

SCHOPENHAUER'S COMPASS

An Introduction to Schopenhauer's Philosophy and its Origins

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To Monica Esposito

*Nella vita e nella morte
quello che conta di più
è l'abbandonarsi*

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MEMORY GAPS

October 2008, Frankfurt city main cemetery. Did I not glance at a map of the cemetery yesterday at the Schopenhauer Archive in order to memorize the location of the philosopher's grave? I may have been a bit distracted, thinking that the grave of one of the city's most eminent men should be well marked and easy to find. It definitely was somewhere near the Western wall ... But my search along the endless wall is unsuccessful. Soon I find myself straying left and right in search of some marker and graves worthy of the man and his city. To no avail. Asking several visitors of the cemetery I find them equally ignorant about the resting place of Frankfurt's most eminent philosopher. Had I not seen a photo of the gravestone in some book? As I begin to lament my memory gap and get ready to abandon my search, an elderly couple kindly points the way to a plain, neglected grave. A modest stone plate, flat on the ground, bearing only Arthur Schopenhauer's name, and next

to it a bundle of withered roses in a knocked-over plastic vase and two half-broken flower pots full of weeds. The area around the grave stone is overgrown and the neighboring tomb of the Schopenhauer scholar Arthur Hübscher equally neglected. Does Frankfurt am Main—one of the world’s few cities whose name graces a current of philosophy (the Frankfurter Schule)—also suffer from a memory gap? In the heart of the old city J. W. Goethe (1749–1832) has his much-visited Goethehaus and a culture center named after him. As it should be, Frankfurt is proud of the man who had spent part of his youth in the city. By contrast, Arthur Schopenhauer who died here after a sojourn of almost three decades rests in a neglected grave covered with weeds. Yet the works of Frankfurt’s greatest poet seem today far less widely read than those of Frankfurt’s greatest philosopher. In a kiosk of a Sardinia ferry one searches in vain for any work by Goethe; but what did I find there a few summers ago among piles of holiday literature and bestselling thrillers? No less than five Italian translations of Schopenhauer!

From the cemetery I wandered to the Schöne Aussicht (“Beautiful View”), the street on the bank of the Main river where Schopenhauer used to live. His residences, the houses number 16 and 17, were damaged by aerial bombardment in 1943. The international German cultural institution named after Goethe (Goethe-Institut e.V.) recently proclaimed on its website that this is the very *address of philosophy*: “It may be grounds for surprise, but philosophy has an address—at least according to one of its most brilliant adepts. Arthur Schopenhauer arrived at final answers to the ultimate questions and claimed that philosophy had reached perfection in his own work. Philosophy is at home where he has his abode, in the ‘true center of Europe.’ The final address of philosophy is: Frankfurt am Main, Schöne Aussicht 16.” (Volker Maria Neumann; www.goethe.de; August 2008).

When I visited this “address of philosophy” in October of 2008 I found a Pizzeria next to a huge gap shielded from view by eight-foot-high metal panels featuring not words of wisdom but huge publicity posters for American cigarettes, German beer, and free Christian Bibles.

Memory Gaps



Frankfurt, gap at Schöne Aussicht street (Photo by the author, 2008)

I was told that the present owner of this vacant property is a Persian investor, which reminds me of another memory gap: the oblivion of the philosopher's favorite book in Schopenhauer research. According to visitors, the *Oupnek'hat*—a two-volume Latin book containing fifty Upanishads translated from Persian—always lay open in Schopenhauer's apartment at the Schöne Aussicht, ready for the philosopher's vesperal devotion. Schopenhauer heaped the highest praise on it:

How entirely does the Oupnekhat breathe throughout the holy spirit of the Vedas! How is every one who by a diligent study of its Persian Latin has become familiar with that incomparable book, stirred by that spirit to the very depth of his soul! How does every line display its firm, definite, and throughout harmonious meaning! From every sentence deep, original, and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest

spirit. Indian air surrounds us, and original thoughts of kindred spirits.¹

Sometimes one is asked what book one would take along to banishment on a solitary island if only a single work were allowed. For Schopenhauer the answer was clear: except for the original text, the Latin *Oupnek'hat* "is the most rewarding and uplifting reading possible in the world: it has been the consolation of my life and will be that of my death."²

