buddhism pre-eminence [over other religions].”48

In On the Will in Nature Schopenhauer includes a brief discussion of the obstacles standing in the way of European understanding of Oriental religions.49 Europeans, he says, had come so closely to identify the notion of religion with theism and to assume without evidence that all peoples on earth worshipped a single World-Creator as they themselves did, that the discovery that this was not the case in lands like China and India loomed
disproportionately large for them. A second obstacle he identifies is the optimistic view of the world that is the necessary complement of belief in a beneficent Creator-God. This too is absent in the East: “They [Europeans] have been brought up in optimism, whereas existence is regarded there [in the East] as an evil.” And a third major obstacle standing in the way of European understanding is “the decided idealism (entschiedenen Idealismus), essential to both Buddhism and Hinduism.” Idealism for Schopenhauer is the doctrine of “the merely apparent existence of this world that is presented to our senses.” It is, he says, “a view known in Europe merely as the paradox of certain abnormal philosophers and as hardly worthy of serious consideration,” and yet in Asia it pervades society and finds expression even in the popular belief. It is this idealism and the extent to which its expression in Indian thought corresponds to Schopenhauer’s own teaching of representation to which we now turn.
“Representation”:
Schopenhauer and the Reality-Status of the World

We come now to the first of the two principal comparative sections of this study. The first of these is concerned with Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the world as representation and analogous Indian teachings. In this chapter the main features of Schopenhauer’s doctrine are examined, and in the two following chapters we will seek to discover what affinities with these ideas exist in the areas of Indian thought that most interested the philosopher—namely, Mahāyāna Buddhism (known to him, to a limited degree, through European scholars studying Chinese and Tibetan sources) and Advaita Vedānta (known to him initially through the Oupnek’hat).

We have already seen that the discovery of Indian thought, and above all of the Oupnek’hat, appeared to Schopenhauer as an astonishing corroboration of the insights into the nature of the empirical world that, only some twenty years earlier, had been achieved by Kant. Schopenhauer regarded himself as belonging to—and perhaps, indeed, as being the flag bearer of—the central tradition of European thought going back through Kant, Berkeley, and Locke to Descartes. He first read the Oupnek’hat a few months after the publication of his earliest work, The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, in which his ideas regarding the nature of the world and the manner in which it appears in consciousness are set out in detail. What interested Schopenhauer when he turned the pages of the Oupnek’hat was the discovery that there appeared to exist a significant degree of concordance between the ancient Indian teachings he now had before him and the doctrines that he himself, on the basis of Kant’s work, had formulated only a few months before. As Bryan Magee puts it, “In his mind the most important point lay in the fact that there was no influence: the profoundest thinkers of East and West, working unknown to each other in virtually unrelated tradi-
tions and languages . . . had been led to the same fundamental conclusions about the nature of the world.”

As he readily acknowledged, Schopenhauer’s conclusions regarding the nature of the empirical world were developed from the teaching of Kant, and he believed himself to be the latter’s true successor, destined to complete and perfect his insights. Since Kant had shown that our a priori judgments are valid only for objects of possible experience and can never go beyond these, Schopenhauer made a conscious decision to restrict his philosophy to an examination of the world: “The present philosophy,” he writes, “by no means attempts to say whence or for what purpose the world exists, but merely what the world is.” He believed that in The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason he had taken a significant step in this direction. He had shown the ways in which this principle, embracing the four different modes of our cognitive faculty, “combines all representations, of whatever kind they be, one with another; but it in no way connects these with the subject.” Thus, he claims, he had clarified the laws “according to which all phenomena are connected to one another” and in so doing had demonstrated that the whole world is entirely dependent upon the principle of sufficient reason and exists only in consequence of and in conformity to it. In the first of the four books that make up the original edition of his principal work, The World as Will and Representation, he develops this into one of the twin pillars of his philosophy, the doctrine of the world as representation.

The Starting Point for Philosophy:
The World as Representation

What does Schopenhauer mean when he writes of the world as representation (Vorstellung)? Near the beginning of his principal work he tells us that his procedure is entirely different from that of the philosophers of earlier times. Previous systems, he says, had started either from the object (i.e., the world) or from the subject and had then sought to explain the one from the other by means of causality. But neither the world nor the subject is the correct starting point for philosophy, for they cannot be related to each other by the principle of causality for the good reason that this principle does not extend
to the subject but, on the contrary, originates in the subject. The correct starting point for philosophy is the representation of the world, for it is this that contains both the subject and the object.7

The German word Vorstellung means “placing before,” and the representation is the inner mental picture made up of objects related to one another in space that at each successive moment our cognitive faculty places before our consciousness. The continuous flow of such mental images, when derived from sensory perception rather than dream or thought, is what we think of as the external world. However, it is only the mental representations that we experience with immediacy and certainty; we do not know whether these correspond to an external reality existing in its own right and outside our consciousness. The only certainty we have is the presence of the representation in consciousness, and since philosophy must build upon a foundation of certainty, only this can be its starting point. Schopenhauer does not initially make much distinction between representation and the consciousness in which it occurs, but in the second (1844) volume of The World as Will and Representation we can detect a shift of emphasis from the representation to the underlying consciousness in which it takes place. For example we read: “For only after men had tried their hand for thousands of years at merely objective philosophizing did they discover that, among the many things that make the world so puzzling and precarious, the first and foremost is that, however immeasurable and massive it may be, its existence hangs nevertheless on a single thread; and this thread is the actual consciousness in which it exists.”8 Schopenhauer goes on to say that the fact that consciousness is the correct starting point is the real significance of Descartes’s cogito: Descartes showed that our own consciousness is the only immediate certainty that we have while all else is subject to doubt, and it follows that it is only on this basis that we can build philosophy. Following on from this, it was the “very correct and deep insight” of Berkeley that the objective, material world exists as such simply and solely in our representation and has no existence outside representation and independently of the knowing subject. And this, says Schopenhauer, is no mere hypothesis or peremptory pronouncement; on the contrary, it is the surest and simplest truth: “For the objective, as such, always and essentially has its existence in the consciousness of a subject; it is
therefore the representation of this subject, and consequently is conditioned by the subject, and moreover by the subject’s forms of representation, which belong to the subject and not to the object.”9 In short, the whole world is given to us only in a secondary manner—that is, as a representation, as a series of pictures in our head, as a phenomenon of the brain.10 It follows that true philosophy must be idealistic; it must start from a recognition of the ideal nature of the empirical world, from an appreciation of the fact that the knowledge that we have of it is knowledge only of the representation. Unless it acknowledges such a starting point, philosophy since Kant can no longer be honest;11 for this reason Schopenhauer contrasts idealism with materialism, writing that the latter “carries death in its heart even at its birth, because it passes over the subject and the forms of knowledge that are presupposed just as much with the crudest matter from which it would like to start, as with the organism at which it wants to arrive.”12

Once the correct starting point, the representation, is established, the division of consciousness into subject and object is the next step. This division constitutes “the first, universal, and essential form of the representation” and is inseparable from existence as an individual since all thinking and representing presuppose it.13 Subject and object are the two mutually dependent halves of the representation: “These halves are inseparable even in thought, for each of the two has meaning and existence only through and for the other; each exists with the other and vanishes with it.”14 Without the subject the world as representation would no longer exist, for “everything that exists for knowledge, and hence the whole of this world, is only object in relation to the subject, perception of the perceiver, in a word, representation.” No truth is more certain, Schopenhauer says, more independent of all others, and less in need of proof than this. Everything that in any way belongs or can belong to the world exists only for the subject—that is, as representation. This “being-conditioned by the subject” was known to Berkeley and to some extent to Descartes, and its neglect was Kant’s “first mistake.”15

Kant’s unwillingness to admit the merely relative existence of the empirical world and his “visible fear of decided idealism” was a matter of importance to Schopenhauer, and in the “Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy” which he added as an appendix to the first volume of his principal work, he
devotes several pages to discussing it. Basing his position on the dictum *No object without a subject*, he writes: “The object, because it always exists only in relation to a subject, is dependent thereon, is conditioned thereby, and is therefore mere phenomenon that does not exist in itself, does not exist unconditionally.” Kant fought shy of this Berkeleian principle in later editions of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the reason for this being, Schopenhauer suggests, Kant’s erroneous basis for his thing-in-itself, namely, a connection to an unknowable but objectively existing external cause—such a connection being illegitimate since according to Kant’s own doctrine, causality has no jurisdiction outside the sphere of phenomena. But Schopenhauer tells us that he discovered, “to my great joy,” that in the first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant clearly affirms that the external world is a mere representation of the subject that knows it and, in an extensive passage that was subsequently deleted, “expounds his decided idealism with great beauty and clarity.” Schopenhauer cites as an example of Kant’s original view the following passage: “If I take away the thinking subject, the whole material world must cease to exist, as it is nothing but the phenomenon in the sensibility of our subject, and a species of its representations.” Schopenhauer believed that following the death of Frederick the Great, Kant was constrained to “modify, castrate, and spoil his masterpiece in the second edition” out of fear of the authorities. However that may be, it is abundantly clear what Schopenhauer’s own position is: “empirical perception actually is and remains our mere representation.” The material world exists as representation in the consciousness of living beings, and were this representation to cease, the world would be nothing.

Schopenhauer and Kant:
The Separation of the Ideal from the Real

Like many others of his time, Schopenhauer recognized in Kant’s philosophy an event of great importance: a revolution, an awakening from the dream within which European thought had hitherto been enclosed. It was, he claims in the preface to the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation*, “the most important phenomenon which has appeared in philosophy for two thousand years.”
Schopenhauer is generous in his praise of Kant, “that giant mind” whose works “will always live on earth,” compared to whom all previous Western philosophy appears “unspeakably clumsy” and speaks “as if in a dream.” Kant brought about “the greatest revolution in philosophy,” a “new age” that marks for the West the beginning of “an entirely new third world-epoch in philosophy.”

Schopenhauer writes of his “sincere and deep reverence for Kant” and his “deeply-felt veneration for and gratitude to Kant.” Although his own thought, he says, contradicts that of Kant in many points, yet it is “completely under its influence.” It presupposes and starts from Kant’s thought: “I take my departure direct from him.”

What was this “new and great knowledge” in the teaching of Kant and why was it so important? Schopenhauer lists three special merits in Kant’s thought. First was his clear and definite separation of the phenomenon from the thing-in-itself, and thus of the realm of appearance (Erscheinung) or phenomenal reality from the underlying (although, for Kant, inaccessible) reality behind it. Second, Schopenhauer considers that Kant, by showing in his practical philosophy that the moral significance of human conduct is not dependent on the laws governing phenomena but stands outside these and is directly linked to the thing-in-itself, took an initial step toward his own doctrine of the will. And third, Kant dealt a “death-blow” to the speculative theology, the Scholasticism, within the confines of which European thought—even that of the seventeenth century, for Descartes did not really break free—had continued to struggle.

For Schopenhauer, it is the first of these achievements, the separation of phenomena from underlying reality, and thus of the ideal element in our experience from the real, that is fundamental. Kant presented this doctrine not mythically and poetically (as Plato had done long before), but “in an entirely new and original way,” making of it “a proved and incontestable truth.” Schopenhauer writes: “Such clear knowledge and calm, deliberate presentation of this dreamlike quality of the whole world is really the basis of the whole Kantian philosophy; it is its soul and its greatest merit.”

We are fortunate in that Schopenhauer has left us in two separate places clear summaries of the transcendental philosophy of Kant as he understood it, making it clear which elements he rejected and which he accepted and
took as the basis on which to build his own thought. These are, first, the well-known appendix to the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation*, first published in 1819 but (unlike the rest of the volume) extensively revised in the second edition of 1844, and second, the rather less well-known pages on Kant buried in the middle of the essay entitled “Fragments for the History of Philosophy” in volume 1 of *Parerga and Paralipomena*.29

We are not here concerned with the correctness or otherwise of Schopenhauer’s understanding of Kant, although it may be said in passing that this is not inconsiderable.30 Our concern is only with what Schopenhauer understood to be Kant’s view and either rejected or, as happened much more frequently, accepted with modifications and made a part of his own teaching. He believed that his own principle work, *The World as Will and Representation*, following on from that of Kant, stood as the culmination of “a coherent, consistent, and uniform train of thought” running from Locke through Berkeley, Hume, and Kant to himself.31 Even before Locke, Descartes had shown that since our knowledge of the objective world is never direct but always mediated by the processes of our consciousness, it can never be certain. But philosophy is just that inquiry that seeks to lead us beyond our always-uncertain empirical knowledge, and it therefore requires a base in certainty. In the past philosophers were agreed that this base was to be found in the universal concepts by means of which phenomena are connected to one another—that is, in the ideas of time and space, causality and inference, together with the laws that govern these. These constitute “the universal fundamental determinations of the objective world.”32 It is only they, together with the a priori knowledge that we have in mathematics, that come to us from a source other than the empirical.33

Traditionally, Schopenhauer argues, philosophy has proceeded by means of logical inference from the base provided by the universal concepts. Until the time of Locke this system appeared to work well enough, and the origin and nature of the universal concepts were not called into question. Philosophers simply took them as self-evident facts, assuming them to be absolute laws conditioned by nothing at all; they were accepted as “eternal truths” that provided the given basis upon which the world rests, and within their framework the whole riddle of the world and its existence was to be ex-
plained. This attitude is dogmatic philosophy since the assumptions on which it rested had not been properly examined; indeed, such an examination had the potential to undermine all previous philosophical thought. Schopenhauer attributes the initial step in this inquiry to Locke, but the latter’s conclusions formed no more then a “youthful prelude” to what was to come. Kant carried the line of thought initiated by Locke to an altogether more profound level and introduced in place of the dogmatic attitude of earlier philosophy what amounted to an entirely new method. This was the critical or transcendental philosophy contained in The Critique of Pure Reason.

This new philosophy, Schopenhauer writes, was based upon an examination of the inbuilt structure of the mind by which it forms the representations that appear in consciousness. Kant achieved this “by taking to pieces the whole machinery of our cognitive faculty, by means of which the phantasmagoria of the objective world is brought about.” In the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” as presented in the first edition of The Critique of Pure Reason, Kant showed that both time and space are forms of intuition that are known to us prior to all perception. Upon these knowledge-forms the whole of our experience of the world rests. Also known to us a priori are the forms of thought—that is, the twelve “categories” or pure concepts of the understanding that are discussed by Kant in the “Transcendental Analytic” and that make up the conceptual apparatus that gives shape and meaning to the world. Schopenhauer reduced these to the single category of causality: “The law of causality is the real, but also the only, form of the understanding, and the remaining eleven categories are merely blind windows.” When the twelve categories (or for Schopenhauer, the law of causality) combine with the ideas of space and time, experience of the empirical world results. Thus, for Schopenhauer, Kant showed conclusively and finally that our knowledge of space, time, and causality is not derived from experience. It is not, as Locke had thought, inferred from observation of the physical world and our own inner experience. Rather, the truth is the reverse: it is our a priori knowledge of space, time, and causality that provides the underlying mental structure that makes possible in consciousness the representation of a meaningful external world. Space, time, and causality are transcendental in nature; they are prior to or transcend the empirical world. They constitute
the formal element in our knowledge, quite independent of experience; they result from the form of our intellect and are contributed by the subject.38

For Schopenhauer, then, the forms of intuition, time and space, together with causality, the only form of the understanding (*Verstand*), according to which all phenomena are connected to one another, exist a priori as the structure of the mind. They are subjective. They are not laws existing objectively and outside us, governing the universe, as had been supposed until the time of Kant; they—and the world they shape—are “conditioned by the subject’s manner of knowing,”39 and Kant writes, “If the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us.”40 However, we are normally quite unaware of this so that space, time, and causality seem to be external and objective; earlier European philosophers, Schopenhauer argues, took them as the very nature of things, standing above and determining the world order. Kant’s achievement lay in showing that although they do indeed determine the nature of the world we experience, they are laws not of the existence of things but laws governing our representation of things — internally existing mental structures, and not “eternal truths,” having an objective and absolute validity.41

The a priori concepts, Schopenhauer tells us, by means of which the mind constructs a meaningful world, have no empirical content.42 They provide a form, a mold, into which the content of sensibility can flow. Without this mold sense impressions would remain formless and without meaning—a chaos of raw sensations we could not interpret. It is the inborn universal concepts of time, space, and causality (present, let us note, in the minds of animals as well as those of human beings) that endow the flow of sensory information with form, establishing patterns of relationship and therefore meaning. In this way sensory experience is shaped and assumes in consciousness the form of the empirical world: “Before Kant,” Schopenhauer writes, “it may be said, we were in time; now time is in us,” and “By their whole constitution and conformity to law, space, time and causality are given to us *prior* to all experience and are precisely known; and so they must lie preformed within us, as does the specific kind of receptivity and activity of each
of our senses.” And he adds in a footnote that recalls his work On Vision and Colours: “Just as our eye produces green, red, and blue, so does our brain produce, time, space, and causality (whose objectified abstraction is matter).”

The Understanding (Verstand): Causality as the Root of Intuitive Perception

Schopenhauer was the first European thinker to definitely separate the two mental faculties of understanding (Verstand) and reason or conceptual thought (Vernunft). The distinction is clearly made in The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, where he writes: “Man’s intellect is double; in addition to knowledge of intuitive perception, he has also abstract knowledge.” Later in the same work he refers to the understanding in man, “which we nevertheless clearly distinguish from his faculty of reason,” and in his principal work we read “for the understanding is completely and totally different from the faculty of reason.” The two terms, understanding and reason, were taken over from Kant, who had already made an initial move toward separating them. But Kant had not arrived at a clear distinction, and Schopenhauer believed that for this reason his own clarification of the nature and operation of the understanding represented an important advance. In his “Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy” he devotes some highly critical pages to the failure to properly separate intuitive knowledge of perception, in which the world exists, from abstract knowledge of concepts (i.e., Verstand from Vernunft), writing that it was “Kant’s great mistake” and the source of “a terrible confusion” leading to inextricable contradictions.

For Schopenhauer, the understanding is “not the complicated clockwork of the twelve Kantian categories” but something altogether simpler. It consists in one thing only, “an immediate intuitive apprehension of the causal connection.” It is systematically prior to conceptual thought, and it is through the understanding that we and all living beings know the world directly and in experience. While through the faculty of reason we know the world only conceptually and in abstraction, the understanding gives it to us as an actual, tangible reality that affects us and can be affected by us. It is the understanding that coordinates sense impressions to produce from
them perception, and hence it is linked with questions of being, of reality and illusion; against this, the faculty of reason is concerned with conceptual knowledge and so with questions of truth and error.47 The understanding is something that man possesses in common with other animals; every creature that perceives does so by means of the understanding, whereas reason or abstract knowledge is the distinctive characteristic of mankind.

Schopenhauer argues that the difference between the two mental faculties is apparent in certain instances in which the understanding is deceived and attributes an effect to a mistaken cause. Reason may discover the correct cause, but this abstract knowledge has no effect upon the understanding, which continues to view the matter as before; the understanding is inaccessible to the teaching of reason because it is knowledge of a more primary kind. Schopenhauer gives several examples of this, among them that of the full moon, which appears unnaturally large when close to the horizon, and the apparent motion of a bridge on which we stand as we watch a ship passing beneath.48 We may add a familiar modern example: the strong impression we have that a stationary train in which we sit is moving as another train moves past it.

Once the understanding and reason have been clearly separated and their different functions understood, the primary role of the understanding becomes apparent, and it is principally the discussion of this that gives The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason its lasting importance. The understanding holds a vital place in Schopenhauer’s system, for the entire concept of the world as representation rests on it. Especially in the long paragraph 21, added in the 1847 edition, we find Schopenhauer’s careful and detailed discussion of the nature of intuitive perception (Anschauungsvermögen), of the fundamental role played in this by the principle of causality (i.e., by the understanding), and of the bearing this has on our knowledge of the reality-status of the empirical world.49 The starting point for this discussion is sensation. Schopenhauer does not question the assumption that the representations forming the empirical world are based upon sensation: perception comes about through the medium of a body, from whose affections it starts.50 But a sensation is not a representation; it is simply an event occurring in one of the sense organs, nothing more than a local specific feeling and
therefore in itself always subjective. It cannot contain anything objective or resembling intuitive perception: “For sensation of every kind is and remains an event within the organism itself; but as such it is restricted to the region beneath the skin; and so, in itself, it can never contain anything lying outside the skin and thus outside ourselves. . . . Consequently, it is something essentially subjective whose changes directly reach our consciousness only in the form of the inner sense and hence of time alone, that is to say, successively.”

How then does it come about that sensation—in current terms, electrochemical data passing from the senses to the brain—which lacks a spatial dimension, is transformed into perception and thus into representations? The answer, Schopenhauer argues, lies in the operation of the understanding. This is “a function not of single delicate nerve extremities [as is sensation] but of that complex and mysterious structure the brain that weighs three pounds.” It is, as we have seen, the immediate apprehension of causal relations that lies as a priori knowledge in every person, and indeed in every animal. Its nature is to refer every effect back to a cause; and this it does, not by means of rational thought, but intuitively and therefore (when the understanding is sharp) instantaneously. Schopenhauer explains the process in the following words:

The understanding grasps the given sensation of the body as an effect (a word comprehended only by the understanding), and this effect as such must necessarily have a cause. Simultaneously the understanding summons to its assistance space, the form of the outer sense also lying predisposed in the intellect, i.e., in the brain. This it does in order to place that cause outside the organism. . . . The understanding now avails itself of all the data of the given sensation, even the minutest, in order to construct in space, in conformity therewith, the cause of the sensation.

Thus the senses play only a preliminary role. They do not of themselves produce knowledge, and for this they must always be supplemented by the activity of the understanding: “The understanding first creates and produces this objective external world out of the raw material of a few sensations in the organs of sense,” and so “intuitive perception of the corporeal world is es-
sentially an intellectual process, a work of the understanding, for which the sensation merely furnishes the opportunity.” Empirical intuitive perception, though based on sense impressions, is the work of the understanding.

The operation of the understanding is not discursive and reflective as is that of reason, nor is it dependent on concepts. It is, on the contrary, intuitive and immediate. When sensation occurs in one or more of the sense organs, causality at once traces this back to a cause, and, unlike the reflective intellect, its operations are so rapid that we are not aware of them. Nevertheless, while knowledge of causality is inborn, its application to sensory data has to be learned in early life. A child in the first weeks of life has not yet learned how to apply its inborn knowledge of causality to the sensations it experiences and therefore perceives nothing. For it there is only sensation, pleasant or unpleasant, and Schopenhauer says, “It therefore stares stupidly at the world,” which indeed does not as yet exist for it. But little by little it begins to link sensation to its inborn knowledge of causality. Frequently repeated sensations come to be joined in a sequence and then attributed to a cause: “We can also watch them experimenting for a long time with sight and touch . . . We see them pursue a silent but serious study until they have learnt all the above-mentioned intellectual operations of vision.” In this way the empirical world gradually comes into being for the infant, beginning with its mother and immediate surroundings. By conceiving every change of sensations as an effect and referring this to a cause, “the understanding brings about the cerebral phenomenon of the objective world,” and so “It is only when the understanding begins to act . . . only when the understanding applies its sole form, the law of causality, that a powerful transformation takes place whereby subjective sensation becomes objective intuitive perception.”

For only by this operation and consequently in the understanding and for the understanding does the real, objective, corporeal world, filling space in three dimensions, present itself; and then it proceeds, according to the same law of causality, to change in time and to move in space. Accordingly, the understanding itself has first to create the objective world, for this cannot just step into our heads from without, already cut and
dried, through the senses and the openings of their organs. Thus the senses furnish nothing but the raw material, and this the understanding first of all works up into the objective grasp and apprehension of a corporeal world governed by laws, and does so by means of the simple forms already stated, namely space, time, and causality. Accordingly, our daily empirical intuitive perception is intellectual.60

We see from this passage that, as Schopenhauer expresses it in another place, “The understanding is the artist forming the work, whereas the senses are merely the assistants who hand up the materials.”61 Schopenhauer engages in a detailed examination of the processes by which sensation gives rise to intuitive perception of external objects. Of the five senses, only two, touch and sight, are of great importance in the formation of objective intuitive perception (Schopenhauer is referring here to human beings; in the case of other living beings the relative importance of the senses clearly differs). Space is the essential precondition for all intuitive perception; it is “the manner in which the subject apprehends something as different from itself,” and it is only in space that objects can present themselves in consciousness.62 But the senses of hearing, taste, and smell tend to lack sufficient data for the understanding to place the cause in space and in this way construct an objective world. Without sight or touch, therefore, the other three senses will not usually give rise to objective intuitive perception.

The two leading senses, sight and touch, exhibit complementary qualities. Touch is restricted to contact and hence to what is immediately present, but its data are so infallible and varied that it is the most radical and thorough of all the senses. It immediately supplies the data for the knowledge of size, shape, hardness, softness, dryness, moisture, smoothness, temperature, and so on. Touch is assisted by the shape and mobility of the arms, hands, and fingers, and from the position of these, the understanding, by touching bodies, derives the data for constructing them in space. Yet more information comes from the use of the muscles, by means of which the understanding knows the weight, solidity, and strength of bodies—and all of this directly and with the least possibility of deception.63

Sight, on the other hand, has no need of contact or proximity. Its field is
without limits, extending even to the stars. It furnishes the understanding with a great deal of finely determined data, for it is sensitive to the most delicate degrees of light, shade, color, and transparency. From this sensory information the understanding, by dint of constant practice, is able instantaneously to construct and present in intuitive perception the shape, size, distance, and nature of bodies. In fact, Schopenhauer says, sight can be regarded as a kind of imperfect touch extending to a distance and making use of the rays of light as long feelers. But because it acts at a distance and is altogether dependent on the medium of light, sight is one-sided and open to deception and error; its range is far greater than that of touch, but it lacks the high degree of certainty that touch supplies. Schopenhauer devotes some twenty pages to demonstrating, on the basis of his wide reading in the science of optics, the intellectual nature of visual perception, arguing that inborn knowledge of causality is the precondition of perception and therefore of all outer experience. Causality, as well as space and time, cannot therefore have been empirically conceived by us, as maintained by Locke: “All this proves that time, space, and causality do not come to us through sight, touch, or indeed at all from without, but rather that they have an internal origin, one that is not empirical but intellectual.”

This, of course, dissolves the apparent substantiality of the material world. Matter is only the objective correlative of the understanding; it is causality itself objectively conceived:

For matter is absolutely nothing but causality. . . . Its being is its acting; it is not possible to conceive for it any other being. Only as something acting does it fill space and time; its action on the immediate object (which is itself matter) conditions the perception in which alone it exists. The consequence of the action of every material object on another is known only in so far as the latter now acts on the immediate object in a way different from that in which it acted previously; it consists in this alone. Thus cause and effect are the whole essence and nature of matter. . . . Its whole being and essence consist only in the orderly and regular change produced by one part of it in another; consequently, its being and essence are entirely relative.
Schopenhauer goes on to explain that matter arises in consciousness from the coming together of time (or change) with space (or persistence). Its essential nature is the union of these two, for the essence of change “consists in the fact that, at the same place in space, there is now one condition or state and then another, and at one and the same point of time there is here this state and there that state.” Thus matter has its essential nature in the union of time and space and bears the stamp of both. The legislative force of causality relates entirely to the determination of what kind of state or condition must appear at this time and in this place, and on this rests our knowledge of the sure and certain properties of matter.\(^69\)

All forms of animal life share in this a priori knowledge of causality and hence of matter; without it they could not function, avoid danger, or obtain food. Every living being, however humble, is possessed of the faculty of understanding, even though this is present in different species in vastly different degrees of keenness and clarity. And since it is the understanding that places the world before consciousness, this faculty is of fundamental importance in determining our relation to the world. Thus certain animals can at times amaze us with the acuity of their understanding, while the lowest forms exhibit only the dimmest glimmering of it.\(^70\) The same applies to humankind; here too the understanding operates under different guises and with different degrees of speed and acuity. Thus in one person the understanding may show itself as discernment or penetration, while in another its relative lack appears as dullness or foolishness. It may manifest in the form of prudence or judiciousness, or as cunning or knavery, depending on the moral attitude with which it is associated.\(^71\) And it is the understanding that directs the movements of the duelist’s sword or (to give an example not found in Schopenhauer) the actions of the sportsman on the field suddenly producing the winning stroke or the unexpected goal.

Thus it is the understanding, the inborn knowledge of causality and the ability to seize its connections directly, intuitively, and without the intervention of a chain of rational thought, that supplies our fundamental knowledge. Its action is seen in many forms, from the basic function of perception, without which there is no world for us, right up to the exalted insights of men of genius. It is the understanding of causality (\textit{Verstand}), and not reason
(Vernunft), that stands behind every great discovery. The role of the reason is to fix that discovery as soon as it is made by reducing it to a concept, an abstract idea, and in this way to conserve it and make it generally available. It is the custodian, but not the creator, of profound ideas:

Every simpleton has the faculty of reason; give him the premises, and he will draw the conclusion. But the understanding supplies primary, and therefore intuitive, knowledge, and here we find the differences. Accordingly, the pith of every great discovery . . . is the product of a propitious moment when, through favourable outer and inner circumstances, complicated causal series or concealed causes of phenomena seen already a thousand times, or obscure paths never previously followed, suddenly reveal themselves to the understanding.

We may summarize as follows: the empirical world arises in the consciousness of each individual, whether human or animal, as a continually shifting pattern of representations. These representations are possible only by there being preformed in the intellect space as the form of intuitive perception, time as the form of change, and the law of causality as the only form of the understanding and the principle by which all things are connected. It is the existence of these knowledge-forms, ready-made and prior to all experience, that constitutes the intellect. The faculty of reason is secondary. It is an additional faculty, a tool for survival possessed by humankind alone, the function of which is to convert the concrete representations of the understanding into abstract concepts; in this way it distances us from their immediacy and endows us with the power to manipulate them at will. It is not reason but the understanding, together with the inborn knowledge of space and time, that gives to us the world. The mind or intellect comes first, and the world it perceives, the world as representation, is totally dependent upon it.
The Reality-Status of the Empirical World:
The Mādhyamika Teaching

We have seen that one of the reasons for Schopenhauer’s interest in the *Oupnek’hat* was that in its pages there was to be found a teaching that appeared to broadly resemble his own doctrine of the world as representation. Such a teaching plays a significant part in Indian thought, in both its Buddhist and Hindu forms. Since, so far as we know from surviving texts, it received a developed formulation at an earlier period in the writings of Buddhist philosophers, we will turn to their view first.

Early Mahāyāna: Nāgārjuna and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Pratītya-samutpāda*)

The Mahāyāna represented a significant change within Buddhism and was regarded as a new phase in the development of the teaching, the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. Its origins lie roughly between 100 BC and AD 100, when texts known as the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* appeared. These writings, claiming to be the esoteric teaching of the Buddha, seek a more profound understanding of the nature of reality and a new, more compassionate way of living based on this. They place a fresh emphasis on “skillful means” (*upāya*) through which one may seek not just the desirable state of the Arhat and the ending of one’s personal suffering, but the vastly superior path of the Bodhisattva. The character of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is mystical rather than philosophical, revolving around the idea of *śūnyatā*, the “emptiness” of all things and of the world as a whole. These insights were systematized, probably during the second century in southern India, by one of the greatest figures in the history of Indian thought, Nāgārjuna.

Nāgārjuna has been described as “a monk-scholar second only to the
Buddha,” who gave to the whole of the Mahāyāna a firm philosophical foundation. Around him there formed a new school of Buddhist thought, philosophical in its mode of expression but deriving its insights from the Prajñāpāramitā literature and spiritual insights gained during meditation. This was the Madhyamaka — the name expresses the claim to be the Middle Way, which the Buddha taught — and its influence was felt not only throughout Buddhism but also by Hindu schools and notably in Advaita Vedānta circles. The principal text of the Mādhyamikas is the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā, in which Nāgārjuna establishes his teaching in brief and often paradoxical verses. A later member of the school, Candrakīrti, thought to have been a monk at the famous Nālandā monastery during the first quarter of the seventh century, has left an important commentary on this work, the Prasannapadā, and it is on these two texts that the present chapter is based.

If one comes to his writings without an awareness of the traditional background, Nāgārjuna appears as a thinker of scintillating brilliance — bold, paradoxical, and difficult. Sprung remarks that he is regarded as the acutest intellect in Buddhist history. Yet Nāgārjuna was a monk, and like other Buddhist teachers his purpose was to rescue human beings from suffering. Though his discourse is couched in intellectual terms, he was traditionally regarded as a mystic of high attainments and believed to have moved after his death to the Pure Land of Sukhāvatī. Candrakīrti, in his dedicatory verse at the start of the Prasannapadā, speaks of him as the one who “compassionately brought to light the hidden truth of the treasury of Buddhism” and who “burns up the darkness in the minds of men.”

Nāgārjuna tries, by means of what might be described as intellectual shock therapy, to startle us out of the habitual manner in which we view and live in the world — to make us see that in truth its nature is quite different from what we had supposed and that we are living in what is in reality a vast, self-imposed illusion. Central to his teaching was a fresh interpretation of a fundamental Buddhist doctrine, that of “dependent origination” (pratītya-samutpāda). This is among the core concepts of Buddhism and is traceable to the Buddha’s own teaching, while its subsequent development and expansion is, to a considerable degree, the development and expansion of Buddhist thought. The doctrine of dependent origination was initially a teaching of
moral causation, developed to explain the process by which living beings circle endlessly upon the Wheel of Becoming. Buddhists saw the world as irremediably bound up with craving and greed, leading to suffering that is abolished only when craving finally ends. The doctrine of dependent origination was formulated with a very practical purpose: it was to show in careful detail, so that the process may be reversed, the causes and conditions by which suffering, both in this life and in future lives, comes into being and is perpetuated. The fundamental principle was summed up in the formula “Because that exists, this too exists” (asmin sati idam bhavati), and in the Abhidharma period pratītya-samutpāda described the chain of twelve interdependent factors or nidānas (literally “ropes” or “links”) leading from ignorance to death by which living beings are bound to the Wheel of Becoming and the painful process of repeated rebirth. At the heart of the Mādhyamika teaching is a transformation of the manner in which this fundamental doctrine is understood.

The Mādhyamika Reinterpretation of Dependent Origination

In Nāgārjuna’s writings dependent origination is given a greatly expanded application and brought together with the insights of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras into the emptiness of things. It was now held that liberation from suffering, the objective of all Buddhist teaching, finally depended on knowledge of the ultimate nature of things—that is, their essential emptiness (śūnyatā) or absence of true being. The long-established principle of dependent origination was transformed into a method by which the hitherto concealed nature of the world was explored and its dependent nature understood. The new outlook provided the basis for the entire Mahāyāna worldview, and in time it came, to a significant degree, to represent the view of Buddhism in general; thus we find a representative of the Theravāda, Thera Nyānatiloka, writing, “Let it be said, once and for all, that the Paṭicca-Samuppāda is nothing but the teaching of conditionality and interdependence of all the manifold phenomena of existence, and of everything that happens, be it in the realm of the physical, or the psychical.”

Nāgārjuna and those who followed him did not claim to teach anything
new. They claimed that the apparently radical ideas they put forward were implicit, but not fully developed, in the teachings of the First Turning. The new interpretation restored to Buddhism, they maintained, the profoundest insights of its founder. These had initially been kept secret; the esoteric knowledge was hidden but carefully preserved—in the language of myth, it was entrusted to the nāgas, the serpents of wisdom—until, when the time was ripe, it emerged in the hands of the man whom posterity called “Lord of the Serpents,” Nāgārjuna. Even in the early period there had been an awareness that behind the twelfold pratītya-samutpāda there was a broader and still more profound conception. In the Pāli canon the Buddha is represented as saying, “Whoso understands the Dependent Origination, understands the Law; and whoso understands the Law, understands the Dependent Origination.” And when the disciple Ānanda told the Buddha that the doctrine of dependent origination, though profound in appearance, was not difficult to understand, it is recorded that the Buddha rebuked him in strong terms: “Say not so! Profound, Ānanda, is this Dependent Origination, and profound does it appear. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this law, that this world resembles a tangled ball of thread.”

It was this hidden profundity that Nāgārjuna claimed to restore, and his dedicatory verse at the start of the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā is addressed to the Buddha specifically as the teacher of dependent arising. The manner in which the doctrine was understood now underwent a striking expansion as the idea of a chain or network of interdependent links was given a much broader application. The old moral understanding was left in place, but the principle of interdependency was applied not just to the process of rebirth and suffering that binds living beings to the Wheel of Becoming, but to the very being of the world and all its phenomena. Dependence on other factors was seen as a general rule for all existence, a defining characteristic of Being. Causal relationships were seen to extend throughout time and space, and the elements of the entire cosmos were found to exist only in mutual dependence. In this way dependent origination became nothing less than the Buddhist doctrine of the reality-status of the world: the essential interdependence of all entities, the fundamental mode of existence, the manner in which anything at all comes into being and subsists.
In the Abhidharmic period objects, when analyzed, had been found to dissolve into their constituent parts. The standard example was that of a chariot. It was argued that this is simply a thought construct (vikalpa) existing in the minds of men, a name for an assemblage of different parts, and that if we take away each part in turn, we find that we are left with nothing other than an assortment of parts (which in their turn could be similarly deconstructed, ad infinitum). There is no chariot as such, and it is the same with every other thing and every living being. The thinkers of the Mahāyāna accepted this line of thought but took the deconstruction much further by applying the principle of dependent origination. Now objects were analyzed not so much in terms of their parts (as with the chariot) as in terms of their external relations and interdependence. A thing possesses the qualities that give it its nature only in relation to other things: it is big or small, hard or soft, good or bad, only in relation to other factors. An object is simply a moment, longer or shorter as the case may be, in a continuous process of relationships—a moment that has become fixed in the mind by means of a concept and a name. It is a pattern of changing relations, all of which are relative to one another, and its origination and subsistence is dependent on these external factors, other than which there is nothing. One’s own self is no exception. The body, the mind, its thoughts and emotions—all these, like everything else, result only from the momentary interplay of relationships. Nāgārjuna, following the Prajñāpāramitā texts, called this absence of intrinsic reality or being śūnyatā, emptiness.

Emptiness (Śūnyatā) and Inherent Being (Svabhāva)

In a pair of celebrated verses Nāgārjuna links the śūnyatā of the early Mahāyāna sūtra writers with the long-established concept of dependent origination:

Whatever is dependently co-arisen,
That is explained to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation,
Is itself the middle way.
Something that is not dependently arisen,
Such a thing does not exist.
Therefore a nonempty thing
Does not exist.\footnote{11}

Here emptiness is equated with dependent arising and the absence of inherent being, and before going further it will be well to clarify the meaning that the important concept of inherent being (svabhāva) has for the Mādhyamikas. Nāgārjuna’s definition is as follows: “Self-existent nature (svabhāva) is not created nor is it dependent on anything other than itself.”\footnote{12} When we turn to modern scholars, we find that Nagao notes that svabhāva is the opposite of dependent origination and “refers to the inherent essence of a thing. . . . In other words, it is an ‘absolute existence’”;\footnote{13} De Jong writes that svabhāva is “non-contingent and has no relation to anything whatsoever”;\footnote{14} Garfield states that “essence (svabhāva) by definition is eternal and independent” and adds that nothing existent fulfills the three criteria that define authentic self-existence (svabhāva)—namely, being uncaused, being independent of other phenomena, and not being made up from other things.\footnote{15} Thus svabhāva is absolute reality, that which is not dependently arisen—and there is no dharma, nothing that exists, that is not śūnya, empty or hollow.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the teaching of emptiness does not imply for the Mādhyamikas the complete unreality of the dependently arisen world. Emptiness is not to be confused with nihilism. Being and non-being, it was realized, form a pair of opposites, and therefore both belong to the world of plurality and appearances and are in consequence empty.\footnote{16} Nāgārjuna sought to establish a Middle Way—the madhyamā pratipad—between asserting that the things of the world as we experience them are truly real and denying to them any existence at all; as Conze notes, “Emptiness is that which stands right in the middle between affirmation and negation, existence and non-existence, eternity and annihilation.”\footnote{17} On the one hand, the things of the world—and indeed anything whatsoever of a determinate nature, including mental events—lack inherent being and intrinsic reality since without exception they all arise dependently and cannot stand apart from the network of relationships of which they form a part.
They are therefore said to be empty, śūnya; they are empty of svabhāva and thus hollow. But the Mādhyamikas are emphatic that it does not follow from this that the things of the world that we experience do not exist in any way. They exist conventionally. Conventional things (dharmaś) and the everyday world that they make up are empty in that they lack true being, and yet they exist for us and in this sense they are not unreal. They lack intrinsic being (i.e., are nihsvabhāvā), but nevertheless exist at the level of everyday life. As Williams observes, “emptiness” does not equal “nonexistence.”

Nāgārjuna argues in chapter 15 of the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā that if “existence” meant inherent existence, intrinsic being (svabhāva), then nothing could exist since everything we perceive is impermanent. This would be nihilism (in the Mādhyamika use of the word). The opposite stance is that everything that exists is not impermanent but possessed of svabhāva and hence changeless. To assert this would be eternalism. Neither position is acceptable; neither corresponds to our experience of the world. Therefore the concept of inherently existing entities cannot stand; there are no such things. Entities exist not intrinsically but conventionally. They are dependently arisen and exist in the conditioned consciousness of living beings as a part of the net of mutually supportive relationships that appears as life and the world. It follows from this that there must be two “truths,” the truth of conventional existence and the truth of intrinsic being, absolute truth.

The “Two Truths”

The teaching of the Two Truths (satya-dvaya), together with the doctrines of dependent origination and emptiness, forms a complex that is of fundamental importance for the Mādhyamika school and in fact its very basis. The three doctrines form a philosophical whole and must be grasped as one. The teaching of the Two Truths has deep roots in the religious and philosophical thought of India. It is implicit in the early Upaniṣads and is clearly stated in the Bhagavad Gītā, and we shall meet it again when we turn to Advaita Vedānta. It was certainly not a new creation, but Nāgārjuna gave it a fresh precision and prominence, writing in the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā:
The teaching of the Buddhas is wholly based on there being two truths: that of a personal everyday world and a higher truth which surpasses it.

Those who do not clearly know the due distinction between the two truths cannot clearly know the hidden depths of the Buddha’s teaching.22

In his commentary to the first of the above two verses Candrakīrti adds, “The teaching of the illustrious Buddha in this world is effective and valid only as based on the twofoldness of truth,” and he goes on to explain that the everyday or samvṛti truth is in reality a form of ignorance (ajñāna) arising from “the utter obscuring of the true nature of things.”23 Samvṛti-satya is provisional truth, the apparent reality of the world, in spite of the fact that things are dependently originated and “based on each other in utter reciprocity.” It means conventional thinking, the world of ordinary language and of transactions between individuals, characterized by the distinction between knowing and the thing known, naming and the thing named.24

Thus the dependently originated world is viewed by the Mādhyamikas neither as truly real (possessed of svabhāva) nor as completely nonexistent; it is conventionally existent but empty or hollow. Candrakīrti expresses this as follows: “The meaning of the term ‘dependent arising’ is the same as the meaning of the term ‘absence of being.’ But the meaning of the term ‘non-existence’ is not the meaning of the term ‘absence of being.’”25 This makes it quite clear: dependent arising is equated with absence of being (nīhsvabhāva), but absence of being is not identical with nonexistence (abhāva). To suppose that it is constitutes a dangerous error comparable, in Nāgārjuna’s image, to a snake wrongly seized or some secret knowledge wrongly applied.26 The conventional truth is dependently arisen, but nonetheless it is “real” in the sense that it is conventionally existent.

Clearly distinguished from the conventional truth is the ultimate truth (paramārtha-satya). This is absolute truth, as opposed to empirical truth (including, of course, “scientific” truth). It is beyond thought and language, which is why the Buddha maintained noble silence when questioned on metaphysical matters. It contains no object of thought and therefore noth-
ing for the mind to grasp or for language to refer to, so that it can be spoken of only by means of analogy making use of terms drawn from the everyday world. Nāgārjuna writes that it is “not dependent on anything other than itself, at peace, not manifested as named things, beyond thought construction, not of varying form—thus the way things are really is spoken of.” Candrakīrti adds to this that the ultimate truth is attained without any mediation and not by the instruction of another; it is the true nature (svarūpa) of things, the way they really are (tattvam). T. R. V. Murti writes that paramārtha-satya is absolute truth, knowledge of the real as it is without any distortion, beyond categories of thought and all points of view. It is “the utter absence of the function of Reason (buddhi) which is therefore equated with samvr̥ti. The absolute truth is beyond the scope of discursive thought, language and empirical activity.” Garfield writes that the term paramārtha-satya “denotes the way things are independent of convention, or to put it another way, the way things turn out to be when we subject them to analysis with the intention of discovering the nature they have from their own side, as opposed to the characteristics we impute to them.”

The Truth of the Everyday World (Samvr̥ti-satya)

We have seen that for Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka there is an empirical or conventional level of existence that lacks intrinsic being and falls short of absolute truth but nevertheless enjoys a provisional reality. This everyday level of existence cannot be ignored; it is a fact of our experience, we ourselves form part of it, and it is only by using the conceptual instruments with which it endows us that we can come close to grasping the nature of ultimate truth. The question therefore arises: does the conventional level of existence, or samvr̥ti-sattva, and with it the everyday world, enjoy a real, even if incomplete, ontological efficacy, or is it ultimately of the nature of illusion?

That the precise nature of the Mādhyamika view is not easy to ascertain is evident from the fact that there is among recent scholars a division of opinion on this question. One view is that the Two Truths must be seen as radically distinct from one another and that the conventional truth is not in fact a truth in any straightforward sense, so that the distinction between the
conventional and the ultimate truth corresponds to that between phenomenon and noumenon, or appearance and reality, in Western philosophy. Such a view is held in a strong form by Murti, who writes, “Relativity or mutual dependence is a mark of the unreal. . . . Only the Absolute as the unconditioned is real.” A similar view is held by Nagao, who states that the two truths are “opposite to each other as perverted and correct, false and true. . . . There is no continuity between them and they are completely severed from each other.” No matter how high conventional truth may ascend, it can never become ultimate truth. “Conventional truth is truth no doubt, but seen from the perspective of this ultimate truth, it is a truth with limitations, a truth of a lower degree, and in the final analysis, it must be said to be false.”

