

Eastern Principles within Western Metaphysics

Claus Dierksmeier

My talk addresses how elements of Indian philosophy resurface in the metaphysics of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832). After a brief prologue on Schopenhauer and Krause, I sketch how the latter incorporated some elements of Upanishadic and Vedantic speculation into his system. In particular, I emphasize Krause's "panentheistic" conception of the absolute being (hereafter "the Absolute") and how it facilitates an "open" dialectics that compares favorably with the dialectics of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

When one ponders the reception of Eastern thinking in Western metaphysics, Arthur Schopenhauer comes immediately to mind. He was introduced to Indian thought first in 1813 by the orientalist Friedrich Majer (1771-1818) in his mother's salon in Weimar.¹ Schopenhauer's appreciation for Vedantic texts then became deeper through the influence of one Karl Friedrich Christian Krause (1781-1832). Krause was a philosopher in his own right, although to his contemporaries he was known mostly as a master disciple of Fichte and Schelling. Between 1815 and 1817 Schopenhauer lived in Dresden in the *Große Meißensche Gasse* with Krause as his housemate. Through Krause's private library Schopenhauer became acquainted with Sanskrit originals and their recent translations.² Krause was an independent follower of Kant, who, just as Schopenhauer himself, developed his own position in altercation with Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.³ Although adverse to their carefree speculative idealism, Krause was not against metaphysical thinking altogether. He developed a philosophy of the Absolute for which he coined the term "*panentheism*" (All-in-God-theory).⁴ And it was Krause's panentheistic system, Schopenhauer scholars believe, that accounts for important changes in Schopenhauer's

1 Cf. Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer und die wilden Jahre der Philosophie*, Frankfurt 1990, 303. See also Arthur Hübscher, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its intellectual context - Thinker against the tide*, New York 1989.

2 Cf. Kurt Riedel, "Schopenhauer bei Karl Christian Friedrich Krause", *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch*, Frankfurt 37/1956, 15pp. In 1804 the *Oupnekhat*, a Persian version of the Upanishads, translated into Latin by Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, was the first such text to be broadly read in German intellectual circles. In his *Vorlesungen über die Grundwahrheiten der Wissenschaft, zugleich in ihrer Beziehung zu dem Leben. Nebst einer kurzen Darstellung und Würdigung der bisherigen Systeme der Philosophie, vornehmlich der neuesten von Kant, Fichte, Schelling und Hegel, und der Lehre Jacobi's. Für Gebildete aus allen Ständen*, Göttingen 1829, a work that gives a major synopsis of his system, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause lists the primary and secondary literature that informed his research into Indian philosophy.

3 For a systematical location of Krause in his historical context cf. Claus Dierksmeier, *Der absolute Grund des Rechts. Karl Christian Friedrich Krause in Auseinandersetzung mit Fichte und Schelling*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 2003.

4 Cf. "Panentheismus", in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. VII, Basel 1989, 48.

thinking, namely in regard to the conception of the epistemic and ontological quality of the “Ding-an-sich” (thing-in-itself).⁵ We will hear more of this later.

Between 1798 and 1804 Krause lived in Jena and worked in close communication and competition with the Romantic Movement there. Although initially he was very popular with the Jena audience and received favorable reviews for his works, he did not manage to make an academic career. Partly for political reasons, as his social philosophy was far too modern for his contemporaries, yet mostly since he made some unfortunate career decisions, he slowly but surely maneuvered himself out of the focus of academic attention. A few years after his early death, in 1832, just a handful of German scholars knew him, and at the close of the 19th century he was all but forgotten. In the last thirty years, though, his philosophy has been experiencing a renaissance in research literature, driven by studies from Spanish and Latin American scholars.⁶ This revival of interest is due to the enormous impact Krause’s philosophy had on Spain and Latin America. In the pre-Franco era, that is, in the second Spanish republic (1865-1936), one Julián Sanz del Río (1814-1869) was a towering figure in Spain’s cultural life. He became Krause’s main promoter: Sanz del Río compiled a book from translations of several of Krause’s works. Introducing it into Spain, he then proclaimed, falsely, it contained a liberal philosophy of his own making, albeit influenced by Krause. Under this guise, Krause’s teachings enjoyed a major triumph first in Spain and then all over Latin America, being received as the long awaited Spanish contribution to 19th-century liberalism. Being ‘idealistic’ in its quest for peaceful social reform, yet much more oriented towards experience (both scientific and historic) than *German Idealism*, ‘krausismo’ answered to a broadly felt need for a modern philosophy with a social agenda.⁷