But it was not only such gushing praise of the aged philosopher that should have made this Latin translation of fifty Upanishads an important research topic. Already in the latter half of the 19th century it was well known that young Schopenhauer in 1816, just when he started redacting his major work *The World as Will and Representation*, had jotted the following note in his philosophical notebook:

I confess that I do not believe that my teaching could ever have come into being before the Upanishads, Plato, and Kant cast their rays simultaneously into one man's mind.³

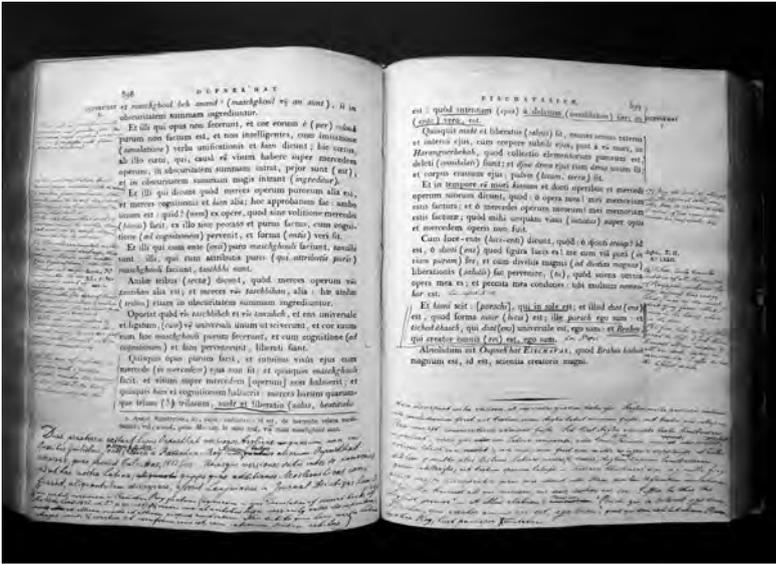
¹ »Wie athmet doch der Oupnekhat durchweg den heiligen Geist der Veden! Wie wird doch Der, dem, durch fleißiges Lesen, das Persisch-Latein dieses unvergleichlichen Buches geläufig geworden, von jenem Geist im Innersten ergriffen! Wie ist doch jede Zeile so voll fester, bestimmter und durchgängig zusammenstimmender Bedeutung! Und aus jeder Seite treten uns tiefe, ursprüngliche, erhabene Gedanken entgegen, während ein hoher und heiliger Ernst über dem Ganzen schwebt. Alles athmet hier Indische Luft und ursprüngliches, naturverwandtes Daseyn.« *Parerga and Paralipomena* §184; SW5.421; Z10.437. English translation by Max Müller, *The Upanishads* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962, vol. 1: lxi).

² »Es ist die belohnendeste und erhebendeste Lektüre, die (den Urtext ausgenommen) auf der Welt möglich ist: sie ist der Trost meines Lebens gewesen und wird der meines Sterbens seyn.« *Parerga and Paralipomena* §184; SW5.421; Z10.437.

³ »Ich gestehe übrigens daß ich nicht glaube daß meine Lehre je hätte entstehn können, ehe die Upanischaden, Plato und Kant ihre Strahlen zugleich in eines Menschen Geist werfen konnten« (HN1 #623). Schopenhauer first wrote: "...before an individual had in front of himself the Upanishads, Plato, and Kant" (»... ehe ein Individuum die Upanischaden, den Plato u. den Kant vor sich hatte«) (Handschriftlicher Nachlass Berlin 20.426).

Memory Gaps

In spite of this, the influence of the Upanishads on Schopenhauer remains nebulous even today.⁴ Though some books, dissertations and numerous articles about Schopenhauer's early interest in Asian thought have been published, they unfortunately rely almost without exception on modern Upanishad translations from Sanskrit—that is, on texts that in 1816 did not exist. To my knowledge the entire research literature about oriental influences on Schopenhauer contains a single article in Italian (Piantelli 1986) that briefly discusses the question of influence using the source which Schopenhauer actually studied: the Latin text of the *Oupnek'hat*, his favorite book.



Marks and notes by Schopenhauer in his favorite book (OUP1:389-399)

⁴ In 2011 Schopenhauer's most recent biographer, David Cartwright, was asked what Schopenhauer had learned from the Upanishads. He answered: "That is the million dollar question. He said that his doctrines could not have originated without the Upanishads, Plato, and Kant casting their rays of light simultaneously into a single mind. How to trace back one of these rays to the Upanishads is very difficult" (Skinner 2011).