Against this view stand scholars such as Garfield who maintain that to understand the Two Truths as radically distinct is to misapprehend Nāgārjuna’s position. It is to fail to appreciate that Mādhyamika teaching treads a middle path between the two extremes of nihilism (denying any reality to conventional truth and the empirical world) and absolutism (affirming the absolute reality of the world), and there is a sense in which things exist without being inherently and absolutely real. Garfield writes: “Whatever is dependently co-arisen is verbally established. . . . To say of a thing that its identity is a merely verbal fact about it is to say that it is empty. To view emptiness in this way is to see it neither as an entity nor as unreal—it is to see it as conventionally real.” Release from the idea that reality can only be inherent reality (svabhāva) comes with a full awareness of the dependent origination of all things, and it is just this awareness that is paramārtha-satya, the highest truth. It is not a matter of different degrees of reality but of different ways of understanding the one world.

The division of opinion as to the final meaning of the Mādhyamika teaching may result from shifts of standpoint on the part of Nāgārjuna himself. At times he takes “existence” to mean inherent existence (the standpoint of ultimate truth) and at other times to mean conventional existence (the standpoint of conventional truth), and it may be that a more extensive investigation would reveal that a similar unstated movement between standpoints underlies the whole method of the Mādhyamika tetralemma and the
denial of the four possibilities (cataśkoti). Perhaps this is what Conze has in mind when he refers, in connection with Nāgārjuna, to “the gentle art of undoing with one hand what one has done with the other.”

Be that as it may, it is evident that Murti and Nagao are writing from the standpoint of ultimate truth and consequently see the conventional truth (and therefore the empirical world) as existent after a fashion, no doubt, but ultimately unreal. Scholars such as Garfield, on the other hand, view the question from the standpoint of conventional truth. This is the standpoint of ordinary life and of unliberated beings, and it generally provides the basis from which Buddhist teaching proceeds. From this standpoint, samvit-satya, the conventional truth, must certainly be affirmed, and the spiritual dangers of failing to do so are, as Nāgārjuna points out, considerable. Thus it is primarily with the standpoint of conventional truth in mind that the Mādhyamikas teach. As Candrakīrti explains, “What is relative to certain conditions does not truly exist, like the heat of water, like ‘this side’ and ‘other side’ or like the long and the short. . . . Although this is so, nevertheless, in order to dispel the fears of people, we say ‘Things do truly exist’ by employing ordinary language and so constituting the everyday world (samvityā samāropya).” In another place, Candrakīrti likens the conventional truth to a container for someone who needs water. Thus the adoption by the Mādhyamika philosophers of the standpoint of conventional truth, in preference to that of ultimate truth, may be seen as an example of the compassionate application of “skillful means” characteristic of the Mahāyāna. The Mādhyamika teaching represents a serious and sustained effort to come to grips with the reality of the everyday world, which is not dismissed as merely an illusion. Although Nāgārjuna often likens the world to dream and mirage, we should not be misled, for dreams and mirages do exist—not as what they appear to be, but as dreams, as mirages. In a comparable way, the events and objects of everyday life are not what they appear to be (that is, substantial and possessed of inherent existence, svabhāva), but they do exist as empty, dependently arisen, nominally real phenomena. While it is true that they are empty, they are not nonexistent; Candrakīrti writes, “Devoidness (śūnyatā) means only that everyday things are not self-existent. . . . Devoidness destroys the one who takes it to mean the non-existence of things.”
fact, as Williams notes, for the Mādhyamikas it is of crucial importance to accept the everyday conventional world since it provides the basis for religious practices and without it nirvāṇa cannot be attained.42

Thus existence, in the Mādhyamika view, is not limited to inherent existence. Neither the self nor any other phenomenon is possessed of inherent existence; all are dependently arisen and therefore empty. Yet the phenomena of the everyday world, just as we experience them, do exist conventionally, and it is only by understanding their dependently arisen nature, while not denying their existence, that rebirth and suffering can be brought to an end. The everyday world is important and is not to be dismissed as less than real. Candrakīrti warns: “If he imagines that just because the entire realm of things is devoid of self-existence it does not exist in any sense, then a serious heresy has taken hold of him,” and he cites the words of Nāgārjuna: “This teaching, wrongly grasped, destroys the unwise man; he drowns in the quagmire of the view that all things are unreal.”43

Nāgārjuna’s teaching, in its theoretical aspect, is therefore a clearing of the ground, a systematic stripping away of error so that, on a basis that is free from illusion, a proper engagement with the positive and practical aspects of Buddhism may take place. The full meaning of emptiness (śūnyatā) cannot be grasped so long as it is considered simply as a philosophical idea; it is only when the spiritual intention behind the doctrine is considered that its true significance becomes clear. Conze writes perceptively of emptiness: “It is a purely soteriological term. The moment it is detached from its practical basis it becomes a travesty of itself,” and he adds that meditation on emptiness serves the purpose of “helping us to get rid of this world by removing the ignorance which binds us to it.”44 Emptiness is not a static condition; it is the progressive cultivation of a spiritual attitude that, in its essentials, is close to the “non-attachment” (vairāgya) advocated by the Bhagavad Gītā and in the teaching of Advaita Vedānta. It is to this school of thought that we now turn.
Chapter Seven

Advaita Vedānta: The World as Illusory Appearance

Within Hinduism, it was the Advaita or “non-dual” school of Vedānta that most closely examined the reality-status of the world.\(^1\) It was largely through this school that from about the sixth century onward, the Hindu tradition was able to produce an adequate response to the intellectual challenge presented by Mahāyāna Buddhism. During the same centuries the rapidly expanding devotional (or bhakti) movement provided a counterweight to the spiritual and emotional appeal of the Bodhisattva ideal, with the result that the energies that had brought about the flowering of the Mahāyāna in India were gradually drawn back into the Hindu stream. It was partly for this reason that when, in the eleventh century, the Muslim assault on India took place, Buddhism rapidly disappeared while Hinduism did not.\(^2\)

The leading proponent of Advaita Vedānta was the philosopher and theologian Śaṅkara. He is widely regarded as the most penetrating and influential thinker within the Hindu tradition, and it is primarily with his ideas that we are concerned in the present chapter. Śaṅkara’s high reputation in the West goes back to the nineteenth century and Paul Deussen’s study of his thought, *The System of the Vedānta*.\(^3\) Drawing the idea of a convergence of Greek, Indian, and Kantian thought directly from Schopenhauer, Deussen compared Śaṅkara’s vision of the world to that of Parmenides and Kant. He writes that all three thinkers, widely separated in time and space, arrived at essentially the same conclusion (although by very different routes), this being that “all empirical investigation and knowledge amounts in the end only to a great deception grounded in the nature of our knowing faculties.” It is this deception that it is the task of metaphysics to overcome, and Deussen argued that the Indians attained this knowledge in a form that was, “if not the most scientific, yet the most inward and immediate expression of the deepest secret of being.”\(^4\)
Deussen’s book was a landmark. Nevertheless, our understanding of Advaita Vedānta has gained considerably since he wrote; it was only in 1950 that a start was made on separating Śaṅkara’s authentic writings from the inauthentic works traditionally attributed to him. Śaṅkara was not a detached thinker like Kant or Schopenhauer. He was practically engaged in the religious life of his times and first and foremost a commentator on the Vedic texts (only one independent work has survived, the relatively brief *Upadeśa Śāhasī*). These texts were held to be infallible, and yet an apparent conflict existed between those that advocated ritual activity as the purpose of life and those that regarded knowledge alone as the source of salvation (*mokṣa*). Śaṅkara’s importance for the Hindu tradition lies in the manner in which he admits this conflict and then succeeds in resolving it by the application of a single exegetical principle: that of the ultimately unreal nature of the world, which, he maintains, has never truly come into being and exists only in appearance. This is the doctrine of non-origination or “birthlessness” (*ajāta-vāda*), to which we will return below. It maintains that there is no duality, absolutely nothing that stands over against the one reality of Brahman: “On the dawn of knowledge, no duality is left,” writes Śaṅkara in commenting on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. Since duality, in the shape of the empirical world, nevertheless appears to exist, this gives rise to a teaching of two standpoints, or *drṣṭi*, broadly similar to the Two Truths of the Madhyāmika philosophers.

The “Two Standpoints” in Advaita Vedānta

The two standpoints are the standpoint of knowledge (or non-duality) and the standpoint of ignorance (or duality), and they constitute a distinction between absolute truth and apparent or empirical truth. The distinction is rooted in earlier Hindu literature. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* we read that “Verily, there are two forms of Brahman, the formed and the formless, the mortal and the immortal, the unmoving and the moving, the actual and the true”; and in the *Mundaka Upaniṣad* it is said that “two kinds of knowledge are to be known . . . the higher as well as the lower.” For Śaṅkara absolute reality, Brahman—which is also ātman or the true
Self—is unconditioned and free. It is all-pervasive consciousness in which everything takes place, the self-luminous witness (sāksin) of the play of unreal appearances that make up the world. He writes, “The Self which takes all mental ideas for its object illumines all cognitions. It is pure Consciousness in its true form. . . . There is no other way to have knowledge of the inmost Self but this.”8 From the standpoint of absolute truth there is, for Śaṅkara, no difference between dream experience and waking experience; neither has any reality at all, other than the underlying consciousness that forms the “substratum” or adhiśṭhāna on which both rest. “As the body perceived in the dream is unreal,” he writes, echoing the words of Gauḍapāda, “so also all that is cognised by the mind, even in the waking state, is unreal; for all these perceived objects are mere different states of mind.”9 Commenting on the image of the inverted tree in the Bhagavad Gītā—the Tree of Samsāra, which represents transmigratory life and the ever-changing phenomenal world—Śaṅkara says that in its nature it is “like a dream or a mirage or a magic display (māyā) or a city in the clouds (gandharvana-nagara);”10 and it is because Advaita Vedānta attributes this illusory status to the world that it came to be popularly known as māyā-vāda, the doctrine of māyā or illusion.11 The following passage from Śaṅkara’s commentary on the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad illustrates this view of the world. Unusually for Śaṅkara, who sought to establish the superiority of Hindu thought, it makes striking use of imagery current among the Mahāyāna Buddhists:

And so the whole world . . . is impure, hollow, changeful like a running river, comparable to the series of flashes that seems to constitute a steady flame, insubstantial like the stalk of a plantain, comparable to foam, to the water of a mirage, to a dream and the like, being kept in being solely by the stream of the acts and impressions of acts (vāsanā) of its teeming living beings—this whole world, thus constituted, cannot be eradicated by those who identify themselves with it, and to them it seems eternal and solid.12

This is absolute truth, how things stand in reality, and one could hardly ask for a clearer statement of the doctrine of māyā as conceived from the standpoint of knowledge. However, it is worth remarking that Śaṅkara ends
the passage by emphasizing that to those whose thought remains within its bounds, the world-appearance seems eternal and solid. Even a dream has reality so long as we are enclosed within it. It is the same a fortiori with waking experience; this too has apparent reality until such time as it is canceled by the awakening of knowledge, as a dream is canceled when we wake. “Before one awakens to the Self as reality, everything is real in its own realm, as the objects seen in a dream [are real during the dream],” writes Śaṅkara.13 Thus, from the standpoint of the ordinary, unrealized human being, we cannot say that the world is unreal. Things lack true reality (svabhāva), but they are not nonexistent and must be accorded a provisional reality.14

It therefore becomes clear that there are two grades of “reality,” two sorts of “truth,” and two standpoints from which the world may be considered. From the standpoint of absolute truth and the true Self (ātman), the world and the beings that experience it are no more than illusory appearances devoid of reality. But from the standpoint of empirical existence and the individual self (jīva) the world appears to be real. It is lived in as such, and it is the deeply rooted idea of an individual self, and a world of objects and other beings that it confronts, which prevents us from identifying with the underlying consciousness. In this way Brahman-ātman, the only true reality, is lost to sight under the flood of shifting and ultimately unreal appearances superimposed upon it. Śaṅkara writes: “By that element of plurality which is the fiction of nescience (avidyā) . . . Brahman becomes the basis of this entire apparent world with its changes, and so on, while in its true and real nature it at the same time remains unchanged, lifted above the phenomenal universe.”15 Thus the idea of an individual self and an external world that it experiences is the fundamental form of duality (dvaita), which it is the purpose of the teaching of non-duality (advaita) to overcome. Śaṅkara does not evade the consequences of this doctrine. In his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra he raises the objection that if we adopt the standpoint that only Brahman-ātman is truly real, will not all our means of knowledge (pramāṇas) become invalid for want of real objects to work with, and all religious texts and even the teaching of release (mokṣa) itself lose their meaning and validity?16 The answer Śaṅkara gives is, yes, it is true; they will, for all these form part of the empirical world, and from the standpoint of absolute
truth they too have no reality. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* commentary he writes: “The śāstra [religious teaching] is concerned with the ignorant who view things as they present themselves to their consciousness.”

For Śaṅkara, then, there are two mutually exclusive standpoints or “truths,” that of knowledge and that of ignorance, and like the Mādhyamika philosophers before him he makes use of the terms *paramārtha* and *saṃvrti* (or its synonym, *vyavahāra*) for these. However, he also employs another term, *prātibbāsika* (fictional), and it was noticed by later followers that the way in which he applied these terms to the world was not consistent. When the world was compared to perceptual illusions or dreams, it was said to have “practical existence” (*vyāvahārika-sattva*), but when compared to Brahman, it was said to have only “fictitious existence” (*prātibhāsika-sattva*). Consequently, later Advaitins developed Śaṅkara’s usage into a more systematic teaching containing four ontological levels: first, *asat*, complete unreality, the necessarily nonexistent (e.g., *vandhyā-putra*, “the son of the barren woman”); second, *prātibbāsika-sat*, the “fictitiously existent” (the level of dreams, erroneous sense perceptions, etc.); third, *vyāvahārika-sat*, the “practically existent,” the level of appearances making up sense-mental experience of the empirical world; and finally *pāramārthika-sat* (or simply *sat*), the “supreme existent,” the level of unconditioned consciousness or Brahman-ātman. *Prātibhāsika-sat* and *vyāvahārika-sat* taken together constitute *māyā*, the realm of illusion, the inexplicable nature of which derives from the fact that the four ontological levels are qualitatively different, so that causal relations among them are not possible. From the standpoint of the highest truth the other levels of being, all diversity and manifestation, are void of reality, mere appearance. This teaching was known as *ajāta-vāda*, the theory of “no birth (*a-jāta*)” or non-origination.

**Ajāta-vāda: The Doctrine of Non-origination**

It is the doctrine of non-origination that marks the emergence of Advaita as a distinct school within the broader Vedānta tradition. It was affirmed by the earliest known Advaita philosopher, Gauḍapāda. His *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, or expository verses (*kārikā*) on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, com-
posed around the start of the sixth century or perhaps a little earlier, argues strongly that the world has never truly come into being and thus has “no birth.” Although it is cast in the form of a free commentary upon the brief *Māndūkya Upaniṣad*, it shows very clearly the influence of Buddhist thought and the Mādhyamika ideas that were examined in the last chapter. A number of its verses are close both in thought and in expression to Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*. For example, the opening verse of Nāgārjuna’s work reads:

No things whatsoever exist, at any time, in any place, having arisen of themselves, from another, from both or without cause.

And in Gauḍapāda’s *Kārikās* we find the following:

Nothing, whatsoever, is born either of itself or of another. Nothing is ever produced whether it be being or non-being or both being and non-being.

At one point Gauḍapāda explicitly expresses agreement with the *ajāti-vāda* taught by the Mādhyamikas, writing: “We approve the *Ajāti* or non-creation declared by them. We do not quarrel with them.” One Indian writer, in a well-known work, has suggested that the last of the four books into which Gauḍapāda’s *Kārikās* are divided, a sustained critique of causality in which Buddhist imagery is very prominent, was originally an independent Buddhist tract and that in it “Gauḍapāda has discussed nothing directly of the Vedānta.” This view has not been universally accepted, but it is an indication of how close the thought of the early Advaita school, as represented by Gauḍapāda, and that of the Mādhyamikas was at this time—a period that was, as Mayeda puts it, “the age of the happy coexistence of Buddhism and Hinduism.”

Other writers have suggested that Gauḍapāda’s closeness to Mahāyāna thinking may reflect the fact that the Buddhists were ultimately drawing upon the seeds of idealism that are contained in earlier Indian tradition and notably in the Upaniṣads. The idea that the empirical world is *māyā*, illusion or magic, and has only an apparent reality is deeply rooted in Indian thought. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* it is made clear that sensory experience, like
all else subject to change, must be accounted unreal, and *ajāta-vāda* is anticipated by the emphatic declaration that “The unreal never is. The Real never is not.”²⁶ The *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* cites a mantra that even then was already ancient, the opening words of which are “Asato mā sat gamaya” (From the unreal lead me to the real).²⁷ Even as far back as the *Ṛg Veda* the celebrated image of the two birds in the same tree (subsequently repeated in the *Mūndaka* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads*) implies the possibility of two levels of experience, that of a real and that of an apparent self.²⁸

It therefore seems probable that the doctrine of the ultimately unreal nature of the world had been known to India from early times, was absorbed into both Upaniṣadic and Buddhist thought, was revived and developed with great force and clarity in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and was finally reclaimed for the Upaniṣadic tradition by Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara. A. J. Alston writes of Gauḍapāda as follows:

Gauḍapāda thought that the Buddhist works which he so frequently quoted were only restating the old Upaniṣadic wisdom enunciated by Yājñavalkya [in the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*], but in a clearer, more systematic form, better suited to the philosophic climate of his own day. . . . Gauḍapāda clearly considered that Buddhist dialectic, Buddhist methods of textual interpretation and Buddhist yoga were all powerful aids in attaining practical realization of the ancient Upaniṣadic wisdom.²⁹

In spite of this, the argument followed by Gauḍapāda in his *Kārikās*, and later by Śaṅkara, differs in significant respects from that of the Buddhists. It centers on the analysis of the three states of conditioned consciousness that is found in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*—waking, dream, and dreamless sleep (symbolized by the three curves in the graphic representation of the traditional symbol *Om*). All three states, it is argued, lack permanence, and to lack permanence is to lack reality. Just as a dream vanishes on waking, so too the waking world disappears when we dream. Moreover, both of these disappear during dreamless sleep—and this condition in turn vanishes when we dream or wake. Thus, at different times, each state disappears and is as though it never existed. Therefore none of them can be real. And so Śaṅkara,
in the *Upadeśa Sāhasrī*, writes: “One should abandon as non-existent the triad of the states of waking, dreaming, and their seed called the state of deep sleep and consisting of darkness; for when one [of them] exists, the others do not.”\(^{30}\) While it is admitted that the world has pragmatic value since it is experienced, it cannot for this reason be called real (*sat*), for exactly the same can be said of dream: “That which is non-existent at the beginning and in the end, is necessarily so in the middle,” Gaudapāda asserts.\(^{31}\)

A second argument advanced by the Advaita philosophers is that both the waking world and the dream world are composite and formed of many elements. That which is compound must at some point disintegrate; hence it cannot be real. Furthermore, both of these worlds are subject to continual internal change, and that which changes cannot be real. In addition to these arguments, it is logically impossible that the world as a second thing over against Brahman, or indeed duality in *any* form, can come into true being. It cannot arise from the unreal since this has no being. Nor can it arise from the real since this by definition is not subject to modification. Consequently, it cannot be real, and Śaṅkara writes:

> If one cannot logically establish that duality can arise, it cannot be real. But in fact it cannot [logically] come into being either from the real or the unreal. For if duality arose from the real, the latter would [undergo transformation and so] be unreal. And if duality arose from the unreal, the latter would be [its material cause and so] real. Hence action and its factors and results do not [from the standpoint of the highest truth] exist. Only the one unborn Self exists. . . . The eternal and transient are unrelated, and it is impossible to establish that any effect could emerge from their congress.\(^{32}\)

In passages such as this Śaṅkara strongly affirms the doctrine of non-origination. Not only does he refute the position of the Indian realists, but he also refutes the contention that objects are produced by the mind or that they are produced by a combination of external reality and the action of the mind (broadly speaking, the Kantian position). From the standpoint of knowledge and absolute truth, the world-appearance is not produced by the mind, for it has no true existence. Alston writes, “In the long run, Śaṅkara
did not teach that the world existed either inside the mind or outside it, as he taught that it did not exist at all.” For Śaṅkara the final truth is exactly as stated in Gauḍapāda’s verse: “There is no dissolution, no birth, none in bondage, none aspiring for wisdom, no seeker of liberation and none liberated. This is the absolute truth.” Thus, in what we might regard as a characteristically Hindu fashion, Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara absorbed the theoretical insights of the Mahāyāna philosophers and utilized them to clarify the meaning of their own tradition. And they were able to do this because essentially the same insights, albeit in a less developed form, were already present in the Upaniṣads. At the conclusion of his commentary on Gauḍapāda’s Kārikās, Śaṅkara writes that the latter had rescued “this nectar, hardly obtainable even by the gods, from the innermost depths of the ocean of the Vedas by churning it with the rod of his illumined reason.”

Theories of Causality and the Reality-Status of the World

The doctrine of ajāta-vāda brought with it a difficulty, for embedded in the authoritative text of the broader Vedānta school, the Brahma Sūtra, was a doctrine of causality that implied a different worldview. This teaching had three stages, which went by the names of satkārya-vāda, pariṇāma-vāda, and bhedābheda-vāda.

The first stage, satkārya-vāda, the theory of the prior “existence (sat) of the effect (kārya)” in its material cause, had been developed by the philosophers of the earlier Sāṃkhya school. It presented no difficulties for Śaṅkara. In his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra he defends it. He argues that since the world exhibits an undeniable order—curds can be obtained from milk and not from clay, pots from clay and not from milk—we must accept that there is a causal chain and that objects (or effects) manifest the potential or power that is inherent in the material cause from which they are formed. The effect is identical with that power, and the power, in its turn, is identical with the essence of the cause. But milk and clay themselves come forth from prior causes, and in this way the whole universe may be traced back to the five great elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth) and these in turn to Brahmā, the ultimate cause in which the entire effect (the universe) lies in
potential — and from which it periodically comes forth and into which it is again withdrawn.

Just as a pot is clay upon which name and form are superimposed and a ring is gold in the same way, the world as a whole is simply Brahman, the ultimate cause, assuming certain forms. As Śaṅkara puts it, “The one Being persists under a different configuration . . . like clay assuming different successive forms such as powder, lump, pot.” Thus, when the Brahma Sūtra likens Brahman to a folded piece of cloth, Śaṅkara explains that while the cloth is folded, we hardly know what it is; but as it is unfolded, we recognize it as cloth, then come to know its length and width, and finally the design woven into it and all of its particulars. Yet the unfolded cloth is not different from the folded object that existed initially: the effect preexisted in the cause. It was simply not manifested.

In this way satkārya-vāda established, to Śaṅkara’s satisfaction, that the world as effect arises from Brahman as cause and is essentially non-different from Brahman. But at this point a difficulty arose. This was the question of the reality-status of the effect and consequently of the world. The usual view among Vedāntins prior to the time of Śaṅkara was that known as parināma-vāda. This taught that the effect was fully real. It was argued that if an effect is non-different from its cause, it must share the latter’s reality. Consequently, when the effect is manifested, a real transformation or parināma of the cause (Brahman) takes place (as when milk turns into curds), and the result is a real world with real individual living beings (jīvas) in it. Both share the reality of Brahman, their cause. Thus the world is not illusory but an actual and real transformation of Brahman, its material cause.

Since it is evident that the world, even though it may share in the reality of Brahman, also differs from Brahman, those maintaining the parināma view were obliged to refine their argument by adding a third stage to the theory of causality. This was the “doctrine of difference and non-difference” (bhedābheda-vāda). It maintained that the effect is non-different from the cause since it shares in the latter’s reality (just as a pot shares the reality of the clay that is its material cause), and yet it is different since it is manifested and has assumed a separate identity. A frequently used illustration was that of the sea. Waves and foam emerge from the sea. They are distinct from it. Yet they
are nothing but sea, and without it they do not exist (although, it was noted, the reverse is not true: the sea can exist without them). In the same way, the world, and the beings it contains, even while they maintain their distinct forms, are Brahman and share the reality of Brahman. This view of Brahman as simultaneously unmanifest cause and manifested effect attributes full reality both to the world and to the individual soul (jīva). It is found in the Purāṇas and was probably held by a majority of early Vedāntins, including the author of the Brahma Sūtra. After Śāṅkara’s time it was championed by Rāmānuja and Madhva—who, significantly enough, accused Śāṅkara and his followers of being crypto-Buddhists whose qualityless Brahman was really no different from the śūnya of the Mādhyamikas.

Here, then, was a position clearly in conflict with the ajāta-vāda that Gauḍapāda, Śāṅkara, and other Advaitins had embraced. Śāṅkara therefore opposed parināma-vāda—the doctrine that a real transformation takes place—together with its refinement, bhedabheda-vāda. He objects to the latter in many places, pointing out that the teaching of simultaneous identity and difference conflicts with the unity of Brahman and that it is invalid to draw a comparison between Brahman, which the Veda defines as being without parts, and such worldly phenomena as the sea, which invariably do have parts. With regard to parināma-vāda, he argues that while it is true that the effect inheres in the cause, the effect is nonetheless not real. It is only an apparent and illusory manifestation of the cause, just as an imagined snake is an illusory manifestation of the rope on which it is superimposed and not a real transformation of it. This position later came to be called vivarta-vāda (the doctrine of apparent transformation), although the term postdates Śāṅkara.

The conflicting positions with regard to the reality-status of the world can be traced back to the different standpoints on which they rest. The parināma view of Rāmānuja and others, asserting the full reality of the empirical world, is conceived from the standpoint of ordinary men and women—the standpoint of ignorance, in Advaita terminology. The vivarta-vāda of the Advaitins is conceived from the standpoint of absolute truth, the “standpoint of knowledge,” for which the world has no true and inherent reality. In spite of this, it can be observed that Śāṅkara does not write
consistently from the latter standpoint. He shifts at times to the standpoint of empirical experience or ignorance, so that his attitude to the doctrines teaching a real transformation, by which the world participates in the reality of Brahman, is not always one of clearcut rejection. It is essential to be clear which standpoint he is writing from at any given point. When writing from that of absolute truth (paramārtha-satya), he has no doubt that the whole of manifestation is void of intrinsic reality: “One . . . should not so much as behold the world of duality, because it does not exist,” he asserts uncompromisingly. Brahman is One and cannot in reality, but only in appearance, become many. The world consists of appearances subsisting for a time and vanishing without trace, like the snake in the rope; they are the result of superimposition (adhyāsa) and have no more reality than does the second moon experienced by a person suffering from double vision. But when writing from the standpoint of ordinary life, in his role as religious teacher (ācārya) rather than philosopher, Śaṅkara concedes that parināma, the participation of the world in the reality of Brahman, may be admitted. There is, indeed, a conflation between the two different standpoints in Śaṅkara’s writing. But it is not the result of confusion or indecision; it is the only way in which the riddle of empirical existence and its relation to changeless final reality can be approached. The hiatus between different orders of being cannot be overcome; it can only be handled in practice by constantly moving between them. Śaṅkara is aware of this, writing, “The Vedānta-texts declare that for him who has reached the state of truth and reality the whole apparent world does not exist . . . . On the other hand, all those distinctions are valid, as far as the phenomenal world is concerned.” By a skilful use of the two standpoints of knowledge and ignorance Śaṅkara succeeds in reconciling those passages in the Upaniṣads that support the theory of a real transformation (parināma) of Brahman, and the consequent reality of the world, with other passages that may be adduced in support of the view that he himself puts forward and that was later called vivarta-vāda: the view that the world is a mere appearance or superimposition upon consciousness or Brahman and apart from this basis has no inherent reality whatever.
Chapter Eight

Conclusions: Schopenhauer’s *Representation* and Its Indian Affinities

Schopenhauer was aware of an affinity between his own early research into the principle of sufficient reason and teachings of the Vedānta regarding the deceptive nature of the empirical world. It was one of the main reasons for his interest in the *Oupnek’hat*, and it may well be as Berger has suggested that this translation of the Upaniṣads, when he first studied it in 1814–1818, helped him to develop his own ideas.¹ Near the start of *The World as Will and Representation* he refers to Heraclitus, Plato, Spinoza, and Kant as having had essentially the same understanding of the fundamental emptiness of the world, which he himself speaks of as “the world as representation subordinated to the principle of sufficient reason,” and he compares this European tradition to “the ancient wisdom of the Indians [which] declares that ‘it is Māyā, the veil of deception, which covers the eyes of mortals, and causes them to see a world of which one cannot say either that it is or that it is not; for it is like a dream, like the sunshine on the sand which the traveller from a distance takes to be water, or like a piece of rope on the ground which he regards as a snake.’”²

The concept of māyā, and the likening of the empirical world to a dream, a mirage, and a rope mistaken for a snake, are all prominent features of Advaita Vedānta, and it is probably this influence (conveyed in passages of commentary sometimes included along with the Upaniṣadic texts of the *Oupnek’hat*) that these words reflect. The existence of a measure of convergence between the doctrine of representation and Indian thought was accepted by Paul Deussen and others already in the nineteenth century; does the examination undertaken in the last three chapters, and making use of more recent research into Indian thought, add in any significant way to this knowledge?
In the opening pages of the 1844 edition of his principal work Schopenhauer notes that the doctrine that the world is representation, existing only for the subject, is not new. Not only had Berkeley enunciated it, but also at an early stage in the discovery of Indian thought Sir William Jones had perceived that it was the fundamental tenet of the philosophers of Advaita Vedānta. Schopenhauer quotes the following passage from Jones’s Presidential Discourse, read before the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1794: “The fundamental tenet of the Vedānta school . . . consisted not in denying the existence of matter, that is, of solidity, impenetrability, and extended figure (to deny which would be lunacy), but in correcting the popular notion of it, and in contending that it has no essence independent of mental perception; that existence and perceptibility are convertible terms.”

Matter—and with it the universe—has no essence independent of mental perception. The world exists in the minds of living beings and not independently of these. This, as we have seen, is the conclusion reached by all three of the teachings explored in the last three chapters. Schopenhauer, accepting Kant’s demonstration that the world takes shape in accordance with the forms of intuition, and condensing the twelve categories into a single concept, the understanding, concludes that true philosophy must start from the fact that the knowledge we have of the world is formed by the subject. “Everything that in any way belongs and can belong to the world is inevitably associated with this being-conditioned by the subject, and it exists only for the subject. The world is representation,” he writes. Our knowledge of the world is knowledge only of the representation, not of whatever reality might underlie this. “All perception is intellectual,” Schopenhauer asserts; “at one stroke does the understanding through its one simple function [of causality] convert the dull meaningless sensation into perception.”

The empirical world, therefore, exists in consciousness; it has no being outside the minds of the living beings that experience it. Schopenhauer notes that Kant had written the following in the Critique of Pure Reason: “If I take away the thinking subject, the whole material world must cease to exist, as it is nothing but the phenomenon in the sensibility of our subject, and a species of its representations.” It follows that there is no objective, self-existing material basis to the world, no “matter” as this is commonly un-
derstood. Schopenhauer tells us on numerous occasions that matter is simply causality, objectively conceived. All its properties—and these constitute its entire nature—form part of the endless chain of cause and effect. “Matter is absolutely nothing but causality,” he writes. “Thus its being is its acting; it is not possible to conceive for it any other being. . . . Cause and effect are the whole essence and nature of matter. . . . Its being and essence are entirely relative.” Matter, objects, and the world as a whole exist only in relation to subjects, just as Berkeley had perceived. They are dependent on the subject and conditioned thereby. “The only world everyone is actually acquainted with and knows, is carried about by him in his head as his representation,” Schopenhauer writes. An object is “mere phenomenon that does not exist in itself, does not exist unconditionally.” The world of everyday experience, the product of our cognitive faculty, is appearance (Erscheinung); it is ideal and not real and exists only as representation in the consciousness of living beings.

The Mādhyamika Buddhists also see the world as a creation of mind, devoid of inherent reality (svabhāva). In the Prajñāpāramitā texts of the early Mahāyāna it is stated that “Matter is emptiness and the very emptiness is matter,” and Sprung observes that “against the view that the everyday world is constituted of self-existent entities and natures the entire Mādhyamika attack is directed.” Even in earlier forms of Buddhism the world was compared to such things as foam, a bubble, a mirage, a dream, a magic show. By means of their greatly expanded understanding of dependent origination the Mādhyamika philosophers were able to show exactly why this is so: the world is a network of dependently arisen phenomena, resulting from interdependent thought-constructions (prajñāpti-upādāya) occurring in the minds of living beings. All dharmas, everything that exists, are dependently arisen and therefore empty or hollow (śūnya). Thus we find it written in one of the early Mahāyāna sūtras that “All principles of things (dharmas) have their origin in mind: when mind is exactly known, all principles (dharmas) are known. . . . Mind is like a circling firebrand: mind is like a heaving wave: mind is like a blazing forest fire: mind is like a rushing mighty flood.” In the words of De Jong, the Mādhyamikas “maintain that things are not real, that there is no real origination (samutpāda), but only origination dependent
on causes (pratītya-samutpāda). On the level of samvṛti things exist, but they do not exist on the level of paramārtha.”15 Intrinsic existence or essence (svabhāva) cannot be attributed either to the individual self or “I” (ātman in Buddhist terminology) or to any other existent thing.

Thus for the Mādhyamikas the world lacks true reality. It depends on the temporary coming together of causes and conditions, and Candrakīrti affirms that “What is relative to certain conditions does not truly exist.”16 Nothing real, but only appearance, has ever come into being and we are left, as I. J. Schmidt put it in the lectures Schopenhauer thought so well of, with “only the great Unity outside all the borders of nature, in which every ‘I’ disappears.”17

It is interesting to observe how close Schopenhauer’s own thought comes to the Mādhyamika position at this point. Conze describes the doctrine of dependent origination as it was reformulated by Nāgārjuna—not, of course, to be confused with the earlier doctrine of moral causality from which it was developed—in these words: “Any relative thing is functionally dependent on other things, and can exist, and be conceived, only in and through its relations with other things. By itself it is nothing, it has no separate inward reality.”18 Describing Schopenhauer’s teaching in On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, J. A. Atwell, a scholar concerned purely with Schopenhauer and quite unconcerned with India, writes as follows: “Everything knowable is conditioned by or dependent on something else, hence occasionally the principle of sufficient reason is called the ‘principle of dependence’”; and two pages later: “Normal perceptual objects are, as it were, tied to each other in a gigantic network of time, space, and causality, such that no object can be known (intuited, perceived) or even conceived independently of its relations to other objects.”19 Schopenhauer himself writes: “The general meaning of the principle of sufficient reason may, on the whole, be reduced to the fact that always and everywhere each thing exists merely by virtue of another thing,”20 and in another place, “I have shown in detail how every possible object . . . stands in a necessary relation to other objects, on the one hand as determined, on the other as determining.”21 These are words that could well describe Nāgārjuna’s doctrine of dependent origination. Let us recall that they were written long before the teachings of the
Mādhyamika philosophers were explored in detail by the scholars of the twentieth century.

The Mādhyamika understanding of the deceptive nature of the world was shared by Advaita Vedāntins. Gauḍapāda writes: “Nothing, whatsoever, is born either of itself or of another. Nothing is ever produced.” This, we saw in the previous chapter, is ajāta-vāda, the doctrine that duality has no intrinsic being. Nevertheless, Advaitins reach this conclusion by means of arguments rooted in the Upaniṣads and quite distinct from those of the Buddhists. In place of dependent origination, Gauḍapāda and Śaṃkara base their argument upon an examination of the three conditioned states of consciousness—dreamless sleep, dream, and waking. They conclude that none of these has true self-existence (svabhāva) since none has stability and permanence. For Śaṃkara the world is appearance, superimposed by nescience upon a substratum (Brahman) that is real. As in the often-cited example of the snake and the rope, it is an apparent transformation (vivarta) lacking intrinsic reality. The underlying rope, Brahman, unconditioned consciousness, alone is real. The snake, the world and all its contents, is illusory appearance superimposed on that reality. Nothing real has ever come into being, nor can it ever do so: it is impossible in principle, for it can arise neither from the unreal, which is without being, nor from the real, which by definition is not subject to modification. Thus from the standpoint of knowledge there is no difference between dream experience and waking experience; neither has any reality other than the substratum of consciousness on which it rests. Śaṃkara writes that the ideas of duality and birth are “merely an objectification of the mind,” and in another place: “As the body perceived in the dream is unreal, so also all that is cognised by the mind, even in the waking state, is unreal; for all these perceived objects are mere different states of mind.”

Thus both the Advaita philosophers and the Mādhyamikas (and with them, Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole) conclude that the empirical world has no true being; it is of the nature of an immense collective illusion conditioning the consciousness of living beings. A similar understanding was reached more than a millennium later and by means of arguments rooted in European idealism by Schopenhauer. All three doctrines conclude that whatever reality may be concealed by its arising, the world of ordinary
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everyday experience is appearance, representation, phenomenon, an illusion, a magic trick or māyā, and has no inherent being. It is worth noting that a century ago Deussen drew attention to the way in which the idealism of Europe lent added strength to the position of Advaita Vedānta. In relation to Śaṅkara’s doctrine of ignorance (avidyā) he writes: “All these expressions point to the fact that the final reason of the false empirical concept is to be sought—where, however, the Vedānta did not seek it—in the nature of our cognitive faculty. An analysis of this, as Kant undertook it, would in fact give the true scientific foundation of the Vedānta system.”

In this way a broadly similar conclusion with regard to the reality-status of the world is reached by Schopenhauer and the two Indian doctrines with which we are concerned. “Śaṅkara does not hesitate to speak of the experiences of transmigration openly in terms of images derived from the staccato Buddhist world-view, calling it momentary (ksanikā), like the ever-changing stream of a river or the sputtering jets of flame that underlie the apparent unity and continuity of the flame of a lamp,” observes Alston.

There, however, agreement ends, for in another respect Śaṅkara’s world-view is radically different from that of the Mahāyānists. For the Buddhist philosophers the world is essentially empty, a vast, dynamic imaginative construction (kalpanā) resting on nothing but the predispositions (samskāras) from past impressions, and thus arising out of karman; an endless process suspended over a void. On the other hand, Śaṅkara’s teaching is essentially a philosophy of Being. Reality is a plenum in which an unreal nescience (avidyā) produces the appearance of divisions and hence of multiplicity. Śaṅkara’s position, therefore, is quite distinct from that of subjective idealism. For him there can be no appearance without an underlying reality: “Yet it [Brahman] definitely exists,” he writes, “as, even though it is bereft of particular characteristics, it must exist as the ground of the universe.” To suppose otherwise and assent to a doctrine of nonexistence is to subscribe to a “devilish sceptical doctrine.”

When Gaudapāda, in the fourth book of his Kārikās, uses the Buddhist image of a whirling firebrand to describe the illusory arising of the world, Śaṅkara interprets this (in a manner that would be quite unacceptable to Buddhists) as the illusory rising of forms superimposed upon a substratum that is Consciousness:
The text means that the appearance of a subject and an object is like the appearance of straight and curved lines which results when a flaming torch is set in motion. Here it is consciousness that is set in motion, which means apparently set in motion, through nescience. For there is no real motion in motionless consciousness. It has already been declared to be unborn and motionless.

But when that very same flaming torch is held motionless, it does not suffer “birth” into straight and curved lines, produces no false appearances and is “unborn.” In the same way, Consciousness is set in motion only though nescience, and when the latter ceases, Consciousness ceases its apparent motion. It will then produce no more false appearances as if it were undergoing birth and the like.

Thus, for Śaṅkara, the world-appearance (prapañca) rests upon a substratum that is real; that is, indeed, Reality itself. Just as the snake turns out to be real when perceived in its true nature as the rope, the mind, and the universe that arises out of it, turns out to be a reality when perceived in its true nature as the Self. Behind the deceptive and changing picture that is samsāra there is concealed a positive ground, a reality that is stable, eternal, and unchanging and is variously designated as Brahman and Self (ātman), as Being and as Consciousness. The universe could not exist apart from this ultimate ground.

The worldview of Schopenhauer is different again. It falls between the two Indian positions: something positive underlies existence—it is because we sense this that we feel an inner reluctance to accept the world as nothing more than representation. But this metaphysical presence, the will, falls short of the finality that Śaṅkara attributes to Brahman. Its ultimate nature is unclear, and its ontological status resists definition. We cannot say with certainty (as we shall see in a later chapter) whether the will, in its ultimate nature, is identical with final reality or merely the first and most primary of the illusory forms that are superimposed upon it.

Let us now turn to another feature of Schopenhauer’s argument, one we have not yet touched upon and that sometimes draws critical comment. This is the apparently circular nature of his assertion that the world and
its objects, since both are representations, are dependent upon the subject, while at the same time he locates the subject in the world. Space and time are made dependent upon the physical existence of the brain, in which they exist as forms of intuitive perception, and yet the brain itself exists in space and time. The same difficulty does not obtain in the case of Kant, for whom the knowing subject is not itself in space and time, and we could absolve the two Indian systems under consideration on the same ground. But Schopenhauer, notably in the work of his middle years, locates the subject in a much more immediate and physical manner, writing for example, “The only world everyone is actually acquainted with and knows, is carried about by him in his head as his representation.” The experience of a beautiful view, he tells us in another place, depends “not merely on the object, but also on the quality and constitution of the brain, that is on its form and size, the fineness of its texture, and the stimulation of its activity through the energy of the pulse of the brain-arteries.” Consequently what appears to be a vicious circle results: the world, consisting of representations, is in my head. And yet, evidently enough, my head is in the world.

Schopenhauer was aware of the apparent contradiction. He writes, for example, “It is true that space is only in my head; but empirically my head is in space.” His solution is found immediately after the passage, noted above, which he cites from Sir William Jones, when he remarks that the words of the British Orientalist “adequately express the compatibility of empirical reality with transcendental ideality.” This teaching, that empirical reality and transcendental ideality exist simultaneously and each on its own plane, is Kantian in origin. In Schopenhauer’s interpretation, it tells us that the world is empirically real because the law of causality relates all phenomena. It relates one’s own body to all other material objects in a continuous and convincing way, and it is this net of relations that constitutes empirical reality. And yet at the same time the world is transcendentally ideal because causality originates with the subject and is confined to the sphere of representation; it cannot form a bridge between this and things-in-themselves, which exist independently of the subject. Empirical reality, he writes, “has no claim to pass for the world of things-in-themselves.” Thus idealism does not, as people persistently suppose, Schopenhauer asserts, deny the empirical reality of
the external world but leaves this quite untouched; “the perceived world in space and time, proclaiming itself as nothing but causality, is perfectly real, and is absolutely what it appears to be . . . representation, hanging together according to the law of causality. This is its empirical reality.” On the other hand, it is equally true that the world is dependent upon causality and that this is contributed by the subject, so that from this second point of view the world is representation and not an independently existing reality: “We must absolutely deny to the dogmatist the reality of the external world, when he declares this to be its independence of the subject. The whole world of objects is and remains representation, and is for this reason wholly and for ever conditioned by the subject; in other words, it has transcendental ideality. But it is not on that account falsehood or illusion; it presents itself as what it is . . . a series of representations, whose common bond is the principle of sufficient reason.”

Two chapters later Schopenhauer returns to the question, writing that from the standpoint of transcendental idealism the world is representation and “requires the knowing subject as the supporter of its existence”; without this it “is nothing at all.” On the other hand, the law of causality tells us that the world existed long before organic life and that the minds in which the world appears have arisen from and depend upon it. The two contradictory views, he writes, “to each of which we are led with equal necessity, might certainly be called an antinomy in our faculty of knowledge.” He suggests that this antinomy cannot be resolved if we consider only the world as representation, since this rests on the antithesis between subject and object that cannot be eliminated. The solution will be found only if we turn away from the representation, which is no more than the external side of the world, and toward the metaphysical reality (called, he says, the thing-in-itself by Kant, and by himself, will), which is its inner being.

Schopenhauer says no more than this at this point, so that we are left with a suggestion rather than a solution. But what he is moving toward can be clarified to some extent in the following way. We have seen that the empirical world is sometimes likened, both by the Indian philosophers and by Schopenhauer, to a dream. In dream the same problem of circularity arises: the dream, including my own self in the dream, exists in my head, as a phenomenon
of the brain. Yet at the same time, I and my head exist in the dream. Here, however, it is easy to see the solution: my head that appears in and forms a part of the dream is not the same as my head that is creating the dream. The latter is outside the dream and not within it, asleep on a pillow. Similarly, the individual self or subject (jīva, in the terminology of Hinduism) that forms part of the empirical world and shares its nature is not the same as the self or subject in which the entire world of representation with its forms of space and time appears. That subject (the ātman, for Advaita Vedānta) stands outside of and prior to the representation and is of an entirely different order of being. “Behind our existence lies something else that becomes accessible to us only by our shaking off the world,” as Schopenhauer writes.46

In spite of the illusory nature of existence and the doctrines of representation, emptiness, and non-origination (or “no birth”) in which this is elaborated, none of the teachings under review considers that the empirical world can be ignored. It is not nothing; it has transactional reality and cannot be dismissed as simply nonexistent. For Schopenhauer, it is representation or appearance only and to be understood as such; nevertheless, the appearance exists in the consciousness of living beings and for them is perfectly real: “The whole world of objects is and remains representation. . . . But it is not on that account falsehood or illusion . . . and to the understanding it speaks a perfectly clear language.”47 Śamkara points out that on waking, one knows the dream one was experiencing to have been unreal, but one does not consider the consciousness one had of the dream, the experience of the dream, to have been unreal; the dream existed.48 Even the liberated being, the jīvanmukta, continues to experience the world, although he knows it for the transient appearance that it is. The Mādhyamika philosophers warn of the spiritual dangers of failing to take account of empirical reality. Nāgārjuna likens such an attitude to seizing a snake in the wrong way and in consequence getting bitten49 and warns that without taking empirical truth into account, one “drowns in the quagmire of the view that all things are unreal.”50

Thus the world, created in and by the minds of the living beings who experience it, does exist, even though this existence is appearance and not reality. And we have seen that for both the Indian schools we have examined this gives rise to a teaching of two grades of “reality” or degrees of “truth,” two quite dif-
ferent ways in which the world may be understood. For the Mādhyamikas the doctrine of Two Truths is the key to the hidden depths of the Buddha’s teaching. Nagao states that it is one of the most important features of the school and probably of the whole of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Sprung considers it to be the crucial thought of the Mādhyamika teachers. For Advaitins the distinction between the standpoint of ignorance and the standpoint of knowledge is also of fundamental importance: the world may be viewed in its empirical reality, as it is perceived by the mind and experienced in daily life, but the truth is that this is nescience, avidyā. True being is unconditioned consciousness devoid of parts and change, and from this standpoint the world is illusory appearance. Only the higher standpoint is knowledge properly so called; the lower standpoint is that of epistemological ignorance.