Before we turn to Krause’s metaphysics and its incorporation of Indian thought, let us take a brief look at his methodology and epistemology. Krause sets himself apart from his contemporaries in that he advocates an “open” dialectical process. He wants to provide a system of ratiocination that offers, but does not prescribe, speculative patterns for conceiving the world. Krause did not believe one could generate knowledge about factuality by conceptual effort alone. Knowledge needs experience of both natural and social phenomena. The basic epistemic function of metaphysics for Krause is thence, quite Kantian, to conceptually process our experience by the help of dialectical patterns. That however is not the only function of dialectics. Additionally, they are heuristical. Conceptual speculation leads to the formulation of expectations about reality that can be submitted to empirical observation for the purposes of falsification or verification.

5 Cf. Robert Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schopenhauer/>.

6 Here especially the excellent studies of Enrique Menendez Ureña, director of the *Instituto Investigación sobre Liberalismo, Krausismo y Masonería* of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid deserve to be mentioned. For further information see http://www.upco.es/centros/cent_inst_ilkm.aspx.

7 Cf. Carlos Otto Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and his influences in the Hispanic worlds*, Köln / Weimar / Wien 1998.

Speculations about unobservable, or merely notional, entities obviously have a different epistemic status than systematized matters of fact. However, such speculations are not pointless. Indeed they fulfill an inevitable function in human self-orientation, since, in many realms of life, we cannot but speculate. In regard to classical philosophical topics such as freedom, individuality, etc., there is an inexorable need for orientation through ideas. We cannot abstain from forming opinions about how to live well, about the significance of death, and so forth. Hence, whenever we cannot obtain orientation other than through ideas, it is better to employ a philosophically guided speculation, carefully laying down its premises for public critique, than simply to follow our emotional predilections, cultural prejudices, or religious preferences.

For this purpose, and far ahead of his time, Krause developed a two-pronged methodology that interweaves analytical and synthetical philosophy. Therein synthetical thinking employs speculative methods of intuition, introspection, and conceptual construction in order to divine the nature of things beyond our empirical ken, whereas analytical thinking is employed in the constant critique of such notions. Analytical philosophy investigates whether the proceeds from synthetical thinking hold up to logical scrutiny, separating out those that do not. The same process also works inversely: Analytical thinking stirs up antinomies that cannot be solved by analytical tools alone, calling synthetical speculation to the fore. Synthetical philosophy responds with developing ideas under which antinomies that otherwise would paralyze reason can be reconciled, or by designing concepts that integrate otherwise fragmented knowledge into meaningful units. The ideas thus found are in turn subjected to analytical scrutiny, and the process starts all over again. In the end, only such synthetically generated ideas that are found to be analytically without reproach stay in place. They continue to be employed precisely as long as, and insofar, they remain unchallenged. As soon as there is well-argued doubt as to their validity, the process of analytical-synthetical investigation is taken up anew; the philosophical endeavor is hence perennial. Accordingly – and in striking difference to Hegel and others – Krause did assume, and even intend, his philosophical works to be superseded by those of future philosophers.

Krause specifically wants to promote only such ideas that anyone who is willing and able to join the conceptual endeavor of philosophy without prefabricated standpoints could endorse. Unlike most of his colleagues, who unabashedly deduced *ex cathedra* what was true (theoretically) and what had to be done (practically), Krause felt that one must make *freedom* not only the prime *content* of philosophy but also its *methodological principle*. Hence, Krause employs a host of participation-oriented procedures (dialogical approaches, phenomenological analyses, etc.), and takes the worldviews and arguments of ordinary citizens seriously. He does not follow the then popular trend to use the notion of a “transcendental consciousness” to override the inconvenient objections our everyday consciousness raises against certain dialectical speculations. And it was exactly this liberal methodology that brought about the highly uncommon results that set Krause’s metaphysics of freedom so distinctly apart from any other liberalism of his days, and that render it interesting into the present.⁸ For the *theoretical* stance for the procedural