In the case of Schopenhauer, empirical reality and transcendental ideality exist simultaneously in much the same way as do the Two Truths. The world may be understood in its empirical reality, as the senses and mind present it to consciousness and as natural science studies it, or it may be understood from the standpoint of philosophical truth and in its transcendental ideality. The world as representation is analogous to the relative truth of the everyday world (samvṛti-satya) of the Indians. There can be real knowledge “only of what exists in and for itself, and always in the same way,” just as the Indians demand intrinsic being, svabhāva. Schopenhauer maintained that the distinction between degrees of reality is expressed in Plato’s Myth of the Cave, “the most important passage in all his works,” the meaning of which is that the world that appears to the senses has no true being but only a ceaseless becoming. This is also, he argues, a principal teaching of the Indians in the form of the doctrine of māyā, “by which is understood nothing but what Kant calls the phenomenon as opposed to the thing-in-itself.” By making it possible to distinguish true being from representation, the hidden thing-in-itself from appearance, Kant revealed with brilliant new clarity the truth of these ancient insights. Without this separation of the real from the ideal there can in future be no serious philosophy.

Thus a teaching of Two Truths, shared by the Mādhyamika and Advaita philosophers, finds a counterpart in the transcendental idealism of Schopenhauer. This brings us to the question of the relationship between the two different “truths” or levels of being. Here again we find a large measure
of agreement: for all three of the teachings under review there is and can be no relationship. For Schopenhauer, causality is limited to the sphere of representation, which is in fact its creation; it cannot go beyond this to form a link with the being-in-itself of the world. For Advaita Vedānta and Hindu thought in general, there is and can be no common ground between the unreal and the real: “The unreal never is; the Real never is not,” the Bhagavad Gītā announces. And for Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka, the world (samsāra) is nothing but reality (nirvāna) wrongly apprehended; it has no true being of its own, so there can be no question of relationship. Between the relative and the absolute truth, empirical reality and transcendental ideality, there exists no linkage. Like dream and waking consciousness, they exist on distinct planes and cannot be related.

And yet we have seen that the world cannot be dismissed as simply nonexistent. In consequence, its reality-status becomes shrouded in uncertainty, and all three of the teachings we are concerned with enter an area from which ambiguity cannot be eliminated. Which of the two truths is “true” at any given time and in any given context depends on the standpoint from which it is viewed. Schopenhauer speaks of the riddle constituted by the mysterious “world-knot,” which binds together in an apparent unity the real and the ideal, and of “this dreamlike quality of the whole world” and “the phantasmagoria of the objective world.” The world we know through the senses is, and it also is not; its comprehension is “not so much a knowledge as an illusion.” In Advaita Vedānta the concept of māyā expresses the indeterminate reality-status of the world resulting from the discontinuity between the two truths, and this is further indicated by the use of such expressions as “false” (mithyā), “other than the real or the unreal” (sad-asad-vilakṣaṇa), and “indescribable” (anirvacanīya). In a similar manner, the Mādhyamika philosophers emphasize the “Middle Way,” which neither admits nor denies the reality of the world; regard all phenomena as at once conventionally real and ultimately hollow or empty; and take śūnya to mean “lacking both being and non-being.” All these expressions imply awareness of the parallel existence of the two truths on distinct planes and of the fact that each of them is simultaneously true and false.

It is worth observing that both Nāgārjuna and Śaṅkara, in different ways, succeed in exploiting this situation. In an effort to convey ultimate
truth while not losing touch with empirical reality, both teachers move continuously between the two different and opposed ways of understanding the world. The strikingly self-contradictory quality of some of the statements found in Nāgārjuna’s verses (and earlier in the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras) is made possible by rapid shifts between the Two Truths, shifts that are not signaled and that result in the challenging paradoxes that give to Mādhyamika thought a characteristic quality. Śaṃkara also made use of the hiatus between the Two Truths. He succeeded in creating by this means a method of exegesis that enables him to reconcile conflicting passages in the Vedic texts and forms the foundation of his method of teaching. That the movement between standpoints was for him a conscious and deliberate process, occasioned by the differing states of those he was addressing, is evident from the following words: “The entire complex of phenomenal existence is considered as true as long as the knowledge of Brahman being the Self of all has not arisen; just as the phantoms of a dream are considered to be true until the sleeper wakes. For as long as a person has not reached the true knowledge of the unity of the Self, so long it does not enter his mind that the world of effects with its means and objects of right knowledge and its results of actions is untrue.”

We may conclude, therefore, that in Schopenhauer’s doctrine of representation there exists a significant link between the Western philosophical tradition and Indian thought. This, of course, is not a new conclusion: Schopenhauer himself believed it to be the case, and the view came to be widely accepted. What is interesting, however, is the discovery that in the light of our examination of the Mādhyamika and Advaita teachings, and of a more exact knowledge of Indian philosophical thought than was available to the nineteenth century, it becomes evident that the affinities are both closer and more extensive than previously supposed.
Chapter Nine

Schopenhauer’s Conception of the World as Will

We come now in the third part of our study to Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will and to the question of whether equivalents for this doctrine, perhaps cast in very different forms, are to be found among the teachings of the Indian philosophers. Is there any common ground between Schopenhauer’s doctrine and Indian thought? If so, can it cast any light on some of the often-noted obscurities that surround this central feature of his system? Conversely, is Schopenhauer’s teaching of any assistance in helping to clarify the meaning of certain Indian conceptions? These are the questions before us in the group of chapters that follow.

Schopenhauer’s Critique of Kant’s Conception of the Thing-in-Itself

Schopenhauer was certainly not the first thinker in the European tradition to draw attention to the will; he himself mentions in this connection Clement of Alexandria, Spinoza, and Schelling. But he argues that what really matters is not the mere occurrence of the idea but the ability to appreciate its full significance and to accord it a central place in one’s system. The strength of his affirmation of the primary importance of the will and of the merely secondary role of the intellect was revolutionary. Later in the nineteenth century it helped to draw attention to his teaching but in the following century may have contributed to its neglect. It was not difficult to shunt the question of the primacy of the will off into a siding marked “voluntarism” and to leave it standing there.

As with the doctrine of representation, Schopenhauer’s starting point for his teaching with regard to the will was the Kantian philosophy, in this case the doctrine of the thing-in-itself. We have seen that Schopenhauer, follow-
ing the arguments of Kant, taught that the world known to us in experience is a matter not of real substance but of appearances. But this leaves an important question unanswered. Even though it is the inborn knowledge of causality—the *understanding* (*Verstand*) in Schopenhauer’s terminology—that presents to consciousness the empirical world, it is sense-impressions that trigger the activity of the understanding. But what gives rise to these sense-impressions? In what, if any, reality lying *outside* the understanding are they grounded? Or, to put the question a little differently, what is the factor that gives to the world of empirical experience its apparently objective nature? Schopenhauer accepted that Kant had shown that the qualities that characterize material objects (both animate and inanimate), and by means of which alone we know these objects, are, one and all, a priori in origin. As we have seen, it was no longer a matter of primary and secondary qualities, as with Locke; *all* qualities were now found to be secondary—that is, subjective in origin. In Schopenhauer’s words: “That the objective existence of things is conditioned by a representor of them, and that consequently the objective world exists only as representation ... is the surest and simplest truth.”2 The “Transcendental Aesthetic,” that “diamond in Kant’s crown,” had shown that space and time are ultimately subjective; therefore matter itself (if understood as substance existing independently of mental perception) was in effect dissolved. “Matter itself is conditioned through the representation in which alone it exists,” Schopenhauer writes, and in another place, “Materialism is the philosophy of the subject who forgets to take account of himself.”3

Yet if solipsism was to be avoided, there had to be some factor behind phenomena to account for what appears to be their objective nature. Berkeley, who had earlier been faced with the same problem, posited the idea of orderly sets of sense-experiences (interpreted by us as physical objects) planted in our minds by God; Kant had recourse to the thing-in-itself; yet both of these are expressions that assert the existence of some objective factor but do not really tell us anything about it. As Schopenhauer puts it, “My intuitive perception of a body in space is the product of my sense-function and brain-function with X.”4 As is well known, Kant concluded that this “X,”
the thing-in-itself, could not be known since the mind cannot penetrate beyond the representations that are the medium of its existence.

Up to this point Schopenhauer is in agreement with Kant, but now two problems arise. First, like many of those who came after Kant, Schopenhauer was aware that a thing-in-itself, which is neither a representation nor anything else that can be known, is not in the long run a viable conception. As he says at the outset of his principal work, it is “the phantom of a dream . . . an ignis fatuus in philosophy.” Second, while Kant was quite right in positing a thing-in-itself existing independently of representations and forming their basis, his justification for this view could not be derived from the principles he himself had laid down, and this inconsistency constituted a great weakness in his philosophy.

Schopenhauer summarized his arguments regarding the thing-in-itself in a section in Parerga and Paralipomena. According to Kant, he says, our empirical knowledge contains two components. One of these—the a priori forms of knowledge, consisting (in Schopenhauer’s simplification of Kant’s scheme) of time, space, and the law of causality—is of subjective origin; but the other (the thing-in-itself) was assigned by Kant to the objective sphere. Thus, Schopenhauer argues, it is only with regard to the a priori element in our knowledge that Kant’s transcendental idealism denies an objective essence to things, their reality independent of our apprehension. Kant allows what lies beyond the a priori, and cannot be constructed by means of it, to remain: the entirety of the nature of phenomena, and of the world they make up, is not determinable a priori by us, but there is a further factor. In spite of the fact that the a priori forms embedded in our intellect govern all phenomena, things show great diversity. What is the cause of this diversity? It must in each case be the character of the particular thing-in-itself underlying the phenomenon in question. It is true that the a priori element supplies the universal form of phenomena, made up of their conformity to the laws of time, space, and causality. But the empirical content of phenomena, every closer determination of them, is known to us only a posteriori. It is not dependent on our subjectivity but is the manifestation of the inherent nature of the thing-in-itself: “This a posteriori,” Schopenhauer writes, “which appears in
every phenomenon shrouded as it were in the *a priori* but yet imparts to every being its special and individual character, is accordingly the *material or substance* ([Stoff]) of the phenomenal world as opposed to its *form.*

This substance is not derived from, but is only dressed in, the *a priori* forms of the phenomenon that have their origin in the subject. After the abstraction of everything that flows from these forms, this inner something is left over and remains as “a second wholly distinct element of the empirical phenomenon,” something that is additional to and foreign to the *a priori* forms. This a *posteriori* element “is not within the arbitrary power of the subject,” and it often stands in opposition to our desires. Its source is not in ourselves, but it comes “entirely from without,” and therefore Kant attributed it to the *thing-in-itself.* But this inner element, deriving from the nature of the *thing-in-itself* that stands behind each particular phenomenon, cannot be isolated and known in its purity. It is experienced only through the *a priori* and subjective forms in which it is clothed and always enveloped. Consequently, Kant concluded that we know of the *existence* of *things-in-themselves* but can know nothing more than this; in Schopenhauer’s words, “We know only *that* they are, not *what* they are; and so the *essential nature* of *things-in-themselves* remains with him [Kant] an unknown quantity, an X.”

For Schopenhauer, this assumption of a *thing-in-itself* behind each phenomenon, of “a real kernel under so many shells,” was a profound and correct insight on the part of Kant. Yet the way in which Kant had deduced it was at fault, and this became “the untenable point of his system.” For Kant based the assumption of a *thing-in-itself* upon a conclusion according to the law of causality—namely, that sensation in our organs, and therefore perception, must have a cause external to the subject. Yet Kant himself had shown that the law of causality is subjective and *a priori* and therefore cannot extend beyond the possibilities of experience. In short, Schopenhauer concludes, Kant never gave a strict deduction of the *thing-in-itself*; he took it over from his predecessors, especially Locke, regarding its existence as really something self-evident.

Still more unsatisfactory, in Schopenhauer’s eyes, was the solution offered by J. G. Fichte. Fundamentally, this was simply to eliminate the *thing-in-itself* on the ground that something inherently unknowable can have no re-
ality for us. This was, in Schopenhauer’s view, a giant step backward; it was to do away with “the essential and most meritorious part of the Kantian doctrine, the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* and thus that between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself.”¹⁴ Kant had made a great advance in distinguishing the representation from the thing-in-itself, but if this gain was to be consolidated so that a permanent step forward in philosophical knowledge was achieved, the thing-in-itself could not remain a mere $X$, an unknown. It had to be identified.

The Will as the Thing-in-Itself

Schopenhauer believed that his own greatest contribution to philosophical thought lay in overcoming this difficulty by making “the transition from the phenomenon to the thing-in-itself, given up by Kant as impossible.”¹⁵ He considered that his own teaching both completed and vindicated that of Kant and tells us that “my philosophy is only his thought out to the end.”¹⁶ Schopenhauer broke the impasse represented by the unknowable character of Kant’s thing-in-itself in a characteristic fashion: he did it by means of an appeal to experience. It is true, he says, that our knowledge cannot penetrate beyond the veil of appearances formed by the qualities and attributes that are all we know of the things of the world, be they animate or inanimate. It is a knowledge of the phenomenon, not of the thing-in-itself: “This essence itself cannot be understood . . . through any merely *objective* knowledge; therefore it would remain eternally a secret unless we had access to it from an entirely different side.”¹⁷

But this entirely different side does exist. Kant’s mistake, Schopenhauer argues, was in laying down, as he does in the first paragraph of the *Prolegomena*, that “the source of metaphysics cannot be empirical at all; its fundamental principles and concepts can never be taken from experience, either inner or outer.”¹⁸ Kant’s reason for adopting this position is that since metaphysics is the science of that which lies beyond the possibility of all experience, it cannot be founded according to principles that are themselves drawn from experience but only by means of inferences from universal principles a priori. In short, Kant makes his starting point the assumption that metaphysics
must be identical with knowledge a priori; subsequently, of course, the a priori principles are found incapable of giving us metaphysical knowledge, and hence the dogmatic systems are overthrown. In this way the teaching of the subjective origin and a priori nature of the forms of knowledge “cuts us off for ever from knowledge of the being-in-itself of things” and confines us to a world of mere phenomena, so that metaphysics is impossible.19

Schopenhauer takes the view that this assumption on the part of Kant is not justified and is the ultimate cause of the sterility of his system. The correct path lies between the despair of the Kantian critique and the earlier dogmatism with its supposed eternal truths. Other than the etymological argument from the word *metaphysics*, Kant advances no reasons to support his rejection of inner and outer experience, nor does he show that the material for an understanding of the world cannot possibly be contained in the world itself. In reality, Schopenhauer argues, the task of metaphysics is not to pass over experience in which the world exists but to understand it thoroughly. Inner and outer experience are certainly the principal source of all knowledge. We cannot shut ourselves off from this richest of all sources, and so “the solution to the riddle of the world must come from an understanding of the world itself.”20

When Kant showed that the moral significance of human conduct is not dependent on the laws of the phenomenon but belongs to an altogether different order, he took “a great and original step” toward recognizing the nature of the thing-in-itself,21 but he failed entirely to connect his insight into inner experience with our outer experience of phenomena. And yet it is precisely here that the answer lies, for “the solution to the riddle of the world is possible only through the proper connection of outer with inner experience, carried out at the right point.”22 Kant speaks as though we were merely knowing beings, possessed of absolutely no datum other than the representations constructed by the understanding and forming the beings and objects of the empirical world.23 But this, claims Schopenhauer, is not the case. There is one instance, and one only, in which we have *both* relative knowledge of the usual kind—that is, knowledge of the phenomenon—and at the same time direct intuitive knowledge of the inner nature of the object and thus immediate experience of the thing-in-itself. Consequently a way
from within stands open to us, giving access to the inner nature of things, to their being-in-itself, to which we are unable to penetrate from without.\textsuperscript{24} This single instance provides the key; it is the essential breakthrough, from which we can extrapolate to the other objects of the world. And this unique instance, Schopenhauer asserts, is ourselves, our own inner being:

\textit{[Kant] had too hastily assumed that \ldots apart from the world as representation, nothing is given to us except perhaps conscience. \ldots He had overlooked the fact that \ldots our own inner being nevertheless belongs of necessity to the world of things-in-themselves, since this inner being must be rooted in such a world. From this, however, even if the root cannot be directly brought to light, it must yet be possible to lay hold of some data for explaining the connection between the world of phenomena and the being-in-itself of things.}\textsuperscript{25}

And this is in fact the case, for each of us, Schopenhauer argues, knows himself or herself in two distinct ways. First, as an individual in the world, we know ourself as an observable phenomenon forming part of empirical reality, a human body existing and operating in the world, just as we know other human beings, animals, and inanimate objects. Second, we also have direct intuitive knowledge of what lies within our body and initiates its actions, and we know from immediate experience that this factor is what we call our \textit{will}:

\textit{Our willing} is the only opportunity we have of understanding simultaneously from within any event that outwardly manifests itself; consequently, it is the only thing known to \textit{us immediately}, and not given to us merely in the representation, as all else is. Here, therefore, lies the datum alone capable of becoming the key to everything else, or, as I have said, the only narrow gateway to truth. Accordingly, we must learn to understand nature from ourselves, and not ourselves from nature. What is directly known to us must give us the explanation of what is only indirectly known, not conversely.\textsuperscript{26}

Thus the datum by which we may understand what it is that links the phenomenal world to the inner being-in-itself of things is our own willing,
immediately experienced in self-consciousness. It is primary knowledge, “the most immediate of all our knowledge,”27 a matter of direct observation, and as such it requires no proof: “We know and understand what will is better than anything else,” Schopenhauer writes.28 He does not mean by this that we know the will in its wholeness and completeness; we know it only as it exists within ourselves and thus in its fragmented, individualized form. But we know its nature, its character, what it is like, and it is in this sense that the thing-in-itself may be said to be knowable.29 Moreover, the act of will within ourselves occurs in time; it therefore has one knowledge-form in common with the world of representation and this allows transference from inner experience to outer experience to proceed, enabling us to recognize in the outer world the same force and striving that in ourselves we know as will:

Hitherto the identity of the inner essence of any striving and operating force in nature with the will has not been recognized, and therefore the many kinds of phenomena that are only different species of the same genus were not regarded as such; they were considered as being heterogeneous. Consequently, no word could exist to describe the concept of this genus. I therefore name the genus after its most important species, the direct knowledge of which lies nearest to us, and leads to the indirect knowledge of all others.30

Thus by naming the striving we see in the whole of nature will; rather than giving it some more abstract name such as “energy” or “force,” we name it in a way that is truly meaningful. Schopenhauer writes, “But the word will, which like a magic word, is to reveal to us the innermost essence of everything in nature, by no means expresses an unknown quantity, something reached by inferences and syllogisms, but something known absolutely and immediately.”31

Schopenhauer was of the view that his insight that the will is the reality that lies behind the entire world of manifestation was the master stroke at the heart of his whole philosophy. It was, he says, “the most characteristic and important step of my philosophy” and “the core and main point of my teaching, its metaphysics proper.”32 It is, then, for Schopenhauer, the will that is the “X,” the mysterious thing-in-itself that finds expression in the
world of representation. That same will that we know in ourselves is the nucleus of every phenomenon, of each individual object, binding its attributes together so that we recognize it as a distinct existence among other existent things. In *Parerga and Paralipomena* he writes: “Now as a serious and careful reflection of ourselves discloses to us the *will* as the core of our true being, in this we have an immediate revelation of the *natura naturans* [nature in its creative aspect] and are therefore justified in transferring this to all other beings that are only one-sidedly known to us [i.e., as representation]. We thus arrive at the great truth that the *natura naturans* or thing-in-itself is the will in our heart, whereas the *natura naturata* [nature in its created aspect] or the phenomenon is the representation in our head.”

**Will and Intellect: The Primacy of Will**

Many of the difficulties initially felt with regard to Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will arose from the fact that it had long been accepted in Western thought that the will is dependent upon knowledge. It is only when we know something, the argument runs, that our will with regard to it can come into play; hence it is not the will but knowledge or intellect that is primary. Schopenhauer speaks of this argument as “this extremely old, universal, and fundamental error,” constituting a colossal first false step in philosophy. For him, as we have seen, the contrary is true, and knowledge results from the higher grades of the objectified will: “It sprang from the will, so to speak, as the head from the trunk.” The will is primary, and the intellect and all its works, all its knowing, derive from it, as Schopenhauer argues in the following passage:

The first step in the fundamental knowledge of my metaphysics is that the will we find within us does not, as philosophy previously assumed, proceed first of all from knowledge; that it is not, in fact, a mere modification of knowledge, and thus something secondary, derived, and, like knowledge itself, conditioned by the brain; but that it is the *prius* of knowledge, the kernel of our true being. The will is that primary and original force, which forms and maintains the animal body, in that it carries out that body’s unconscious as well as conscious functions.
Our capacity to think, and even to perceive, depends upon the brain. And the brain, Schopenhauer asserts, like the rest of the body, has been formed by the will, is but an instrument of the will, and depends upon it: “The will-to-know, objectively perceived, is the brain, just as the will-to-walk, objectively perceived, is the foot.” Thus the will, by means of corporization, provides itself with an intellect for the purpose of its relations with the external world, and then through this intellect comes to know itself in self-consciousness. Knowledge remains in relation to the will and serves it—it is precisely this relation that makes it interesting to the individual. In its essence and origin the intellect is therefore secondary; it has developed to serve the needs and purposes of the individual and at bottom is just another offensive or defensive weapon. Its knowledge is therefore bound to be inadequate for fathoming the true nature of the world: “The intellect has come forth from the hands of nature by no means for the purpose of comprehending the inner being of things, but... to serve an individual and temporal phenomenon of will.”

Thus, for Schopenhauer, the intellect is far from being primary and reveals this in its weak and imperfect nature. It is subject to error, perversity, and folly and is capable of activity only at times, while at other times requiring rest—all of which would be inexplicable if the intellect were, as formerly supposed, the immediate and original essence of the so-called soul or inner man. The intellect is merely the medium of motives. But, as against this, every being wills incessantly, vigorously, and decidedly, so that we see that “the will is the true inner being, the kernel, the radical element in man, while the intellect is the secondary, the adventitious, the accident of that substance.” The primacy of the will and the secondary and subordinate role of the intellect are confirmed by the fact that it is always some relationship of an object to the will, whether direct, indirect, or merely possible, that the mind seizes upon. We see this clearly with animals: that which has no reference to their will (possibilities of food or mating, threats of danger, etc.) has no interest for them and may be said barely to exist for them. In man the process is more sophisticated and may take place at several removes, but in this case too it will be found that in the final analysis that which engages the intellect has reference to the will. What keeps the intellect active and governs the association of ideas is the will of the thinking subject—in a word, motivation: “In the secret of our inner being, what puts into activity the
association of ideas itself . . . is the will. This drives its servant, the intellect, according to its powers to link one idea on to another, to recall the similar and the simultaneous, and to recognise grounds and consequents. For it is in the interest of the will that we should generally think, so that we may be in the best possible situation for all the cases that arise.” In the normal way, Schopenhauer argues, as soon as the will is no longer engaged, our interest in a matter disappears; consequently, “an entirely pure and objective picture of things is not reached in the normal mind, because its power of perception at once becomes tired and inactive, as soon as this is not spurred on and set in motion by the will.” It is only in the most exceptional instances, and as it were by a freak of nature, that a human mind is endowed with such energy that it can proceed autonomously and without the motivations (often, of course, concealed) supplied by the will. Only then can a truly objective, and hence a perfectly distinct, picture of the external world form itself. This rare and exceptional condition is what we term genius.

Will, then, is the primary force, the human mind simply the most developed and sophisticated of its instruments. Moreover, the will marks the limit of the application of the principle of sufficient reason and therefore of causality. It is only within the orbit of the will that we can speak of distinctive existences and therefore of cause and effect. Consequently, to ask why the will exists, or where it comes from, is a question without meaning. The will is as far as causality can reach; it represents the outer limit of the mind, of possible knowledge. Individual acts of will result from causality, but the same cannot be said of the will in general. The will is “that which is incapable of further explanation, but is the basis of every explanation”; it is “the boundary-stone of every investigation, beyond which this cannot go anywhere.” The will is “the metaphysical from which experience in general is to be explained,” and so Schopenhauer concludes that “The alone has metaphysical reality by virtue whereof it is indestructible through death. The intellect . . . is merely physical and perishes therewith.”

The Will in Nature

“The whole of my philosophy can be condensed into one expression, namely: the world is the will’s knowledge of itself,” Schopenhauer noted as he was
preparing his principal work, and we have seen that what he intends by the word *will* is something vastly greater and more universal than we usually understand by the word. The same force that in ourselves we call will is to be found throughout the whole of nature, of which it is the very essence: the will objectifies itself feebly in clouds, more completely in the plant, still more in the animal, and most completely in man, he observes in another note. The will is fluid, changing, in unceasing movement as it strives blindly to perpetuate itself; to borrow John Oxenford’s expression, “The world in itself is one enormous will, constantly rushing into life.” Starting from activities that we commonly recognize as directed by the will, Schopenhauer extends its range first to the involuntary and unconscious processes by which all animal bodies are constantly sustained, then to the movements and activity of plants, and finally to inorganic nature and the universal natural forces (*allgemeinen Naturkräfte*) that move and govern this. “An essential point of my teaching,” Schopenhauer writes, “is that the phenomenal appearance of a will is as little tied to life and organization as it is to knowledge, and that therefore the inorganic also has a will, whose manifestations are all its fundamental qualities that are incapable of further explanation.”

The will is “the key to the knowledge of the innermost being of the whole of nature.” Its phenomena range from the unconscious impulse of obscure natural forces up to the most conscious action of man. In human action it is often concealed but always present; in the animal and its activity we see it in its naked state; in the plant it is again seen quite nakedly, but more feebly, as a mere blind impulse to exist and thrive. Every living being and every object is its appearance or phenomenon—but the will itself is never an object, never a representation, but something of an entirely different order. The will is “the one and only thing-in-itself, that which alone is truly real, the only original and metaphysical thing in a world in which everything else is only appearance.” The body, and the whole process through which it exists, are nothing but the phenomenal appearance of the will, its becoming visible, its objectivity, and the will expresses itself in that striving that informs the whole of the natural world:

Every glance at the world . . . confirms and establishes that the *will-to-live*, far from being an arbitrary hypostasis or even an empty expression,
is the only true description of the world’s innermost nature. Everything presses and pushes towards existence, if possible towards organic existence, i.e., life, and then to the highest possible degree thereof. In animal nature, it then becomes obvious that will-to-live is the keynote of its being. . . Let us consider the universal craving for life, and see the infinite eagerness, ease, and exuberance with which the will-to-live presses impetuously into existence under millions of forms everywhere and at every moment by means of fertilizations and germs . . . seizing every opportunity, greedily grasping for itself every material capable of life.62

But the will, as we have seen, is not confined to the world of animate being:

This will endows all things, whatever they be, with the power by virtue whereof they are able to exist and act. Accordingly, not only the voluntary actions of animals, but also the organic mechanism of their living bodies, even the shape and constitution thereof, also the vegetation of plants, and finally even in the inorganic kingdom crystallization, and generally every original force manifesting itself in physical and chemical appearances, in fact gravity itself—all these in themselves and outside the appearance, which merely means outside our head and its representation, are absolutely identical with what we find in ourselves as will.63

And again, in the second volume of his principal work: “It is the same will that in the plant forms the bud, in order to develop from it leaf or flower; in fact the regular form of the crystal is only the trace of its momentary striving left behind. . . . It underlies all the forces of inorganic nature, plays and acts in all their manifold phenomena, endows their laws with force, and, even in the crudest mass, manifests itself as gravity.”64 Thus, Schopenhauer says, “The will proclaims itself just as directly in the fall of a stone as in the action of man,” and he draws a striking picture of this force as it moves upward through the chain of being to its most clearly manifested form in man, with his distinct consciousness and self-awareness. This power, the will, is that which lies at the heart of each separate object and which holds it in being. It is “the innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing,” as it is also the inner reality of the whole of manifestation, and “it appears in every blindly acting force of nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of
man, and the great difference between the two concerns only the degree of the manifestation, not the inner nature of what is manifested.” Thus the world is nothing but the visibility of the will, and the whole of nature is alive.

The will-to-live, Schopenhauer tells us, flows through both individuals and the species as a whole, but it is closer to its origin in the species. Here, and not in the individual, it manifests most clearly and forcefully. It is the species that is the most immediate objectification of the will. The species is closer to the source—to the will as it is in itself—than are the individuals who are its expressions, so that “the innermost being of every animal and of man also lies in the species.” For this reason it is always found in nature that the interests of the species override those of the individual. What the will seeks is always the expression and perpetuation of the species. In animal and human life this is seen most distinctly in two ways: first as the sexual impulse, and thereafter in the passion with which the offspring are cared for and protected by the parents. In these ways the maintenance of the species, the true end sought by the will, is ensured; the individual is merely the means to that end, no more than an ephemeral and expendable link in the greater life of the species.

Here, Schopenhauer claims, lies the explanation of the great strength and vehemence of the sexual impulse. It is in the form of the sexual impulse that the will, seeking the continuation of the species and striving to maintain its perfection, reveals itself in an especially clear and distinct way, and therefore “The sexual impulse is the kernel of the will-to-live, and consequently the concentration of all willing.” This fact may be observed in every animal species:

The keen ardour and profound seriousness with which every animal, and man also, pursues the business of that impulse, are evidence that, through the function that serves it, the animal belongs to that in which its true inner being really and mainly lies, namely the species; whereas all the other functions and organs serve directly only the individual, whose existence is at bottom only secondary. In the vehemence of that impulse which is the concentration of the whole animal inner nature is further expressed the consciousness that the individual does not endure, and
that everything therefore has to be staked on the maintenance of the *species*, as that in which the individual’s true existence lies.69

Mankind is no exception to this rule. Already in a manuscript note written early in 1813 while he was still a student at Berlin, we find Schopenhauer picking out the sexual impulse as especially revelatory of that “force of nature” that he would subsequently name as *will*. Taking his cue from a remark of one of his favorite authors, the English novelist Thomas Sterne, that “there is no passion so serious as lust,” Schopenhauer writes:

Picture to yourself the most beautiful and charming couple, see how gracefully they attract and push each other back in their beautiful love-play. . . . And now look at them at the moment of enjoying voluptuousness. All those pranks, all that tender charm suddenly end and have vanished quite suddenly at the beginning of the *actus*. They have been replaced by a profound seriousness. What kind of a seriousness is this? The seriousness of animality; animals do not laugh. The force of nature everywhere acts seriously, mechanically. This seriousness is the opposite pole of the sublime seriousness of inspiration, of withdrawal into a higher world.70

Thus we find that sexual desire has a different character from every other desire. It is more impetuous, more demanding, less amenable to the restraints suggested by reason: “The sexual impulse is the most vehement of cravings, the desire of desires, the concentration of all our willing.”71 The genitals represent and express the impetuous and dark impulse of willing through which the individual is connected to the species. They may be compared, Schopenhauer suggests, to the roots of a tree, its essential and original element reaching down into the darkness; just as the head and the intellect may be likened to the crown of the tree.72 Between these two poles the life of the individual moves: “Far more than any other external member of the body, the genitals are subject merely to the will, and not at all to knowledge. . . . The genitals are the real focus of the will, and are therefore the opposite pole to the brain, the representative of knowledge.”73 So it is that genitals and brain reflect in the physical body of each individual the twin principles that account for the
empirical world: will on the one hand, and the knowledge that gives rise to the world of representation on the other. Throughout the entire field of sexuality it is always the will, and therefore the interests not of the individual but of the species, that is the dominant factor. The individual may believe that he or she is freely choosing a sexual partner, but in reality it is the will working for the continuation of the species in a form as close to the ideal as possible that determines that choice. What most attracts us in the opposite sex is just that which best compliments our own characteristics and compensates for our own shortcomings. That great power of attraction, that “being in love” that is so overwhelming at times, is precisely the will of the species seeking its own most complete and perfect expression. When a couple falls in love, Schopenhauer tells us, they may believe they are free agents seeking their individual good, but it is not so. In reality it is the peremptory force of the will that is sweeping through them. It is in order to perpetuate the species, and to do so as purely and correctly as possible, that we are drawn to a particular member of the other sex. That is why those in love have the sensation of being “swept off their feet” by a force greater than themselves—it is precisely what happens to the lover:

In the higher degrees of being in love, his thoughts are given such a poetical and sublime touch, even a transcendent and hyperphysical tendency, by virtue of which he appears wholly to lose sight of his real, very physical aim. What gives this to his thoughts is ultimately the fact that he is now inspired by the spirit of the species, whose affairs are infinitely more important than all those that concern mere individuals, in order to establish under the special direction of this spirit the entire existence of an indefinitely long posterity with this individuality and precisely determined nature, a nature that it can obtain simply and solely from him as father and from his beloved as mother.

Without this union this particular posterity cannot come into existence. Yet that it should do so, Schopenhauer continues, is expressly demanded by the will, and this demand appears in the lover’s consciousness as the anticipation of an infinite bliss that is to result from union with this particular partner and no other. This chimera can become so radiant and all-engulfing that if it
cannot be attained, life no longer seems worth living and suicide may result. The will of such a person, Schopenhauer concludes, “has been caught up in the whirlpool of the will of the species.”

Thus, despite all romantic delusions, for human beings as for animals “the genitals are the focal point of willing,” and the sexual impulse is “the most complete manifestation of the will-to-live, its most distinctly expressed type.” For Schopenhauer the sexual impulse expresses the will with a dramatic clarity, giving it concentrated expression as it sweeps through matter and imposes form upon it; and the greatest intensity of willing is to be seen in the act of procreation, which ensures the continuation of the species: “The affirmation of the will-to-live is seen to be concentrated in the act of procreation, which is its most decided expression.”

The manner in which the interests of the individual are sacrificed in favor of those of the species is again seen with clarity, Schopenhauer argues, in the readiness of parents among the higher species of animals to sacrifice themselves to protect their offspring; and in the lower forms of life we see it yet more clearly, where hundreds or even thousands of individuals may be sacrificed to procure the survival of those few who will ensure the continuance of the species. Thus the will, acting in the interests of the species rather than of the individual, is inevitably linked to the suffering of the latter.
Schopenhauer: The Will in Its General Forms (Ideas)

While the will-to-live shows itself in the first place as an effort to maintain the life of the individual, this is not its final purpose, for behind the individual forms that the will assumes are more fundamental forms that are likened by Schopenhauer to the Ideas of Plato. Schopenhauer tells us that he uses the word “Idea” (Idee) not in the manner of Kant (i.e., to mean anything that is not an object of experience), but “always in its old original, Platonic significance.”

In Schopenhauer’s view, and in spite of their considerable apparent differences, the thing-in-itself of Kant’s philosophy and the Ideas of Plato are closely related concepts. In a manuscript note of 1815 he writes: “The will is Kant’s thing-in-itself, and the Platonic Idea is the wholly adequate and exhaustive knowledge of the thing-in-itself, is the will as object.” These two great and obscure paradoxes, Schopenhauer says later in his principal work, of the two greatest philosophers of the West, are like different paths leading to one goal. Both are attempts to approach that metaphysical reality and true being that stands behind the ever-shifting forms that constitute the world of phenomena. “If Kant’s teaching, and, since Kant’s time, that of Plato, had ever been properly understood and grasped; if men had truly and earnestly reflected on the inner meaning and content of the teachings of the two great masters, instead of lavishly using the technical expressions of the one and parodying the style of the other, they could not have failed long ago to discover how much the two great sages agree, and that the true significance, the aim, of both teachings is absolutely the same.”

Plato and Kant, Schopenhauer argues, shared a common intent and were inspired by essentially the same worldview. Their paths were very different, yet each of them was, in his own way, correct: Plato “rightly founded the whole of philosophy on knowledge of the doctrine of Ideas, in other
words, on the perception of the universal in the particular,” while Kant was “guided by the truth certainly felt that there lies behind every phenomenon a being-in-itself . . . Behind the representation there lies something represented.” And yet, Schopenhauer is careful to point out, it would be a mistake to regard the *Idea* of Plato and the *thing-in-itself* of Kant as absolutely one and the same. The two concepts, he says, are “not exactly identical, but yet very closely related.” We have already seen that whatever it meant for Kant, the thing-in-itself was for Schopenhauer the will, not in its millions of individualized forms, for these are only its expressions, but in its unity as the metaphysical reality standing behind the world-appearance.

This is not the place to discuss the manner in which Plato conceived of the Ideas or the adequacy of Schopenhauer’s understanding of this aspect of Plato’s thought. Our concern is only with Schopenhauer’s teaching per se and the relation it might bear to Indian schools of thought. Let us therefore accept Schopenhauer’s statement that “I have explained that the adequate objectivity of the will as thing-in-itself is the *Idea* at each of it grades,” and limit our task to establishing how he conceives these fundamental forms assumed by the will and the role they play in his doctrine as a whole.

The Ideas in Relation to Phenomena

The Ideas, Schopenhauer tells us, stand in the same relation to the individual phenomena making up the empirical world as do archetypes to their copies. We are not normally aware of them; the individual as such is unable to apprehend the Ideas since they exist not at the physical but at the metaphysical level. Lying beyond the jurisdiction of the principle of sufficient reason, they cannot be known by beings whose knowledge is entirely determined by that principle and who are, indeed, its correlate. Schopenhauer therefore concludes that the Ideas are known only if there is a change in the consciousness of the subject; this will bring about a corresponding change of the object. To have knowledge of the Ideas we must cease, even if only briefly, to be an individual (and therefore enclosed within the forms of the principle of sufficient reason) and must become instead what Schopenhauer calls the *pure subject of knowing*. It is only if we cease for a time to identify
with our empirical individuality—“only by abolishing individuality in the knowing subject”—and instead experience ourselves as the pure subject of knowing that we have access to the Ideas. They are glimpsed only in those rare moments when the will in us is briefly inactive and we are no longer aware of ourself as an individual subject: “If I perceive a tree with artistic eyes, so that my entire consciousness is engrossed in this representation and I contemplate not the tree’s relation to anything outside it, but only its form, the expression of its inner nature (which is the visibility of the will at this stage), then I have the Platonic Idea of this tree and am the pure subject of knowing.” In such a moment we see before us not an object or being that may have some bearing on our welfare, but the object as it is in itself, “the Idea in it striving for revelation.” And that fleeting glimpse of the Idea, when sufficiently intense, is what we call the experience of beauty, or, on occasions, of the sublime.

Thus, to experience the Idea is to see the universal in the particular. Yet, as Deussen and others have pointed out, it is important not to confuse the Ideas, as conceived by Schopenhauer, with concepts. In fact, Schopenhauer clearly distinguishes the two. The Idea is prior to plurality; in the language of medieval philosophy it is the *universale ante res.* The concept, on the other hand, is the *universale post res.* Concepts exist only in the human mind and have no other reality. Ideas exist wherever there is creativity in Nature; indeed, they *are* that creativity. The Idea “horse” is a power of nature (*Naturkraft*) that finds expression in every individual horse, whereas the concept “horse” is the mere reflection of this in the human mind.

The Ideas, asserts Schopenhauer (here closely following Plato), are the original forms of things. They neither come into being nor pass away but always are. They stand outside time. In them there is no plurality; each Idea is one only, for it is the archetype itself, a single and specific determination of the will, a definite grade of its objectivity, “the one being of each kind that alone really exists.” The Ideas are metaphysical realities, determinations of the will at the universal level. Each Idea is an objective image, a mere form, having no physical existence. Its empirical correlative—that is, the same Idea taken empirically as mediated by the principle of sufficient reason—is, in the case of all forms of organic life, the species. So long as we experience
ourselves as individual beings and thus remain at the level of the representa-
tion and of empirical existence, the Ideas of other living beings appear to us
in the form of the natural species. It is these that constitute for us “the most
immediate objectification of the thing-in-itself, i.e., of the will-to-live.”

Because of the effect of the a priori forms of knowledge lying in our intel-
lect, a specific determination of the will (i.e., an Idea) such as that of “horse”
manifests to us in time and space “as a plurality of homogeneous beings”—
in short, a species. Schopenhauer uses the example of a rainbow shining
steadily in a waterfall to convey the manner in which the Ideas permeate
the ever-changing world of representations. The drops of water (i.e., the
individuals making up a species) of which the fall is composed and which
provide the material support for the appearance of the rainbow are never
still. One replaces another with great rapidity. Nevertheless the rainbow (the
Idea of the species) is quite untouched by that continuous alteration and
activity. In just the same way, every Idea—that is, in the case of plants and
living beings, every species—remains entirely untouched by the constant
change of its individuals. The unchanging Ideas from which the species arise
stand firm, like the unshaken and unmoved rainbow in the waterfall; and
this, says Schopenhauer, was why Plato attributed true being only to the
Ideas, making this doctrine the very center of his philosophy.

In living beings the will, manifesting as the will-to-live, has its deepest
roots not in the individual but in the species, and this is nothing other than
the Idea drawn apart upon its entry into time and space into a multiplicity
of individuals. The individual, with its immediate consciousness, imagines
itself to be distinct from the species and in consequence fears death. Yet deep
within its being, the individual also senses that its innermost nature is that
of the species and therefore eternal—that “the true being-in-itself of every
living thing lies primarily in its species.” From this, claims Schopenhauer,
springs the confidence and serenity with which every animal and even every
human individual moves lightheartedly through life, in spite of the host of
hazards that may annihilate them at any moment and the certainty of death
that awaits them. Each individual animal is a demonstration of the preemi-
nence of the Idea, and if we pause to look, we may see in their eyes the deep
certainty and peace of the species gazing out at us: “Look at your dog, and
see how cheerfully and calmly he stands there! Many thousands of dogs have had to die before it was this dog’s turn to live; but the death and extinction of those thousands have not affected the Idea of the dog. This idea has not in the least been disturbed by all that dying. Therefore the dog stands there as fresh and endowed with original force as if this day were his first and none could be his last, and out of his eyes there shines the indestructible principle in him, the archaeus.”

What has died throughout those thousands of years? Schopenhauer asks. Not the dog, for he stands there before us intact and unscathed. What has died is merely his image, his copy in our manner of knowing, his individual manifestation, which was bound to time. The constant arising and passing away is only apparent, only a superficial phenomenon. It does not touch the root of things, and for the species the death of the individual is no more than a brief sleep or a winking of the eyes is for us—and Schopenhauer notes, correctly enough, that among the Indians it is held that when the gods (i.e., the archetypes, the Ideas) come among us in human form, they may be distinguished from human beings by the fact that their eyes never wink.

This vision of the Ideas, “the persistent and enduring objectification of the will,” standing behind and giving permanence and meaning to the world of representations so that in spite of time and constant change nothing really changes, was something that moved Schopenhauer: “We sit together, talk, and excite one another; eyes gleam and voices grow louder. Thousands of years ago, others sat in just the same way; it was the same and they were the same. It will be just the same thousands of years hence. The contrivance that prevents us from becoming aware of this is time.” In another passage, of some beauty, he pictures the timeless reality of the Ideas, shining through the shifting pattern of representations:

Thus everything lingers only for a moment, and hurries on to death. The plant and the insect die at the end of the summer, the animal and man after a few years; death reaps unweariedly. But despite all this, in fact as if this were not the case at all, everything is always there and in its place, just as if everything were imperishable. The plant always flourishes and blooms, the insect hums, animal and man are there in ever-
green youth, and every summer we have again before us the cherries that have already been a thousand times enjoyed.  

This, then, in the thought of Schopenhauer, is how the Ideas stand in relation to phenomena, to the world as representation. Let us now look more closely at their relation to the thing-in-itself, the will.

The Ideas in Relation to Will

How does the will, the thing-in-itself of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, which is unitary, formless, metaphysical, give rise to the multifarious world of empirical reality that teems with distinct objects and individual beings? The answer, Schopenhauer thought, lies in the Ideas. The Ideas are best thought of not so much as a third constituent of total reality situated somehow between the metaphysical will and the world of phenomena, but as manifestations of the will—the will itself, now considered no longer in its unity, but in the first stage of its progressive “descent” into a multiplicity of distinct forms.

We have already noted Schopenhauer’s assertion that the thing-in-itself (i.e., the will) and the Ideas are “not exactly identical, but yet very closely related,” and that only a single fact distinguishes them. The Ideas differ from the will in one respect only: they have entered into the first and most universal form, that of the representation in general, of being an object, a representation, for a subject. The will, on the other hand, stands outside all possibility of knowledge. It is prior to the first and most universal form, that of being object for a subject, and is in consequence “not yet objectified, has not yet become representation.” Schopenhauer observes that Kant, although very correct in affirming that the thing-in-itself (for Schopenhauer, of course, the will) is free from all the forms adhering to knowledge, committed at the same time a fundamental error by overlooking the very first of such forms: that of being object for a subject, the first and most universal form of every phenomenon.

The Ideas, having assumed this first and most universal form, are available in principle to knowledge. An Idea is “necessarily object, something known, a representation,” and only in this respect does it differ from the thing-in-itself, the will; Schopenhauer writes that the Idea “is even the whole
thing-in-itself, only under the form of the representation."30 Thus the Ideas are the will at one remove, its immediate objectivity. Plato was mistaken, Schopenhauer argues, in unreservedly equating the Ideas with the highest reality of all, for they stand in a subordinate relation to the will. They are, as it were, at a lower level than the will in its unity, having already taken the first step toward manifestation and multiplicity. Nevertheless, the Ideas have not entered into the next form, which representation requires. This is the principle of sufficient reason, the general expression of the a priori forms of thought (time, space, and causality). It is only when they encounter this principle that the Ideas bring into being the empirical world. In themselves, they are prior to the principle of sufficient reason, stand outside its forms, and remain untouched by all plurality and change.31

Thus the will is, for Schopenhauer, the one and only existent behind all manifestation, and the Ideas are this same reality at the first remove. They are “the adequate objectivity of the will at a definite grade,” as Schopenhauer puts it.32 The will, the innermost nature of the world, stands prior even to that fundamental division of subject from object upon which all representation rests. Something of it is known only because we ourselves as living beings are in essence that will and are conscious of its presence directly and immediately in the depths of our being. The Ideas, on the other hand, are multiple, and each Idea “is necessarily object, something known, a representation.”33 With the Ideas the will has taken the initial step on the path toward representation and multiplicity. It has commenced a process of progressive manifestation as a variety of distinct forms.

In this way the unity of the one will devolves first into a multiplicity of distinct and separate Ideas (of which, as we shall see, there are many grades). Thereafter, as each Idea comes in contact with the principle of sufficient reason in the minds of living beings, its unity is broken up by our mode of cognition, so that it appears in the empirical world as a host of particular and fleeting individuals or as a multitude of separate things. Only those few Ideas that correspond to the most fundamental forces of nature, such as gravity, retain a certain unity; the rest appear as if seen through a kaleidoscope. This division of the one will in a series of progressive stages, Schopenhauer notes, is what lies behind the appearance of order and conscious design that we find in nature.34
The representations of empirical existence, or phenomena, therefore, are not the direct objectivity of the thing-in-itself, the will. They are only its indirect objectivity, mediated by the Ideas. Moreover, Schopenhauer tells us, the objectification of the will in the form of representations is, to some degree, obscured by the forms that the representations assume (in accordance with the operation of the principle of sufficient reason). The result of this is that the phenomena of the empirical world do not constitute an entirely adequate objectivity of the will.35 It is the Ideas that are the most adequate objectivity that is possible for the will; standing outside the principle of sufficient reason, and therefore outside time, they are, as Plato saw, metaphysical realities of a high order existing in and for themselves in an eternal present. In contrast, the representations of the empirical world are dependent, fleeting, and merely apparent. Consequently, true knowledge can only be of the Ideas. The will in its unity is not available to knowledge, and the things of the world are the outcome of what amounts to a mere opinion or doxa, the activity of the mind brought about by sensation and the inherent forms of our knowledge.36

In brief summary, we may therefore say that the Ideas constitute the initial stage of the objectification of the will. They are metaphysical realities of a high order, occupying an intermediate place between the will in its unity and the phenomena that give expression to it at the level of empirical existence. Each Idea is a specific determination of the will, and Schopenhauer remarks that we may regard Ideas as individual acts of the will that express, to a greater or lesser degree, its inner being.37 The Ideas are the primary manifestations of the will, metaphysical essences shaping and forming the things of the world, and the principle of sufficient reason forms the boundary line between them and the world of representations.

The Ideas and the Natural World

Schopenhauer differs sharply and importantly from Plato in denying that there are Ideas that correspond to manufactured objects. There is no Idea of a table or a chair, and Schopenhauer argues convincingly that, according to Aristotle, the Platonists did not admit Ideas of manufactured articles.38
The Ideas stand behind and give rise to the *natural* world, and by means of them the will develops in a graduated series of manifestations that progress from the so-called laws of matter at one end of the scale to the sensibility and understanding of animals and finally the reason of man, at the other. The most fundamental of the forms that the will assumes, “the universal basic Ideas of nature,”\textsuperscript{39} are reflected in the world as the *Naturkräfte*, the fundamental “forces” or “laws” upon which the whole of nature depends: “Every universal, original force of nature is, in its inner essence, nothing but the objectification of the will at a low grade, and we call every such grade an eternal *Idea* in Plato’s sense,” Schopenhauer writes.\textsuperscript{40} Among these original (and inherently mysterious) forces of nature Schopenhauer mentions at various times gravity, impenetrability, rigidity, density, fluidity, electricity, and light. A table is a particular arrangement of such forces, which are expressed in its structure and the materials out of which it is made. Here we see the will objectifying itself at the lowest grades, and these most fundamental Ideas may be thought of as “the deepest, lingering bass-notes of nature.”\textsuperscript{41}

At this most primary level of objectification, the unity of an Idea is not broken up by the process of progressive manifestation. It is maintained and carries through even into the phenomenal world: there is but one force of gravity, even though its manifestations may be many and varied. At this level the action of the Ideas may be seen in the formation of natural objects in which two or more of the universal forces of nature come together; thus a stone is the coming together of gravity and impenetratability, a river, that of gravity and fluidity. A little higher up the scale, the Ideas find expression in forms that betray the trace of a momentary effort toward life—a crystal is the record of an Idea that briefly flashed into life and left its imprint behind.\textsuperscript{42}

Higher up the scale again are the most primitive forms of organic life. Still higher, we come to the world of plants, and here the same general rule applies, so that “every plant expresses the special will of its species, and says something that cannot be expressed in any other language.”\textsuperscript{43} But at this level we find that the Idea of which each species is the phenomenon has gained in complexity. It can no longer find full expression as a simple manifestation of more or less identical individuals; rather it must unfold successively over time and in somewhat varied forms, as each plant struggles with
its particular environment in order to grow to maturity. At still higher levels each Idea, as it finds phenomenal expression and thus comes under the rule of our mode of consciousness expressed as the principle of sufficient reason, is reflected in time and space as a host of fleeting individuals. These are virtually identical to each other in the lower grades (insects, for example) but become progressively more diversified as we move up the scale of the will’s objectification. With animal species the objectification of the will takes on a pattern that is still more complex. Now it is not only the growth in time of the physical form, as with the plant, that is required to express the Idea manifested in the species, but also the activity that the animal undertakes, its whole mode of existence.

In the course of its progressive manifestation the higher grades of the will’s objectification, represented by organic life, overwhelm with their greater energy and distinctness its lower grades, and in this way the expressions of the will gain a new character: “From the contest of lower phenomena the higher one arises, swallowing up all of them, but also realizing in the higher degree the tendency of them all,” Schopenhauer writes. Thus that which, a few decades later, was seen by Darwin as the purely material and quasi-mechanical process of evolution was to Schopenhauer the metaphysical striving of the will—expressed in the progressive diversification of the Ideas—to manifest in ever more complete and complex ways:

We shall certainly find in the organism traces of chemical and physical modes of operation, but we shall never [be able to] explain the organism from these, because it is by no means a phenomenon brought about by the united operation of such forces, and therefore by accident, but a higher Idea that has subdued these lower ones through overwhelming assimilation. For the one will, that objectifies itself in all Ideas, strives for the highest possible objectification, and in this case gives up the low grades of its phenomenon after a conflict, in order to appear in a higher grade that is so much the more powerful.

At the final point of this process by which the will, the thing-in-itself, manifests in the varied forms of the world stands the Idea of man. Here the will reaches its most developed point, its most complete objectification, and at
last arrives at consciousness of itself. With the advent of reflection, action
becomes for the first time fully conscious, and the will comes face to face
with its own nature. At the same time the process of diversification reaches
its furthest point and individuality appears. Now, for the first time,

We see individuality standing out prominently, especially in man, as the
great difference of individual characters, i.e., as complete personality,
outwardly expressed by strongly marked individual physiognomy, which
embraces the whole bodily form. No animal has this individuality in
anything like such a degree; only the higher animals have a trace of it,
but the character of the species completely predominates over it, and for
this reason there is but little individual physiognomy. The further down
we go, the more completely is every trace of individual character lost in
the general character of the species, and only the physiognomy of the
species remains.48

Schopenhauer suggests that this strong individuality arises because each
man or woman, besides expressing the general Idea of the human species,
embodies a unique form of the will: “In animals it is different for each spe-
cies, in men for each individual,” he writes.49 Thus each human being, in
his or her fundamental individual nature, is the expression of a distinct and
original Idea: “The character of each individual man, in so far as it is thor-
oughly individual and not included in that of the species, can be regarded
as a special Idea, corresponding to a particular act of objectification of the
will.”50 Each human person reflects a singular act of will, a unique inborn
character; it was this, Schopenhauer argues, that Kant was seeking to convey
in formulating his concept of the intelligible character, “One of the most
beautiful and profound ideas brought forth by that great mind.”51 Although
its mode of expression may be greatly modified in the light of experience and
knowledge—giving rise to the empirical character—this fundamental and
inborn character is not itself subject to modification. It remains unchanged
throughout the whole course of life, just as the Idea “horse” or “cow” remains
unchanged. For the intelligible character expresses an indivisible act or for-
mation of the will lying outside time; it is the metaphysical Idea, the “will
as thing-in-itself,” from which the individual is born (and subsequently reborn) and of which his or her whole life is the expression. “Life,” Schopenhauer noted, “is the intelligible character’s becoming visible.” And yet, he reminds us, in spite of this we should not think that the Idea of man is different in kind and stands altogether apart from all the lower objectifications of the will; it is merely the crest of the wave, the blossom on the great tree of the Ideas, the tip of the pyramid.
Having briefly sketched Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will, we now return to the thought of India. Turning first to the Hindu tradition, let us inquire how Śaṅkara and other Advaitins conceived the process by which the world comes into being and appears as external reality.

For Śaṅkara ultimate reality, Brahman, the unchanging ground upon which all appearances and changes are superimposed, is consciousness in its pure or non-intentional condition; this is in conformity with the Great Saying (mahāvākyā) of the Aitareya Upaniṣad: “Consciousness is Brahman (pajñānam brahma).”¹ Such a position may appear to conflict with the frequent statements also found in the Upaniṣads that Brahman is unknowable, and in his commentary on the Kena Upaniṣad Śaṅkara carefully examines this contradiction. He concludes that while Brahman is “unknowable” in the sense that, being attributeless, it cannot be the object of determinate knowledge, it is nonetheless immediately known as the very essence of our being.² It cannot be known by any act of knowing (for there would always have to be a further subject to perform this act, hence an infinite regress), yet it is known as the inmost Self; Śaṅkara writes: “It being by nature Consciousness Itself, there can be no dependence on another consciousness, just as light does not depend on another light.”³

Thus for Śaṅkara the world-appearance rests not upon a void as in Buddhist thought, but upon the all-pervasive reality of Brahman. And yet it cannot be the unconditioned Brahman or consciousness that gives rise to the forms of the empirical world; these can only arise from conditioned or “impure” consciousness. The crucial question is, then, what is the nature of this conditioning and how does it come about? At first sight, Śaṅkara seems to tell us little about this. His principal concern was to establish with
a maximum of clarity the sole reality of the one non-dual principle, Brahman, and its identity with the Self (ātman), and for this reason his treatment of the manner in which the world arises, be it at the level of the individual living being or at that of the cosmos as a whole, often seems to be cursory; one looks in vain in his writings for a full and sustained account of the coming into being of the physical world. The reason is not far to seek. Causality implies duality and therefore cannot extend to the non-dual Brahman, so that any explanation of the arising of the world from ultimate reality is logically excluded. Since, for Śaṃkara, all coming into being or “birth” is, from the viewpoint of the highest truth, illusory (this, as we have seen, is the doctrine of ajāta-vāda), any explanation of the manner in which the world arises is necessarily provisional in nature. Various accounts of the arising of the world are possible and are in fact found in the Vedas and Purāṇas, but these have only a relative truth, only a provisional value. As Śaṃkara puts it, the relative universe is the subject matter of ignorance; the subject matter of knowledge is the Self.

We found in our earlier chapter on Advaita Vedānta that for Śaṃkara and his school the ultimate truth (paramārtha-satya) is that the entire world of experience, all forms of whatever kind, are delusory appearance and that the unconditioned Brahman (or Consciousness in its non-dual and non-intentional purity) is alone real. What we know are the forms that arise in the mind, forms that on account of the power of nescience (avidyā) are superimposed in appearance (but not in truth, for they lack final reality) upon unconditioned consciousness or Brahman. This mass of illusory forms is mind, and the empirical world is its manifestation and outer form.

Śaṃkara’s position, when writing from the paramārthika standpoint, may therefore be regarded as a form of epistemological idealism. But as a teacher addressing persons in the world, he could not write consistently from this position but had frequently—one might almost say continually—to move between it and the everyday or relative (vyāvahārika) standpoint; many of the difficulties in interpreting his thought arise from this fact. From the relative standpoint the world cannot be considered as an unreal appearance. It has for those who form a part of it an undeniably objective character, and to this Śaṃkara gives full weight. In commenting on a passage in
the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, he writes: “Objects are only perceived when invested with the light of the intellect. It is as if they were standing in the dark and were perceived only as lit by the light of some lamp held in front of them.”6 Again, in the Upadeśa Sāstras he speaks of the mind taking on the form of perceived objects in the same way that molten bronze takes on the form of the mold into which it is poured.7 From such passages it is apparent that the world exists in some way that is prior to the forms under which we perceive it. In what manner, then, do objects exist prior to being perceived, and how can we reconcile their reality when seen from the relative standpoint with their unreality when considered from the standpoint of highest truth? The answer, we shall find, is that objects, and the empirical world as a whole, exist not as material realities but as metaphysical facts—that is, as mental conditioning superimposed upon consciousness or Brahman-ātman. Let us see how this comes about.

The Subtle and Causal Bodies of the Individual

Long before the time of Śaṃkara, and under the influence of the Saṃkhya philosophy, Indians had come to think of the human individual as composed of three “bodies” or levels of existence, one enclosed within the other in the manner of Russian dolls. These were the physical or gross body (sthūla-śarīra), the subtle body (sūksma-śarīra), and the causal body (kāraṇa-śarīra).8 The three bodies corresponded to the three states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep) that form the subject of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and that Śaṃkara in his commentary to this Upaniṣad clearly distinguishes from the Self or ātman:

This Self, which has an absolutely real form and an unreal form, has been declared to have four quarters. Its unreal form is set up by nescience and consists in the three quarters [the dreamless sleep, dreaming, and waking states] which correspond to a seed along with its [two] sprouts, although they are [mere imaginations] like the snake imagined in a rope. The text now proceeds to affirm the existence of the absolutely real form of the Self, which is not a seed and which corresponds
to the rope in the rope-snake illustration. And it does so by negating the aforementioned three states as mere imaginations, like the snake.\(^9\)

Here we see that the physical, subtle, and causal bodies are unreal forms superimposed upon the Self in the same way that an imagined snake may be superimposed upon a length of rope lying in the twilight.\(^10\) All three of these bodies are unreal, even though from the relative (\(\text{vyāvahārika}\)) standpoint they have provisional reality, and they reciprocally generate one another just as do seeds and the plants that grow from them. Thus the physical body was regarded as the transient receptacle of the subtle body within it, from which it obtained that animation and warmth that depart at death.\(^11\) The subtle body, comprising the vital, sensory, and mental functions, was also regarded as essentially material. It consisted of the vital energy (\(\text{prāṇa}\)), shaped into the higher mind (\(\text{vijñāna}\) or \(\text{buddhi}\)) and the lower mind (\(\text{manas}\)), from which arise in turn the five inner senses (\(\text{tanmātras}\)) associated with sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell and their counterparts in the external world—that is, the five elements of ether (or space), air, fire, water, and earth. Thus the subtle body was a kind of matter but of an immensely fine and imperceptible kind. It was more durable, and therefore in Indian terms more real, than the physical body; even in the state of dreamless sleep, it was observed, when the mental processes are suspended, the vital energy of the subtle body continues to maintain the basic physiological functions. At death, the senses and mental powers first sink back into the remaining vital energy (now much depleted, if the death is natural), which then in its turn withdraws from the physical body.\(^12\)

Hidden within the subtle body was yet another body. This was the causal body (\(\text{kāraṇa-śarīra}\)), so called because it is the cause or “seed” out of which the other two bodies arise. The causal body was identified with the state of deep, dreamless sleep (\(\text{prājña}\)), likened by Śaṅkara in the passage cited above to a seed out of which the other two states come forth, as do the emergent sprouts of a plant; both in the causal body and the state of \(\text{prājña}\), cognition is altogether absent. Just as the consciousness of the individual withdraws periodically from the waking and dreaming conditions and enters dreamless sleep, so too at death the gross and subtle bodies sink back into the causal
body and return to the unmanifest, potential, non-cognitive state. From this source the vital energy is replenished and in due course reemerges, bearing with it the seeds of a fresh subtle body and physical rebirth. All three states, as Śāṅkara tells us, are forms of nescience. All three are superimposed upon the reality of the Self. But it is the causal body (corresponding to the state of dreamless sleep) that is immediately associated with nescience, and from it the other two “bodies” or states of consciousness, and the suffering they bring with them, arise.

The same view is found among other Advaitins. Śāṅkara’s disciple, Sureśvara, writes that “in [dreamless] sleep there is present that very ignorance of the Self which is the seed of all evil,” and he adds that were this seed not present, living creatures would escape transmigratory life merely by falling into deep sleep. We are unaware of the profound ignorance (avidyā) that constitutes the causal body and is the root of all manifestation but it is nonetheless present: “The ignorance is there. It is merely that there is nothing to reveal it,” Sureśvara declares.13 Vidyāranya, a highly regarded Advaitin of the fourteenth century, writes that “The avidyā (nescience) is the causal body. When the jīva [or individual] identifies himself with this causal body he is called prājña [the state of deep dreamless sleep].” And later in the same work: “In deep sleep, the state of the causal body, the jīva knows neither himself nor others and appears as if dead. The causal body is the seed of future births and their miseries.”14

An Advaita text traditionally attributed to Śāṅkara but almost certainly by a later writer, the Tattvabodha, tells us that the causal body (kāraṇa-śarīra) is “of the form of beginningless, indefinable ignorance (anirvācyā-anādi-avidyā-rūpa), the cause of the two bodies [gross and subtle], ignorance of one’s own [true] nature (sat-svarūpa-ajñāna), and [is] of the nature of total non-differentiation [between subject and object — i.e., prior to the rise of duality].”15

Śāṅkara’s own terminology differs from that of later Advaitins, and although it was current in his day, he does not use the term “subtle body” (sūksma-śarīra) but prefers the expression liṅga-śarīra, “inferred body”— a liṅga is a “sign” by which we can infer something not perceived by the senses. Nor does he favor the term kāraṇa-śarīra (causal body); it has only a single oc-
currence in his probably authentic works, where it is mentioned in the commentary on the *Īśā Upaniṣad* and equated with “the dirt of ignorance.” Śaṃkara does, however, speak at length of *prājña*, the “dreamless sleep” state free of the duality of subject and object, which, as we have seen, is equated with the causal body; he describes *prājña* as the universal consciousness when this is associated with the totality of nescience in its unmanifest or seed form.

Commenting on the *Brahma Sūtra*, Śaṃkara explains that the Self in the state of dreamless sleep may be likened to a carpenter who after work lays down his tools and relaxes. The Self in this state sets aside those “instruments” (the subtle and gross bodies) by which it is linked to duality and rests in its own nature: “As soon as, for the purpose of shaking off its weariness, it enters into its own highest Self, it frees itself from the complex of effects and instruments, and enjoys full ease in the state of deep sleep.”

During the absence of any consciousness of duality the bliss emanating from the Self is temporarily reflected in the state of deep sleep. This, as Śaṃkara acknowledges, raises the question of whether there is any difference between this state, when the mind is inactive and withdrawn into the causal body, and that of final release (*mokṣa*); in both cases there is no distinction of subject and object and no awareness of duality and its limitations. Śaṃkara raises the question again in his commentary to Gaudapāda’s *Kārikā*, and here he answers it as follows: “The condition of the mind in dreamless sleep is one thing and its condition when stilled is another. In dreamless sleep it is swallowed up in the darkness and the delusion of nescience. It is dissolved into seed-form, retaining the latent impressions of evil and activity. In its stilled state, on the other hand, the seeds of nescience, evil and activity have been burnt up in the fire of the awakening to the sole reality of the Self. In this state it is independent and free from all the dust of the passions.”

In an earlier passage of the same commentary Śaṃkara explains that were it not for the presence of seeds (*bījas*), beings dissolved in dreamless sleep would not emerge from it again, nor would there be anything to distinguish those in bondage from those who are liberated. Were it not for the seeds, the Upaniṣadic teachings conveying spiritual knowledge would have no point since it is the function of that knowledge to burn and neutralize the seeds.

Thus it is clear that it is the presence of the seeds that constitutes the differ-
ence between the state of nescience and that of release. The individual living being, although experiencing the bliss of the Self in deep sleep, remains bound by nescience. It is the “seeds of nescience, evil and activity” in the causal body (into which consciousness withdraws in deep sleep) that, becoming active in the subtle body, produce the living being and the empirical world. The seeds are “the dust of the passions,” and out of them the experiences of both the waking and the dreaming states arise. Let us look more closely at these seeds and at the part they play in the arising of the world.

Karmic Impressions (Vāsanās) and Formative Forces (Saṃskāras)

We noticed above that a frequently used comparison for the manner in which the world appears in consciousness was the way in which a length of rope is sometimes mistaken for a snake. This involves two stages of avidyā or nescience: first, a negative stage, concealment (āvaraṇa), the failure to perceive what is really there; and then a positive stage, projection (vikṣepa), the superimposition of the false idea of the snake. In the latter stage we are not inventing an image altogether new to us. The idea of the snake is already in the mind; it is there in seed form as an unconscious memory, and it is the rope’s broad similarity to it that summons it forth. Thus nescience in its positive aspect as misapprehension (anyathā-grahaṇa) is, Śaṃkara says, “of the form of memory” (smrīti-rūpa). The impression of the snake, unconsciously absorbed into the mind as the result of emotion associated with an earlier thought or experience, is superimposed upon the unrecognized rope. It is, in Śaṃkara’s phrase, a buddhi-saṃskāra, a predisposition or formative force acting in the mind. A preexisting, unconscious mental tendency or formation such as that which gives rise to the snake is a vāsanā or saṃskāra. The exact relation between the two words is hard to determine, and they were often used more or less synonymously by Indian philosophers, including Śaṃkara. If they are to be differentiated at all it is along the following lines.

A vāsanā is the residual impression or “odor” (vāsa) left in the subliminal layers of the mind (or, in Indian terms, the causal body) by activity (karman), whether physical or mental; it is not so much the action or thought in itself but the emotional charge accompanying it that determines the depth
of the impression (vāsanā) formed. The causal body, like the subtle body, is thought of as composed of extremely subtle matter; it is thus capable of receiving form, and the vāsanās are residual impressions left in it that result in latent tendencies or “seeds” (bījas), or strengthen or modify seeds already present and perhaps accumulated over many lifetimes. A sāṃskāra is the subsequent and outgoing stage of the same process. The term figures prominently in two important doctrines of Buddhism (as one of the five skandhas and as one of the twelve links in the chain of dependent origination), but there is no exact equivalent in European languages for the Indian concept of a sāṃskāra;25 however, it is thought of as a mental-emotional predisposition or impulse in the shape of a definite formative force emerging from the causal body and contributing to the formation of the subtle body. The etymology of the word links it to the idea of coming together and of molding or shaping. Thus sāṃskāras are those subtle or hidden formative forces that condition and mold consciousness and in doing so determine the manner in which the world is experienced, the attitudes and activities of living beings (animal and human), and the nature of their rebirth. In the present work, wherever a distinction is required, vāsanā will be rendered as “impression” and sāṃskāra as “formative force.”

It is not easy for persons with a Western background to appreciate how fundamental for Indian thought and the worldview it engenders the process of the formation and coming to fruition of the karmic seeds is. It is vāsanās and sāṃskāras, both favorable and unfavorable, that give substance to the doctrine of karman; they are the reality of karman, the stuff of which it is formed. Karmic impressions (vāsanās) result from the emotional attachment with which actions, whether physical or mental, are performed. Every time that a living being thinks or acts with emotional attachment an impression or vāsanā is left in the subtle matter of which the mind (citta) is formed. Taking his cue from the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad, Śaṅkara likens the manner in which impressions sink into and color the mind to the dyeing of a piece of cloth.26 Each impression, pleasurable or unpleasant, weak or strong, harmful or helpful to release, sinks into the mind and adds its particular splash of color. The process is unconscious, and as long as the mind is active, it is incessant: “No one can determine,” he writes, “the beginning or the end or
the middle or the number or the place or the time or the immediate occasion of the rise of these impressions. Impressions are innumerable and innumerable their causes. "27

The Indian belief is that karmic impressions are accumulated in the course of many lifetimes, so that the total deposit forming the causal body is very considerable. Out of this dense store there arise not only the characteristics that determine each individual being but also the forms that appear in his or her consciousness in the shape of the empirical world—forms, moreover, that are shared with other members of our species and even to some extent with other species whose world-experience is in part similar to our own. Thus behind the conscious mind there lies a vast hinterland of unconscious memory, which is the real source of each individual being. Rebirth comes about when a group of accumulated impressions or “karmic seeds” (karmabījas) come together and stir into activity, while a further group (forming sañcita-karman) remains dormant. The awakening impressions form prārabdha-karman, the portion of karman that finds expression in the course of a single lifetime; emerging from the causal body in the shape of formative forces (saṃskāras)—predisposed capacities and patterns of thought and behavior—they constitute the subtle body of the new individual being. Prārabdha-karman, once launched into manifestation, must play itself out: even the liberated person (jīvanmukta), until physical death, remains subject to prārabdha-karman, which, like an arrow once it has left the bow, must complete its course.

It is this doctrine of formative forces that lies behind the strong emphasis upon action free of emotional attachment (karma-yoga) found in the early chapters of the Bhagavad Gītā, and equally the emphasis on devotion (bhakti) in later chapters; devotion, and to a lesser extent meditation and ritual properly carried out, are presumed to result in auspicious karmic seeds tending toward liberation. It is karmic impressions and the formative forces that arise from them that shape both living beings and the world that takes form in their consciousness—“In the state of ignorance every person through his actions creates the universe and enjoys its fruits... Thus each man creates the universe by his knowledge and action,” writes Karl Potter in summarizing the view of Sureśvara.28 And Śaṃkara, commenting on
Gauḍapāda’s words—“First of all, is imagined the jīva and then are imagined the various entities, objective and subjective, that are perceived. As is knowledge so is memory of it” —writes as follows:

What is the mechanism of this imagination whereby external and internal phenomena [i.e., objects and events in the world on the one hand, and samskāras forming the subtle body on the other] appear to stand in the relation of effect and cause? First of all the Lord imagines the individual soul, who belongs to the realm of cause and effect, and thinks, in regard to his own true Self, “I do such and such” or “I am affected by such and such a joy or such and such a sorrow,” whereas his Self is really pure and of a totally different nature. All this is false imagination, like the false imagination of a snake in a rope. Then, for the sake of the individual soul, the Lord imagines the Cosmic Vital Energy and then [as modifications of it] all the other phenomena of the world in all their variety, both external and internal, and differentiated into action, its factors and results.

Here, then, we have the process—beginningless and never-ending, except when cut short by mokṣa—by which the empirical world arises and is maintained in the conditioned consciousness of living beings. From the store of seeds that underlie a particular individual and constitute his or her karman the names and forms that make up the empirical world arise, superimposed upon the unchanging reality of the Self in essentially the same manner as are the images of a dream, but with a greater degree of stability and continuity than these. And the individual’s reaction to the conditions thus created brings into being fresh karmic impressions; the process goes on indefinitely, like the seed and the plant that arises from it and will in turn produce new seeds. Liberation comes about only when the entire store of seeds is annulled by the immediately experienced living knowledge that they are not one’s real being but rather a lifeless and quasi-material limitation placed upon it; a patterning in the deep unconscious memory that constitutes the causal body, superimposed upon the unchanging reality of pure consciousness and resulting in the illusory appearance of a limited individual being as subject and a world that is his or her object.
The Subtle and Causal Bodies of the Cosmos: Hiranyagarbha and Avyakta

So far we have discussed the arising of the world as it occurs in the consciousness of individual living beings; if we now transfer our attention to the cosmic level of existence, we find a parallel picture. On the analogy of the individual, the cosmos is thought of as composed of three layers or “bodies.” Indeed, the relationship is closer than that of analogy, for each of the three bodies of the individual is conceived as forming part of the corresponding cosmic body and as incapable of existence apart from it. Śaṅkara, in commenting on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* and Gauḍapāda’s *Kārikā* upon it, makes use of three terms for these bodies, not to be found in those texts but nevertheless well attested in the Vedic literature. Corresponding to the gross body of the individual is the cosmic principle called Virāt. This is the entire universe in its physical form, the world of waking experience, of manifested name and form (*nāma-rūpa*). Corresponding to the subtle body of the individual is Hiranāyagarbha, the world of unseen, subtle realities that stands behind Virāt, out of which the latter emerges and by the energies of which it is maintained in being. And corresponding to the causal body is the Unmanifested (Avyakta or Avyākṛta), which is nothing other than the Self veiled by nescience; Śaṅkara writes that the Avyakta “is ignorance (*avidyā*) itself, the seed of the whole multitude of created beings.”

In the present context Hiranyagarbha is of particular interest, for it is this “subtle world” of conditioned consciousness and vital energies that stands behind the physical world as its cause. The name “Hiranyagarbha” is significant. It means “Golden Embryo” or “Golden Womb,” indicating that this principle or “god” (*deva*) is the source out of which the forms of the empirical world are born; already in the *Rg Veda* we find it said that “In the beginning rose Hiranyagarbha, born Only Lord of all created beings. He fixed and holdeth up this earth and heaven.” In the Vedic literature Hiranyagarbha is identified with both Brahmā and Prajāpati, while all lesser deities presiding over particular aspects of the cosmic order such as Āditya, the sun god, are modifications of this one great deity. But Hiranyagarbha should not be mistaken for an independent, self-existent creator-god; rather, this principle
represents the collective mind,\textsuperscript{34} the existence of which lends the world its apparently objective quality as something external and marks off waking experience from the subjective experiences of dream. Like the subtle body of the individual living being, Hiranyagarbha is conceived as a non-conscious principle, illumined and given apparent animation by the reflection in it of the light of consciousness or Brahman.

Hiranyagarbha, then, is the metaphysical or “subtle” cosmic principle that stands immediately behind the arising of the world, brings it into being, and sustains it. But what is the content of this principle? What is its reality? The answer is that Hiranyagarbha is both the Cosmic Vital Energy (Prāṇa, Vāyu) and the Cosmic Intellect (Mahat, Buddhi) that shapes that energy—the expression of the collective formative forces (samskaras) from which arise the energies and forms of the physical universe.\textsuperscript{35} Just as the subtle body of the individual is made up of the energies and activity of the formative forces, so too is the Golden Embryo. A. J. Alston writes:

Śaṅkara took all the impressions of the past experiences of all living beings collectively as constituting the one deity Hiranyagarbha, the Cosmic Intellect. Just as the individual as a physical being (piṇḍa) is non-different from the totality of physical beings (called Virāt), so the individual as constituted of subtle impressions, some manifest, some unmanifest, that have been engendered by past thoughts and deeds, is non-different from the totality of such impressions belonging to all creatures, this totality being called Hiranyagarbha or Cosmic Intellect.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus, as the physical individual exists in relation to the physical universe and is a part of it, so too the inner subtle being of the individual (from which the physical being arises) exists as part of and in relation to the subtle universe or Cosmic Intellect, Hiranyagarbha; and that subtle universe consists in the totality of the formative forces or deeply rooted predispositions of all the creatures composing it. These formative forces will in due course come into manifestation as the names and forms of the physical world, seemingly solid, objective, and material. The process, Śaṅkara tells us, is “without beginning”: the Cosmic Vital Energy arising out of the accumulated karmic impressions and assuming shape as the formative forces is “beginningless”
for it is the very condition of manifestation, and it is only with it that time itself arises.\textsuperscript{37}

Let us now turn to the third element, the causal body of the macrocosm. We saw above that in the case of the individual living being it is the presence of unmanifest “seeds” that marks the difference between the state of dreamless sleep and release (\textit{mokṣa}). We saw too that, although in dreamless sleep our consciousness of duality is suspended, duality nevertheless remains present in potential form, the sign of this being the continued activity of the \textit{prāna} or Vital Energy. The same pattern obtains at the macrocosmic level. Here the underlying principle from which the world-appearance arises is the Unmanifest (Avyakta), which in Śaṃkara’s thought is closely identified with nescience (\textit{avidyā}).\textsuperscript{38} Just as, in the case of the individual, release is clearly differentiated from dreamless sleep, so at the macrocosmic level Brahman or the Imperishable (\textit{aksara}) is clearly differentiated from the Unmanifest (Avyakta). The \textit{Bhagavad Gītā}, at verse 8.20, is at pains to make this distinction clear, and Śaṃkara in his commentary to this verse writes of “the Para-Brahman, called \textit{Aksara}” that “He is of quite a different nature from the Avyakta.”\textsuperscript{39}

The concept of the Avyakta or Unmanifest emerges most clearly in connection with the periodic universal withdrawal of manifestation (\textit{pralaya}) posited by Hindu cosmology.\textsuperscript{40} At this time the Cosmic Vital Energy is reabsorbed into the Unmanifest, and yet continues to exist within this in latent form as the accumulated impressions that collectively constitute kar-

man. Out of this accumulated energy, in due course, the creative power, Hiranyagarbha-Prajāpati-Brahmā, will once more emerge as a new “day” or world-appearance dawns. Śaṃkara writes: “The Unmanifested (Avyakta) is the sleeping condition of the Prajāpati. . . . Out of That, all manifestations, all creatures . . . are manifested at the coming on of day [when Prajāpati or Brahmā “wakes”]. . . . This multitude of beings—the same multitude that existed in the preceding \textit{kalpa} or age, and no other—involuntarily comes into being at the coming on of day and is dissolved again at the coming on of night.”\textsuperscript{41}

The emergence of the world at the dawn of each cycle (\textit{kalpa}) commences as the latent impressions or “seeds” carried over from the previous \textit{kalpa} stir
into activity. There then arises the urge of consciousness to turn outward toward individualized existence and the experience of an “external” world, expressed in the “I shall become many. I shall be born” of the Chandogya Upanishad. This arising of the world, or “reversed knowledge” (viparita-jñāna), is described as if it were a process in time but is more properly understood as something prior to time and, as it were, instantaneous; Śaṁkara notes that it is said by some that Hiranyagarbha comes forth from the Unmanifest at the beginning of the world-period like a single lightning flash. As the formative forces (samskāras) emerge from the causal or “seed” state, they become the active constituents of the newly emergent subtle body of the cosmos. Śaṁkara describes the process in these words:

From the Unmanifest when just about to go into manifestation arises the Cosmic Vital Energy (prāṇa) or Hiranyagarbha, invested with the powers of knowledge and action. From the Cosmic Vital Energy so constituted arises Mind, the principle of deliberation, doubt and decision. From the principle of Mind, of the nature of deliberation, arises the principle of empirical existence (satya), [consisting of] the five elements beginning with ether. As acts do not perish even in millions of world-periods, so their fruits remain in being also.

In this passage we see Śaṁkara setting out a clear sequence. Out of the Unmanifested (Avyakta), which is the causal body of the universe, there emerge the Cosmic Vital Energy and Mind (Mahat or Buddhi, the Cosmic Intellect), “the powers of knowledge and action” that form the subtle body of the cosmos; and from these in turn arises the principle of empirical existence (Virāt) in the form of the five elements from which the worlds are formed. The apparently objective character of the empirical world comes about because the entire process has its existence within the one consciousness or Brahman; as Alston writes, “Objects like the Cosmic Vital Energy (prāṇa), which appear to constitute a common public world, are in fact reducible to the co-ordinated imaginations of individual souls, the co-ordination being explicable because the individual souls themselves are but imaginations of the Lord, the one Self.” Thus it is the prāṇa or Cosmic Vital Energy (hypostatized as Hiranyagarbha, Prajāpati, Brahmā, etc.) that is the inner
support and creative power maintaining the changing forms of the physical universe. Śaṅkara emphasizes this by the use of a simile drawn from everyday life: “And this realm of nescience which has been treated of is of two kinds. One part is luminous and immortal. It is the Cosmic Vital Energy (prāṇa) that is within, like a [permanent] pillar supporting a house. And there is an external part, of the nature of an effect, non-luminous, subject to coming-into-being and passing-away. It is mortal like the straw, grasses and clay of a house [which in Indian villages must often be replaced after the rains], and is known as empirical existence.”

A different image for the Cosmic Vital Energy that underlies and supports the manifested world is that of the inverted World Tree, spoken of in celebrated passages in the Mahābhārata, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Kaṭha Upaniṣad. In commenting on the Kaṭha Upaniṣad Śaṅkara says of this tree: “Its root and origin is the supreme principle, the Absolute [Brahman], to be known through the Upaniṣads. It springs from the unmanifest seed of ignorance, desire and action [i.e., the Avyakta, or causal body of the universe]. It comes forth as the Golden Embryo, Hiranyagarbha, consisting in the twin powers of knowledge and action belonging to the Absolute in its ‘lower form.’”

The World Tree is said to be eternal in that it is coextensive with existence itself, but to the individual living being it offers no security, no permanence, and thus no real and final happiness. In commenting on the description of the Tree in the Bhagavad Gītā Śaṅkara emphasizes its impermanent and illusory nature: “They call this tree Aśvattha because it will not abide the same even till tomorrow, because it undergoes destruction every moment. The illusion (māyā) of samsāra having existed in time without beginning, they say that this Tree of samsāra is eternal; for it rests, as is well-known, on a continuous series of births which is without beginning or end and is thus eternal.”

Śaṅkara goes on to say that while the ultimate root of this tree is Brahman, its secondary roots are the latent impressions (vāsanās) derived from the attachment and aversion associated with previous actions; these roots “are spread especially in the world of man” and from them arise future acts, both good and evil (dharma and adharma). Commenting on the image of the Tree as it occurs in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, he goes further: “It is called a
tree because it can be cut down. It is an unmitigated series of evils, such as birth, old age, death, grief and many another. Every instant it changes its constitution, for its nature is to vanish on sight, like the water of a mirage or a city seen in the clouds.”

Thus the creations of the World Tree have no true reality (svabhāva) and are the cause of bondage. They are, in the words of the *Atharva Veda*, “the food of time” and “the pasture of death.” Śaṃkara writes: “And Death, which is to be identified with hunger, is in fact the Cosmic Intellect. . . . It is the inner self of all creatures. It is the subtle body (liṅga). . . . It is the repository of the merits and demerits of all creatures. . . . One might wonder how far it stretched and what it embraced, seeing that it encompasses us on every side. To answer this question would involve all the world, the whole realm of bondage.”

Śaṃkara’s teaching is therefore clear: so long as the consciousness of living beings remains within the domain of the Cosmic Vital Energy and the formative forces that shape it—for so long will they be subject to fear and death.” It is, however, precisely the Vital Energy and formative forces that bring living beings into being, and to step outside their domain is to surrender separate, individual existence—a change of identity at the deepest level possible. The necessity of such a change is of course the constantly reiterated theme of Śaṃkara, for whom the question of how the world arises is a mere sideshow that has meaning only from the standpoint of relative truth (vyavahārika-satya). For the philosophers of Advaita Vedānta it is by bringing to an end the process of superimposition by which unconditioned consciousness is confused with the limitations of individual being that release from “the whole realm of bondage” is found. Beyond the subtle body of the cosmos (symbolized as the World Tree or the “Golden Embryo,” Hiranyagarbha); beyond even the Unmanifested (Avyakta), in which the cosmos lies in seed form during the time of pralaya, lies the one non-dual consciousness or Brahman-ātman. This alone is not appearance, but Reality itself. For Śaṃkara and those who followed him it is the karmic impressions and formative forces conditioning consciousness that bring into being and sustain the empirical world.
The Arising of the Empirical World in Buddhism: The Yogācāra Teaching

When we turn to Buddhist thought and seek to discover how the arising of the empirical world is understood, we at once find similarities with the Hindu view.

The Buddhist tradition (as well as that of the Jains) shares with Hinduism essentially the same understanding of karmic impressions, formative forces, and “seeds” (vāsanās, samskāras, bijas) and of their collective outcome as action and its results (karman). In the older schools of Buddhist thought these ideas occur largely in the context of the twelvefold chain of dependent origination, which was discussed in chapter 6; the formative forces, it will be remembered, form the second link (nidāna) of the chain, arising out of ignorance (avidyā) and leading to cognition (vijñāna) as a subject aware of objects. They condition consciousness and are the source of the activity of mind, speech, and body1—“the seed, out of which springs the new life, just as from the mango-seed is generated the new mango-tree.”2

What is it, then, that brings the formative forces themselves into being? The answer offered by Buddhism is that it is the craving and clinging (tanbā and upādāna, the eighth and ninth links in the chain of dependent origination) experienced in earlier births that does so. Without this earlier volitional activity (cetanā) there would be no formative forces and no rebirth with its accompaniment of suffering.3 It is the samskāras, whether wholesome (kusāla) or unwholesome, that form the new individual living being, and without their presence no new life will arise. The Buddhist monk Nyānatiloka writes: “The wholesome and unwholesome Karma-formations [samskāras] are the causes of future rebirth in an appropriate sphere (gati). The Karma-formations of the previous life condition the budding in a new mother’s womb of a fresh psycho-physical aggregation of the five groups of
existence (*skandhas*). . . . Already from the very first moment of conception in the mother’s womb, this karma-resultant consciousness of the embryonic being is functioning.”4 This, then, is the understanding found in the older Buddhist schools. However, the fullest investigation of the nature of the formative forces and the part they play in the arising of the empirical world is to be found in a later doctrine, that of the *ālaya-vijñāna* or “store-consciousness.” This is the distinguishing feature of what is often spoken of as the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, and it found its philosophical expression in Yogācāra and Vijñānavāda thought—two different aspects of what is really a single approach, which for present purposes may be treated as one.

The Yogācāra School

The Yogācāra school and that of the Mādhyamikas may be said to form the twin peaks of that glittering range of ideas that constitutes the Mahāyāna Buddhist thought of India. The ideas of the Yogācārins were unknown to Schopenhauer and his contemporaries, and it was only in the twentieth century that scholars such as Lévi, Lamotte, and La Vallée Poussin began to make available key texts. Since their time further considerable advances have been made by Japanese and Western scholars, and today few would, with Conze, speak of the *ālaya-vijñāna* of the Yogācārins as a “conceptual monstrosity.”5

The beginnings of the Yogācāra school are usually placed about AD 150 with the appearance of an anonymous work, the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*. In its developed form the school is centered on the writings of the brothers Asāṅga and Vasubandhu during the fourth century, and thereafter it flourished during the Gupta Empire, a time when “India was perhaps the happiest and most civilized region of the world.”6 Yogācāra thought existed alongside and sometimes in conflict with that of the Mādhyamikas, and it came to be linked with the development of Tantra. Around AD 1100 it disappeared from India along with other Buddhist schools; yet it continued to flourish in Tibet and East Asia, giving rise in China to the Hua Yen school and in Japan to the Kegon.7
The compound Yogācāra means “engagement in yoga”—that is, in spiritual practices—and the Yogācārins were not primarily theoreticians concerned with philosophical thought but practical teachers: both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu were successively abbots of the great monastery at Nālandā. While for the Madhyamaka the way forward had been primarily by means of conceptual analysis leading to knowledge and eventually to wisdom (prajñā), for the Yogācārins spiritual practice and meditative experience came first.8 The leading Yogācārins may be seen as spiritual physicians rather than philosophers; knowing that mental experience may be controlled by appropriate techniques of meditation, they were especially interested in the processes by which the mind constructs what appears as an external world.9 They were concerned to establish how the world arises in the mind and, with all its suffering, is repeated again and again, and with the processes by which, as they believed, the original unitary consciousness has come to be divided into awareness of a subject and objects, “grasper” and “grasped,” and thus falsified. The division was to be healed by means of meditation (dhyāna) rather than by conceptual knowledge, but an adequate theoretical basis was felt to be essential.

The degree to which Yogācāra teaching was in conflict with the Madhyamaka is not easy to determine. The new teachings were certainly contested by the Mādhyamikas. But the Yogācāra may also, and perhaps with more justice, be viewed as an attempt to vindicate and build upon Nāgārjuna’s position. He had expounded the śūnyavāda with an extraordinary depth and brilliance, demonstrating with unrelenting logic the incapacity of metaphysical argumentation to reach any conclusion about the nature of the highest truth (paramārtha-satya). Yet to many on the Buddhist path the fiercely deconstructive reasoning of the prasaṅga must have seemed too abstract, too remote from human life and the moral sphere, to have practical application, while the emphasis upon śūnyatā left the Mādhyamika teaching open to misinterpretation as a form of nihilism.

Thus there were aspects of Mādhyamika thought that seemed to require elaboration. Some middle ground between the highest truth and the illusory world, by which the latter could be overcome, was needed. For the monk
on the Buddhist path it was one thing to be told—and indeed to be intellectually convinced—that the world is śūnya, another to find that, far from dissolving when we attain this knowledge, the empirical world continued to present itself to him with a persistence and urgency that were not adequately explained. Why was this so? As we have seen, Nāgārjuna had demonstrated with a logic that seemed irrefutable that the world is a creation of dependent origination, lacking in true being, in svabhāva. What was it, then, that was responsible for the relative consistency and “density” of the delusory world? How is it that the empirical world arises in the consciousness of living beings and does so, moreover, with a notable degree of apparent objectivity?

A further difficulty was that of accounting for continuity. Because of the doctrine that living beings are without a permanent self (anātma), the Mādhyamikas, like other Buddhists, found it hard to explain this. The appearance of continuity, both in human life and in the world as a whole, it was held, is illusory: the self is a vikalpa, a mental construct, and there is in truth no lasting self; what really exists is the unceasing flow of change. But this position left important questions unanswered. If there is no factor of continuity within the makeup of the human being, how are we to make spiritual progress? How can the merit or abilities won by our yoga practices of one day carry over to the next day? Equally important, how can we talk about rebirth, the accumulation or dissolution of samskāras, and good or bad karman—all central Buddhist concerns—without some factor within the human makeup that carries over from one life to the next? And again, if the individual is not a self but only a process, what is it that withdraws at death? And how is it that the yogi who has reached the state of Cessation when mind and mental factors have ceased (nīrodha-samāpatti) does not die? How is it that when he comes out of trance these reemerge? What is it that bridges the gap between the state of Cessation and the normal consciousness to which he returns? Buddhism, with its denial of the existence of any self, seemed to have no answer to these questions. It is not surprising, then, that quite soon after Nāgārjuna we find the beginnings of the Yogācāra in attempts to address some of the questions left unanswered by the Mādhyamikas.
The Doctrine of “Mind Only” (Cittamātra)

In response to the difficulties they perceived in the Mādhyamika position the Yogācāra teachers took a radical step: they introduced into Buddhism a new and expanded doctrine of the nature of man. To the six forms of cognition (vijñāna)—that is, the five kinds of sense perception and the coordinating mind (manovijñāna) operating in conjunction with them—that had hitherto been recognized in Buddhist thought, they added a further two. These they called kliṣṭa-manas and ālaya-vijñāna. The literal meaning of kliṣṭa-manas is “defiled mind”—defiled, that is, by the almost continuous (and largely unconscious) tendency to view everything in terms of whether it is potentially good or bad for the individual self.