8 Cf. Claus Dierksmeier, “Deduktion/Konstruktion versus Mechanismus/Organismus. Zu Methodologie und Inhalt der Sozialphilosophie im Deutschen Idealismus“, in *System and Context*

participation of everyone is met *practically* in Krause's notion of 'harmonic' freedom, emphasizing the need of integrating any and all subjects, not forgetting the marginalized ones: disabled, senile, and poverty-stricken persons, for instance. Accordingly, Krause was (as early as 1803) one of the first to advocate for the protection of the rights of children and women, for global social justice, ecological sustainability, and the rights of future generations.⁹

According to the aforementioned methodology, the task of the professional philosopher is to provide his audience with what he deems the best available metaphysical models, suggesting how these can be employed so as to solve the philosophical problems that concern everyone. Krause felt, for instance, that certain nuances of the idea of absolute unity as presented in Indian philosophy provided such conceptions worthy of universal attention. However, since he drew on a broad variety of Indian texts, it is not easy to pinpoint which particular text gave him what kind of inspiration.¹⁰ Moreover, I myself am not an expert of Vedantic materials, so I cannot assess whether his understanding of his sources was adequate.¹¹ Consequently, I will confine myself to reconstructing his position. Yet even this, to give account of Krause's metaphysical core concepts in ordinary language, is not without difficulty. Over time, Krause developed his very own, and hardly intelligible, technical language. The reasons behind this decision, which had a major negative impact on his career, were these: Krause had witnessed the careers of Fichte and Schelling being severely hampered by attacks charging them with *atheism* and *pantheism*.¹² Furthermore, Krause himself had been a victim of a smear-campaign of

/ *System und Kontext. Early Romantic and Early Idealistic Constellations. Frühromantische und frühidealistische Konstellationen*, ed. by Rolf Ahlers, Lewiston / Queenston / Lampeter 2004, 229-262.

9 Cf. Claus Dierksmeier, "Recht und Freiheit. Karl Christian Friedrich Krauses 'Grundlage des Naturrechts' im Kontext des Jenaer Idealismus", in *International Yearbook of German Idealism / Internationales Jahrbuch für Deutschen Idealismus*, 2/2004, 309-334.

10 Cf. however his *Vorlesungen über die Grundwahrheiten der Wissenschaft [...]*, 278-284, where he gives an overview of the main teachings of the major Vedantic and Buddhist schools and points out which of their respective tenets are in accordance with his own philosophy. Most importantly, Krause acknowledges there that the "Vedam" did already contain the main elements of "die reine Wesenschauung" (the pure notion of the Absolute) and, based upon it, a correct understanding of the relation between the realms of nature and freedom (p. 279).

11 For introductory purposes cf. Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, Hawaii 1985; Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, Motilal Banarsidass 1991; Patrick Olivelle, *Upanisads*, Oxford 1996; Sue Hamilton, *Indian Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2001. For a selection of original texts see John and Patricia Joyce Koller, *A sourcebook in Asian philosophy*, New York 1991.

12 Cf. *Fichtes Entlassung - Der Jenaer Atheismusstreit vor 200 Jahren*, *Kritisches Jahrbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. IV, ed. by K.-M. Kodalle and M. Ohst in collaboration with C. Danz, C. Dierksmeier and C. Seysen, Würzburg 1999.

freemasons who felt he had unduly criticized them.¹³ A highly technical and artificial language, he hoped, might reduce the risk of conceptional ambivalences that then could be exploited through willful misapprehension. It is from the resulting, highly intricate, idiom that one must translate Krause's thinking back into ordinary language.

Although Krause's ultimate conception of *the Absolute* was influenced by a few additional sources, Krause's reading of Sanskrit texts was a central factor in his decision, displayed in his works from 1803/04 on, to depart in method and content from his idealistic contemporaries Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. He criticised what he saw as an overly simplistic dialectic of 'unity versus diversity' in their conceptions of the Absolute. The main lines of his argument are as follows: If one conceptualizes the Absolute only as unity in respect of, and in regard to, diversity then one either has to design the Absolute as the *principio a quo* of diversity, or as its *principio ad quem*. Taking the Absolute as the *principio a quo*, the philosopher has to face the problem of how to generate diversity from something that is not diverse but simple. In order to generate something other than itself the Absolute must thence be conceived as in internal conflict with itself, so to speak. Assuming the Absolute to be in need of reconciliation with itself, however, contradicts the basic notion of it being absolute. To avoid this, there remains only the unattractive Manichaean solution of treating diversity as a self-standing opposite to the Absolute. Then, however, all forms of diversity – and with them finitude as their marker – become, as it were, 'the dark side' that besmirches the purity, goodness, and beauty of the Absolute. Mundane life, consequently, is conceived as of no inherent worth, as something that exists only in order to be overcome; a negative teleology of being results, with manifestly misanthropic postulations.