But behind the kliṣṭa-manas there lay, according to the new ideas, another and yet more fundamental level of mind. This the Yogācārins called ālaya-vijñāna, a term usually translated as “the store-consciousness.” It is here, they thought, that the identity of individual living beings is finally rooted. It is out of the ālaya-vijñāna that the “defiled mind” arises, and along with this the subject-object mode of consciousness and all that comes into existence with it.

For the Yogācārins external objects and the world as a whole are representations in consciousness to which no independent existences outside mind correspond. This is reflected in the frequent use of the expressions “mind only” (cittamātra), “consciousness only” (vijñāna-mātra), and “representation only” (vijñapti-mātra); the three terms are used synonymously to convey the idea that the empirical world and its phenomena are, on close investigation, found to be nothing but representations arising in mind. It is mind that is the source and substance of the world.

At the beginning of the Vīmśatikā (Twenty Verses), one of the central statements of the Yogācāra teaching, Vasubandhu states unequivocally that the empirical world is representation only: “This [world] is nothing but representation on account of [its being] false knowledge of unreal objects.” In his auto-commentary to the verse he invokes scriptural authority for this view and tells us that the terms “mind,” “mental consciousness,” and “representation” (citta, manovijñāna, and vijñapti in Lévi’s reconstruction of the
Sanskrit text) are synonymous. This false knowledge is then likened to the manner in which certain defects of the eye produce the appearance of hairs or of a second moon, to which nothing external corresponds. In subsequent verses and the commentary he attached to them Vasubandhu goes on to answer the principal objections that can be raised against ontological idealism; he uses the analogies of dream and collective hallucination and asserts unambiguously that only mental events exist. In verse seventeen of the same work Vasubandhu writes, “One who has not woken up does not understand that the things he sees in a dream do not exist,” and his auto-commentary to the verse runs as follows:

In this way the world sleeps, its sleep impregnated with the habit-patterns (abhyāsa-vāsanā) of false mental construction, seeing unreal objects as though in a dream; not being awake one does not properly understand that these [objects] do not exist. But when one awakes, obtaining that transcendent knowledge which makes no false constructions and which acts as an antidote to that [false construction], then, as a result of being face-to-face with a subsequently attained pure mundane knowledge, one properly understands that the objects of sense-perception do not exist. The principle is the same [in the case of awakening from a dream as in the case of realizing that the objects of sense-perception do not exist].

Thus the objects of the empirical world are likened to those experienced in dream: they have no true reality, no external existence outside the minds, which know them. This does not mean that mind is something approaching a permanent substance, an ultimate reality of some kind. It means only that it is more real than the empirical world that arises in it, and for the Yogācāra philosophers it was not mind that was ultimate but Suchness (tathatā) or Essential Nature (dharma-dhātu)—terms with a meaning equivalent to Nāgārjuna’s śūnyatā, or “void,” but couched in positive language. Nor is the expression “mind only” intended to imply that the world is simply nonexistent; on the contrary, it is tangibly and visibly real, existing as the flow of experience occurring in the mind. The point the Yogācārins wish to make is that the empirical world is not genuine; it is deceptive, like a magic trick.
In taking it for a reality external to the mind, we mistake it for something it is not.\textsuperscript{14} In the words of Griffiths: “The basic ontological question—what is there in the world?—is answered unambiguously by the Indian Yogācāra theorists of the classical period: they say that there is nothing but mind (cittamātra). Many ways of making this assertion are found in the texts, and there are many synonyms used for the basic term ‘mind,’ but the central point is always the same.”\textsuperscript{15}

For these reasons the interest of the Yogācārins is centered on the workings of consciousness, and their position is most clearly articulated in a doctrine concerning three ways in which the world may be understood: the “three natures” of the world (trisvabhāva). The first of these “natures” is the world understood in terms of a subject and objects, both of them enjoying independent existence; this is the “imagined” (i.e., wrongly understood and false) nature of the world, parikalpa-svabhāva. The second nature is paratantra-svabhāva; it is the world understood as the flow of mental experiences existing in mutual dependence on one another, the world of dependent origination—this is a fact of the mind and its existence cannot be denied. The third or “perfected” nature (parinispana-svabhāva) indicates reality as experienced by the enlightened sage. This nature arises from the deepest level of the mind, prior to the intervention of the kliśta-manas, so that it sees things “as they are,” yathābhutā. It is not something different from paratantra-svabhāva; it is paratantra-svabhāva in its purified form, with the “imagined” nature removed.\textsuperscript{16}

We are left with the question of how and why these different “natures” arise in consciousness. What is the source of the “habit-patterns” or abhyāsa-vāsanā, as Vasubandhu called them, that stand behind them? The answer to this lies, for the Yogācārins, in the concept of the store-consciousness or ālaya-vijñāna.

The Store-Consciousness (Ālaya-vijñāna)

The idea of the ālaya-vijñāna or store-consciousness is of central importance for the teachers of the Yogācāra school, supplying the foundation that supports their worldview.\textsuperscript{17} The concept of this new kind of mind or conscious-
ness formed gradually, partly in response to the exegetical problems mentioned above and partly as a result of intuitive insights attained in the course of meditational *yoga*. Within Buddhism the store-consciousness was always a controversial conception as it seems to suggest the idea of a permanent self. The Yogācārins were struggling with an essentially contradictory situation. On the one hand, a point had been reached at which they felt they had to account for the continuity that was evident in human life and without which the methods of spiritual practice made little sense; on the other, they wished to stay within the confines of Buddhist orthodoxy, for which maintenance of the *anātma* doctrine was critical. As a result, explanations of the store-consciousness in the Yogācāra literature diverge and cover a spectrum of related views rather than a single fixed position.\(^{18}\)

The word *vijñāna*, like the English *consciousness* and *mind*, by which it is usually translated, is capable of some ambiguity;\(^{19}\) however, in a Buddhist context it generally means a consciousness that cognizes something, an intentional consciousness. The word *ālaya* is also complex, combining the idea of clinging or adhering with that of melting into or hiding within something,\(^{20}\) and in the Yogācāra conception it is the karmic seeds that melt into and cling to this deepest form of mind or consciousness, which is thus a “store-consciousness.”

The seeds—a synonym for the *vāsanās* and *samskāras* and like them the means by which *karman* is transmitted—are thought of as collected together in a unique kind of consciousness, a *vijñāna* of its own, sometimes called “mind-containing-all-seeds” (*sarvabījakam-cittam*),\(^{21}\) which is contrasted with the “outgoing forms of consciousness” (*pravr̥tti-vijñāna*) consisting of the five senses and the *manas*. In the *Yogācārabhūmi* it is said that the outgoing consciousness (*pravr̥tti-vijñāna*) stamps the store-consciousness with karmic impressions (*vāsanās*); in this way they condition it, causing it to receive the seeds that will later emerge as formative forces (*samskāras*).\(^{22}\) Thus the store-consciousness is closely linked to the concept of *karman* and came to be regarded as its vehicle and primary result.\(^{23}\)

In the writings of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu the *ālaya-vijñāna* is treated as a well-established part of Yogācāra thought and is discussed at length. It is seen as a consciousness of a unique kind, for although the structures
that will emerge as consciousness of a world, and the seeds of all objects, are stored or “hidden” within it, there is no awareness of this. It contains all intentionality in potential, but this becomes actual only with the appearance of kliṣṭa-manas and the six outgoing forms of consciousness to which it gives rise (the five senses and the mind that coordinates them). In consequence, mind is described as twofold, composed of the store-consciousness as cause and pravṛtti-vijñāna, the “functioning consciousnesses” (kliṣṭa-manas, manovijñāna, and the five sense consciousnesses), as effect. Vasubandhu writes: “It is admitted that mind (citta) is twofold, according to its being either cause or effect: the consciousness that is called ‘ālaya’ (receptacle) and the consciousness that is called ‘pravṛtti’ (functioning) which is sevenfold.”

Rather than being a power that cognizes an object, as are the functioning consciousnesses, the ālaya-vijñāna is thought of as an unconscious container of seeds (bījas), an underlying force that brings together or “appropriates” the other forms of consciousness and the physical elements of the body they inhabit. In the Mahāyāna-samgraha Asaṅga writes: “Why is it called the ‘appropriating consciousness’? Because it is the cause of all the physical sense powers and is the support that appropriates all bodies. As long as one is still alive, it holds the five physical sense powers such that they do not disintegrate. Also, when the connection between lives is made, because it appropriates rebirth, the [new] body is appropriated.” Here we see that the ālaya-vijñāna is the force that during life binds together the body and the five sense-powers and that thereafter forms the link between one life and the next. Having its being at the level of subtle existence and constituting the deepest layer of mind, it carries over from one life to another, and it is called the “store-consciousness” because in it the karmic seeds, which will result in future patterns of existence and behavior and which collectively constitute karman, are stored. In the Mahāyāna-samgraha and other works Asaṅga makes it clear that the ideation that brings the world into being arises directly from, and is entirely conditioned by, the ālaya-vijñāna, out of which that particular conditioned consciousness arises. Similarly, in the Viniścaya-samgrahāṇi there is a passage (possibly by Asaṅga and in full agreement with his views) in which it is expressly stated that the ālaya-vijñāna contains the
seeds of all dharmas, which of course means that it is responsible for the arising of the whole world as this appears to a given living being.\textsuperscript{28}

With the concept of the ālaya-vijñāna in place it was possible to outline the process by which objects, and indeed entire worlds, arise in the consciousness of living beings. The ālaya-vijñāna, it was held, is impregnated with the impressions (väsanās) of the skandhas, dhātus, and āyatanas, the forms of future empirical life.\textsuperscript{29} The process by which this comes into being is characterized as “imagination of the unreal” (abhūta-parikalpa)—unreal because “the duality which is unreal (abhūta) is imagined (parikalpyate) in it, or by it.”\textsuperscript{30} At the base of this process lies the ālaya-vijñāna. It is unmanifest and in itself devoid of any positive determination, even though it contains the potential for all determinate consciousness. Thus Vasubandhu writes that “it is the causal condition for the other consciousnesses,”\textsuperscript{31} and Sthiramati further explains in his secondary commentary that the ālaya-vijñāna may be viewed either as a result or as a cause. It is a result in as much as all impure dharmas are eventually gathered into it in the form of karmic impressions, and this is why it is called a store. And it is a cause since the formative forces arising out of it bring into being once again the outgoing forms of consciousness and the objects they perceive. In this way the ālaya-vijñāna acts as the ground or basic condition that is necessary for all determinate consciousness, and it is for this reason that it is spoken of as a vijñāna. Sthiramati writes: “It is consciousness because it causes the representation of the world of sentient beings and inanimate things through appearing as such. . . . It is consciousness as causal condition since it is the basic causal condition for both the ‘seeds’ of all impure dharmas that follow in consequence of it, and for the other mental consciousnesses.”\textsuperscript{32}

The ālaya-vijñāna, then, is called a consciousness (vijñāna), but it is in fact only potential consciousness. It contains differentiated forms—karmic seeds—in great number, but consciousness in the sense of knowledge of these is entirely absent. Consciousness in the sense of cognition begins to emerge only with the second stage of “the imagination of the unreal,” as some among the seeds begin to stir and collect together into a certain shape, issuing from the store-consciousness as the kliṣṭa-manas, the “de-
filed” or egoic mind. Near the start of the *Trīṣīkā*, Vasubandhu draws the distinction:

Consciousnesses capable of unfolding or manifesting themselves may be grouped in three general categories: (1) The consciousness whose fruits (retribution) mature at varying times [*ālaya-vijñāna*]; (2) the consciousness that cogitates or deliberates [*kliṣṭa-manas*]; and (3) the consciousness that perceives and discriminates between spheres of objects [*manovijñāna* and the five sense-consciousnesses].

As it emerges in this way from the all-embracing, unmanifest causal condition that is the *ālaya-vijñāna*, consciousness divides. It assumes the form of a duality, two complementary but opposed aspects. On the one hand, the emergent formative forces are projected outward in the form of the human body and the external world it experiences. On the other hand, the *kliṣṭa-manas* arises and is experienced as a self—a subject that stands over against and knows the external world. Thus it is said that *kliṣṭa-manas* is always accompanied by four vexing passions (*kleśas*): a false belief in the self (*ātmadrṣṭi*), self-love (*ātmasneha*), self-importance (*ātmamāna*), and self-delusion (*ātmamoha*).

*Kliṣṭa-manas*, which of course has the *ālaya-vijñāna* as its base and support, provides the point of origination for the outgoing forms of consciousness. As these grow to maturity in early childhood, the empirical world gradually arises in the consciousness of the subject, full of objects that are no more real, Sthiramati says in his *tīkā*, than elephants in a magic show. The entire fabrication is “the imagination of the unreal” (*abhūta-parikalpa*), with the initial division of consciousness, the duality of subject and object (*grāhaka* and *grāhya*) lying at its heart. Sthiramati writes: “The mind and the mental concomitants of the past, present and the future . . . which are in conformity with [i.e., take the form of] *samsāra*, are, without exception, unreal imagination; but especially it [unreal imagination] refers to the conceptual differentiation of the apprehended object and apprehending subject.”
The Two Aspects of Karman

What has been said so far may give the impression that the store-consciousness was a relatively simple concept, but this was far from being the case. Nor was it thought of as static, as the analogy with a store might lead one to suppose. The *ālaya-vijñāna* was conceived as something living, active, constantly changing, like an ocean within which currents flow, patterns form, and pressures build. In the *Trīṃśikā* Vasubandhu tells us it is impossible to comprehend fully what it holds and what it receives, or to know the basis (*sthāna*) on which it rests or the powers of representation (*vijñapti*) that arise out of it.38

Nor are the formative forces that emerge from the store-consciousness of a single kind. La Vallée Poussin draws attention to the fact that the Yogācārins adopted, but with a changed terminology, a teaching of the Abhidharma.39 According to this, the operation of *karman* is of two kinds. One kind is called by the Yogācārins *paripūraka* (supplementary). This is *karman* more or less as it has been understood in the West. It determines the mental and physical characteristics with which a person is endowed and the circumstances into which he or she is born—character, physique, health, social position, family background, and favorable or unfavorable conditions met with.

The other kind of *karman* is called *ākṣepa-karman*. It is of an altogether more primary and fundamental nature. *Ākṣepa* means “drawing together,”40 and *ākṣepa-karman* determines what new mode of existence (*gati*) will arise at a given point out of the accumulated seeds collected in the store-consciousness. While some seeds will remain dormant, a certain grouping will reach a state of maturity (*vipāka-avasthā*) and produce the consciousness and experience of a particular life. In this way, it is *ākṣepa-karman* that forms the new basis of personal existence (*ātmabhāva*), be it that of a human, a god, or one of the damned. And along with this, it causes the world-sphere (*dhātu*) requisite for such an existence to arise in the mind. Such worlds depend on the consciousness of the beings that pass through them and have no reality outside this. Worlds vary in accordance with the karmic seeds
accumulated in the consciousness of those who experience them; thus water is known to the world of men; to the world of the pretas, or ghosts, only blood and pus are known, and to the world of the gods, nectar. All existences, all worlds, arise out of seeds and patterns within the ālaya-vijñāna; so too do time and space, which form the framework within which they appear. This is the background against which ākṣepa-karman is said to determine birth of a particular nature and to bring into being the world necessary for this. Thus in the case of a human birth:

Among the diverse and countless possibilities which my Ālaya contains, only those which produce modes of consciousness accordant with the human state are actualized. I see myself with a human body; I see the world perceived by men, the sun, mountains, and in this world the living beings which are known to humankind. I experience human feelings. The roots of good and bad are active: I am capable of good and of evil actions. . . . In a word, my Ālaya, this unbroken stream which sweeps along all the impression-seeds of a long past, has entered upon a phase, a destiny, which is human.

In such a case, the store-consciousness actualizes from among the seeds it contains those that produce in the mind the awareness of a human body, of a human personality, and of the world of empirical reality known to human beings. It assumes the form, on the one hand, of the physical body with its five sense organs and coordinating mind, and on the other, of the physical universe that supports all living things. And this can only mean that a large part of the seeds (those forming ākṣepa-karman) contained in the store-consciousness of each individual is not particular to that individual but is held in common with all those other beings who take human birth and also, to a reduced extent, with those who take animal births, sharing, to varying degrees, the same world as we do. Thus while paripūraka-karman results in the birth of a unique individual, there exist other seeds that are held in common and give rise to the physical universe known to all human beings: “Inherent to the ālaya of every being there are archetypal determinations of consciousness . . . which ensure a common manifestation of the phenomenal world. The uniformity of the physical shapes and localities of this specific
world system (mountains, rivers, etc.) attest the universal self-particularizations of consciousness,” writes B. E. Brown,45 and Williams summarizes the Yogācāra understanding in the following words:

The substratum consciousness [ālaya-vijñāna] . . . is personal, individual, continually changing and yet serving to give a degree of personal identity and to explain why it is that certain karmic results pertain to this particular individual. The seeds are momentary, but they give rise to a perfumed series which eventually culminates in the result including, from seeds of a particular type, the whole “inter-subjective” phenomenal world. This inter-subjective world is the product of seeds which are common to all relevant substratum consciousnesses, the results of appropriate common previous experiences stretching back through beginningless time. Note, therefore, that for Yogācāra there are multiple substratum consciousnesses—indeed, one for each sentient being—not just one only. It thus makes sense, it is held, to speak of the minds of other people.46

To a large extent, therefore, the store-consciousness is a collective mind, while paripūraka (i.e., “supplementary”) karman is that much smaller portion of karmic seeds that is unique to each individual being. In any case, a life lasts only as long as the formative forces that arose out of the store-consciousness to bring it into being retain their vitality. Once they have received expression and are exhausted, the body and the surrounding world they have brought into being fade, and this is the experience of death. In due course a different life, a new individual being, will arise as a fresh grouping of formative forces within the store-consciousness gathers into shape and comes to maturity.47

The Store-Consciousness as the Source of Suffering

Yogācāra teaching, in both its early and classical forms, emphasizes the fact that the store-consciousness is associated with suffering. In the Basic Section of the Yogācārabhūmi, “badness” (dausṭhulya), consisting on the one hand of latent wickedness and on the other of a profound, if largely subliminal, sense of unease and unsatisfactoriness (duḥkkhata), is unambiguously
associated with the seeds, which are in consequence called “seeds of defilements” (kleśa-pakṣyāṇi bijāṇi). This understanding is expressed in the term samskāra-duḥkhatā, conveying the essential unsatisfactoriness or suffering that inheres in the formative forces. Thus from an early stage a negative character was attributed to the ālaya-vijñāna. It was thought of as duḥkha-satya (the truth of suffering), and as “a kind of principle of unsatisfactoriness constituting the uneasiness of the whole personality in which it sticks.” It was primarily something to be overcome.48

In a later section of the Yogācārabhūmi, called by Schmithausen the “Nivṛtti Portion,” the spiritually negative character of the store-consciousness is very strongly emphasized. Schmithausen writes that in this section the ālaya-vijñāna is “essentially connected with Badness (dauṣṭhulya), especially in the sense of latent wickedness (= seeds of defilements), and with spiritually evil Clinging (upādāna).”49 Not only does it constitute “the truth of suffering” of the present life, but by receiving, storing, and passing on karmic impressions, it ensures that of the next life also. It is the root of all pollution (sarva-saṃklesa-mūla), essentially permeated by “badness,” and by its very nature the cause of the arising and continuation of defilements (kleśas).

Moreover, the store-consciousness is associated with the spiritually negative idea of clinging—clinging to the belief in an individual self or ātman, the existence of which must at all costs be maintained. Even after death the clinging rooted in the store-consciousness continues, as a further individual existence is seized upon; conversely, it is precisely the store-consciousness that is absent in those who have attained the state of the Arhat.50 This view of the ālaya-vijñāna—the store of karmic impressions, the source of formative forces—as an essentially negative power standing in the way of nirvāṇa was later modified by Chinese thinkers belonging to the Fa-hsiang school. Nevertheless, it was extremely influential in India and is clearly present in the works of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.51

As the source of upādāna, “clinging,” the store-consciousness provides the ultimate basis for the notion of “I,” which, as we have seen, emerges in the form of the defiled mind, kliṣṭa-manas. The powerful formative forces arising from the store-consciousness constitute the individuality of every living being; they are falsely experienced as a self, which has to be supported by
possessions and power and protected from suffering and destruction. In the anonymous commentary to the Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkara, it is said that the characteristic of the store-consciousness is badness (daunṣṭhaulya) and that it is to be “driven away as is poison by an antidote.” Vasubandhu likens it to a rushing torrent:

It is perpetually manifesting itself like a torrent,
And is renounced in the state of Arhatship.

At other times it is compared to a lake into which the karmic impressions ceaselessly flow and out of which the rivers of mental representation that form the empirical world pour forth; these, however, are not auspicious streams but inauspicious, bringing suffering. In the Yogācārabhūmi we read: “That is the lake which entails the branching off of all streams—of what[ever] adverse streams [there are] in this world. Neither fire nor wind nor the sun could dry it up, but only the practice of the Doctrine.”

To summarize, in the classical Yogācāra represented by the teaching of Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and their commentator Sthiramati, the store-consciousness forms the “basis” (āśraya) both of personal existence and of the world that arises in the mind as the locus of this existence. It is by the formative forces perpetually flowing from it “like a torrent” that the individual is swept through life. By means of biological appropriation it brings the physical body into being, and thereafter it maintains it throughout the course of life and even when all other forms of mind are absent as in the state of yogic Cessation. It provides the foundation not just of the individual being as he or she now is, but of the entire phenomenal transmigrating personality structure passing through any number of different lives and worlds.

Yet the store-consciousness is not a self. However, it provides the basis for a defiled idea of a self—the kliṣṭa-manas, with its division of consciousness into subject and object—and in this way it is the ultimate source of that craving and clinging that, as the Buddha had long since declared, is the cause of suffering.

The store-consciousness may be likened to a lake. Into it the karmic impressions resulting from actions and experiences unceasingly flow. These accumulate over many lifetimes, forming patterns that are deeply etched into
the unconscious mind. From these “seeds” future lives and activity arise. It is from the formative forces taking shape deep within this lake, and in due course flowing from it, that all things (dharmas) and the world in its entirety arise in consciousness. It is these subtle or metaphysical forces that give to the world the appearance of consistency and substantiality with which it presents to consciousness. Thus for the Yogācārins, the store-consciousness both explained the arising of the empirical world and provided that element of continuity that had hitherto been absent from Buddhist thought.
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A poem written by Schopenhauer in his youth, while he was still in training as an apprentice merchant at Hamburg, opens with these lines:

Voluptuous pleasure, infernal delight,
Love insatiable and invincible!
From the heights of heaven
Thou hast dragged me down
And cast me in fetters
Into the dust of this earth.¹

Already in these words we find the central motivation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy: the need to understand the will, this mysterious force or “love insatiable” that like some evil magician imprisons us in a world of imperfection and suffering. It is the same motivation that we find at the base of the Hindu and Buddhist thought of India: the deeply felt need to escape the power of *karman* and the repeated rebirths it brings, and by means of directly experienced insight (*anubhava*) to find the way out of the world of illusion and suffering in which we wander. We should not be too surprised, then, that the philosophical positions explored in the last few chapters, despite originating in distant spheres, should show a tendency toward convergence. It is of interest, for example, that Schopenhauer himself observed the similarity of Buddhist teaching to his own doctrine of the will. In a letter of 1856 he wrote: “*Upādāna* is the ‘Will-to-live,’ *Karma* is the individual Will without the intellect, it is what appears as the empirical character. . . . Altogether the agreement with my doctrine is wonderful.”² *Upādāna* is “appropriation,” that clinging to the idea of an individual self that is for Buddhism a kind of “original sin”; and “individual Will without the intellect”
is an excellent description, not perhaps of karman itself, but of the store-
consciousness or causal body through which it takes effect. Just as for Schop-
enhauer the empirical world is the result of a progressive differentiation
of the will, so for the two Indian schools the seemingly solid and objective
world is an appearance, the result of karmic impressions (vāsanās) condi-
tioning consciousness. Let us recall Śaṅkara’s words, cited above in chapter
7: “And so the whole world . . . is impure, hollow, changeful like a running
river, comparable to the series of flashes that seems to constitute a steady
flame, insubstantial like the stalk of a plantain, comparable to foam, to the
water of a mirage, to a dream and the like, being kept in being solely by the
stream of the acts and impressions of acts (vāsanās) of its teeming living
beings—this whole world, thus constituted, cannot be eradicated by those
who identify themselves with it, and to them it seems eternal and solid.”3

Thus the picture that emerges at this point in our study has two princi-
pal aspects. First, as we saw in earlier chapters, for both Schopenhauer and
the Indian philosophers the whole of material existence, the entire world
of representation, the māyā of the Upaniṣads, the sāṁśāra of later Hindu
thought, the parikalpita-svabāva of Yogācāra, is no more than a network of
appearances existing in the minds of living beings and having no final and
inherent reality. Second, in later chapters we saw that this illusory world
is brought about and kept in being by a metaphysical principle enjoying a
higher degree of ontological reality, a dynamic volitional energy over which
we have no control but which on the contrary controls us, conceived in dif-
ferent terms by Schopenhauer and the Indians but nonetheless appearing to
be of an essentially similar nature. Before proceeding further, let us review
in greater detail this second group of affinities and seek to gauge their extent
and significance.

Affinities between Schopenhauer’s Will and Indian Doctrines

We have seen, first of all, that for both Schopenhauer and the Indian phi-
losophers a fundamental consideration is that there exists a metaphysical
force supporting the world-appearance and providing the basis out of which
it comes into being.4 Schopenhauer calls this force will. It is, he argues, the
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...essence of every phenomenon, not only of animate but also of inanimate existence, that which makes it what it is and gives to it its energy. In its ultimate nature will is unmanifest, formless, unknowable, and devoid of knowledge. Having neither beginning nor end, it is not a cause; it is rather that inner core or thing-in-itself that remains over in every phenomenon after all causal factors have been taken into account: the world is the will, made manifest. When we turned to Advaita Vedānta, we found that here too a metaphysical principle that brings about and supports the empirical world is posited. Superimposed upon pure consciousness or Brahman, which thus appears as conditioned (*saguṇa*), it brings into being the world of everyday experience. It is co-extensive with the world, the source from which springs the continuous series of births. It is known by a variety of names: the Unmanifest (*āvyakta*), unmanifested name-and-form (*āvyākta-nāmarūpa*), and, when thought of in relation to the individual, the “causal body” (*kāraṇa śarīra*), the state of deep, dreamless sleep (*prājñā*), “the space within the heart” (*ḥrd-ākāśa*), and others. In the case of Buddhism, we saw that a similar principle was of central importance for the Yogācāra philosophers. They called it the store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) and in line with a general tendency of Buddhism thought of it in psychological terms rather than those of the cosmogony and myth that Hinduism often favors. The store-consciousness, although conceived in more dynamic terms, is, as Radhakrishnan has pointed out, equivalent to the Upaniṣadic concept of “the space within the heart” (*ḥrd-ākāśa*) — that is, to the “causal body” in which the seeds of future manifestation are stored — and we saw that for the Yogācāra teachers it is a dark, obscure power, as is the will for Schopenhauer. Like the will and the causal body, the store-consciousness has no beginning and no ending (except with the attainment of *nirvāṇa*). It is the source of that continuous flow of ideation that brings into being the empirical world; it accounts for all continuity yet is not a true self (although giving rise to the appearance of selves) since it is in continual flux; and it exists both before and after the life of the individual — this latter being a briefly appearing phenomenal form that arises out of and sinks back into the store-consciousness.

What, then, is the source of this metaphysical power or energy? Schopenhauer does not attempt to answer this question, taking it simply as a
given fact and naming it will. It is, he tells us, “absolutely inexplicable.”6 The Indian thinkers, on the other hand, do seek to explore its inner workings. They explain these, as we have seen, in terms of the doctrine of karman. Hindu teachers sometimes liken the causal body to a tank of water in which many impurities are mixed; the idea is evidently an old one, for we saw in the previous chapter that the store-consciousness was likened by the Yogācārins to a lake or ocean in which currents flow. At one end of the tank water flows out, taking with it some of the impurities; these are the “seeds” that, emerging from the causal body in the shape of formative forces (saṃskāras), form the prarabdha karman, which finds expression in a new lifetime. Elsewhere in the tank freshly generated karmic impressions (vāsanās) resulting from the activities of life flow in and replenish the store of seeds. The tank of water remains, but a part of its contents changes. It is a process that could equally well be used to explain the continual renewal of the energies of the will.

Second, we found that for both Schopenhauer and the Indians the above-mentioned metaphysical force is the root and origin of living beings, the source of their existence, energy, and life. Schopenhauer describes the will as the kernel of our true being as individuals in the world. Body and mind, he asserts, are simply the will made manifest and their activities the expression of its inward movements; we may compare this with words of the Buddha recorded in the Anguttara Nikāya: “Volition (cetanā) is action (karman), thus I say, O monks; for as soon as volition arises, one does the action.”7 Schopenhauer maintains that at the moment of conception the will enters the womb and there, drawing about itself the necessary physical elements, creates and forms the embryo. Thereafter it ceaselessly maintains the body; in deep sleep, when the intellect withdraws and all representations cease, the will continues to carry on the organic functions without which life would stop; it guides the unconscious physiological functions and works to repair injuries while the body sleeps.8 In Advaita Vedānta, and Hindu thought more generally, these same actions are attributed to the principle of vital energy (prāṇā) arising out of the karmic impressions concentrated in the causal body. For the Yogācāra school the store-consciousness performs functions almost identical to those of the will: from it arises that energy that enters the mother’s womb at conception and gathers round itself the elements required
to form the embryo; after birth it maintains the body, appropriating what is needed for growth and health; and even when all activity of the mind is suspended in the state of absorption (samādhi), it continues to maintain life.

A third point is that the force called will by Schopenhauer, and by the Indians the causal body or store-consciousness, is associated with suffering. Because of it our experience of the world is distorted by desire-driven habits of consciousness that bind us to empirical existence. In Schopenhauer’s philosophy the will remorselessly sacrifices the individual in the interests of the species, while its many different phenomenal forms battle with each other. In the words of Arthur Hübscher, “The blind will, endlessly turning on its own axis, remains unredeemed and produces only a world of misery and torment.”9 In Advaita Vedānta, karman and the formative forces that are its expression condition the individual and bind him or her to repeated and painful rebirths as to an endlessly turning wheel. “The causal body,” we read in a well-known Advaita text, “is the seed of future births and their miseries,”10 and we found that Śaṅkara calls the inverted World Tree of the Bhagavad Gītā, whose roots (the karmic impressions) “are spread especially in the world of man,” an “unmitigated series of evils.” Similarly, we saw that for the teachers of classical Yogācāra the store-consciousness is deeply inauspicious, for out of it arises the constant flow of desires, that thirst (tṛṣṇā) for life that is the cause of rebirth and suffering. The Indian philosophers are in essential agreement with Schopenhauer when he writes that the fact that we must all say “the world is my will” is something “which must be very serious and grave if not terrible to everyone.”11

Fourth, Schopenhauer and the Indian thinkers share common ground in maintaining that the metaphysical force that drives living beings through life and energizes the entire cosmos cannot, in its final nature, be grasped by thought. For Schopenhauer the will in its ultimate nature is prior to even the most fundamental form of knowledge, the distinction of subject from object, and is in consequence unimaginable. We could have no conception of it, he maintains, were it not for the fact that each one of us is the will and experiences its movements directly in inward intuition. In Advaita Vedānta, the causal body is equated with the Unmanifested principle (Avyakta), the seed of created beings. We saw that in his commentary to the Bhagavad
Gītā Śaṅkara writes of this principle that it “is avidyā (ignorance) itself, the seed of the whole multitude of created beings.” And in commenting on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, he tells us that deep, dreamless sleep (prājñā) is undifferentiated (ekībhūta), a mass of consciousness (prajñāna-ghana) in which discrimination (i.e., true knowledge) is absent, as if covered in darkness. Similarly, for the Yogācāra school the store-consciousness is “not accessible to speculative enquiry”; it exists, just as does Schopenhauer’s will, at a level of being that is prior to the separation of subject (grāhaka) from object (grāhya) upon which all determinate knowledge depends. We noted that Vasubandhu, in the Trīṃśikā, tells us that it is impossible to comprehend completely the nature of the store-consciousness; like the will it is unavailable to thought, and we saw that the awareness of its existence may have arisen not from speculative inquiry but as a result of intense introspection in the course of meditation.

A fifth point of convergence is that for both Schopenhauer and the Indians there exists an intermediate stage, situated between the hidden source of volitional energy and the manifold forms of material existence that are its eventual outcome. For Schopenhauer the Ideas, understood in the Platonic sense, are “the enduring objectification of the will.” They are not independent existences but fundamental forms that the will assumes as it moves away from its initial unity and begins to assume a diversified character. All forms are expressions, at various levels, of the Ideas and therefore of the will. In both of the Indian schools we explored a similar intermediate stage is posited. It is regarded as “beginningless” (outside time) and as composed of forces or energies variously called karmic impressions (vāsanās), formative forces (samskāras), or simply “seeds” (bījas). Unlike the statically conceived Ideas of Schopenhauer, these are seen as fluid and ever-changing. They condition consciousness, giving rise to the appearance within it of the empirical world. Emerging from the store-consciousness (or, for Hinduism, the causal body), the formative forces—“directing forces of the will,” to use von Glasesnapp’s phrase—bring into being both the newly arisen living being and the world experienced by that being. These forces (vāsanās, samskāras) form the real content and active element of one of the distinguishing concepts of Indian thought, “action and its results” (karman). When regarded as a
whole, they are described in the language of myth employed by Hinduism as the “Golden Embryo” (Hiranyagarbha), or as the inverted World Tree, or Prajāpati or Brahmā. It is the Golden Embryo that energizes (as Cosmic Vital Energy) and shapes (as Cosmic Intellect) the manifested world—just as the Ideas give form to the empirical world in the thought of Schopenhauer.

This brings us to a question that was important for both Schopenhauer and the Indians: that of the seemingly objective and external character that the world presents. Neither the doctrine of representation nor the dependent origination of the Mahāyāna or the māyā of Upaniṣadic thought can account for this on their own. At first sight it appears that there is a radical divergence here, for Schopenhauer explains the apparently objective nature of the world in terms of the existence of things-in-themselves, and the very idea of a thing-in-itself is anathema for Buddhism. But let us look more closely at this question. We saw that for the Indian schools karmic impressions and formative forces exist prior to the world of experience, which is in fact their outcome. Moreover, a high proportion of the formative forces governing the consciousness of an individual are what are sometimes described as “universal samskāras,” held in common with other members of the same species (and even, to a reduced extent, of other species also), with the result that more or less, though never absolutely, the same world is experienced. It was the Yogācārins who examined this question most closely. They concluded that the “objective” character of the physical universe, the uniformity of the physical shapes and locations of the world—mountains, rivers, trees, and so on—arises from common or universal seeds (bijas) lodged deep within the store-consciousness, the result of common experiences stretching back through beginningless time. In this way living beings may be said to participate in a collective or objective mind, the karma-bijālaya (karmic seeds store), described in Buddhism as “group karman” and in Hindu thought often hypostatized as Iśvara, “the Lord of māyā.”

For Schopenhauer, following the lead of earlier European thinkers, there is at the heart of each phenomenon a thing-in-itself, an objective factor not contributed by the subject but existing independently and outside of the perceiving mind. The thing-in-itself is a particular determination of the will, essentially metaphysical in character yet productive of physical consequences.
It is the object that forms the basis of representation, the starting point for sensation. Thus while phenomenal forms are ideal, the determinations of the will that are their starting point and inner core have metaphysical existence and are real. For example, a tiger is a phenomenal form arising from a particular determination of the will (or, in terms of Indian thought, a particular grouping of formative forces). That determination shares a high proportion of its content with all other tigers, and this is the Idea determining the species; but it also contains an individual component resulting in this particular tiger. As a determination of the will, the tiger exists independently of my perceiving mind, even though it is the latter that involuntarily clothes it in form. Thereupon, on the stage constructed by the mind out of the inborn knowledge of time, space, and causality, the determination of the will that is the tiger may come into conflict with my own willing, with resultant suffering to one or other of us. It is a clash of two different determinations of the will, essentially a metaphysical event but appearing in the world as physical conflict. Thus in spite of a very different approach and terminology, both Schopenhauer and the Indian thinkers maintain a fundamentally realist position: there is a definite metaphysical factor (which may not, however, be ultimately real) behind each of the appearances that constitute the empirical world. For the Indians this is a particular grouping of formative forces. For Schopenhauer it is a thing-in-itself, a particular formation of the will. Both are metaphysical existences occurring in conditioned consciousness (“mind”) and giving rise to an apparently external and objective world.

When we take together the points outlined above, it becomes evident that there is present in both the Buddhist and the Hindu thought of India a group of ideas bearing a systematic rather than a casual resemblance to Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will. The fact is the more remarkable when we remember that the philosopher had little or no access to the Indian ideas we have reviewed, most of which were unavailable to Western scholarship until the twentieth century. Certainly there are differences in approach and presentation: the Indians start from “seeds,” which condition the consciousness of each individual; Schopenhauer, from the undivided totality of the will. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer in speaking of the Ideas and their objectification as things-in-themselves, and the Indian thinkers in speaking of
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Formative forces, are referring to broadly homologous metaphysical factors. In Schopenhauer’s thought it is Ideas emerging from *will* that shape and maintain the world as it arises in consciousness; in Indian thought formative forces emerging from the store-consciousness (or causal body) perform the same function. Schopenhauer writes at the close of his principal work, “The act of will, from which the world springs, is our own”; *Śatīkara*, citing the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, writes, “It has been taught that the worlds are rooted in will.”

In spite of this convergence it may still appear that significant differences exist between the metaphysics proposed by Schopenhauer and that of the Indian philosophers. For the former, it may be argued, the ground of being is will, and this is said to be single, unchanging, and devoid of knowledge. In Yogācāra philosophy the basic reality is the store-consciousness, which is also devoid of knowledge but regarded as multiple (one for each living being) and subject to continual change. In the case of Advaita Vedānta the difference is still greater, for the unchanging ground of being is Brahman-ātman, the nature of which is entirely different from will. Closer consideration shows that these arguments rest upon misunderstanding. With regard to Advaita Vedānta, it is certainly the case that will and Brahman-ātman are widely different concepts. But the comparison is valid only if will represents final reality for Schopenhauer, as Brahman-ātman does for the Vedānta. We shall find in the chapters to follow that will is not final reality for Schopenhauer but only the power bringing about manifestation. Consequently its true analogues are not Brahman but the store-consciousness of Yogācāra thought and the causal body of Hinduism. It is out of this source that not only living beings but also the physical forms of the natural world arise — just as for Schopenhauer both the lives of individuals and the *Naturkräfte*, fundamental forces determining nature, are expressions of the will.

The argument that the store-consciousness is multiple while the will is single is also flawed. It is when the store-consciousness (or the causal body) is considered as a general concept, as the universal energy bringing about manifestation, that it may legitimately be compared to the will, while the multiple store-consciousnesses of the Yogācārins may be correctly compared not to the will but to the Ideas of Schopenhauer’s system. And this raises a further
point of interest. We saw in chapter 10 that Schopenhauer specifies that in the case of human beings, with their strongly marked individual natures, a unique Idea, a thing-in-itself, stands behind each person (again, one for each individual). Arising out of this unique Idea is the *intelligible character*, and this plays a part that broadly corresponds to the *prarabda karman* of the Indians. Although the two concepts are by no means identical, they are close enough to illumine one another. The *intelligible character* is that singular formation of the will that forms the inner and unchanging nature of a particular human being, the “decided and unalterable tendencies already recognizable in the child.” And similarly, *prarabda karman* is that complex of volitional seeds that, having come to maturity, forms the essence of a particular lifetime and must complete its course like an arrow shot from a bow.

Just as for Schopenhauer “Life is the intelligible character’s becoming visible,” for the Indian philosophers rebirth is the passage into life of *prarabda karman*. In both cases, it is a particular formation of volitional factors that brings into existence the living individual being. And here, incidentally, we find Indian thought strongly supportive of Schopenhauer’s contention—so controversial for Europe at the time he advanced it—that it is will, and not intellect, that constitutes the fundamental nature of human beings.

Schopenhauer held that the Indian is the “wisest of all mythologies,” and we can find a striking confirmation of our conclusion that there exists in India a group of ideas analogous to the doctrine of the will if we turn to a concept that has a significant place in the mythology and popular religious thought of the subcontinent—the concept of *śakti*, a word usually translated as “energy” or “power.”

**Śakti** and Will

In the past and with the exception of a short paper published by Heinrich Zimmer many decades ago, the affinity between the Indian idea of *śakti* and Schopenhauer’s concept of the will, understood as the force or power behind the world, has not been noted by scholars. In later Hinduism *śakti*—often represented as a goddess, Śakti or Mahāśakti—plays an important role. It holds a central place in both Tantric and Kashmiri Śaivite thought, pervades
popular Hinduism, and is present also in the Jain religion and Tantric forms of Buddhism. The subject is a vast one, and in the present context we can do no more than touch briefly upon it while restricting ourselves to popular forms of Hindu thought. Nonetheless, even the brief summary that follows will be sufficient to indicate its relevance to Schopenhauer’s will.

The notion of a final reality that is changeless and ineffable and yet puts forth a śakti or energy that brings into being all that exists has ancient roots in India. Already in the Rg Veda an all-embracing feminine creative power is found in the form of the goddess Aditi, described significantly as “the supporter of the earth living in heaven,” and in the Yajur Veda Aditi is addressed as “Supporter of the sky, sustainer of the earth, sovereign of this world, wife of Viṣṇu,” words that could well apply to later concepts of Śakti. The Hindu gods (as also the five Dhyāni Buddhas of the later Mahāyāna) have each their śakti, their “energy” or “power,” represented in female form as their consort or “wife.” We saw in chapter 11 that the cumulative effect of the karmic seeds was expressed in Hindu thought by such concepts as that of the inverted World Tree and the Golden Embryo (Hiranīyagarbha), and in popular imagery this same creative force is personified as the Great Goddess, Mahādevī or Mahāśakti, and as the host of lesser feminine deities or śaktis that constitute her varied aspects and are found throughout the Purāṇas and the epic literature. It is from Mahāśakti that all manifestation arises. It is she who carries out the tasks of creation, maintenance, and reabsorption of the universe, and the Goddess is worshipped in her own right in India—notably in Bengal and adjacent regions, where her adherents (Śāktas) often outnumber those of Śiva or Viṣṇu.

In time the concept of śakti as the creative force underpinning the world pervaded the whole of Hindu thought, and it is in this connection that the resemblance to Schopenhauer’s will emerges most clearly. In the case of Advaita Vedānta the relatively passive ideas of ignorance (avidyā) and illusory appearance (māyā) took on a new energy. For Śaṅkara, avidyā had been the beginningless superimposition (adhyāsa) of the unreal upon the real (and vice versa), but in later Advaita both it and māyā merge into a single, all-pervasive cosmic power, Mahāmāyā, far more dynamic than the earlier concepts. In Śaivite and Tantric thought the effect was still greater. Final
reality is represented as the supreme deity, Śiva, while the creative principle that brings into being and maintains the world is regarded as his consort, the goddess Śakti. Śiva is by definition beyond all change or modification. He is unconditioned Consciousness-Being, and as such necessarily free of all relativity. Should he act, he would be subject to change and thus no longer ultimate reality. There must therefore be some subordinate power that brings the world into being. That power is Mahāśakti or Mahādevi, the Great Goddess conceived as the consort of Śiva. Her relation to the latter is an unfathomable mystery, but together with her subject and object (and thus the world) first appear. As the principle limiting unconditioned reality or Brahman, her role is essentially a negative one, but from the viewpoint of empirical existence it appears as positive and creative so that she is represented as feminine. By means of the forms she imposes, manifestation issues forth from the repose of unconditioned Being; as a Tantric text tells us, “Śiva, when he is united with Śakti, is able to create; otherwise he is unable even to move.”

Thus Śiva, the unconditioned consciousness that is final reality, is prior to and stands apart from manifestation, while it is Mahāśakti who, by limiting consciousness in an infinity of ways, produces all that is manifested. That there is no great distance between this concept of “power,” or the “formative energy of consciousness” (cidrūpinī), shaping and maintaining the forms of the universe, and that of will as conceived by Schopenhauer is clear from the following definition of Śakti taken from a modern encyclopedia of Asian thought: “Śāktas worship Śakti and revere her as the force that makes all life possible and maintains the universe. This is the fundamental creative force whose most primary expression is the sexual energy that unites the polarity of male and female and brings forth new life. Hence the symbols of Śāktism are sexual in nature . . . the personification of primal energy . . . the dynamic aspect of God through whose agency He creates, maintains and dissolves.”

There is little here that could not apply equally well to Schopenhauer’s will, while the reference to sexual energy as the primary manifestation of this force is the very point that, as we saw in chapter 9, he makes so strongly. For Hindus it is Mahāśakti who is at the root of manifestation and gives rise to the world-appearance or māyā; for Schopenhauer it is will that gives rise to
the Erscheinungswelt, the world of representation and appearances. In one of the Tantric texts we read that Śakti “is the Will of Śiva as yet unmanifest”; and in the Kashmiri Śaivite tradition it is said that “all things come into being through an act of will.”

Neither Tantric nor Kashmiri Śaivite thought became known to the West until well after Schopenhauer’s death. Yet it is possible that by a curious chance, the concept of śakti may have played a part in the genesis of the doctrine of the will. We saw in chapter 3 that in making the Persian translation of the Upaniṣads on which the Oupnek’hat was later based, Prince Dārā Shikūh and his collaborators made use of Islamic terms in place of Sanskrit ones, which had no meaning for their Muslim readers. The Italian scholar, M. Piantelli, has drawn attention to an instance of this: the use of the term Iśq to replace the Indian māyā. Iśq is a Sufi conception, and Prince Dārā was familiar with it. It has a meaning comparable to that of amor in the literature of late medieval and Renaissance Europe—“the Love that moves the sun and the other stars” of Dante’s poem—and like the latter shares a certain amount of ground with will as Schopenhauer conceived this.

When Dārā used Iśq as a substitute for the Indian māyā, he was thinking of māyā as it was understood in his own day. However, we have seen that the concept underwent considerable change in the course of time, and for Indians of Dārā’s period māyā was no longer the relatively passive “illusion” of the Upaniṣads and early Advaita. It had merged with the idea of śakti to become Mahāmāyā, a far more active principle responsible for bringing into being and maintaining the empirical world—the goddess Mahāśakti, in fact, presented in a somewhat more philosophical guise. For this later concept Iśq is a reasonable equivalent, just as Dārā believed, but it is not a good equivalent for the older and much more passive māyā or “illusion” of the Upaniṣads. Anquetil-Duperron, when making his translation, had no means of knowing this, and the result was that it was Mahāmāyā-Iśq, an idea very close to śakti, that appeared in the pages of the Oupnek’hat. It is this more dynamic concept, relatively unrelated to Upaniṣadic thought, Piantelli suggests, that may have played a part in the formation of Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will.

Whether or not this is the case, we find, when we consider the forms in
which the concept of śakti finds popular expression in India, many points of contact with Schopenhauer’s will. Of particular relevance is Kālī, the tutelary deity of Bengal. In the entire pantheon of India there is no figure that has so troubled the Western mind as has that of Kālī. Her appearance is fearful, even horrific: “She is represented with a black skin, a hideous and terrible countenance, dripping with blood, encircled with snakes, hung round with skulls and human heads, and in all respects resembling a fury rather than a goddess,” Dowson writes. Various levels of esoteric interpretation are offered for this fearsome figure: her black color refers to the fact that her ultimate nature lies beyond manifestation and is unknowable; the burning ground on which she dances is where all worldly desires are burned away; the necklace of severed heads is the universe of name and form that she, as Śiva’s power or śakti, creates, maintains, and destroys. But valid and often profound as such interpretations are, there is little doubt that the image of Kālī with its pulsating vitality springs from a deeper and more primary level than that of conscious interpretation and is the recognition of an intuitively grasped truth. For Kālī is life—life as both animals and human beings experience it with all its dangers, its sufferings, its fierce competition, its ruthless disregard for the fate of the individual, its inevitable ending in death. Kālī is, in Tennyson’s phrase, “Nature, red in tooth and claw,” an image of the terrible and destructive aspect of nature, so frankly admitted in the Bhagavad Gītā when Arjuna experiences the vision of the cosmic Viṣṇu: “The sons of Dhrētrarāṣṭra . . . and our leading warriors, too, hurrying enter Thy mouths, fearful, with terrible teeth; some of them are seen fixed between Thy teeth, their heads crushed. . . . As moths enter a kindled flame swiftly, to their own destruction, so, verily, to their destruction the people swiftly enter thy mouths. Thou consumest the people with licking tongues, all together in Thy blazing mouths.”

In the Mahānirvāṇa-tantra Kālī is regarded as the primordial power (adyā-śakti), and Śiva praises her in these words: “Because Thou art the Origin of and devourest all things Thou art called the Adyā Kālī. Resuming after dissolution Thine own nature, dark and formless, ineffable and inconceivable, Thou alone remainest as the One. Though having a form, yet art Thou formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the power
of Māyā, Thou art the beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress, and Destruc-
tress that Thou art.” It is not difficult to see, both in the imagery of the
Gītā and in this description of Kālī, a parallel to Schopenhauer’s vision of
the will, dark and formless in its inner nature and subjecting living beings
to suffering and destruction as it relentlessly seeks its own perpetuation. He
himself noticed the parallel in the Gītā, and in the second edition of The
World as Will and Representation he writes: “Nature, which never lies, but is
always frank and sincere, speaks quite differently on this theme, as Krishna
does in the Bhagavadgīta. Her statement is that the life or death of the indi-
vidual is of absolutely no consequence.”

Other fierce forms that Mahāśakti has assumed in the Hindu pantheon
among them Bhairavī (the Terrible One), Rakta-dantī, (red-toothed),
and the goddess of smallpox, Sītalā (the Shivering One)—support this con-
clusion. Each is a variation on the same theme, a recognition of the remorse-
less and destructive aspect of nature, that energy or śakti that brings into
being only to destroy again all that it creates, or, in Schopenhauer’s terms,
the will-to-live as the root cause not only of life but also of all strife, struggle,
suffering, and death. We are reminded of Aristotle’s remark, cited by Scho-
penhauer, that “Nature is not divine, but demon-like.”

It is true that Mahāśakti differs from will in that she has strongly positive
characteristics as well as negative ones. We see this in the figure of Durgā,
perhaps the most widely worshipped of all the forms that Śakti assumes.
Durgā—her name means “difficult to reach”—is usually represented as a
stern yet beautiful female warrior mounted upon a lion or tiger (a symbol
of insatiable desire, mastered by the goddess) and brandishing in her ten
arms an impressive array of weapons. It is from her brow that the terrible
Kālī is said to have sprung forth, and up until 1830 human sacrifices were
offered to Durgā. Even now, on the occasion of her annual festival, large
numbers of animals are sacrificed at her shrine in Calcutta, and it is said that
as their heads are severed, the blood must spatter her image. Such sacrifices
point to the underlying nature of the conception and its similarity to the
all-devouring will described by Schopenhauer. Yet it is also said of Durgā
that she is tender when supplicated, protective of her devotees, and the
Mother of the Universe (Jagad-dhātrī). Her beauty bewitches the world;
she dispels difficulties and annihilates the evil ones. She is the embodiment of sacrifice (yajña) and knowledge, the personification of all that is good and auspicious. Many other forms of the Mahādevī share the benevolent and propitious aspects of Durgā—Ambikā, Umā, Gaurī, Pārvatī, to name but a few—and it is in general the positive and creative rather than the destructive aspect of the Goddess that finds greatest emphasis in popular Hindu thought.

Thus the nature of Śakti is essentially ambivalent, in contrast to the predominantly negative emphasis of Schopenhauer’s will. But we do not have to look very far to find the reason for this divergence. It lies in the fact that the concept of śakti originates in popular religion, and this, conceived from the standpoint of worldly existence, is in every culture no more than half-willing to admit the negative nature of life in the world, while it seeks to balance this by an emphasis upon the positive. Schopenhauer and the Indian philosophical schools we have discussed do not share this positive outlook. The German philosopher’s “pessimism” hardly needs emphasizing; Buddhism sees the world as sorrowful; Śaṅkara writes, “Remember that all duality is caused by avidyā or illusion and therefore afflicted with misery.

The dark side of Mahāśakti offers striking points of contact with Schopenhauer’s view of the will. It confirms, at the level of popular religious thought, the affinities we noted above when discussing such concepts as the store-consciousness, formative forces, and karman. It is therefore apparent that there exists, widely diffused in both the popular and the philosophical thought of India, a concept surprisingly close to the ever-active will, the hidden metaphysical force or power that drives the world. This fact has not been accorded the attention it merits; it calls into question the manner in which the relation of Schopenhauer’s thought to that of India has been viewed in the past. It is not a matter of the doctrine of representation only but of both the main pillars of his philosophy: both representation and the doctrine of the will have recognizable equivalents in Indian thought.
The Ontological Status of Will

We have seen that striking points of contact exist between the Indian concept of divine energy or power, personified as the goddess Śakti, and Schopenhauer’s doctrine of the will. However, while Śakti is always seen in close relation to Śiva—almost, if not quite, one with him—and never as an opposed principle, the ontological status of will is much less clear. Indeed, Schopenhauer comes at times close to dualism, with will as a quasi-independent power responsible for the existence of the world and the suffering that comes with it, in seeming opposition to some greater but nameless reality. He was certainly conscious of this and sought to avoid dualism; even so, it seems to hover in the background as a potential outcome. This brings us to one of the oldest problems in the study of Schopenhauer’s doctrine, often seen as the Achilles heel of his system: the question of how the will can be said to deny itself.

Will and Its Self-Denial

Ever since the earliest critical studies of his thought, the question of how the will could deny itself has dogged Schopenhauer’s philosophy. It appears to fly in the face of a fundamental rule of logic, that nothing can deny its own essence, and seems to undermine his whole system. It will be recalled that Schopenhauer argued that the denial of the will was an act of the intellect that had, in exceptional persons, somehow struggled free from the will that gave it birth.¹ But since throughout his writings he emphasizes that the intellect is “originally a mere instrument in the service of our will,”² its tool and offshoot, this argument has not seemed convincing to many. To most commentators it has appeared that if the intellect is a creation of the will, it can hardly deny the latter, for to do so would be to deny its own origin and
essence. The will could only be denied by a principle other than itself, and
the intellect as understood by Schopenhauer does not qualify as such. This
brings us to the question of the nature of final reality in his thought.

In theory this is a question that lies outside the range of his thought; he
often affirms that philosophy, when within its proper limits, can tell us noth-
ing about ultimate reality or its relation to the manifest world. The principle
of sufficient reason, the most universal and general form of our intellect, can-
ot grasp the being-in-itself of things, on which all whence and why rests:3
“The actual, positive solution to the riddle of the world,” he writes, “must
be something that the human intellect is wholly incapable of grasping and
conceiving; so that if a being of a higher order came and took all the trouble
to impart it to us, we should be quite unable to understand any part of his
disclosures.”4 Yet he is careful to avoid the implication that there is nothing
beyond these limits; he speaks of another kind of knowledge, known to mys-
tics but inaccessible to philosophical thought. In the second (1843) volume
of his principal work he sets out his view clearly:

[The philosopher] should therefore beware of falling into the way of
the mystics . . . of trying to give in bright colours a positive knowledge
of what is for ever inaccessible to all knowledge, or at most can be ex-
pressed only by a negation. Philosophy has its value and virtue in its
rejection of all assumptions that cannot be substantiated. . . . Its theme
must restrict itself to the world; to express from every aspect what this
world is, what it may be in its innermost nature, is all that it can honestly
achieve. Now it is in keeping with this that, when my teaching reaches
its highest point, it assumes a negative character, and so ends up with a
negation. Thus it can speak here only of what is denied or given up; but
what is gained in place of this, what is laid hold of, it is forced (at the
conclusion of the fourth book) to describe as nothing. . . . Yet it still does
not follow from this that it is nothing absolutely, namely that it must be
nothing from every possible point of view and in every possible sense,
but only that we are restricted to a wholly negative knowledge of it.5

This is as far as Schopenhauer was willing to go in his published works.
His position is therefore essentially that of Buddhism: ultimate reality is of
another order, and any attempt to describe it positively can only betray its nature. Yet anyone reading *The World as Will and Representation* cannot help being aware of the presence in his thought (just as in Buddhism) of another concern: that of the possibility, and indeed necessity, of freeing ourselves from the world of representations and its concomitant sufferings. Rudolf Malter has written that “the liberation of the human being is the theme of Schopenhauer’s philosophy,” and this of course means liberation from the will. Unless we are to interpret Schopenhauer’s philosophy as a form of nihilism—a position quite untenable in the light of the glowing terms in which he speaks of the insights of the mystics—liberation from willing must imply the existence of a genuinely independent principle superior to, or at any rate clearly distinct from, the will. Only then can denial of the will, and with it the salvation that the whole Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation* points toward, be possible—and if this is the case, will cannot be ultimate reality. And yet time and again in Schopenhauer’s pages we read that will is the thing-in-itself, the reality underlying and bringing into being the appearances of the world. It is the linchpin of his whole doctrine.

To those familiar with Buddhist thought the difficulties surrounding the doctrine of the will have a familiar ring, for like the Buddha and those who followed him Schopenhauer is anxious to respect fully the ineffable character of final reality, with the result that its relation to the principal of manifestation remains deeply obscure. The similarity between the negative formula, “denial of the will,” and the “blowing out” (*nirvāna*) and “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*) of Buddhism is evident, and Schopenhauer, who was well aware of this, regarded it as a favorable sign for his own doctrine. Both he and the philosophers of Buddhism held that since ultimate reality lies beyond all possibility of conceptualization, it can only be misrepresented by any attempt we make in this direction, and in consequence neither could avoid the danger of their teaching being interpreted at times as a doctrine of nihilism; it was largely in reaction to this that the Tathāgatagarbha school came into being. The relation of manifestation to final reality is of course a perennial conundrum of metaphysical thought; is it one of opposition, as in many Gnostic schools, or is the one in some way a development, a manifestation or “creation” or “emanation,” of the other, as in Christianity or Neo-
platonism? We have seen that Schopenhauer sought to maintain the second of these positions. But if the will is in some way linked to ultimate reality, what is the nature of this relation? Is the will, as conceived by Schopenhauer, the ultimate principle behind the world; is it absolute and final reality? Or is it, on the contrary, not this but only the inner essence of the world, the metaphysical power or principle that brings into being and sustains the representations among which we live? If the first is the case, it is difficult to see what Schopenhauer can mean by the will denying itself; if the second, then self-denial of the will is a figure of speech and indeed a somewhat misleading one. Let us try to determine which is the case.

**Will and the Thing-in-Itself**

When Schopenhauer tells us, as he often does, that the will is the thing-in-itself, what does he mean by the latter term? Is he using it to designate the inner essence of the world, or does he mean by the thing-in-itself that final reality, transcendent in nature, which cannot be grasped by thought since it lies outside the forms of knowledge and all possibility of representation? This might appear a straightforward question, but unfortunately the waters are muddied because Schopenhauer uses both of these terms, will and thing-in-itself, in an ambiguous fashion. Both of them may, at different times, have either of the above two meanings!

Let us first take the term will. In much the greater part of Schopenhauer’s writings this term is used to refer to what he occasionally calls “natural will,” that hidden and metaphysical force that is the essence of the world, that finds expression as the will-to-live, as the will of the species, and as the universal natural forces (allgemeinen Naturkräfte), and that lends to the empirical world its relatively stable and objective quality; it is “that which is hidden behind nature, and renders nature possible.” Yet, as we shall see shortly, there also exist passages in which the meaning of the word will is clearly different and refers to an ineffable reality beyond the natural will.

The second term, the thing-in-itself, was of course inherited from Kant and his predecessors, and like them, Schopenhauer uses it to refer to the hidden essence of every appearance. This means that as a rule the thing-in-itself
is equated by Schopenhauer with will (in the sense of “natural will”), and as we have seen, we frequently find it asserted that the thing-in-itself is the will. But here too we come upon occasions when the expression the thing-in-itself clearly has another meaning and is used to refer to unconditioned being, ultimate and ineffable reality. When used in this sense, it is possible for Schopenhauer to tell us that the will is not “positively and absolutely the thing-in-itself.”

What are we to make of this? Is Schopenhauer guilty of failing to separate and properly define two distinct concepts: will as the metaphysical reality behind all appearances, and the thing-in-itself as ineffable, ultimate reality lying beyond the will? Some commentators have taken this view; there is, however, a good reason for what would otherwise appear as simply a failure on Schopenhauer’s part. It is that from the first he is seeking to avoid the dualism into which his teaching could easily fall, with will as the power driving the world, opposed to an ineffable reality standing apart from it. This, I suggest, is the underlying reason why we find him applying, at various times, both terms to both concepts. For Schopenhauer will is not the same as the thing-in-itself when the latter is understood as final reality, but neither is it something altogether different from or opposed to it. Will is in some mysterious way an expression of final reality.

In the first (1818) volume of The World as Will and Representation Schopenhauer does not draw a distinction between will and thing-in-itself. He uses the two expressions as synonyms; the will is the thing-in-itself. The Manuscript Remains of the period bear this out: in paragraph 35 the Platonic Idea, the thing-in-itself, and the will are said to be “all the same.” In paragraph 521 he writes, “What are things in addition to being our representation... What are they in themselves? Simply that which we know in ourselves as will.” Schopenhauer must have come to realize, perhaps reluctantly, that this position entailed serious difficulties, for it had the effect of making the natural will, described so powerfully by him, appear to be final reality. Subsequently his philosophy was often interpreted in this sense, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century many of those influenced by his thought took this to be his meaning. And yet this interpretation is quite incompatible with the outcome of The World as Will and Representation,
in which it is not \textit{will} but \textit{denial of the will} that is presented as the ultimate good and \textit{will} appears as something to be overcome.\footnote{17} Consequently, in the second (1844) volume Schopenhauer devotes a chapter entitled “On the Possibility of Knowing the Thing-in-Itself” to correcting the earlier impression and clarifying the relation of \textit{will} to \textit{thing-in-itself} (which is now treated as synonymous with final reality).\footnote{18} It is possible that he did not wish to extensively revise the original 1818 volume of his principal work or to reduce the prominence there accorded to the will as the central feature of his doctrine. He therefore seeks to interpret retrospectively what he had written earlier and to present it in a fresh light, according to which \textit{will} can be spoken of, in a loose but not illegitimate way, as the \textit{thing-in-itself} but \emph{is not really so} when a higher standard of exactitude is applied.\footnote{19}

In the chapter in question Schopenhauer goes to considerable trouble to distinguish \textit{will} from \textit{thing-in-itself} when the latter term is used to mean final reality. He tells us that “it is to be carefully noted, and I have always kept it in mind, that even the inward observation we have of our own will still does not by any means furnish an exhaustive and adequate knowledge of the thing-in-itself.”\footnote{20} Our inward knowledge of the will is the nearest we can come to the thing-in-itself but is not the same thing. Rather, it is “the point where the thing-in-itself enters the phenomenon most immediately, and is most closely examined by the knowing subject,” so that this event, our own willing, must “become the interpreter of every other.”\footnote{21} So “the act of will is indeed only the nearest and clearest \textit{phenomenon} of the thing-in-itself. . . . In this sense I teach that the inner nature of everything is \textit{will}, and I call the will the thing-in-itself.”\footnote{22} Here, then, Schopenhauer unambiguously tells us that although he speaks of will as the thing-in-itself, it is not really this. Will is the thing-in-itself’s “representative for us”; it bears some relationship to it, points toward it, and is that “in which the thing-in-itself is manifested under the lightest of all veils.”\footnote{23} It is only in this relative sense, and not as an absolute truth, that will can be said to be the thing-in-itself.

There follows a passage of considerable interest for our inquiry. In it Schopenhauer first tells us that the will has two aspects, that which manifests in and as the world and that which is the will’s ultimate nature. Immediately after this he says virtually the same thing of the thing-in-itself; its first aspect
being the will that produces the world and its second being unknowable and outside all possible phenomena. The passage reads as follows:

The question may still be raised what that will, which manifests itself in the world and as the world, is ultimately and absolutely in itself; in other words, what it is, quite apart from the fact that it manifests itself as will, or in general appears, that is to say, is known in general. This question can never be answered, because, as I have said, being-known of itself contradicts being-in-itself, and everything that is known is as such only phenomenon. But the possibility of this question shows that the thing-in-itself, which we know most immediately in the will, may have, entirely outside all possible phenomenon, determinations, qualities, and modes of existence which for us are absolutely unknowable and incomprehensible, and which then remain as the inner nature of the thing-in-itself.24

These unknowable qualities, Schopenhauer continues, remain as the inner nature of the thing-in-itself (by which he here clearly intends ultimate reality) after the abolition of the will, which is in consequence not an absolute but only a relative abolition: “If the will were positively and absolutely the thing-in-itself, then this nothing would be absolute, instead of which it expressly appears to us there only as a relative nothing,” he writes.25

In the passage cited above, Schopenhauer makes it clear that the thing-in-itself (in the sense of final reality) is other than the will and that the will as principle of manifestation, the inner reality of the world, provides only a partial and incomplete expression of this ultimate reality. If confirmation were needed that this is Schopenhauer’s position, it may be found in a well-known letter he wrote to Julius Frauenstädt in 1852. In it he says of his philosophy, “It teaches what appearance is, and what the thing in itself is. But this is thing in itself only in a relative sense, i.e., in its relation to appearances. . . . But I have never said what the thing in itself is apart from that relation, since I do not know it; but in it, it is the will to life.”26 Thus, at least from the time of the 1844 edition of The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer did not equate the will (in the sense he gives to the word in by far the greater part of his writing) with final reality, although he
may have been responsible for leading many of his readers to suppose that he did.27 Will is not “positively and absolutely the thing-in-itself,” and it is unfortunate that in seeking to avoid dualism, with the will appearing as a kind of demiurge, he so often uses the terms synonymously.

Once we reach this conclusion, two problems that have haunted Schopenhauer’s philosophy almost since its first appearance are found to melt away. The first is the notorious contradiction, referred to above, involved in the claim that the will can deny itself. We now see that it is “will” as ineffable final reality that denies “will” as the immanent principle and inner being of the world—two different things to which the same word, infelicitously enough, has been applied.

The second difficulty to dissolve is that inherent in the frequent assertion that the will is the thing-in-itself. Many commentators have pointed out that Schopenhauer can hardly presume to tell us what the thing-in-itself is since he accepted Kant’s doctrine that it is not available to knowledge. But Schopenhauer himself now supplies the answer, for we have found that, strictly speaking, the will is not the thing-in-itself but only the most immediate of its phenomena, the nearest we can come to it, “its representative for us.” To this extent, Schopenhauer claims, Kant’s doctrine of our inability to know the thing-in-itself is modified: the thing-in-itself is not absolutely and completely knowable, but, as will, we come closest to knowing it.28

It therefore becomes evident that the difficulties surrounding the nature of the will and its relation to the thing-in-itself are, at least in part, terminological in nature. The will is not for Schopenhauer the thing-in-itself (when this means ultimate reality) but only the first step in its manifestation and therefore the closest that thought can approach to it: “The thing-in-itself has indeed to a great extent cast off its veils, but still does not appear quite naked,” as Schopenhauer expresses it.29 Will, when understood as the will-to-live, the natural will, the metaphysical core of the world, is not final reality.

Manifestation and Final Reality in Indian Thought

We have seen that in spite of the fact that the will is identified as the source of suffering, Schopenhauer was careful not to draw a clear distinction be-
tween it and the thing-in-itself, seeking to imply that the two principles are not so much separate and distinct as facets of a single reality. The will is not something altogether different from and opposed to the thing-in-itself (when this term means final reality) but in some way an expression of it. But the price of this attempt to hold the two principles together is the uncertainty and misunderstanding with regard to the ontological status of the will that we have noted and the frequent objections that have in the past been raised to the doctrine of the will. Let us see what light Indian thought can throw upon the difficulties Schopenhauer encountered.

In seeking to avoid the dualism into which his doctrine might have fallen, Schopenhauer is at one with Indian thought. He himself cites a passage from the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad, as it appears in the Oupnek’hat—“I am all this creation collectively, and besides me there exists no other being”—saying, correctly, that the Upanisads express this thought repeatedly.30 The same idea of the immanence of Brahman-ātman is fundamental in Śaṅkara’s thought and given graphic expression in the omkāra—“the mysterious Om,” as Schopenhauer calls it31—in which the three lower curves (representing the causal, subtle, and material levels of manifestation) are an integral part of the symbol and thus of final reality or Brahman. In Mahāyāna thought, too, final reality is regarded as being simultaneously immanent and transcendent,32 so that Nāgārjuna can write in a celebrated verse that “There is not the slightest difference/ Between cyclic existence (samsāra) and nirvāna.”33 Moreover, it is worth remarking that the manner in which Schopenhauer’s will tends to merge into the thing-in-itself in such a way as to become conflated with final reality finds a parallel in later Buddhist thought. If we step for a moment outside the confines of India, we find that as the Yogācāra tradition developed in China, in the shape of the Fa-hsiang school during the seventh and eighth centuries, uncertainty arose as to the nature of the store-consciousness. Was it simply the sum of conditioning factors—karmic impressions and formative forces—out of which the world arises, as the earlier Yogācārins of India had generally thought? Or was it rather the case that the store-consciousness, as the source of the arising of the world, could not really be distinguished from unconditioned being, reality itself, and that what was required for salvation was not its overcoming but rather
its purification? It is not within the scope of the present book to enter into the details of this Chinese development, but the fact that both in Schopenhauer and among the Buddhists of China there was uncertainty as to whether the force or power giving rise to the world, on the one hand, and ineffable final reality, on the other, were or were not to be identified is not without interest.

When we examine Hindu thought, we do not find the same reluctance that we encounter, both in Schopenhauer and in Buddhism, to speak of final reality in positive terms. While this brings its own dangers, it does make it possible to conceptualize to some extent the relationship in which the principle of manifestation is held to stand to final reality. In a notable passage in the Bhagavad Gītā it is stated that there are not one but two unmanifested (avyakta) principles that lie behind the world; it is made clear in the text that these are not to be confused and that only one of them is truly imperishable (akṣara)—that is, finally real—while it is from the other, the lower of the two principles, that the whole of manifestation issues forth. The same idea is expressed, in terms of myth, by the relation between the figures of Śiva and Śakti. Śakti, although hypostatized as a distinct principle, as we saw in the last chapter, is nevertheless regarded as being one with Śiva in her ultimate nature. The Kashmiri Śaivite philosopher Abhinavagupta states emphatically that it is a serious mistake to conceive of the Goddess as in any way different from Śiva and writes of “the blessed supreme Goddess who is inseparable and nondifferent from him.”

Thus in the same way that will, in Schopenhauer’s system, appears as distinct from and even opposed to final reality and yet is mysteriously an expression of it, Śakti is one with Śiva and yet, as his “energy,” she appears as a distinct principle. Here, then, we find a parallel to the distinction that Schopenhauer grasped intuitively, but could not clarify as he wished, between will (understood as natural will), corresponding to the lower unmanifested principle that brings about the world, and the thing-in-itself, corresponding to the changeless and truly imperishable (akṣara) principle of the Gītā: “How deeply in the being-in-itself of the world do the roots of individuality [i.e., the will] go?” he asks himself in the “Epiphi
concluding his principal work. Moreover, we also find in Indian thought
the cause behind this paradox. It lies in the doctrine of the Two Truths or
different standpoints discussed in earlier chapters. Seen in the light of this
teaching, the relationship between the power bringing about manifestation
and final reality is not so much a matter of two principles and their relation-
ship as of two different or opposed ways of viewing a single principle. When
considered from the viewpoint of empirical reality and relative truth
(samsvāti-satya), Brahman (or consciousness) appears as śakti, the principle
or power that manifests in and as the world—that constitutes the very sub-
stance of the world (very much as does Schopenhauer’s will). This is saguna
Brahman, Brahman “with qualities and attributes”—in short, conditioned
consciousness. But when considered from the standpoint of absolute truth
(paramārtha-satya), ultimate reality is known to be “without qualities and
attributes”; it is nirguṇa Brahman, Brahman “without qualities,” entirely
free from change or limitation, untouched by any object. The two principles
refer to a single reality but seen from mutually exclusive standpoints. They
relate to different planes of being, depending on whether consciousness is
rooted in individualized being and empirical existence or in supra-individual
awareness and final reality.

In this way Indian thought offers us some help in understanding Scho-
penhauer’s difficulties concerning the relation of the will to ultimate reality.
The ambiguity arises from the fact that there is in reality no relation but
rather a movement of conceptual thought between two standpoints, two
levels of “truth,” between which no linkage is possible or conceivable. Will,
and all that it brings about, is a reality only from the standpoint that it it-
self creates, the standpoint of empirical truth. From the standpoint of final
truth, there is no will but only nirguṇa Brahman, unconditioned conscious-
ness (or, for the Mahāyāna, emptiness, śūnyatā). While Indian thinkers such
as Nāgārjuna and Śākara keep constantly in mind and move frequently
between the two standpoints, Schopenhauer writes consistently from the
empirical standpoint (this, of course, is what gives his thought its immediacy
and power to convince). He grasps intuitively that will and final reality are
in some way one, but he does not see them, as the Indian philosophers do,
as a single principle viewed from opposed, mutually exclusive standpoints. At the end of *The World as Will and Representation* we still find him asking, “But how could the will-in-itself, prior to all phenomenon, and consequently still without knowledge, go astray, and fall into the ruin of its present condition?”38
Beyond the Will: “Better Consciousness” and the “Pure Subject of Knowing”

There remains an aspect of Schopenhauer’s thought to which we have paid no attention. Until recently it received little notice in the majority of studies, for it does not feature, except in a shadowy and implied manner, in the writings published during his lifetime. Yet it is a matter of importance closely linked to the matters discussed in the last chapter, for it concerns the question of what, for Schopenhauer, is ultimately real. We have seen that the will, in spite of being the metaphysical core of existence, is not for Schopenhauer final reality. What, then, lies beyond the will?

To find an answer we must turn to the philosophical notes made by Schopenhauer during the years 1812–1814, when his philosophy was taking shape, and subsequently published in the Manuscript Remains.

The “Better Consciousness” in the Early Manuscript Remains

In the early Manuscript Remains we find that final reality, which in The World as Will and Representation remains nameless and is experienced only when we deny the will, is discussed repeatedly and spoken of in positive terms. In these notes Schopenhauer refers to “the double nature of our consciousness” (die Duplicität unsers Bewusstseyns), and speaks of “the mixture of eternity and temporality of which our consciousness consists and their struggle and striving to separate.” Elsewhere he notes that the one pole does not understand the other—indeed does not even exist for the other. These two forms of consciousness, opposite poles, are the empirical consciousness and what Schopenhauer calls the better consciousness (bessere Bewusstsein). The empirical consciousness is our habitual everyday awareness, our consciousness of the world and of ourselves as subjects in it. Of it Schopenhauer
writes: “If our temporal consciousness completely dominates us and we are in this way abandoned to desires . . . our entire nature is subjective, that is to say we see in things nothing but their relation to our individuality and its needs.” On the other hand, the better consciousness is “enthroned deep within us,” untouched and unshaken by the roaring of the world. It is personified in the *Iliad* by the blissful immortal gods, who calmly watch the tumult of battle from the heights of Olympus. It is “our refuge from the tribulations of the world.”

The expression *better consciousness* first appears in notes made during 1812, when Schopenhauer was studying at the University of Berlin, and the idea it represents (though not the expression) remained present in his thought throughout the remainder of his life. Kossler affirms that it “was considerably influential in the development of Schopenhauer’s philosophy,” and Janaway writes, “Though he abandoned the term ‘better consciousness’ in his published works, the core of this vision remained with him . . . All the positive value that really counts in Schopenhauer’s outlook . . . arises when the will ceases from its normal role of pursuing the ends inherent in individual life.” In the 1812 notes it is said that the better consciousness lies “beyond all experience and thus beyond all reason”—that is, it is beyond both the theoretical reason (Vernunft) of Kant and practical reason or instinct (which later merges into will in Schopenhauer’s doctrine); both of these have to do exclusively with the empirical consciousness or, as Schopenhauer puts it, with the must of experience—that is, with that which is determined by the principle of sufficient reason. Hence nothing positive can be said of the better consciousness, “for what we say lies in the province of reason [so that] we speak only negatively of the better consciousness.”

In other places in the *Manuscript Remains* it is said that the better consciousness, when “very vivid,” reveals itself as the beautiful or the sublime, or it finds expression as saintly behavior. It is “the source of all virtue,” and vice is its negation. Lofty morality and kindness do not depend on the power of one’s reason and understanding, which do little “for the essential thing in man.” The moral element in conduct does not stem from reason (Vernunft) as Kant supposed—indeed, such a supposition is “blasphemy.” Moral conduct (which for Schopenhauer is compassionate action) is the ex-
pression in practice of the better consciousness, which lies “far above reason, expresses itself in conduct as holiness, and is the true salvation of the world.” Virtue is “simply the phenomenal appearance” of the self-affirmation of the better consciousness. The understanding (Verstand) knows only the effects of the better consciousness—that is, it knows virtuous action, but it knows nothing of the inner state that such action reflects. And “with the saint the better consciousness predominates so undisturbed that the world of the senses appears to him only in feeble colours... He acts in accordance with that consciousness, is blissful in it.”

Just as the better consciousness is the hidden source of moral action and of holiness, so it is the source of what is highest in the arts. Here it is reflected as genius in the form of the activity of the inspired poet, artist, or musician. Neither the beautiful nor its extreme form, the sublime, resides in objects. Both are signs of the awakening, the stimulation, of the better consciousness, its liberation from our subjectivity and selfishness. In the case of the beautiful, our contemplation of the object before us becomes so intense that “for the moment subjectivity and thus the source of all misery has vanished. We are free and the consciousness of the material world of the senses stands before us as something strange and foreign which no longer wears us down. Also we are no longer involved in considering the nexus of space, time and causality (useful for our individuality). . . . This liberation from temporal consciousness leaves the better eternal consciousness behind.” Thus beauty is the experience of the better consciousness as it shines through the veil of subjectivity (often subliminal in nature) constituted by the interests of the empirical individual. In a later note he attached to this passage, Schopenhauer adds that once we give ourselves up to contemplation in this way, the better consciousness becomes free from “the subject that is wretched, always in need and limited to a narrow sphere.”

In the case of the sublime, essentially the same process takes place. But it does so suddenly and dramatically as the “better eternal consciousness” unexpectedly bursts through the empirical or temporal consciousness. Thus those who best attain the object of art are those who make known to us “that which is outside time and above nature”: “Every painting, every statue, which depicts some human countenance with the expression of the better
consciousness, corroborates my explanation of the beautiful. . . . Likewise every poem which directly or indirectly presents us with that better consciousness in its many different effects.”

Thus the essence both of beauty and of the sublime is the “theoretical negation of the temporal world and [the] affirmation of eternity,” while the same negation and affirmation in the sphere of practical life form the essence of saintly virtue. The inspiration of both artist and saint results from transient appearances of the better consciousness. It is like lightning flashing in the darkness, and once it has passed, the everyday empirical consciousness again prevails. Genius and saint stand, as it were, at the threshold of the better consciousness; as they move back and forth between it and the empirical consciousness, their actions in the world reflect its presence. Schopenhauer argues that the great value of reason (Vernunft) is to be found here. For reason, historically acquainted with both the empirical and the better consciousness, is able to form a conceptual bond between the two. In consequence, the faculty of reason can lead us to freedom, indeed to the only freedom we have: that which lies in the possibility of breaking away from subjectivity and the contingent and temporal order and guiding our lives by our knowledge of the better consciousness, even when the latter is not actually present to us. In this way, he writes in 1813, we are able “to preserve its pronouncements and make it the compass which navigates the ship of life even in the dark.”

But this must not blind us to the fact that the better consciousness stands over against the empirical or rational consciousness. They are opposite poles, different orders of reality. Reason can bridge the gap conceptually, but the two share no common reality:

The better consciousness is separated from the empirical by a boundary without width, by a mathematical line. Often we do not want to see this and imagine rather that it is a physical boundary over which we can wander midway between the two territories and from which we can look at both. In other words, we want to be worthy of heaven and at the same time pick the flowers of this earth. But it will not work, for as we set foot in the one sphere, to the same extent have we deserted and
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A little later Schopenhauer writes: “The better consciousness is quite separate from the empirical. The perfect philosopher separates it theoretically, the saint in practice.” The empirical consciousness is “the faculty of reason with its illusions” — that faculty which “positively aims at making the world of experience into an absolute, into something at rest, complete in itself and existing by and through itself, and at deceptively setting up phantoms as the ultimate and only existence.” The better consciousness, on the other hand, is death to all this: “The transition to the better consciousness annihilates not one class but all classes of objects.” The side of consciousness that is swayed by the understanding, sensibility, and the faculty of reason (Verstand, Sinnlichkeit, und Vernunft) is “entirely obliterated by the better consciousness,” as also is the latter by the former. The two are incompatible: “With the appearance of the better consciousness that entire world vanishes like a light morning dream or optical illusion. . . . It now becomes clear that the reality of matter, till now eternal, immovable and infinite, was nevertheless only relative, namely a reality dependent on the appearance of consciousness as subject for which alone objects exist. But consciousness now demonstrates that it can appear otherwise than as subject, and here is freedom, the possibility of annihilating the world even theoretically.”

Consciousness “can appear otherwise than as subject” — that is, there is a consciousness other than that of the individual subject experiencing the world as object. It is a significant moment in Schopenhauer’s thought, for it contrasts strongly with usual Western positions and aligns him with an important feature of Indian thought. By stepping from the empirical to the better consciousness, we move from time into eternity, “penetrating to the tranquil centre” instead of running around on the periphery. The better consciousness is “the source of all true happiness, of all sure consolation that is built not on loose sand but on firm and solid ground.” It spells for our empirical consciousness “complete decline, death and destruction,” and to be faithful to better consciousness we must renounce and break away from empirical consciousness.
The pleasures and pains of life do not touch the “better and inner self.” The better consciousness is light, virtue, the holy spirit, unison and harmony, the eternal keynote of creation. It is the supreme happiness, higher than knowledge, for knowledge is at once the condition and promise of better consciousness. Knowledge—the knowledge of the possibility of better consciousness—saves us from willing and thus from continually reaffirming the empirical consciousness. The better consciousness lifts one “into a world where there is no longer personality and causality or subject and object,” and Schopenhauer writes with a characteristic touch: “My hope and belief is that this better (supersensuous and extratemporal) consciousness will become my only one, and for that reason I hope that it is no God.” He means by this last remark that he hopes that it is not subject to the two necessary characteristics that, in his view, define the idea of God, personality and causality. However, he adds, “But if anyone wants to use the expression God symbolically for that better consciousness . . . so let it be, yet not among philosophers I should have thought.” The true philosopher, the unraveller of all the phenomena of life, “liberates the better consciousness from everything to which it may be tied and keeps it free and pure.”

The “Better Consciousness” and the Empirical Consciousness

In the Manuscript Remains Schopenhauer makes it clear that the better consciousness is distinct not only from the empirical consciousness but also from what he calls the subject of consciousness. The better consciousness “does not think and know, since it lies beyond subject and object.” But the subject of consciousness is quite different: it is indissolubly linked to the object and therefore to the empirical world. It is intentional in its very nature: “I cannot conceive the intelligence, the subject, except as having representations or mental pictures.” Normally this is how we think of consciousness, as the flow of perceptions, conceptions, and feelings passing continually through the mind. Yet, Schopenhauer argues, this is a restriction of the meaning of the word that cannot stand: “According to all this, consciousness would have to be restricted to the faculty of reason, but this won’t do; for we need this word (there being no other) not only to denote the whole of being-subject
[Subjektseyn] as the correlative of all classes of representations, but even to include under it the better consciousness as well, which is no longer a being-subject at all."

This again makes it clear that consciousness is more than the empirical consciousness of which we are habitually aware. It does not have to have, necessarily and always, an object. It has at least two aspects or modes. First, it is our awareness, as subject, of inner and outer objects and of the representations forming the world—but over and above this, it is no longer a being-subject (in the sense of having an object) at all. The empirical consciousness is precisely that consciousness that is divided between subject and objects—they are two sides of the same coin. But “the better consciousness knows neither object nor subject” and is not found at either point of view. It begins where all such contrasts known to the reason as conditioned and unconditioned, world and God, etc. have vanished. It is undivided. As against this, being-subject (Subjektseyn) “belongs to the empirical consciousness, that is to the state of wretchedness (or at any rate to the possibility of wretchedness).” In consequence, better consciousness regards the world that is “our empirical, sensuous and rational consciousness in space and time” as that which “ought not to be, but is the wrong direction,” and this finds expression in denial of the world—in virtue and asceticism, which form the return journey by which we move away from this wrong direction.

In contrast to the empirical consciousness, the better consciousness is “bliss in the real sense,” “light, repose, joy, amiability, harmony and peace.” It is Böhme’s “inner mainspring, whence man has emanated”; to attain it is at once “infinitely difficult and infinitely easy.” For the better consciousness to dawn and the peace of God to be shared, man must become aware of himself “no longer as a human being at all, but as something quite different.”

We find, then, that for Schopenhauer consciousness is not of a single kind. It has two forms, empirical consciousness and better consciousness. The first knows objects and experiences the world; the second does not, for it stands beyond the subject-object division. The first inhabits the world of the mind; the second lies outside the sphere of human existence as such. Reason (Vernunft) furnishes a conceptual link between the two that is important, as it enables us to make a choice. Nevertheless, this is a relation based only on
memory and knowledge and thus a link between ideas and not between realities. Men and women can and do move between these two forms of consciousness, and those who experience the better consciousness most vividly are for that reason the saints or significant artists or poets. Nevertheless, to the extent that one consciousness is present at a given moment, the other is obliterated. They are mutually exclusive. For so long as we will to live and to experience the world, the illusion—that is to say, the world-appearance—is for us truth; only in reference to the better consciousness is it illusion. The two states of consciousness are different orders of reality and therefore no relation between them can exist:

After our clearly indicating and drawing a distinction between the better consciousness and the empirical, the question now arises concerning the relation between the two, that is to say, how was I ever able to reach empirical consciousness? The question is transcendent and this relation is a transcendental illusion. For it is assumed here that (i) the empirical consciousness once followed the better consciousness; thus succession and consequently time are assumed. But time is only a determination of the empirical consciousness and is conditioned by this; consequently it already assumes such consciousness. (ii) One asks about the relation itself, whether perhaps the empirical consciousness has in the better consciousness a cause or some such thing. But all possible relation is only a determination of the empirical consciousness. . . . Therefore the question about the above-mentioned relation has no meaning at all, for it sets aside empirical consciousness and asks about a relation which, however, is assumed only with that consciousness. Nevertheless this transcendental illusion is inevitable and cannot be removed; we simply cannot help thinking of that relation. . . . If we want to speak at all about this relation, we can say that it is positively unknowable to all eternity.

This relation, in reality transcendent and illusory and yet apparently real, forms the “mysterious connexion (geheimnissvollen Verbindung)” between the better consciousness and the individual or empirical nature by which the better consciousness meets—or appears to meet—with experience.
“mysterious bond” the better consciousness and the empirical consciousness are “combined into the identity of one I or ego (die Identität Eines Ichs),” and the better consciousness “looks forward” to loosening this bond at death. This bond—or rather apparent bond (since it depends upon a transcendental illusion)—is “the world’s real Gordian knot”; it is cut through only by a fundamental change of identity, a transformation from the empirical to the better consciousness. For the individual, the Ein Ich, has a choice: “the choice whether he will be reason or better consciousness,” as Schopenhauer puts it. That is, we may choose whether we remain part of the world of representations, or whether we will identify with the better consciousness and deliver ourselves from that world; this is the only freedom of choice we have, for within the sphere of empirical consciousness our actions are held by Schopenhauer to be fully determined. If we identify with the empirical consciousness, we remain an individual human being, the subject of consciousness undergoing suffering and death; but if we identify with the better consciousness, then genius (the profound insight into the Ideas, the unchanging nature of things, that is known in moments of inspiration) will appear in the place of theoretical reason and virtuous action (Schopenhauer means the virtue of the saints) in place of practical reason or instinct.

The “Pure Subject of Knowing”

Later in the Manuscript Remains a third form of consciousness makes its appearance in Schopenhauer’s thought, occupying a place midway between the empirical consciousness and the better consciousness. This is the pure subject of knowing. The idea begins to emerge in paragraph 191, written in Weimar in 1814, where he writes: “But the subject is not the will; it is that which merely knows, that to which the will, the body and the whole of life become visible, the calm and pure spectator . . . who lies outside time.” This, he continues, is “the pure, extratemporal and calm subject,” the source of all the pleasure of pure contemplation, and Payne, in translating the above passage, points to a possible source in the Oupnek’hat. The idea emerges further in paragraph 220, written a little later in Dresden, where a distinction,
said by Schopenhauer to be “exceedingly important,” is drawn between the subject of knowing (Subjekt des Erkennens) and the subject of willing (Subjekt des Wollens). As the latter one is “an exceedingly wretched being,” but

As soon as I am wholly and entirely the subject of knowing, in other words am absorbed in knowledge, I am blissfully happy, wholly contented, and nothing can assail me. Whatever object I contemplate, I am that object. If I see a mountain with blue sky behind it and the sun’s rays on its summit, then I am nothing but this mountain, this sky, these rays of the sun; and, purely apprehended, the object appears in infinite beauty. . . . I am the object, I am the pure unalloyed pleasure at the understanding in me which makes this apprehension possible, which is this apprehension. But woe unto me if the slightest willing is associated with this, if the least purpose is presented to me. At once I plunge down from my exulted position, and I am no longer the infinite subject of knowing, but the poor and suffering subject of willing.59

Here the subject of knowing, on its first appearance, sounds very like the better consciousness, and it is perhaps significant that it makes its appearance in the Manuscript Remains just at the point when the expression “better consciousness” is fading from the scene. For a short while the two expressions appear concurrently in the Manuscript Remains. We hear not only of the better consciousness, but also of “the unknowable subject of knowing”60 and that “Man’s most blissful state is the one in which, having disengaged himself from willing, he has become the pure subject of knowing.”61 This too sounds like the better consciousness, but when we come to paragraph 274, where for the first and only time the two expressions are used together, we find there is a difference in their meaning. We read: “Knowledge is the promise of salvation, the true gospel; willing, on the other hand, is hell itself. Thus we now have our bliss to the extent that we find ourselves as the pure subject of knowing: for although knowledge is still not supreme happiness, is not yet the better consciousness itself, yet it is the condition of and the path to this, the promise of this.”62 This is the last appearance of the better consciousness in Schopenhauer’s writings,63 and it now becomes clear that the pure subject of knowing is not quite the supreme happiness, not quite
the better consciousness, though well on the way to it. This is repeated in a later paragraph, where it is said that “the subject of knowing in his purity . . . is not yet salvation, but the necessary vehicle for this, the path to salvation,” and in fact it would be surprising if there were no such distinction, for to be a subject, and to be knowing, both imply an object, and we have already seen that Schopenhauer emphatically states that the better consciousness lies beyond the subject-object division of consciousness.

Thus even though, as the above passage goes on to say, “the subject of knowledge in his purity is something beyond the entire world, that is to say above and beyond everything connected with willing, infinitely sublime, infinitely venerable,” it is still not the better consciousness. On the other hand, it is clearly not the empirical consciousness either. A further distinction has to be made. In the earlier pages of the Manuscript Remains Schopenhauer was content simply to contrast the subject of knowing with the subject of willing, but this will no longer do. Qualifications such as “unknowable,” “pure,” and “wholly contented,” start to appear, and a distinction between the subject of knowing and the pure subject of knowing emerges. We can trace the process. In paragraph 369 two different kinds of knowledge are described: knowledge according to the principle of sufficient reason, which serves the will, and knowledge of the (Platonic) Idea, which, when perfect and complete and in spite of the fact that it still has an object, abolishes the will. In paragraph 439 this distinction is reflected in the contrast between “my personal ego (this phenomenon of will illuminated by the subject of knowing)” and “the pure subject of knowing, which lies outside time and the principle of sufficient reason generally.” And finally, in paragraph 486 the distinction is unambiguously made: it is said that “we human beings are always the subject of knowing, but the pure subject of knowing only when we perceive an object outside its relations” (i.e., when we perceive it as Platonic Idea and no longer in relation to our interests) and also that “[Animals] too are the subject of knowing, but they are never the pure subject of knowing.”