Taking the other alternative and construing the Absolute as *principio ad quem* does not look promising either. In this case, the Absolute is seen as ultimate unity, synthesizing any and all forms of diversity. The comprehensiveness thereof compels the philosopher to demonstrate how even entities and events repugnant to reason can be integrated into, and reconciled with, a notion of absolute unity within which, as a matter of course, reason forms a formidable part. In practical philosophy this leads right into the troubled waters of *theodicy*. In theoretical philosophy, as the phenomena that surround us do not visibly display said unity, one ends up having to postulate a 'hidden', or 'invisible', unity of everything that is. Naturally, such speculation is starkly at odds with our everyday consciousness, since for the ordinary mind there do remain puzzles, unresolved conflicts, and meaningless facts in droves. The postulated absolute unity between everything escapes all but the speculative philosopher, it seems. Immunising themselves from such objections, unfazed by the undemonstrability of their speculative insights into the 'true' nature of things, idealistic philosophers easily turn into speculative dogmatists and parade aloof from the troubles of mundane life.

Krause was strongly opposed to both the content and the corresponding attitudes brought forth by such conceptualisations of the Absolute. Before employing the Absolute for purposes of synthesis and integration, he argues, one has to thematize the idea of unity as

¹³ Cf. Claus Dierksmeier, *Der Freimaurer K.C.F. Krause (1781-1832) und die Rezeption seiner Philosophie*, in *Jahrbuch Quatuor Coronati*, 40/2003, 175-192.

simple *one-ness*, that is, other than as non-duality, which is still defined by its correlate (duality, diversity), as something defined solely through itself. And there is, furthermore, an important understanding of absolute unity not to be overlooked, namely absolute unity as something that *incorporates, yet does not arise from*, the many syntheses within the empirical world. Krause employs the latter notions, broadly articulated in Indian thinking, to redesign the speculative idea of the Absolute as follows: First, there is the unity of being (“Wesen”), pure and simple, conceived of by nothing other than itself; Krause assigns to it the prefix “Or”, so that “Orwesen” results as signifier of this particular aspect, i.e. of the Absolute *a se*.¹⁴ Then, for the manifold entities given, we need the notion of unity-as-origin; Krause’s prefix for it is “Ur”. While he accepts a fundamental *ontological* connection of every single entity with “Urwesen”, *ontic* syntheses between existing things are not worked by “Urwesen” but self-standing. Consequently, whereas “Urwesen” is involved in life, as its source, that does not mean the absoluteness of the Absolute dominates the finite world. In other words, Krause’s model distinguishes between the Absolute proper, as the ‘God of the philosophers’ (“Orwesen”) on the one hand, and the ‘God of religion’ (“Urwesen”) on the other, and equates neither with the universe. Finally, one more neologism must be learned. As “Urwesen”, albeit distinguished from “Orwesen”, is not severed from it, their essential sameness that, so to speak, arches over everything that is finds expression in yet another term: “Omwesen”.¹⁵ Many more such prefix-generated specifications could be enumerated; that is however immaterial for our concern here. More important for Krause’s adaptation of Indian notions to the Western metaphysics is this: Through emancipating the Absolute on the one hand from mundane syntheses between finite entities, the Absolute and historical life become independent from one another. For, in Krause’s conception, the ‘God of religion’ (“Urwesen”), represents the very aspect of the Absolute that it retains for itself, functioning as the inexhaustible source of an eternal flow of life that emanates from it. Therefore, neither the Absolute proper, i.e. the ‘God of the philosophers’, nor the ‘God of religion’ is taking an active part in mundane life. “Urwesen” instead establishes the radical freedom of life to follow its very own laws, and “Orwesen” simply denotes the metaphysical realm where said life takes place.