Thus by the time he came to write the first volume of The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer had distinguished not one but two advanced states of consciousness. We arrive in this way at a hierarchical arrangement consisting of three “levels.” First, the term subject of knowing (or...
Schopenhauer’s encounter with Indian thought

sometimes subject of willing) is used for that day-to-day consciousness that as outer sensibility knows the world and as inner sensibility is aware of the movements of the will; it is the empirical consciousness that was initially contrasted with the better consciousness. Second, the pure subject of knowing (sometimes pure knowing being) is used for the consciousness that still knows objects but sees through their appearances to the Ideas they manifest, thus seeing them no longer as objects of interest to the will. It is the correlative of the Idea, just as the subject of knowing is the correlative of the phenomenal world.69 And finally, there is the better consciousness, which lies altogether beyond the subject-object division, knows nothing whatever of the empirical world, and is beyond the reach of conceptualization.

Once the better consciousness was understood as ineffable, it became apparent that a positive term was no longer appropriate and the expression disappears from Schopenhauer’s vocabulary; it is replaced, Safranski has pointed out, by a negative expression, the denial of the will.70 This had the advantage of placing the will, “the final landmark of the positive,”71 at center stage and was consistent with Schopenhauer’s proclaimed purpose of explaining the nature of the world and avoiding transcendental speculation as to what may lie beyond it. Had he left the better consciousness in the positive form we find in the Manuscript Remains, it would inevitably have challenged the will for supremacy in his system, with a resulting loss of coherence. In the negative form he finally gave it, it could be integrated into the doctrine of the will.

Some Indian Affinities

The ideas we have just reviewed present some interesting points of contact with Indian conceptions. It is evident that Schopenhauer’s better consciousness—or, expressed in negative form, denial of the will—has much in common with the ineffable final reality of Indian thought, whether this is described in positive terms as the ātman of Hinduism or in negative terms as the “blowing out” (nirvāṇa) or “emptiness” (śūnyatā) of Buddhist teaching. Both the Self or ātman and the better consciousness are ineffable, blissful, untouched by empirical experience, and as the innermost kernel of our
true being survive death. Yet it is worth remembering that the idea of the better consciousness cannot have been formed under the influence of the Oupnek’hat or of Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta. Majer drew Schopenhauer’s attention to the Oupnek’hat at some point after the latter came to Weimar following his stay in Rudolstadt—that is, after paragraph 117 of the Manuscript Remains as these are numbered by Hübscher, and there are forty-one occurrences of better consciousness in the Manuscript Remains before this. The first mention of the Oupnek’hat is in paragraph 191 (although māyā is mentioned in paragraph 189), after which there are only twelve occurrences of better consciousness.

The substitution of the negative expression denial of the will for better consciousness brought Schopenhauer’s thought significantly closer to Buddhism than it would otherwise have been. The similarity of the denial of the will to the Buddhist nirvāṇa has often been remarked, and Schopenhauer himself drew attention to it.72 In Parerga and Paralipomena he suggests that denial of the will is paralleled by the periodical withdrawal of manifestation (mahā-susupti or mahā-pralaya) envisaged by Hinduism and referred to in the Oupnek’hat, by the nirvāṇa of the Buddhists, and by the “Beyond” of Neoplatonism.73 We may also notice the manner in which Schopenhauer’s concept of two contrasting consciousnesses, “empirical” and “better,” corresponds to the Indian teaching of two standpoint or “truths”—fundamental for both the Mādhyamikas and Advaitins as we saw in chapters 6 and 7. The relative truth of the everyday world (samvrti-satya) clearly corresponds to the empirical consciousness, and the ultimate or absolute truth in which the world is sublated (paramārtha-satya) to the better consciousness (or denial of the will). And just as for the Indian philosophers no relation is conceivable between these two distinct levels of being, so too for Schopenhauer the empirical consciousness and the better consciousness exist on different planes of reality and insofar as we inhabit the one, we desert the other.

And yet—and this for both Schopenhauer and the Indians is the crucial point—the two “truths” or contrasting forms of consciousness are somehow magically bound together.74 The image of a knot binding together the individual living being (jīva) and the transcendent Self (ātman) is found at several points in the major Upaniṣads. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad we read
of “release from all knots of the heart.”²⁵ In the Munḍaka Upaniṣad there are three references: we read of “the knot of ignorance” (avidyā-granthi), from which the world arises; of “the knot of the heart” (hrdaya-granthi), consisting, as Śaṅkara comments, of karmic seeds in the form of desires; and, in an important passage, we read that “He, verily, who knows the Supreme Brahman becomes Brahman himself. . . . Liberated from the knots of the secret place [i.e., the heart], he becomes immortal.”²⁶ In the Katha Upaniṣad it is written that “When all the knots of the heart are destroyed, even while a man is alive, then a mortal becomes immortal.”²⁷ Śaṅkara speaks of the “apparent conjunction” of the Self and the intellect (buddhi) that enables apprehension to take place,²⁸ and for Indian thinkers it is just this “knot of the heart”—or knot of ignorance—that binds us to the deceptive appearances of māyā and to painful existence in the transitory world of phenomena.

It is a remarkable fact that, as we have seen, Schopenhauer uses the identical image of a “mysterious bond” or knot (geheimnissvollen Verbindung) to describe the apparent relationship between the empirical consciousness and the better consciousness; whether this is an instance of the direct influence of Indian thought or a notable example of convergence must remain an open question until the philosopher’s annotations to his copy of the Oupnek’hāt have been studied. It is upon this apparent relationship, “the world’s real Gordian knot,” that the appearance in consciousness of the world as representation, and our participation in this, depend. And it is the undoing or cutting through of this knot that releases us from representation and will. It brings about, Schopenhauer tells us, a radical alteration of consciousness by which what had appeared as negative and nothingness is seen to be positive, and what had been regarded as positive is experienced as negative and unreal.²⁹ This changed vision, which cannot be communicated and is expressed by philosophy only in negative terms as denial of the will, is salvation (Erlösung)—just as for the Indians it is the untangling of the “knot of ignorance” which is release, mokṣa, nirvāṇa.
IT MAY APPEAR surprising that Schopenhauer chose not to take his analysis of consciousness further, but he himself makes the reason plain. It is that philosophy should not trespass upon the territory of mysticism. The two have different starting points and different outcomes. Mysticism is private in nature and for this reason unable to convince others, but philosophy takes as its ground what all men have in common and in consequence possesses the power to convince.¹ It will not have escaped notice that many of the expressions that Schopenhauer employs in the Manuscript Remains when speaking of the better consciousness bear a markedly religious or even mystical flavor. We have seen that the better consciousness is “light, repose, joy,” “the source of all sure consolation,” “light, virtue, the holy spirit,” and “the peace of God,” and that Kant is “blasphemous” when he attributes morality to reason rather than to better consciousness. Had Schopenhauer continued to use positive expressions to speak of the better consciousness, this could hardly have been avoided. And yet he was aware that anything he could write along these lines would be derived from theoretical knowledge only and not from direct knowledge, and in consequence could not match the words of those who had written from their own experience. In short, it is for the mystic to describe his experience, not the philosopher. After referring to the mystics of the Christian and Vedānta traditions, Schopenhauer writes: “I have now mentioned the sources from which we can obtain a direct knowledge, drawn from life, of the phenomena in which the denial of the will-to-live exhibits itself. To a certain extent, this is the most important point of our whole discussion; yet I have explained it only quite generally, for it is better to refer to those who speak from direct experience, than to increase the size of this book unnecessarily by repeating more feebly what they say.”²
Schopenhauer, of course, makes no pretense of being a mystic and in his personal life was far from that denial of the will that he recognized as the indispensable prerequisite for insight of this nature. But throughout his writing the validity and value of their vision, the essential truth of their understanding (despite its varied conditioning by religious forms), is present in the background like a continuous ground-note. He tells us that he considers the agreement of his own philosophy with quietism and asceticism to be a proof of its accuracy, and it is with good reason that Bryan Magee observes that the mystical side of Schopenhauer “is basic to the whole thrust and tenor of his philosophy. His affinity with Hinduism and Buddhism, and with the mystical tradition in all religions, rests on it.”

“Rationalism” and “Illuminism”

In his published work Schopenhauer, wishing to avoid the transcendental metaphysics condemned by Kant, was careful not to trespass on the ground of the mystics: “I have guarded against setting even one foot thereon,” he writes, which of course implies that he was tempted to do so. Nevertheless, he read the mystics, recognized the reality of the experiences they record, and himself yearned for an escape such as they describe from the domination of the will, as his words at the end of the first volume of his principal work make evident: “We then look with deep and painful yearning at that state, beside which the miserable and desperate nature of our own appears. . . .” He identified the core of mystical insight that, in his view, lies at the heart of the experience of beauty and the sublime; and, as we have seen, he eagerly pursued the information provided by the progressive discovery of Indian philosophical and religious ideas.

In consequence, even in his published works, Schopenhauer’s thought often spills over the narrow limits within which he seeks to confine philosophy. The questions of the nature of ultimate reality and of the meaning and purpose of life are only half-excluded; they hover just out of sight and every now and then break through the barriers he has erected. It is a consistent theme throughout his writings that beyond all that we can grasp conceptually there lies something else, something of ultimate value, available not to
the philosopher but only to the experience of the mystic. But this experience, he asserts, cannot be called knowledge.8 Knowledge in general is conditioned by plurality and difference; it concerns phenomena, and where “the being-in-itself of things” (das Wesen an sich der Dinge) begins, knowledge ceases.9 “In the true being-in-itself of all things,” he writes, “to which time and space, and therefore plurality, must be foreign, there cannot exist any knowledge. Buddhism describes this as Prajna Paramita, i.e., that which is beyond all knowledge.”10 In another place he writes: “The inner being-in-itself of things is not something that knows, is not an intellect, but something without knowledge”11—and, as we saw in the last chapter, it is precisely here that the difference between the pure subject of knowing and the ultimate state, the better consciousness, is to be found.

In spite of his reluctance to overstep the limits of philosophy, we can find easily enough the ghost of the better consciousness haunting Schopenhauer’s pages, particularly the final pages of book 4 of The World as Will and Representation. Here Schopenhauer speaks of “an unshakeable peace, a deep calm and inward serenity, a state that we cannot behold without the greatest longing” known to those in whom the denial of the will-to-live has dawned.12 This state is “that which alone is right, infinitely outweighing everything else, at which our better spirit cries to us the great sapere aude (dare to be wise).” In paragraph 70 it is said that the state in which one is withdrawn from the power of motives does not proceed directly from the will but from a changed form of knowledge and that “Behind our existence lies something else that becomes accessible to us only by our shaking off the world.”13 A few pages later Schopenhauer refers to “that state which is experienced by all who have attained to complete denial of the will, and which is denoted by the names ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with God, and so on.”14

In the corresponding pages of the second volume, published a quarter of a century later, the same idea remains as vivid as ever. Schopenhauer writes, “All genuine virtue proceeds from the immediate and intuitive knowledge of the metaphysical identity of all beings”;15 that individual existence is “an obstacle which stands between me and the knowledge of the true extent of my being. . . . I believe that, at the moment of dying, we become aware that a mere illusion has limited our existence to our person”;16 and that “we
ourselves are the kernel of the world and the source of all existence, to which everything returns.” Finally, he writes, “With me the world does not fill the entire possibility of all being.” These examples—and many more could be adduced—show that although the expression better consciousness disappears from Schopenhauer’s writing after 1814, the idea that it represents does not, and that it is this idea rather than the will that forms the culminating point of his philosophy—his teaching’s “highest point,” as he writes, “the most important point of our whole discussion.”

Like the Buddhist philosophers, Schopenhauer was aware of the limitations implied by his choice of a negative terminology, and he sought to leave room for the unknowable reality that lay outside the scope of his system. In Parerga and Paralipomena he describes philosophy, understood in its broadest sense, as being like a pendulum, swinging between what he calls rationalism (which strives for objective, communicable knowledge based on facts held in common) and illuminism (directed inward and consequently private in nature). But he then defines philosophy more narrowly, saying that philosophy proper must be rationalism, for only that is communicable and able to persuade others of its truth. Thus the task that Schopenhauer set himself is evident: his concern was with philosophy, and philosophy in his view is enclosed within the boundaries of the principle of sufficient reason and the limits of conceptual thought—“but our whole knowing and conceiving are bound to the forms of the intellect,” as he writes. What lies, or may lie, beyond these bounds cannot be its object. It is not, in his judgment, the field of investigation proper to philosophy. It is the territory of the mystics: “But philosophy should be communicable knowledge and must, therefore, be rationalism. Accordingly, at the end of my philosophy I have indicated the sphere of illuminism as something that exists but I have guarded against setting even one foot thereon. For I have not undertaken to give an ultimate explanation of the world’s existence, but have only gone as far as is possible on the objective path of rationalism. I have left the ground free for illuminism.” In these words from the last of his published writings we can detect a certain unease, as if Schopenhauer is not quite sure that he has taken the right course. And in the next paragraph he lets slip what comes very close to being a personal confession: “Nevertheless, a concealed illuminism may often
enough underlie rationalism; and to such an illuminism the philosopher then looks as to a hidden compass.” He speculates that this may have been the case with Plato, Spinoza, and Malebranche (all favorites of his among earlier philosophers) and adds that the fact that certain philosophers may have been possessed of such a “hidden compass,” and the insights it provides, “does not concern anyone, for they are the secrets of their own breast.”

Here again we see Schopenhauer revealing an affinity with Indian modes of thought. Outwardly he adopts, and with some rigor, the Western stance that philosophical investigation is the preserve of human reason, must work within its limits, and is quite distinct from “illuminism” or mysticism. But through cracks in his armor we see appearing the belief that the “inner illumination, intellectual intuition, higher consciousness” known to the mystics might be the true guiding light of the philosopher, the hidden compass by which he finds his way. Toward the end of the second volume of his principal work he asserts at some length that the touchstone for true philosophy is its compatibility with mysticism. Few Indian thinkers, whether Buddhist or Hindu, would fail to agree with this.

The “Eye of the World”

Was the better consciousness Schopenhauer’s “hidden compass”? As we have noted, it makes no appearance in the work published during his lifetime, being replaced by the negative form denial of the will. But we saw in the previous chapter that already in 1813, when Schopenhauer was in Berlin, the better consciousness is spoken of as “the compass which navigates the ship of life even in the dark” and that the closely related term, the pure subject of knowing, is employed on a number of occasions. Perhaps the most important of these occurs when Schopenhauer writes: “For at the moment when, torn from the will, we have given ourselves up to pure, will-less knowing, we have stepped into another world. . . . Happiness and unhappiness have vanished; we are no longer the individual; that is forgotten; we are only pure subject of knowledge. We are only that one eye of the world which looks out from all knowing creatures.” In these few lines two important ideas are contained, both of which have parallels in Indian thought. First, the idea that
in ceasing to will, we cease to be a human being or indeed an individual of any kind. Second, the idea of an unchanging principle of awareness, the one eye of the world (the emphasis is Schopenhauer’s), which stands apart from the will and is anterior to it and which is in fact another name for the pure subject of knowing. The idea of a “world-eye” occurs in both volumes of *The World as Will and Representation*. In the context of his aesthetic theory Schopenhauer writes of the “pure knowing subject, the clear eye of the world” and “the subject purified of will, the clear mirror of the inner nature of the world.” We find “the pure subject of knowing . . . the eternal eye of the world” again in the fourth book of the first volume, and in the second volume the following passage occurs: “I have therefore described the pure subject of knowing, which then remains over [after the denial of the will] as the eternal world-eye. This eye looks out from all living beings, though with very different degrees of clearness, and is untouched by their arising and passing away. It is thus identical with itself, constantly one and the same, and the supporter of the world of permanent Ideas.”

In these passages the pure subject of knowing is “the eye of the world,” an eternal principle of consciousness that looks out from every living being; we may recall the passage cited in an earlier chapter: “Look at your dog . . . Out of his eyes there shines the indestructible principle in him, the archaeus.” When, with the denial of the will, we cease to be an individual—for it is constantly maintained willing that supports the individuality—this eye remains over: it is now pure awareness, a consciousness no longer individualized and consequently beyond happiness or suffering, “the pure subject of will-less knowing,” as Schopenhauer puts it. A few pages later we read of “the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object is the supporter of this whole world” and again of “the eternal subject of pure knowing,” quite distinct from the ordinary willing self, which is “reduced to nothing.”

We do not have to look far for Indian equivalents to these ideas. First, the idea that in ceasing to will, we cease in effect to be a human individual and in consequence no longer suffer. The idea of a transformation of this kind energizes the whole of Indian religious and philosophical thought. To take but one example, the *Brhadâranyaka Upaniṣad*, citing a still older source, tells us
that “When all the desires that dwell in his heart are gone, then he, having been mortal, becomes immortal, and attains Brahman in this very body.”

Second, the expressions “the eternal world-eye” and “the one eye of the world” recall the concept of the Witness (sāksin) or witness-consciousness (sākṣi-caitanya), which, as we noted in chapter 7, is equated in Advaita Vedānta with the Self or ātman. In his commentary on the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad passage cited above, Śaṅkara writes that Brahman, the Supreme Self, is “the Light of Pure Intelligence, the light of the ātman, illumined by which the universe gets its eye of knowledge.” Again, he writes in his independent work, Upadeśa Sāhasrī, of the Self “being the Witness (sāksin) of all other cognitions, it is itself changeless and omnipresent.” This is the same imagery that Schopenhauer employs; indeed, very near the beginning of his principle work we find him writing about “the subject” in terms that are almost identical to those that Advaitins make use of in relation to the Self or ātman: “That which knows all things and is known by none is the subject. It is accordingly the supporter of the world, the universal condition of all that appears, of all objects, and it is always presupposed; for whatever exists, exists only for the subject.”

It is possible that this may be an instance of the direct influence of the Oupnek’hat upon Schopenhauer, for a few lines later he refers to the subject as “the knower never the known,” adding that it does not lie within the forms of knowledge (i.e., space and time) but on the contrary is presupposed by them, “and hence neither plurality nor its opposite, namely unity, belongs to it. We never know it, but it is precisely that which knows wherever there is knowledge.” These words are strongly reminiscent of the doctrine of the non-duality of the supreme reality, from which Advaita Vedānta takes its name. They remind one of celebrated passages in the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad (and hence in the Oupnek’hat) such as, “You cannot see that which is the witness of vision. . . . You cannot think that which is the thinker of thought; you cannot know that which is the knower of knowledge,” and “This Immutable . . . is never seen but is the Witness (drasṛ). . . . It is never known, but is the Knower.”

It is true that while the Witness of Advaita Vedānta is equated with ātman and therefore with final reality, Schopenhauer’s pure subject of
knowing or “eternal world-eye,” as we saw in the previous chapter, is not quite the better consciousness; it knows the Ideas and must therefore be subject to the primary and most basic division of consciousness into subject and object. Nevertheless, the pure subject of knowing is close to the better consciousness, the nearest we can come to it—the representative, as it were, of the better consciousness in the field open to cognitive thought. Here again we find something analogous in Indian thought, for a distinction is made between the meditative state in which consciousness of the world remains but its fundamental unreality is experienced (savikalpa samādhi) and, on the other hand, that still higher state when there is no longer any consciousness of the world and the subject-object division is entirely overcome (nirvikalpa samādhi).

Whether, or to what extent, Schopenhauer was drawing on the Oupnek’hat when he formulated the idea of the “world-eye” is not our concern here; it is clearly a possibility since he was reading Anquetil-Duperron’s text during the period when The World as Will and Representation was taking shape in his mind. The important point in the present context is that at the time he was writing his principal work, Schopenhauer was aware of a reality—the “one eye of the world”—which is anterior to the will.

The “Better Will”

We find confirmation in the Manuscript Remains that Schopenhauer accepted the reality of a metaphysical existence lying beyond the will-to-live. In 1814, while still in Weimar, he refers not only to a “better consciousness” but also to a “better will.” Both are associated with “unison and harmony, the eternal keynotes of creation.”40 A little later he writes: “The double nature of our consciousness is revealed to some extent practically in the double nature of the will which has a twofold supreme good whereof the one . . . is unattainable unless the other be given up and wholly disregarded.”41 Here we see that not only does consciousness have opposed and opposite aspects, empirical and “better,” but that this is reflected in willing. This too has a “double nature,” and Schopenhauer may have had in mind Böhme’s doctrine
of two wills, an “own-will” (eigener Wille) directed outward and a “resigned will” (gelassener Wille) yielded entirely up to God.\textsuperscript{42}

It may be thought that the idea of two wills, or two kinds of willing, is an early notion later discarded, but this is not so. Thirty years later, at the end of the second volume of \textit{The World as Will and Representation}, after asserting once again that his philosophy is immanent and “arrives at no conclusions as to what exists beyond all possible experience,” we find Schopenhauer wondering “from what this will has sprung, which is free to affirm . . . or to deny itself,” and posing the pertinent question: “What would I be, if I were not the will-to-live?”\textsuperscript{43} Later still, in \textit{Parerga and Paralipomena}, the idea of two opposed wills, or rather one will with two opposed motions, is again present. Schopenhauer suggests that that which produces the phenomenon of the world must also be capable of not doing so and of remaining at rest. If there is an “expansion” that is the will-to-live, so too there is a “contraction” that is the will-not-to-live, and he adds, “As we know this being, this essence, the will, as thing-in-itself merely in and through the act of willing, we are incapable of saying or comprehending what it still is or does after it has given up that act.”\textsuperscript{44} This implies that the willing that we know, the will-to-live, is not a principle distinct from final reality but an aspect of a greater whole—in some unfathomable way, an expression of final reality, an aspect of its total nature.\textsuperscript{45}

Is this, perhaps, the reason why what appeared to many observers as the flagrant contradiction involved in the doctrine of the self-denial of the will did not trouble Schopenhauer—and why he never bothered to respond properly to those who drew attention to it (in the passage from \textit{Parerga and Paralipomena} just cited he speaks of “certain silly objections” that have been raised)? Is it because it was evident to him that the will that is denied, the will that is the metaphysical core of the network of representations forming the empirical world, is only a particular mode, a limited aspect, of a final reality or “better will” that is anterior to and greater than it? This ultimate subject both affirms \textit{and} denies the will. “The subject of these two acts,” he writes, “is one and the same and consequently, as such, is not annihilated either by the one act or the other.”\textsuperscript{46} Denial of the will is not the annihilation
of any substance, Schopenhauer asserts here; it is merely ceasing from the act of willing, the denial of one particular form or mode assumed by that subject that is final reality. In *The World as Will and Representation* he writes: “However much my individual existence [i.e., the will-to-live], like the sun, outshines everything for me, at bottom it appears only as an obstacle which stands between me and the knowledge of the true extent of my being. . . . I believe that, at the moment of dying, we become aware that a mere illusion has limited our existence to our person.”

As in the greater part of Buddhist thought, final reality remains in Schopenhauer’s published writings without a name. Its existence is merely implied. The expression “denial of the will” tells us nothing of what it is that overcomes and replaces the will. Instead, it keeps attention focused on the latter principle, in accordance with Schopenhauer’s view that “Philosophy can never do more than interpret and explain what is present and at hand; it can never do more than bring to the distinct, abstract knowledge of the faculty of reason the inner nature of the world.” This restriction had consequences for Schopenhauer’s system. Because he could neither describe nor give a name to what lay beyond the will, he was unable to articulate in any way the relation between the two principles. As a result, his writing at this point becomes pervaded by a certain vagueness and uncertainty, in marked contrast to its usual clarity. It is of course true that the question regarding the relation of the principle of manifestation to final reality is transcendental in nature, since it presupposes causality and this arises only with manifestation—the relation is the ultimate mystery that no philosophy can solve. Nevertheless, this is an instance in which the thought of India, with its use of mythicized forms such as those of Śiva and Śakti to express ideas that cannot be fully rationalized can, if not explain, at least help us to conceptualize more clearly an area that Schopenhauer left in shadow.
Schopenhauer and Indian Thought

We are near the end of our exploration of Schopenhauer’s ideas in relation to the thought of India, and it is time to survey the ground we have covered. What are the principal results of our inquiry?

In the three initial chapters we saw that Schopenhauer believed that a notable resemblance existed between the epistemological idealism of Kant, which provided the starting point for his own philosophy, and Indian ideas then becoming known to Europe concerning the illusory nature of empirical reality. As a result he studied Indian thought in both its Hindu and Buddhist forms throughout his life, doing so with considerable commitment and obtaining, from secondary sources and by the standards of the day, an impressive knowledge.

We then turned to the question of possible affinities between Indian thought and the two main pillars of Schopenhauer’s system, the concepts of the world as representation and as will. In chapters 5–8 we examined the doctrine of representation, together with doctrines advanced by the Mādhyamika school within Buddhism (and thereafter generally accepted within the Mahāyāna) and by Advaitins within Hinduism. We found that for the two groups of Indian thinkers the empirical world, while not unreal in an absolute sense since it exists in the conditioned consciousness of the beings that experience it, is devoid of a true and inherent reality of its own (svabhāva). For Schopenhauer too the world is not the objective reality existing independently of the observer that it seems to be; there is and can be no object without a subject; perceived objects, and matter itself, result from a priori knowledge of the forms of intuition (time and space) and of the law of causality. Objects have no essence independent of mental perception; they are subjective and ideal, creations of the mind—or, in Schopenhauer’s termi-
nology, of the understanding (Verstand). The empirical world is shaped by mind and does not exist as an independent, self-subsisting reality.

We saw that among both Buddhist and Hindu thinkers this understanding of the world resulted in a doctrine of fundamental importance, that of the Two Truths—the provisional truth of empirical reality and, contrasting with this, truth absolute. Schopenhauer reaches a broadly similar conclusion, but by means of different arguments developed from within the European idealist tradition. A teaching of different levels of reality, he argues, is implicit in Plato’s Myth of the Cave, while Kant’s outstanding contribution was to demonstrate with a new clarity and certainty the separation of the ideal from the real—of the phenomenon from the thing-in-itself, and thus of the realm of appearance from the metaphysical reality out of which it arises. Thus there exist, for Schopenhauer as for the Indians, two levels or degrees of “truth,” that of empirical reality and that of absolute reality.¹ It follows that the reality-status of the world cannot be determined, since it depends on the standpoint from which one views it. Here again there is agreement. The empirical world is for Schopenhauer an “appearance-world” (Erscheinungswelt), neither fully real nor altogether unreal; and it is said by the Indian philosophers to be indescribable (anirvacanīya), comparable to a mirage or to the scenes created by the magic (māyā) of a juggler or magician—the magician in question being, of course, mind.

The convergence of European thought, and especially that of Kant, with an Indian position established more than a millennium earlier did not go unremarked. We saw that Anquetil-Duperron and Sir William Jones both noted it, and it was an important factor attracting Schopenhauer and his contemporaries to the Oupnek’hat. Our reexamination of the issue, in the light of work done on Indian thought in more recent times, has suggested that the affinities are both more numerous and more interesting than previously supposed, extending well beyond the general similarity of outcome noted by earlier researchers to significant points of detail. The main points were summarized in chapter 8 and need not be repeated. However, especially noteworthy is the remarkable resemblance that Schopenhauer’s conclusion, that “always and everywhere each thing exists merely by virtue of another thing” and that “everything that exists simultaneously in space and time,
and hence everything that proceeds from causes or motives, has only a relative existence, is only through and for another like itself,” bears to the fully developed Mādhyamika doctrine of dependent origination—a teaching of which he can have had no knowledge at the time of writing. Since this aspect of Schopenhauer’s philosophy stems directly from the central tradition of European idealism, this constitutes a link between Indian and Western thought of unusual interest.

We then focused in chapters 9–13 on a matter that has received little scholarly attention: the question of whether the second main pillar of Schopenhauer’s philosophy—its metaphysical principle, will—may also have equivalents in Indian thought. Our findings were summarized in chapter 13, but let us glance back at the more important points. We found that Schopenhauer’s will (when this word is used, as it usually is, to designate the force or power that brings into being and sustains the empirical world) has significant equivalents in both Hindu and Buddhist thought. The unseen, subtle forces or “seeds” (karmic impressions and formative forces) that give rise to the manifested world, and in Hindu thought appear collectively under such names as “the Golden Embryo” (Hiranyagarbha), Prajāpati, Brahmā, or again in the image of the inverted World Tree of the Bhagavad Gītā, perform a role comparable to that of the Ideas as conceived by Schopenhauer. Just as it is the will, manifesting in successive stages through the Ideas, that brings the world of empirical experience into being, it is the Golden Embryo that energizes (as prāṇa, the Cosmic Vital Energy) and shapes (as Mahat, or Cosmic Intellect) the manifested world. Behind this creative force there stands a yet more fundamental principle out of which it emerges. This is the Unmanifest (Avyakta), and we saw that it corresponds closely to the ultimate nature of will, which in Schopenhauer’s system lies beyond the limits of all possible knowledge.

In the case of Buddhism, we found among the Yogācāra thinkers an essentially similar view but conceived more in psychological terms than in those of cosmology. It is the mass of accumulated karmic impressions (vāsanās) lodged in the store-consciousness, and the formative forces (samskāras) arising out of these, that produce and maintain the world-appearance in the minds of living beings. We saw that the activity and outcome of these pow-
erful forces are comparable in several significant respects to that of the will as described by Schopenhauer—a remarkable convergence, since Yogācāra thought was unknown to Europe until many decades after the philosopher had formed his ideas.

When we turned, in the second part of chapter 13, to the mythological forms in which Hindu thought is so often clothed, a further striking point of contact with the doctrine of the will became evident. This was the old and widely diffused concept of śakti—unknown to Schopenhauer at the time of formulating his doctrine—the “power” or “energy” that, emanating in a mysterious fashion from ultimate reality (hypostatized as Śiva), brings about and maintains in being the whole of manifestation. Much more could be said on this issue, especially if one were one to turn to the teachings of Kashmiri Śaivism, but even within the limits of the present study it is apparent that the names and attributes of the Hindu goddesses who personify diverse aspects of the Great Goddess, Mahāśakti, bear significant resemblances to Schopenhauer’s descriptions of the will.

Thus we find that there exists in both Hindu and Buddhist thought, and under several different forms, a concept of primary importance that has much in common with Schopenhauer’s will. This is a fact to which insufficient attention has been paid. It reveals that the long-recognized similarity of the doctrine of representation to the Indian concept of māyā is matched by a second affinity—one of which Schopenhauer himself was largely unaware—that between will and the Hindu and Buddhist ideas referred to above. It is true, as noted at the beginning of this work, that Indian thought is so rich and many-faceted that it is possible to find within it a counterpart for almost any idea one wishes; but māyā and śakti are not peripheral notions; they are central ideas, among the most characteristic and pervasive to be found in the entire range of Indian thought. The fact that they correspond—not of course in every detail but in significant respects—to the twin pillars of Schopenhauer’s system is therefore worth noting. It shows that the convergence between Schopenhauer’s thought and Indian philosophical and religious ideas is more comprehensive than has been supposed, since it extends to both the epistemological and the metaphysical aspects of his philosophy. It is not a matter of a few coincidences, nor, so far as we can tell
in the present state of our knowledge, the result of influence. The affinities appear to be almost organic in nature and to be growths of the same kind.

We should, however, note two significant differences between the metaphysical teaching of Schopenhauer and that of the Indians. First, in Hindu thought the principle of manifestation, mythologized as Mahāśakti, is thought of as essentially ambivalent in nature—a recognition not only of the suffering and death that life entails, but also of its positive and creative aspects. For Schopenhauer, on the other hand, the will is almost entirely negative; it is the cause of suffering, the “wrong direction.” In this respect he is closer to Buddhism, which similarly emphasizes the sorrowful nature of worldly existence, than to the popular forms of Hinduism for which Śakti is a central concept. Second, Śakti is invariably seen in relation to a superior principle (hypostatized as Śiva or other male deities), but this is not the case with will—here again Schopenhauer is closer to Buddhism, which also names no positive final reality. If Schopenhauer is to be criticized, it is not on the ground that his description of the will as the energy producing the manifest world is unconvincing—on the contrary, the case he makes is a strong one. Nor is it because the outcome of his thought is pessimistic with regard to life in the world, though some may feel it overemphatic in this respect, and it is certainly narrower than the idea of śakti. The true ground for criticism is that the will, in the work he published during his lifetime, is treated in isolation. It is not seen, as śakti is, in relation to a principle of ultimate reality, and for this reason seems to loom disproportionately large. It is an incomplete view, and Schopenhauer’s philosophy has in consequence been likened to a pyramid, the apex of which is missing. No doubt Schopenhauer would answer that this is the incompleteness of philosophy itself, which, confined within the limits of the intellect, cannot do more than describe the world and the forces moving it: “We . . . who consistently occupy the standpoint of philosophy, must be satisfied here with negative knowledge, content to have reached the final landmark of the positive,” as he puts it.

We have seen that both Schopenhauer and the Indians arrive at a metaphysical principle (will, store-consciousness, causal body) that gives rise to the world of phenomena and yet, in its ultimate nature, is itself unmanifested and unknowable. The question then arises: Is this hidden principle
ultimate reality? Advaita Vedānta, and Hinduism in general, clearly teach that it is not final reality but rather a limiting adjunct (*upādhi*) superimposed upon the ultimate reality of pure consciousness—Brahman-ātman or, when seen in relation to śakti, Śiva. Mahāyāna teaching, and Buddhism as a whole, are more reticent, but appear to imply a final reality—an “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*) or “Suchness” (*tathatā*)—lying somehow beyond the source from which manifestation arises. What, then, is Schopenhauer’s position: is will, that “love insatiable and invincible” of which he wrote in a youthful poem, for him final and absolute reality? Or is it a principle that falls short of this?

In the final chapters of our study we addressed this question (illegitimate, of course, if we remain within the confines of philosophy as Schopenhauer defined it). In chapter 14 we examined the status of the will. We noted that to many commentators it has appeared that the denial of the will, when combined with the assertion that the will is the thing-in-itself, presents an insuperable difficulty since nothing can deny itself, and yet there is no doubt that Schopenhauer does frequently speak of the self-denial of the will. We saw that the difficulty is resolved once we understand that he uses the word *will* to indicate two different things. In the great majority of cases, he means by it the metaphysical force that gives rise to and maintains in being the empirical world and to which he frequently refers as the will-to-live. But he also uses the word *will*, on comparatively rare occasions, to designate that which is ultimately and finally real, a further principle, without which denial of the will could not take place. Of this ultimate principle—“the will-in-itself, prior to all phenomenon,” as he calls it in one place—we can have no positive knowledge since the forms of knowledge relate only to appearances; for this reason Schopenhauer, adhering to Kantian principles and perhaps fortified by the Buddha’s example, chose not to discuss it in his published works.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the outcome of his philosophy, that our highest purpose is to deny the will, that he had in mind the existence of some principle anterior even to will. He specifically leaves open the possibility of such a reality, and if we look closely at his thought, we perceive that he does not really observe the limits within which he restricts philosophy. In spite of his reluctance to discuss the question of final reality, the whole of Schopenhauer’s work from the early *Manuscript Remains* to the essays in
Parerga and Paralipomena implies the idea of something ultimately real and infinitely desirable that lies beyond the will and stands to it as an opposite pole. This idea hovers in the background of all his writings; they cannot be fully understood without taking account of it. Occasionally it emerges into the open, as when he speaks of “the being-in-itself of all things” (das Wesen an sich aller Dinge), to which time, space, and plurality must be foreign, and tells us that in consequence “where the being-in-itself of things begins, knowledge ceases.” He recognizes that beyond the point at which conceptual thought comes to an end, there lies a further reality—“Behind our existence lies something else that becomes accessible to us only by our shaking off the world,” he writes at one point.

What, then, is the nature of this final principle, and is there in Indian thought anything to which it may relate? In chapter 15 we saw that in the early Manuscript Remains Schopenhauer named this principle positively, calling it the better consciousness, but that he did not make use of this expression in the writings he published, replacing it by the negative expression denial of the will. The will, on the other hand, finds clear expression in the form of the empirical self, called in the Manuscript Remains sometimes “the subject of knowing,” sometimes “the subject of willing”; this is the individual subject who knows the world and participates in it—the equivalent of the “living being” or jīva of Hinduism, and of the illusory self or ātman as this word is generally used in Buddhist contexts. But we saw that Schopenhauer distinguished two more advanced states of being beyond this. The expression pure subject of knowing (sometimes pure knowing being) describes the first of these, in which awareness of the empirical world remains but its reality is sublated. This state is entirely different from “the subject of knowing” referred to above, for the pure subject of knowing has stepped beyond willing: the world is no longer seen in relation to the individual self and its interests; it is experienced in its purity, and in consequence “the perceived individual thing is raised to the Idea of its species, and the knowing individual to the pure subject of will-less knowing.” Individuality is forgotten, and with it is abolished that knowledge that comprehends only relations in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason. It is a state sometimes glimpsed by artists and poets, known to the saints, spoken of by the mystics.
This, we saw, allows better consciousness (or denial of the will in subsequent writings) to take on a stricter meaning than it had at first held for Schopenhauer. It now stands for the second and higher state, “the supreme happiness,” in which not only will but even knowledge itself has vanished.\textsuperscript{12} The subject-object division of consciousness is entirely transcended and the world ceases to appear: “Denial, abolition, turning of the will are also abolition and disappearance of the world, of its mirror,” we read near the end of \textit{The World as Will and Representation}. “If a contrary point of view were possible for us it would cause the signs to be changed, and would show what exists for us as nothing, and this [present] nothing as that which exists.”\textsuperscript{13} Here the human condition, and even the individual condition as such, has been transcended so that what now exists for us is known to be nothing and what at present seems to be nothing is experienced as the truly real. “We lack concepts for what the will now is,” Schopenhauer writes;\textsuperscript{14} and this is the transformative change of consciousness from the everyday truth to the ultimate truth that, for the European philosopher as for Indian thinkers, is salvation.

From the standpoint of our present inquiry it must be admitted that the disappearance of better consciousness and its replacement by denial of the will appear as something of a mixed blessing, for the latter expression can apply to either of the two advanced states of consciousness just outlined and tends to obscure the difference between them. Even so, the distinction remained and can be traced later in Schopenhauer’s thought. We see it reflected clearly enough in two passages from the fourth book of volume 1 of \textit{The World as Will and Representation}. First, the lower of the two states, that of the pure subject of knowing:

How blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but for ever, indeed completely extinguished, except for the last glimmering spark that maintains the body and is extinguished with it. Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has at last completely conquered, is then left only as pure knowing being, as the undimmed mirror of the world. Nothing can distress or alarm him any more; nothing can any longer move him; for he has cut all the thousand threads of
willing which hold us bound to the world, and which as craving, fear, envy, and anger drag us here and there in constant pain. He now looks back calmly and with a smile on the phantasmagoria of this world.

. . . Life and its forms merely float before him as a fleeting phenomenon, as a light morning dream to one half-awake, through which reality already shines, and which can no longer deceive.\textsuperscript{15}

And a few pages later, the state that lies beyond even this: “With the free denial, the surrender, of the will, all those phenomena also are now abolished. . . . Finally, the universal forms of this phenomenon, time and space, and also the last fundamental form of these, subject and object; all these are abolished with the will. No will: no representation, no world.”\textsuperscript{16}

Here then are the two highest levels of consciousness as we found them in the \textit{Manuscript Remains}. First, that which Schopenhauer called the \textit{pure subject of knowing}, in which the will has been completely overcome, except for “a last glimmering spark” by which the body is maintained; in this state the faculties continue to function and the world is still apprehended—yet we see through its empirical reality to the Ideas behind it, so that we experience it only as “a fleeting phenomenon . . . a light morning dream.”\textsuperscript{17} In the second passage all this too is annihilated and we—no longer individual, no longer human—pass into a totally other state of being, the \textit{better consciousness} or final denial of the will. Here there is no subject and no object. What had hitherto appeared as the world is found to be an empty nothing, a creation of the mind, of the conditioned consciousness, while what had seemed nothing, because it lies beyond the forms of knowledge, is experienced as the truly real.

We may see how closely Schopenhauer’s thought approaches at this point to that of India if we compare his description of the pure subject of knowing, in the first of the two passages cited above, to the following words of the distinguished Japanese scholar of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Gadjin Nagao. These describe the sage who has attained the “purified or consummated nature” (\textit{parinispanna-svabhāva}) of the Yogācārins, in which the world is seen in its purity and free of the “imagined nature” (\textit{parikalpita-svabhāva}) that we habitually superimpose upon it:
The sages and enlightened ones also live in this one unchanged world. . . . For them, too, summer is hot and winter is cold; willows are green and flowers are red. Due to their deep insight and detachment, however, only the pure and real world is manifested to them; the imagined world does not appear. It is in this sense that the one, unchanging world is referred to as possessing a “consummated” \([\text{parinispānna}]\) nature. It is consummated in the sense that it has assumed a nature of perfection owing to the long, assiduous training of the enlightened sages. In other words, the consummated world is established anew by them. It is not established independently outside of this world; it is the very same world, thoroughly transformed and purified.\(^{18}\)

As for the second and higher of the two states, we may compare it with the words of Edward Conze: “The chief message of the *Prajñāpāramitā* books is that perfect wisdom can be attained only by the complete and total extinction of all self-interest, and only in an emptiness in which everything that we see around us has disappeared like an insignificant dream.”\(^{19}\) It is to this state, in which the division between subject and object no longer exists, that the final words of the *Heart Sutra*, “Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond,” refer;\(^{20}\) and Schopenhauer points out at the end of *The World as Will and Representation*, in a note added shortly before his death, that the final, apparently negative outcome of his doctrine, the complete abolition of the will, corresponds to the “beyond all knowledge” of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts.\(^{21}\) The parallel holds when we turn to Hindu thought. The first of the states described by Schopenhauer, that of the pure subject of knowing, corresponds closely to the *jīvanmukta*, the sage liberated in life but nevertheless still aware of and apparently active in the world, and the second to that of *videhamukti* (final and total liberation at the time of death) as taught in the Saṃkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta systems. Or again, the distinction Schopenhauer makes is analogous to the “contemplative absorption with and without knowledge” of Indian thought—the *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta samādhi* of the Yoga tradition or the *savikalpa samādhi* and *nirvikalpa samādhi* of the Vedānta.
One further point should be mentioned. We saw in chapter 15 that Schopenhauer states that consciousness “can appear otherwise than as subject,” and that the better consciousness has no object but nevertheless is still consciousness. These statements belong to the time when he had left Weimar and was reading the Oupnek’hat in Dresden, and it is possible that they may reflect its influence. Whether this is so or not, they represent an interesting departure from Western modes of thought, for which a consciousness that has no object is simply a contradiction in terms—Copleston, for example, writes, “All awareness is awareness of something thus implying distinction.”

Here we come upon a significant factor that separates the Western from the Indian philosophical tradition: the Western tradition generally makes no distinction between thought or knowledge, on the one hand, and consciousness or awareness on the other, while for Indian thinkers this distinction is vital and fundamental. The notion of a pure or unconditioned consciousness—consciousness itself, entirely without objects—lies at the very heart of Advaita Vedānta and of the Upaniṣadic thought that preceded it; it is precisely this, in fact, that is the Self or ātman. In the case of Buddhism something of the same sort is implied in spite of the doctrine of anātma—for without it nirvāṇa could only be a doctrine of nihilism—but it is unnamed, at least until such concepts as the Buddha-nature and tathāgatagarbha appear in the later Mahāyāna. It is therefore of considerable interest to find Schopenhauer in agreement with the Indians and at odds with the Western philosophical tradition on this crucial point, constituting perhaps the most significant single discord between Western and Asian thought. He states clearly, as we have seen, that a consciousness exists that is prior to the distinction of subject and object. It is true that he asserts frequently that there can be no knowledge without an object (which, indeed, is obvious), but this is by no means the same as asserting that consciousness must always be intentional.

Schopenhauer’s conclusions regarding salvation (Erlösung) also coincide with those of the Indians. For Śaṅkara it is knowledge (experiential knowledge, jñāna, not mere theory) that brings about release, freeing us from the grip of nescience (avidyā). It is the consummated knowledge that we are not the empirical individual (jīva) but the transcendental ātman that “burns”...
the karmic seeds and makes them impotent, like grains of wheat heated in cooking. At first it appears that Schopenhauer’s position is different from this and that it is a change of willing, not of knowledge, that brings salvation. But if we look closer, we see that for him too this changed willing is predicated upon a change of knowledge: “The will itself cannot be abolished by anything except knowledge. . . . Only in consequence of this knowledge can the will abolish itself, and thus end the suffering that is inseparable from its phenomenon,” he writes, and a few pages later: “The state in which the character is withdrawn from the power of motives does not proceed directly from the will, but from a changed form of knowledge.”

In the second (1844) edition of his principal work we find Schopenhauer borrowing the imagery of Indian thought in order to describe his own position: referring to the person in whom the will is finally overcome, he writes “In him knowledge has, so to speak, burnt up and consumed the will, so that there is no longer any will.” If we accept the arguments advanced earlier that Schopenhauer’s will is analogous to the powerful volitional factors (karmic seeds, store-consciousness, causal body, śakti, etc.) that in Indian thought condition consciousness, this assertion is identical to the teaching of Śaṅkara, that it is knowledge that destroys the ignorance or avidyā that binds us to rebirth and the empirical world. Metaphysical knowledge liberates, Advaitins maintain, because it brings about a change of identity: from the individual self (jīva), subject always to change and thus to fear and desire, to the changeless and therefore blissful consciousness in which subject and object no longer exist—just as for Schopenhauer salvation lies in a transformation of identity from the relentlessly willing empirical consciousness to the denial of the will and its replacement by the better consciousness.