Thereby, Krause forges theistic and pantheistic notions into what he termed *panentheism*. Neither is he taking the theistic position that God is supreme and apart from the world, acting within it upon discretion, nor the pantheistic one that God is all and all is God,

14 Krause holds that his prefixes aim at restoring an original but mostly lost Indo-German vocabulary, once common both to the German and the Indian culture. Besides an attempt at reuniting these traditions linguistically, his prefix-system is meant to contribute to a universal philosophical speech-logic that intends to bring the clarity of mathematical notation to philosophical thinking. It is likely that with this idea, which Krause himself found in Leibniz, he influenced Gottlob Frege (through C. Fortlage, a Krause disciple), cf. Lothar Kreisler, *Gottlob Frege: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, Hamburg 2001, 155-169.

15 On speculations of the Sanskrit tradition on Brahman, Atman, etc. that have much in common with Krause’s terms Orwesen, Urwesen, and Omwesen cf. David Loy, *Nonduality: a study in comparative philosophy*, New Haven 1988; Sengaku Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesasahasri of Sankara*, 1992; Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamikakarika*, Oxford 1995.

consigning life to a predetermined scheme of events. Krause holds instead that everything exists within the Absolute (“Orwesen”) that (as “Urwesen”) is however not exhausted by the phenomenal world. This panentheistic model holds, as it were, the door open for life to develop itself in autonomy and to supersede itself endlessly.¹⁶ And since things are seen as determined by their very nature instead of displaying absolute *karma*, any fatalistic aspect, as inherent in most pantheistic systems, is evaded. Moreover, the Absolute no longer “suffers” (as in Hegel) from each unresolved disunity on earth. The need for an all-encompassing reconciliation at the end of days evaporates. Life might just be going on and on – imperfect, and with partial solutions only – through the making and breaking of ever new, and always limited, syntheses. Consequently, dialectical processes need no longer run through predetermined stages, as the world is not in progress towards a pre-conceived *telos* that only a speculative history can unveil.

Coming back to Schopenhauer, we can see more clearly now how Krause’s system influenced him: The first volume of the *World as Will and Representation* ends in a notorious paradox. The “thing-in-itself” at the bottom of everything, says Schopenhauer, is but a blind will to life. A cruel master, it drives us with brutish force into ever-new circles of life, longing, and suffering. Severed from our fellow beings through painful individuation, and in sore isolation from the original sources of life, subject to the stern rule of impersonal and deterministic laws of nature, the only way to healing, it seems, is to renounce the very will to life. We must not chafe against the fetters that bind us, but from insight into their necessity renounce any contrary desires: in short, resignation becomes the philosophically recommended state of mind.

However, what is the ontological status of the purged consciousness that recommends this? Is it depleted of any selfish will, already elevated to higher truth? If truly everything is but brute and blind will, why is it we aim for and sometimes achieve, something else, to wit, a consciousness as to why and how to supersede such a will? In the second volume of the *World as Will and Representation*, written after his years as Krause’s housemate, Schopenhauer acknowledges this problem and responds to it with a modification of his system along decidedly panentheistic lines. The thing-in-itself is brute will only “to us”, Schopenhauer now declares.¹⁷ The world itself can, and likely will, have other – and higher – dimensions. The principle of being is not fully disclosed to our understanding. Thus, if ever, *per impossibile*, the “veil of Maya” were taken from our eyes, we would not, as the early Schopenhauer foretold, look into abominable nothingness. Rather, we would behold the very force that enables us to strive for, and arrive at, something over and above a *blind* will to life. Then, and this is a consequence overlooked by

16 A dogmatic Christian theologian might nevertheless not be too happy with this solution. Since Krause locates “Urwesen”, the God of religion, as but a moment within the Absolute proper, God’s mode of existence is nothing but his function. This is not a lowly one, to be sure. “Urwesen” serves as the eternal spring of life, and freedom, after all. Yet, neither does this ‘God’ have powers of his own, as distinct from the powers that be, nor can he interfere with mundane events. He is, consequently, for Krause less an addressee of prayers and more a figure of metaphysical reflection – whence Krause declares that the best ‘holy service’ is philosophizing.

17 Cf. *The World as Will and Representation*, Section 28, Vol. II.

Schopenhauer but energetically emphasized by Krause, a brighter light shines forth upon our path. Given that, and considering that the will to life can enlighten and reflectively modify itself, elevating life to ever-higher forms, resignation seems indeed not the only reasonable response to life.