Of this final state no positive description can be given, and the similarity of denial of the will to the “not this, not this” (neti neti) of the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad and to the “emptiness” (śūnyatā) of Mahāyāna Buddhism is evident. It is interesting to find that the Japanese scholar, Nagao, makes use (quite independently of Schopenhauer) of an image we have already encountered in the writing of the latter. Describing the “turning about of the basis” (āśraya-parāvṛtti) that in the Yogācāra tradition is identical with liberation,
he writes: “If we were to imagine a magnetic field flowing through man’s being, then the āśraya-parāvytti would be the flow of this magnetic field in the opposite direction from its usual flow.” Is this not the “changing of the signs” resulting from the adoption of a contrary point of view of which Schopenhauer speaks at the close of the first volume of The World as Will and Representation?
Chapter 1
Introduction

4. Hecker’s book was published in 1897. See bibliography.
6. The Swiss scholar Urs App (2008, 8) has drawn attention to the need for such a distinction in comparative studies.
7. See Berger 2004, passim.
8. *Taittiriya Up.* 3.1.1; Safranski (1990, 202) draws attention to this passage.
11. App has taken the lead in this work; one awaits with interest his results.
17. Radhakrishnan 1940, 347.

Chapter 2
Schopenhauer in Context: The “Oriental Renaissance”

2. Several Jesuit missionaries had studied Sanskrit during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but their work bore no fruit and was unknown at the time; see Halbfass 1990, 38–45.


7. Schlegel 1849, 522.


12. *WWR*, 2:627–628. For the effect somewhat later upon Max Müller of the idea, communicated via C. Bunsen and E. Burnouf, that Christianity was anticipated and prepared for, at least to some extent, in the religious thought of Asia and particularly of India, see Trompf 1978, 14–18, 39–43, 79–84.


17. *FR*, 179–180. This and the passages below were added in 1847.


29. *WWR*, 1:82.


32. *MSR*, 1:520.


34. See, for example, Deussen 1917, 428–429, 513.
35. Mockrauer 1928, 6; Dauer 1969, 5; Halbfass 1990, 105 (also 436); Magee 1997, 15; Abelsen 1993, 255; Conze 1967a, 222.

Chapter 3
Schopenhauer’s Indian Sources: Hinduism

11. WWR, 2:629, 475.
14. For the full text in German and English, see App 2008, 45–46.
16. See, for example, WWR, 2:473.
17. There are four mentions of the Bhagavad Gītā in The World as Will and Representation and one in On the Basis of Morality. Schlegel’s translation is quoted in WWR, 2:326 and BM, 214; both passages are from chapter 13 of the Gītā.
18. WWR, 2:623.
27. Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is a last echo of this tradition.

28. These texts were the *Corpus Hermeticum*. They were called by Ficino the *Pomandres* (or *Pimander*), which is really the name of the first treatise of the collection. Yates 1978, 14.


30. Copernicus refers to Hermes Trismegistus as an authority supporting heliocentrism: “In the middle of all is the seat of the Sun. . . . Trismegistus called him the visible God.” Copernicus 1976, 50.


32. Yates 1978, 176. An example was the group in Antwerp known as the Schola Caritatis or Family of Love. It counted among its members the celebrated printer Christopher Plantin, the geographer Abraham Ortelius, and very possibly the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder; see Snyder 1985, 503, 510.

33. Isaac Casaubon showed in 1614 that the *Corpus Hermeticum* was not written in ancient Egypt but in post-Christian times. It has since been argued that the ideas contained in the texts may nonetheless be ancient and authentic.

34. De Maistre 1993, 40.


37. This occurred in 1488; see Cust 1901, 23. See also Yates 1978, 42–43, and frontispiece.


42. Examples are found in *WWR*, 1:xv, 383, 417; *WWR*, 2:475.


44. Gwinner 1963, 185 (author’s translation).


47. Halbfass (1990, 64–66) writes that the *Oupnek’hat* did more to awaken the modern interest in Indian philosophy than did William Jones’s works but was not important for the development of scientific Indology. Arthur Waley (1963, 27) writes, “It is instructive to reflect that this work, which had so profound an influence on European thought, ought not, according to the current laws of scholarship, ever to have been undertaken.”


50. Schopenhauer is probably right about this. Hasrat writes, “Dara Shikūh’s
knowledge of [the] Sanskrit language, notwithstanding the fact that he employed a large number of Sanskrit Pandits in the translation of the Upanishads, appears to be very considerable.” See Hasrat 1982, 212–213.

51. See the footnote Schopenhauer added to On the Basis of Morality (BM, 207), in which he compares the Oupnek’hat favorably with later translations made by Ram-mohan Roy, Poley, Röer, and even Colebrooke, claiming that it “is based on an exact and perfect understanding of the words.”

52. PP, 2:396.

53. J. J. Bochinger (1831, 12, note 1), to whom Schopenhauer refers for support at BM, 207, note 8, writes that Anquetil’s Latin translation is “rigorously exact” (rigoureusement verbale).

54. Dārā’s interesting and important preface to the Sirr-i Akbar is reproduced in the Persian original and in English translation in Hasrat 1982, 260–268; the claim to accuracy is on p. 266.


59. Hasrat 1982, 258, note 12. Cf. Halbfass (1990, 33), who writes that the Sirr-i Akbar is “the translation of fifty Upanisads . . . together with paraphrases and excerpts from commentaries which in various cases, though by no means throughout, can be traced back to Śamkara.”

60. PP, 2:398.

61. PP, 2:398.


63. PP, 2:396–397.

Chapter 4
Schopenhauer’s Indian Sources: Buddhism

1. Urs App discusses these notes, together with other sources for Schopenhauer’s early knowledge of Buddhism, in App 1998a and 1998b, to which the author is indebted. App points out that very little from Schopenhauer’s early notes on Buddhism appears in Hübscher’s edition of the Manuscript Remains.


3. Moreover, Hübscher’s statement is factually incorrect since Burnouf and Spence Hardy were certainly not ignorant of the teachings of Theravāda Buddhism.

4. See, for example, PP, 2:401, and the extensive and scholarly Buddhist bibliography given as a footnote in the chapter on “Sinology” in WN, 130–131.

6. This Sūtra was the first Mahāyāna text to be translated into a European language. It was initially translated into French by the Jesuit missionary Joseph de Guignes and published in 1756 as part of his *Histoire générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mongols, et des autres tartares occidentaux*. It was then retranslated into German by Carl Dähnert and first published in this form in 1768. For details see App 1998b, 42–45.

7. The reference in question appears in *WWR*, 1:389 and reads: “We see in the precepts of Fo that the Sannyasi, who is supposed to be without dwelling and entirely without property, is finally enjoined not to lie down too often under the same tree, lest he acquire a preference or inclination for it.” It corresponds to a passage in *Das Asiatische Magazin* 1 (1802): 156.

8. App 1998a, 20–21. Almost forty years later, in 1854, Schopenhauer included Buchanan’s essay in the revised list of recommended works on Buddhism he attached to the chapter on “Sinology” in *WN*, 131.

9. Schopenhauer himself comments on the meagre resources available for the study of Buddhism in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, writing in 1844 that “up till 1818, when my work appeared, there were to be found in Europe only a very few accounts of Buddhism, and those extremely incomplete and inadequate, confined almost entirely to a few essays in the earlier volumes of the *Asiatic Researches*, and principally concerned with the Buddhism of the Burmese. Only since that time has fuller information about this religion gradually reached us . . . so that I have been able to furnish a fairly numerous list of the best works on this religion in my book *On the Will in Nature* [in the note at *WN*, 130–131].” *WWR*, 2:169.

10. Bibliographic details of these works are given in the notes below.

11. This note in its original form is reproduced in App 1998b, 47, note 1.

12. Schopenhauer later omitted Rémuat’s work from the revised (1854) version of the list of recommended writings on Buddhism attached to the chapter on “Sinology”; see *WN*, 130, note 2.


15. In the bibliographical note of 1854 Schopenhauer calls Deshauterayes’s essay “an extremely fine biography of the Buddha”; *WN*, 131.

16. *Journal Asiatique* 7 (1825): 150–151 (author’s translation). Deshauterayes explains (p. 151) that “Fo” is not a proper name, as had been widely supposed, but a title of honor (un nom de dignité, un titre d’honneur). Since the Chinese have no “b” or
“d,” but use instead “f” and “p,” the title “Bouda” was corrupted first into “Foto” and then into “Fo.”


18. “Recherches sur la croyance et la doctrine des disciples de Fo,” *Journal Asiatique* 8 (1826); published in the numbers for January to April.

19. App 1998b, 47.


23. App 1998b, 47.


26. *WN*, 131. Schmidt’s books are listed as forming part of Schopenhauer’s library (*HN*, 5:345–347).


29. Author’s translations; see App 1998b, 51–52, for the German original. Schmidt’s lecture, “Über das Mahājāna und Pradschnā-Pāramita der Bauddhen,” was read to the St. Petersburg Academy in 1836 and published in 1840 in the *Mémoires* of the academy.


34. Even von Glasenapp (1960, 93–94) tends to make this assumption.

35. See the bibliographical note at *WN*, 130–131. Of Spence Hardy’s books (published in 1850 and 1853) Schopenhauer wrote: “These two excellent books, written after a stay of twenty years and from oral instruction from the priests in Ceylon, have given me more insight into the true nature of the Buddhist dogma than have any others”; Köppen’s *Die Religion des Buddha* (1857) is also highly praised. It is possible these books may have modified Schopenhauer’s understanding of Buddhism by placing more emphasis on the Pāli sources, but if this is so, it is not reflected in his writing, for he produced no new work after 1851.
36. WN, 133.


38. See, for example, the long and careful note on the etymology and meaning of the word nirvāṇa at WWR, 2:508–509. For the works on Asiatic religions in Schopenhauer’s library, together with some of his marginal remarks, see HN, 5:319–352.

39. Cited in Schopenhauer: Gespräche und Selbstgespräche, ed. E. Grisebach (Berlin: 1902); author’s translation. Another contemporary account of this Buddha is found at App 1998b, 54, note 1. Gwinner (1963, 186) also mentions the statue.


44. Droit 1989, 230. In his chapter “Une statuette tibétaine sur la cheminée” (pp. 220–238) Droit discusses the question of Schopenhauer’s “Buddhism,” pointing out that E. von Hartmann, among others, regarded Schopenhauer as a Buddhist. An article in La Revue des Deux Mondes in 1870, describing a visit to Schopenhauer in 1859, appeared under the title “A Contemporary Buddhist in Germany.”

45. Von Glasenapp 1960, 93–94, 100.

46. Conze 1967a, 222.

47. Dauer 1969, 38.

48. WWR, 2:169.

49. WN, 132–134.

50. Schopenhauer cites Buchanan’s essay “On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas” as an example.

51. FR, 187.

52. WN, 133.

Chapter 5

“Representation”: Schopenhauer and the Reality-Status of the World


2. Magee (1997, 442) refers to “a single Kantian-Schopenhauerian philosophy.” Schopenhauer’s confidence that he was the true successor of Kant has not gone unchallenged. Janaway (1999, 13) writes, “It should be apparent how un-Kantian a phi-
losopher he is. He uses Kant’s vocabulary pervasively, but the shape and motivation of his philosophy are very different.”

3. *WWR*, 1:82; emphasis in original.
15. *WWR*, 1:3.
30. See the remarks of Payne in his introduction to *The World as Will and Representation* (*WWR*, 1:vii).
32. *PP*, 1:84.
33. *PP*, 1:79.
37. *WWR*, 1:446.
38. *PP*, 1:82.
40. Kant 1992, 82.
42. *PP*, 1:80.
43. *PP*, 1:85–86.
44. *FR*, 72, 111; *WWR*, 1:25.
46. *FR*, 111.
47. *FR*, 104.
49. *FR*, 75–120.
50. *WWR*, 1:175.
52. *FR*, 77.
53. *FR*, 77–78; emphasis in original.
54. *FR*, 75, 84.
55. *VC*, 12.
57. *FR*, 104–105; *VC*, 12.
60. *FR*, 78.
63. *FR*, 81.
64. *FR*, 80–81.
68. *WWR*, 1:8–9.
69. *WWR*, 1:9–11; emphasis in original.
72. *FR*, 111.
73. *FR*, 113.
74. *FR*, 83.
Chapter 6
The Reality-Status of the Empirical World: The Mādhyamika Teaching

2. De Jong (1972a, 5) draws attention to “the very important role of mystical intuition in the Mādhyamika school.” See also Conze 1962, 244.
3. References to the Prasannapadā are given as Pras., followed by the page numbers of Poussin’s 1903–1913 edition of the text. For a translation of the most important chapters, see Sprung 1979. It is as a part of the Prasannapadā that the Sanskrit text of the Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā has been preserved. Apart from this, Nāgārjuna’s text is known in Chinese and Tibetan translations; a recent translation from the Tibetan is that of Garfield (1995).
7. Abhidharmakośa 3.28 (La Vallée Poussin 1971, 2:83); cited in Stcherbatsky 1988, 28. Conze (1967b, 663) gives an alternative form (evam sati idam boti) and points to the similarity to the Gnostic formula, “Because this is so, therefore this is so.”
8. Nyānatiloka 1938, 141.
11. MMK 2.4.18–19, as translated from the Tibetan text by Garfield (1995, 304). Sprung’s translation from the Sanskrit of the Prasannapadā is as follows: “We interpret the dependent arising of all things as the absence of being [śūnyatā] in them. Absence of being is a guiding, not a cognitive, notion, presupposing the everyday. It is itself the middle way. There is no element of existence [dharma] whatsoever which does not arise dependently; and so there is no element of existence whatsoever which is not devoid of self-existence (Sprung 1979, 238–239).
12. MMK 15.2 (Sprung 1979, 154).
18. Williams (2009, 77) writes that emptiness “is nothing more than the mere absence of inherently or intrinsically real existence.”
20. MMK 15.11.
21. BG 2.69, 7.25.

23. *Pras.* 492 (Sprung 1979, 230). The literal meaning of *samvrti* is “covering over,” hence the word implies the idea of concealing, covering up its own emptiness. An alternative and widely used Sanskrit term is *vyavahāra*, meaning transactional, determined by convention, relating to everyday life (Macdonell 1954, 304; Garfield 1995, 297, note 109).


27. *MMK* 18.9.


29. Murti 1960, 244.


31. Cf. Nagao 1992, 213: “Yet the truth of ultimate meaning cannot be expressed unless it relies on conventional truth: it must be expressed in words.”


38. *MMK* 24.11.


41. *Pras.* 496 (Sprung 1979, 233).

42. Williams 2009, 77.

43. *Pras.* 495 (Sprung 1979, 233). The quotation from Nāgārjuna is from *Ratnavālī* 2.19.

44. Conze 1962, 61.

Chapter 7
Advaita Vedānta: The World as Illusory Appearance

1. Strictly speaking, Kevalādvaita Vedānta, “the Vedānta of non-duality alone,” or unqualified monism.

2. It is interesting that centuries later, during the reign of Akbar and again at the time of Dārā Shikūh and Aurangzeb, many Muslims feared that Hinduism might one day absorb the faith of the Prophet as it had the energies of Buddhism.

3. Deussen 1912; first published in 1883.
4. Deussen 1912, 47–49.
5. Paul Hacker’s essay of 1950, “Eigentümlichkeiten der Lehre und Terminologie Śaṅkaras” (translation in Hacker 1995, 57–100) was the essential work. For a summary of his findings see SSB, 1:44–45.
7. Byhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 2.3.1; Munḍaka Upaniṣad 1.1.4 (Radhakrishnan’s translations).
9. GKBh. 4.36 (Nikhilānanda 1995, 252).
10. BGBh. 15.1–4 (SSB, 5:17).
11. The term māyā is found in the Upaniṣads and was also used in the sense of magical illusion by Mahāyāna writers. The word passed into the Oupnek’hāt, where it was seized upon by Schopenhauer; it was largely through his writings that it came to be one of the terms most closely associated in Europe and America with Indian thought.
14. Hacker (1995, 138) writes: “Radical monistic thought was never satisfied with simply, paradoxically, doing away with experience . . . as that which does not exist. Even in Gauḍapāda, Śaṃkara and Manḍanamiśra, the earliest Advaita philosophers . . . we find expressions which attribute to the world a certain degree of reality.”
15. BSBh. 2.1.27 (Thibaut 1904, 1:352).
16. BSBh. 2.1.14 (Thibaut 1904, 1:323–324).
17. BGBh. 13.2 (Śāstrī 1961, 326). Cf. BG 2.46, which compares the utility of the Vedas for a Brāhmaṇa who has attained enlightenment to that of a reservoir in a flooded land.
19. On Gauḍapāda’s date in relation to Śaṃkara, see SSB, 1:15–16, 26, and 53–54 (note 41).
20. MMK 1.1 (Sprung 1979, 36).
22. GK 4.5 (Nikhilānanda 1995, 219). While Buddhist writers favored the term ajāti-vāda (doctrine of no birth), Advaita Vedāntins often preferred ajāta-vāda (doctrine of the unborn one) to describe what is essentially the same teaching.
26. BG 2.1.14–16.
27. *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3.28.


31. *GK* 2.6 (Nikhilānanda 1995, 92).


33. *SSB*, 1:86.


36. *BSBh.* 2.1.18 (Thibaut 1904, 1:334).


38. *BSBh.* 2.1.19 (Thibaut 1904, 1:342).


40. This view is not a form of pantheism, for according to it Brahman is *more* than the world, just as the sea is more than its waves.

41. Dasgupta 1975, 2:43 (this opinion is contested by the Advaita school).

42. Dasgupta 1975, 4:68–69; Stutley and Stutley 1977, 266.

43. See, for example, *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 5.1.1 (Mādhavānanda 1993, 558–559).

44. *GKBh.* 4.90 (Nikhilānanda 1995, 301).

45. Hacker (1953, passim) shows that the term *vivarta* was introduced by later Advaitins.

46. See Dasgupta 1975 (2:38–42) for an extended criticism of Śaṅkara’s inconsistency in this respect.


48. *BSBh.* 2.1.27 (Thibaut 1904, 1:352).

49. *BSBh.* 2.1.14 (Thibaut 1904, 1:329–330). Śaṅkara gives many scriptural references in support of these assertions.

Chapter 8

Conclusions: Schopenhauer’s *Representation* and Its Indian Affinities


3. Cited in *WWR*, 1:4; the passage is from Jones’s essay “On the Philosophy of the Asiatics” (*Asiatick Researches* 4 [1794]: 164). It was added by Schopenhauer to the second edition of *WWR* in 1844.

5. _WWR_, 1:11, 12.

6. “Its existence hangs... on a single thread; and this thread is the actual consciousness in which it exists” (_WWR_, 2:3–4).


8. _WWR_, 1:8–9. See also _FR_, 118–119.

9. _BM_, 132.

10. _WWR_, 1:434.


12. Sprung 1979, 278; see under svabhāva.

13. Conze 1957, 133.


16. _Pras._ 2.64.

17. App 1998b, 51; see chapter 4 above.


19. Atwell 1995, 9–10 and 10–11. An earlier writer, Georg Simmel, describes Schopenhauer’s teaching in very similar terms: “Whatever object may appear before our eyes (the object of recognition), it appears only through the power of another object, which in turn is an element of the world only because of yet another object” (Simmel 1991, 17).

20. _FR_, 232. I have omitted the italics in Payne’s translation since they do not appear in the German text.


22. _GK_ 4.22.


25. Deussen 1912, 55.


27. _SSB_, 2:67.


32. _GKBh._ 2.17. Śaṁkara writes of this positive ground: “It is not known in its own nature, i.e., pure essence of knowledge itself, the non-dual ātman, quite distinct from such phenomenal characteristics indicated by the relation of cause and effect etc.,
which are productive of misery” (Nikhilānanda 1995, 108). Alston translates the passage as follows: “In its true nature, the Self is quite different from the evil empirical world of cause and effect. But it is not recognized in its true form as pure Consciousness and pure non-dual Being” (SSB, 2:258).

33. WWR, 1:4.
34. Fischer 1888, 18–19.
35. BM, 132.
37. WWR, 2:19.
38. WWR, 1:4.
39. “We assert, then, the empirical reality of space, as regards all possible outer experience; and yet at the same time we assert its transcendental ideality.” Kant 1992, 72 (A 28); emphasis in original.
40. WWR, 2:19.
42. WWR, 1:14–15.
43. WWR, 1:30.
44. WWR, 1:15.
45. WWR, 1:30–31.
46. WWR, 1:405. On this question, see Magee 1997, 159–160. Magee poses the question as follows: “How can a phenomenal world which contains within itself as material objects all the brains there are be accounted for as product of brain? . . . How is it possible for phenomena to impinge on our senses and thereby trigger off the intellectual process which creates the world in which they themselves exist?” His answer, in brief summary, is that since nothing can ever be both object of knowledge and subject of knowledge at the same time, there can never actually be an instance of circularity of this sort. Just as my eye can never see itself, my brain can never occur as a physical object in the world of its own construction. Others can experience my brain as an object, but I can experience it only from within (as various sorts of awareness) and never as a substantial thing in the objective world. Magee quotes Schopenhauer (WWR, 2:281): “All immediate existence is subjective; objective existence is present in the consciousness of another, and hence is only for this other.” In the case of the brain and organs of perception, Magee continues, immediate subjective existence and objective existence can never coexist in the same experience and therefore in the same empirical world: “There can be no empirical world in which both of them are (since the world of experience is always the creation of a subject) and this in spite of the fact that both of them are real. In formulating our problem we illegitimately postulated a single world containing both kinds of entity. . . . The secret presuppositions of realism had once again been smuggled into the formulation of a difficulty which could exist only if they were true.”
47. *WWR*, 1:15.
49. *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikās* 2.4.11 (Sprung 1979, 232).
52. We may recall that many years ago the distinguished German scholar of Indian thought Helmuth von Glasenapp pointed to the fact that the Vedānta, Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Schopenhauer all distinguish between a provisional truth “for us” and a truth “in itself,” which can be known only imperfectly by ordinary mortals. See von Glasenapp 1960, 82.
54. *WWR*, 1:419.
55. *BG* 2.16.
58. Sprung 1979, 276; see under śūnya.
60. Deussen 1912, 55, note 31.

Chapter 9
Schopenhauer’s Conception of the World as *Will*

23. *PP*, 1:81. For Kant the *moral law* is a datum that is accessible to practical reason. However, Schopenhauer dismisses this fact, writing, “It is true that [Kant] also took into consideration the will, yet not in theoretical but only in practical philosophy, which with him is quite separate from the former.”

45. *WN*, 59. Cf. *FW*, 93, where Schopenhauer writes, “The mind is designed only for practical and by no means for speculative purposes.”
51. WWR, 2:351, 359.
53. MSR, 1:512.
54. MSR, 1:2.46.
55. Oxenford 1853, 401. It was Oxenford’s article, published in the Westminster Review and subsequently in Germany, that first drew the attention of a wide public to Schopenhauer’s writings.
56. WWR, 1:117–118.
57. WWR, 2:296–297.
58. WWR, 1:109.
59. WWR, 1:156.
60. WN, 20.
61. WWR, 1:108.
62. WWR, 2:350.
63. WN, 20.
64. WWR, 2:293.
65. WWR, 2:299; WWR, 1:110.
66. WWR, 2:484.
67. WWR, 2:485.
68. WWR, 2:513–514.
69. WWR, 2:511.
70. MSR, 1:45.
71. WWR, 2:514.
73. WWR, 1:330.
74. WWR, 2:548–549.
75. WWR, 2:539.
76. WWR, 2:552–555
77. WWR, 2:554.
78. WWR, 2:555.
79. MSR, 1:183; WWR, 2:514.
80. PP, 2:414.
81. Schopenhauer gives a number of examples at WWR, 2:514–516.

Chapter 10
Schopenhauer: The Will in Its General Forms (Ideas)

1. WWR, 1:488.
2. Schopenhauer writes, “In spite of all inner harmony and relationship, they
sound so very different by reason of the extraordinarily different individualities of their authors” (WWR, 1:170).

3. MSR, 1:319 (paragraph 442).
4. WWR, 1:170.
7. WWR, 2:475.
8. PP, 1:89.
10. WWR, 2:484.
11. WWR, 1:169.
12. WWR, 1:176; WWR, 2:484.
13. WWR, 1:169.
14. MSR, 1:442 (paragraph 593).
15. WWR, 1:209.
17. WWR, 1:171–173.
19. WWR, 2:484.
20. WWR, 1:173.
21. See WWR, 2:479, 483; MSR, 1:442 (paragraph 593).
22. WWR, 2:483.
23. WWR, 2:510.
24. WWR, 2:483.
25. WWR, 2:479.
26. WWR, 2:479.
27. PP, 2:276.
29. WWR, 1:174–175.
30. WWR, 1:175.
31. WWR, 1:169.
32. WWR, 1:209.
33. WWR, 1:175.
34. WWR, 1:161.
35. WWR, 1:175.
37. WWR, 1:155.
38. WWR, 1:211; WWR, 2:365.
41. *WWR*, 1:210–211.
42. *WWR*, 1:155.
43. *WWR*, 1:156.
44. *WWR*, 1:175.
47. *WWR*, 1:145–146.

48. *WWR*, 1:131. The trace of individuality to which Schopenhauer refers is apparent in domesticated animals, which exhibit a marked diversification in the form of different breeds. Thus a sheepdog and Schopenhauer’s poodle both express the Idea “dog,” but they are certainly not identical either in body or in activity and character. Here we encounter a diversification of Ideas that falls well short of the human level yet goes beyond that giving rise to the different species.

49. *FW*, 49.
51. *FW*, 96. See also *WWR*, 1:155; *PP*, 1:132.
52. *WWR*, 1:158.
55. *WWR*, 1:153.

Chapter 11
Metaphysical Factors behind the Empirical World: Advaita Vedānta

1. *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.1.3.
2. It is worth noting that this is the same argument that Schopenhauer uses with regard to the will.
4. Karl Potter (1981, 88) has remarked on the limited nature of early Advaita metaphysics.
8. An alternative model is found in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.1.1–2.5.1). This consisted not of three but of five bodies or “sheaths” (*kośa*), formed of food (*annamaya*), the vital air or energy (*prāṇamaya*), the lower mind (*manomaya*), the higher mind (*vijñānamaya*), and the so-called “sheath of bliss” (*ānandamaya-kośa*). The two mod-
else are easily reconciled, for the sheaths of vital energy and lower and higher minds are subdivisions of the subtle body. The causal body is called the “sheath of bliss” because at this level, as we shall see below, consciousness of duality (with its attendant suffering) is withdrawn.


10. This well-known analogy was earlier used by Śaṅkara’s predecessor, Gauḍapāda (*GK* 2.17–2.18).


23. The definitions of vāsanā and sāṃskāra that follow represent what is probably the view of a majority of modern scholars. Nonetheless, it is quite common to find Western writers as well as Indian teachers who reverse the meaning of the two terms, taking sāṃskāra to be the initial impression and vāsanā the result of this. Interesting suggestions as to the meaning of the terms in the context of Advaita Vedānta are found in Potter (1981, 22–23), but perhaps the most informative discussion is that by Alston occurring at *SSB*, 3:204, note 119. It certainly cannot be claimed that the last word has been said on this matter.

24. For the analogy with odor or perfume (vāsa), see La Vallée Poussin 1934–1935, 158. La Vallée Poussin suggests the phonograph provides a still better analogy, for in this case sounds are preserved in a silent form, and from this unmanifested “seed” the same sounds will again emerge at a later time.

25. Griffiths (1986, 108) notes that the word is untranslatable. Von Glasenapp (1960, 80) translates sāṃskāras as Triebkräften (driving forces) and in another place (1960, 92) as Willensregungen (directing forces of the will). Nagao (1989, 37, 160) renders the word as “character disposition.”


30. At *GK* 2.13, to which this passage refers, Gauḍapāda uses the term “the Lord” (*prabhu*) to mean consciousness in its apparently conditioned form—i.e., Īśvara. See Gambhirānanda 1979, 70–71; Nikhilānanda 1995, 101.

31. *GKBh.* 2.16 (SSB, 2:257).


33. “Hiranyakagāra (also called Sūtrātma or *prāṇa*) is the god who presides over the combined subtle bodies of all living beings” (Dasgupta 1975, 2:76).

34. Śaṅkara writes: “It is said that the vital force is one god. Its one common external body, with the sun etc. as its different parts, is variously designated by such terms denoting the body as Virāj, Vaśvānara, the self of a human form, Prajāpati, Ka and Hiranyakagāra.” *Brhadāraṇyaka Up. Bhāṣya*, introduction to verse 2.1.1 (Mādhavānanda 1993, 176).

35. SSB, 3:167.


37. As noted above, nescience has for Śaṅkara both a negative and a positive aspect, namely non-apprehension of the Real (Brahman) followed by misapprehension of the Real or “reversed knowledge” (*viparīta-jñāna*). It is the latter aspect—the creative or “veiling” aspect of nescience—that the Unmanifest represents.

38. Only the Mīmāṃsā School does not accept this theory. Pralaya is, of course, the macrocosmic equivalent of the dreamless sleep state experienced by the individual.


40. Chāndogya *Upaniṣad* 6.2.3. Śaṅkara comments that this being born is like clay taking the shapes of pots or ropes taking on the shape of snakes.

41. SSB, 2:189).

42. Munḍaka *Up. Bhāṣya* 1.1.8. (SSB, 2:183–184); the passage is of course written from the standpoint of provisional truth and not from that of ultimate truth. See also *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.1.1–3.1.3 and Śaṅkara’s commentary on this.

43. Mind is not a principle separate from *prāṇa* but one of its forms. In Indian thought the two are intimately linked, and in the practice of Yoga it is by *prāṇayāma* that the movements of the mind are controlled. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (6.8.2) states, “To the Vital Force is bound mind” (*prāṇa-bandhanam hi mana*).

44. SSB, 2:2:45.

45. From Śaṅkara’s introductory commentary to chapter 2 of the *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (SSB, 2:184).
48. See *Mahābhārata*, Āśvamedhika-parvan 47.12–47.15; *Bhagavad Gītā* 15.1–15.3; *Kātha Upaniṣad* 2.3.1. A related image is that of Viṣṇu asleep in the depths of the primordial ocean, while from his navel (*garbha*) there arises, in place of the Tree, the stem of the world-lotus. Upon this, when it emerges from the waters, the creator-god Brahmā is seated.

49. *Kātha Up. Bhāṣya* 2.3.1 (SSB, 5:10). The Absolute in its “lower form” is of course Saguna Brahman—i.e., Brahman conditioned by the *upādhi* of nescience; thus Śaṅkara speaks of “the derivative Brahman... who is called Hiranya-garbha”; see *Mundaka Up. Bhāṣya* 1.1.9 (Gambhirānanda 1978, 18).

50. A possible etymology of *Aśvattha* is *a* (not), *śvas* (tomorrow), *sthātā* (existing); see Gambhirānanda 1972, 1:201 (footnote).


54. *Aṭṭharva Veda* 11.3.37, on which see *SSB*, 2:209, note 162.


56. Thus *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.2 states that “It is from a second entity that fear comes” (*dvitiyāt vai bhyam bhavati*).

Chapter 12
The Arising of the Empirical World in Buddhism:
The Yogācāra Teaching

1. *Abhidharmakośa* iii, 28 a–b (La Vallée Poussin 1971, 2:84).
3. Nyānatiloka 1938, 141.
5. Conze 1962, 133.
7. Some of the key Yogācāra texts, among them the *Samādhisatīrāca-sūtra* and Vasubandhu’s *Vīśatikā*, survived only in Tibetan or Chinese translations.
19. As Conze (1957, 166) points out, the words mind (citta), thought (vijñapti), and consciousness (vijñāna) are used as interchangeable terms in Buddhist philosophy.
20. Monier-Williams 1899, 903. The word ālaya is derived from the verbal root ā, with the intensifying prefix ā; a well-known example from the Hindu tradition of the second meaning of the root ṛ is the word pralaya, the condition when the universe “melts” or “disappears” into the Unmanifest.
21. In the Samdhinirmocana-sūtra (5.3) it is said that mind-containing-all-seeds (sarvabījakam cittam) is “also called ’ālaya-vijñāna’”; Schmithausen 1987, 22.
22. Schmithausen 1987, 60.
28. Griffiths 1986, 65; Schmithausen 1987, 64.
29. Asaṅga, in the Abhidharma-samucayā (12.1), writes, “skandha dhātu āyatana vāsanā parībhāvatam sarvabījakam ālayavijñānam” (Schmithausen 1987, 64, and note 450).
30. Sthiramati’s Tīkā to Vasubandhu’s commentary on the Madhyānta-vibhāga; as cited in Stanley 1988, 15.
32. Sthiramati’s Tīkā to Vasubandhu’s commentary on the Madhyānta-vibhāga; as cited in Stanley 1988, 40.
33. Trīśikā, verses 1–2, as translated in Wei Tat 1973, cxxiii.
39. See the “Note sur l’Ālaya-vijñāna” prefacing Lamotte’s translation of Asaṅga’s Mahāyānasamgraha; La Vallée Poussin 1934–1935.
40. Monier-Williams 1899, 128.
41. La Vallée Poussin 1934–1935, 164; Tola and Dragonetti 1983, 246.
Chapter 13
Conclusions: Schopenhauer’s Will and Comparable Indian Ideas

1. MSR, 1:1 (Payne’s translation).
2. Letter to A. von Doss, February 27, 1856 (Hübscher 1978, 383–384); cited in von Glasenapp 1960, 92. Schopenhauer is writing with reference to Spence Hardy’s books of 1850 and 1853 on Buddhism, which he and his correspondent studied carefully.
4. We should, of course, remember that Yogācāra thinking on this point was rejected by the Mādhyamikas (and particularly by the Prāsaṅgikas) and that for Advaitins all forms exist only from the standpoint of empirical truth and not from that of ultimate (paramārtha) truth.
5. Radhakrishnan 1953, 492, referring to Chāndogya Up. 8.1.3.
11. WWR, 1:4.
12. BG. Bh. 8.20 (Śāstri 1961, 233).
15. Trimiśikā, verse 3.
16. WWR, 2:479.
17. Von Glasenapp 1960, 80.
19. “In the beginning He (Maheśvara/Hiranyagarbha) created all the separate names and forms and deeds of all creatures”; cited by Śaṅkara from Manu Smṛti 1.21. Śaṅkara adds that planes of being such as “the earth” were created as a result of words (i.e., formative forces, sāṃskāras) that arose in the mind of the Creator (Prajāpati). BSBb. 1.3.28 (SSB, 5:221).
20. “The brain is stimulated from without through a physical impression on the senses,” Schopenhauer writes (PP, 1:301). See also WWR, 1:95.
21. WWR, 2:646.
22. Chāṇḍogya Up. Bhāṣya 8.5.4 (SSB, 2:226). The Sanskrit term translated here as “will,” and used both by Śaṅkara and at Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad 7.4.2, is sāmkalpa.
23. WWR, 1:293.
25. MSR, 1:99.
26. WWR, 1:275.
27. Zimmer 1938. Kapstein (1994, 116) has drawn attention to this paper.
28. Rg Veda 1.136.3.
30. Radhakrishnan 1931, 735.
31. Saundaryalalahari; cited in Radhakrishnan 1931, 735.
32. Radhakrishnan 1931, 735.
33. Schuhmacher and Woerner 1999, 313 (see under Śaktism).
34. Tattva-Sandoha; cited in Woodroffe 1922, 108.
35. Dyczkowski 1987, 89, citing the Spandapradīpikā of Bhagavatotpala.
36. See Piantelli 1986, passim. This essay has not received the attention it deserves.
37. Paradiso 33.145: “l’amor che move il sole e l’altra stelle.”
38. Schopenhauer noticed the link between māyā, will, and amor, writing that “The Māyā of the Indians, the work and fabric of which are the whole world of illusion, is paraphrased by amor” (WWR, 1:330).
39. Dowson 1968, 86–87. See also Stutley and Stutley 1977, 137 (see under Kāli); Kinsley 1977, 81, 91, 125.
40. Woodroffe 1922, 221–223.
41. BG 11. 26–30 (Charles Johnston’s translation).
43. WWR, 2:473.
44. Dowson 1968, 88; Daniélou 1985, 267.
45. Cited in WWR, 2:349.
46. E. A. Gait, writing in Hastings’ Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (see under Human Sacrifice, Indian) states that before this date a boy was beheaded before
Durgā’s altar each Friday and that on one occasion as many as twenty-five men were sacrificed to her.

47. Stutley and Stutley 1977, 82; Basham 1971, 339. It should be added that for the great majority of Hindus today such sacrifices are a matter for regret and that throughout most of India Durgā is worshipped without recourse to such means.


50. GKBh. 3.43 (Nikhilānanda 1995, 205).

Chapter 14
The Ontological Status of Will

1. WWR, 1:285.

2. WWR, 2:641.

3. WWR, 2:641.

4. WWR, 2:185.

5. WWR, 2:611–612.


7. Halbfass (1990, 119) speaks of “the ambivalence and problematic nature” of Schopenhauer’s concept of the will.

8. Schopenhauer’s “pessimism” was sometimes seen in this light in the nineteenth century.

9. For example, Schopenhauer writes with reference to denial of the will, “The end of the individual, and thus the greatest suppression of the natural will, is welcome and desired”; WWR, 1:403.

10. WWR, 2:164.

11. Bryan Magee (1997, 443) calls the first of these two wills the “phenomenal will” and the second the “metaphysical will” and tells us that Schopenhauer “is always aware of the distinction” between his two uses of the word will.

12. WWR, 2:198. Atwell (1995, 124–125) calls the first of these Schopenhauer’s “philosophical” conception of the thing-in-itself and the second his “mystical” conception and writes (p. 127) that “Unfortunately Schopenhauer does not explicitly say that he has two very different conceptions of the thing-in-itself.”

13. Halbfass (1990, 111) notes Schopenhauer’s attempts (of course unsuccessful) to find a meaning for the word “Brahman” that would approximate to “will.”

14. MSR, 1:205.


16. Magee (1997, 144), commenting on the error involved, writes, “Ever since he wrote, Schopenhauer has been widely regarded as saying that the will in something
akin to the ordinary sense of the word is the noumenon.” A. R. Chisholm (1934, passim) shows that the manner in which Schopenhauer’s will was misinterpreted by Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, and other French poets of the later nineteenth century contributed much to the nihilistic outlook of the period.

17. WWR, 1:408–412.
19. WWR, 2:197.
20. WWR, 2:196.
21. WWR, 2:197.
22. WWR, 2:197.
23. WWR, 2:197.
24. WWR, 2:198.
25. WWR, 2:198.
27. Halbfass (1990, 117–118) writes that “the familiar, yet inappropriate metaphysical equation of ‘will’ and ‘absolute’” is a misunderstanding for which Schopenhauer is in part to blame.
28. WWR, 2:197.
29. WWR, 2:197.
30. WWR, 2:205–206 (Oupnek’hat 1:122); as translated by Payne.
31. WWR, 2:611.
32. Conze 1967a, 228 (citing Mur ti 1960, 310).
34. In later Yogācāra as taught in China by Hsüan Tsang and the Wei-shih school the store-consciousness comes to be identified with ultimate reality.
35. BG 8.18–8.21.
37. WWR, 2:641.

Chapter 15
Beyond the Will: “Better Consciousness” and the “Pure Subject of Knowing”

1. MSR, 1:73, 49.
2. MSR, 1:58.
3. MSR, 1:72.
4. MSR, 1:50.
5. MSR, 1:112.
6. MSR, 1:23. A reference to better consciousness in Schopenhauer’s notes on Schelling (MSR, 2:373) also dates to around this time—i.e., to the first half of 1812. Other references in the notes on Kant and Jacobi (MSR, 2:430–431) are slightly later.


11. MSR, 1:55, 132.

12. MSR, 1:50.

13. MSR, 1:55.

14. MSR, 1:47.

15. MSR, 1:74.


17. MSR, 2:323.

18. MSR, 1:47, 52. Both the idea of genius and that of the sublime were important for Schopenhauer’s contemporaries, part of the Romantic rebellion against the emphasis placed upon reason by the Enlightenment.

19. MSR, 1:50.

20. MSR, 1:51, note.

21. MSR, 1:50.

22. MSR, 1:49. Cf. WWR, 1:411, where “the unshakeable confidence and serenity . . . depicted by Raphael and Correggio” is spoken of.

23. MSR, 1:48.

24. MSR, 1:58.


26. MSR, 1:120.

27. MSR, 1:162.

28. MSR, 2:430.

29. MSR, 1:46.

30. MSR, 1:149.

31. MSR, 1:148.

32. MSR, 1:92.

33. MSR, 1:86.

34. MSR, 1:33.

35. MSR, 1:98.

36. MSR, 1:182.

37. MSR, 1:44.
38. MSR, 1:83.
39. MSR, 1:72.
40. MSR, 1:26.
41. MSR, 1:165.
42. MSR, 1:164.
43. MSR, 2:430.
44. MSR, 1:182.
45. MSR, 1:43.
46. MSR, 1:182.
47. MSR, 1:58.
48. MSR, 1:55, 58.
49. MSR, 1:113.
50. MSR, 1:58.
51. MSR, 1:114.
52. MSR, 1:72.
53. MSR, 1:23.
54. MSR, 1:74. “After death only the better consciousness is left,” Schopenhauer notes earlier (MSR, 1:48).
55. MSR, 1:142.
56. MSR, 1:23.
57. MSR, 1:23–24. Schopenhauer argues in On the Freedom of the Will that in spite of the appearance of freedom the choices made by the empirical consciousness are fully determined by the principle of sufficient reason.
58. MSR, 1:116. Payne’s reference is to Oupnek’hat 1:304 (based on Maitri Upanisad 2.7), which reads in translation: “He is comparable to a spectator because, separated from everything, he is looking at a drama.”
59. MSR, 1:137.
60. MSR, 1:152.
61. MSR, 1:168.
62. MSR, 1:181.
63. The appearances in volume 2 of the Manuscript Remains are all earlier in date.
64. MSR, 1:254.
65. MSR, 1:152, 168, 182.
67. MSR, 1:318.
68. MSR, 1:357–358. These distinctions emerge gradually; earlier in the Manuscript Remains we do not find them clearly maintained. For example, on the first occasion that the expression subject of knowing appears (in paragraph 220, cited above), what is actually described is what Schopenhauer subsequently came to call the pure subject
of knowing. Only little by little do the distinctions become clear, but in the end we are left in no doubt about them.

69. MSR, 1:442.


71. WWR, 1:410.

72. For example, in WWR, 2:560.

73. PP, 2:312.

74. Śaṃkara describes this as superimposition (adhyāsa) of the real upon the unreal and vice versa, saying that it is for mankind “a natural procedure.” It is this that makes men and animals what they are; the procedure is co-extensive with existence as a living being. BSBh. 1.1.1 (Thibaut 1904, 1:3–9).


76. Muṇḍaka Upanisad 2.1.10, 2.2.8 (2.2.9 in Radhakrishnan 1953), 3.2.9.

77. Katha Upanisad 2.3.15.


79. WWR, 1:408–412.

Chapter 16
The Hidden Compass:
Schopenhauer and the Limits of Philosophy

1. WWR, 2:611.

2. WWR, 1:389.

3. WWR, 2:615.


5. PP, 2:110.

6. See, for example, PP, 2:612–613, where the Oupnek’hat and the mystical writings of Plotinus, Scotus Erigena, Böhme, Madame de Guyon, Angelus Silesius, and the Sufis are recommended in glowing terms.

7. WWR, 1:411.

8. WWR, 1:410.

9. WWR, 2:275, 641.

10. WWR, 2:275. Here Schopenhauer is drawing on the work of I. J. Schmidt, whom we encountered in chapter 4.

11. WWR, 2:642.

12. WWR, 1:390.

13. WWR, 1:403, 405.

14. WWR1: 410. We have seen virtually the same terms used to describe the better consciousness in the Manuscript Remains.
15. WWR, 2:600–601.
16. WWR, 2:601.
17. WWR, 2:612–613.
18. WWR, 2:644.
19. WWR, 2:612; WWR, 1:389.
22. PP, 2:10.
23. PP, 2:11.
25. WWR, 2:614–615.

27. In chapter 15 we saw that Schopenhauer writes in the Manuscript Remains (MSR, 1:113) that for the better consciousness to dawn man must be aware of himself “no longer as a human being at all, but as something quite different.”

28. WWR, 1:186.
29. WWR, 1:282.
30. WWR, 2:371.
31. WWR, 2:483.
32. WWR, 1:197.
33. WWR, 1:205.
34. Brhadâranyaka Upanisad 4.4.7 (Mādhavānanda 1993, 505).
36. Upadeśa Sāhasrī, verse section, 15.17 (SSB3: 54).
37. WWR1: 5.
38. WWR1: 5.
40. MSR, 1:98 (paragraph 158).
41. MSR, 1:147 (paragraph 234).
42. On Böhme’s two wills, see Brinton 1931, passim.
43. WWR, 2:640–641.
44. PP, 2:312. In chapter 14 we already encountered a passage (WWR, 2:198) in which Schopenhauer asks what the will is ultimately and absolutely in itself, apart from the fact that it manifests as will.
45. Here again Schopenhauer may owe something to Böhme’s idea that “the eternal Will-Spirit is God” (Mysterium Pansophicum, 1.3; cited in Brinton 1931, 108).
46. PP, 2:312.
47. WWR, 2:601.
48. WWR, 1:271.
49. We saw this in chapter 14, when Schopenhauer’s confusing use of the terms “will” and “thing-in-itself” was discussed.

Chapter 17
Schopenhauer and Indian Thought

1. See, for example, WWR, 1:172–173.
2. FR, 232; WWR, 1:7.
3. MSR, 1:43.
5. WWR, 1:410.
6. For example, in WWR, 1:152, it is said that the will’s self-elimination is the ultimate goal.
7. WWR, 2:640.
8. For example, the penultimate chapter of The World as Will and Representation is entitled “The Road to Salvation” (WWR, 2:634–639).
10. WWR, 1:405.
11. WWR, 1:197.
12. MSR, 1:182.
13. WWR, 1:410.
17. The “light morning dream” comes directly from the Manuscript Remains (MSR, 1:148).
21. WWR, 1:412. Schopenhauer added the note in manuscript after he had read I. J. Schmidt’s Über das Mahājāna und Pradschnā-Pāramita der Bauddhen; it was incorporated in the third (posthumous) edition of The World as Will and Representation.
23. Radhakrishnan (1953, 491) notes a closely related divergence. He writes that pure being, devoid of determinations, is often mistaken for non-being in Western thought.
24. WWR, 1:400, 403.
25. WWR, 2:609.
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