Even more surprising is that not a single author has hitherto examined Schopenhauer's marks and handwritten notes in the extant copy of his *Oupnek'hat*. This is astonishing in light of the fact that the *Oupnek'hat* was without any doubt the most important Asian source for the birth of Schopenhauer's system. More than that: as I will show in this book, in the gestation period of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will the *Oupnek'hat* was his most crucial single source *tout court*. No wonder that it became and remained his favorite book and was lauded as the "consolation" of his life and death.

After a lecture about Schopenhauer's favorite book at the Goethe-Haus in Frankfurt in December 2010, I once more took a walk along Frankfurt's *Schöne Aussicht* to find out what was happening around the so-called "address of philosophy" in the jubilee year marking the 150th anniversary of the philosopher's death. Seeing huge cranes and heavy construction machinery, I thought for a moment that Frankfurt is building a dignified counterpart to its stately House of Literature down the road: a House of Philosophy. No, I was told: it will be just another hotel. Frankfurt memory gaps.

It is my hope that his book furnishes a more adequate stopgap and represents a different onset of construction. The domain addressed here lay just as fallow as the property where Schopenhauer had lived and died: a dead angle of Schopenhauer research. In view of the praise heaped by the philosopher on the *Oupnek'hat* and his unequivocal pronouncements as to its influence on the formation of his philosophical system, one is left with the question why so far no Schopenhauer specialist has dared to set foot in this gap. In fact the *corpus delicti*, Schopenhauer's richly annotated copy of his favorite book, can be studied at the Schopenhauer Archive in Frankfurt's University library, just a few tram minutes from the so-called "address of philosophy." It is filled with the philosopher's underlines and handwritten comments stemming from the period between Schopenhauer's purchase of the *Oupnek'hat* in the summer of 1814 and his death in the fall of 1860.

Almost two decades ago, on February 22 of 1997, I said during a Schopenhauer Society lecture celebrating Schopenhauer's birthday that the genesis of Schopenhauer's philosophy cannot be understood without the study of his *Oupnek'hat*. This is just as true today. But this fascinating book is not the only available source. Indeed, there probably is no other philosopher in world history for whom we have such abundant and authentic material concerning the development of his thought. Apart from letters, notes from conversations, and library registers we have a complete set of Schopenhauer's lecture notes from his student years, books and articles containing his markings and handwritten notes, and most importantly his extremely interesting and rich philosophical notebooks. These were major sources used in this study.

Yet the present book does not only seek to throw light on the birth of *one* philosophy (that of Schopenhauer); rather, it also is a case study in the history of ideas that uncovers a variety of influences, some of them complex and exotic, that can be at play in the genesis of a philosophy. Moreover, the detailed study of the genesis of a philosophy may be the most natural introduction to a philosopher's thought. The reader may also discover that since Schopenhauer's lonely death at Frankfurt's Schöne Aussicht in 1860 his thought has lost little of its force and pertinence.

This book's original German version, written in 2008–9 and published in 2011 (see bibliography), was born in the context of my research project "Oriental influences on the genesis of Schopenhauer's philosophy" (Swiss National Science Foundation project 101511–116443). I wish to express my gratitude to the international jury that recognized the project's value, to the foundation's administrators who approved it, and to the Swiss tax payers who provided the funding. In the present English version I made a few corrections and added some remarks about recent publications. On the whole it is a literal translation of the German version; but since I was translating my own text I felt free to reformulate, shorten, or expand arguments when I felt this might be of help to the reader. I also included a new Appendix contain-

ing a description of Schopenhauer's favorite book based on the paper I presented at the international Schopenhauer conference (Frankfurt, 2010) in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the philosopher's passing. For that earlier version see App 2013. Furthermore, I revised the German version's concluding chapter ("Perspektiven") and decided to include it here as Appendix 2.

Chapters 2 to 5 discuss in some detail Schopenhauer's early development and his study of European philosophy. Readers primarily interested in Oriental influences on the genesis of Schopenhauer's philosophy (discussed from Chapter 6) will find an introduction in Chapter 1 and a brief summary of early developments in Appendix 2 (pp. 304-6).

Unless otherwise specified, all translations from non-English sources are mine. Quotations from other languages are as a rule accompanied (in a footnote or column) by their original text. Readers of German, French or Latin can thus easily compare my translation with its source. Though the spelling of German, French, Latin, and Greek sources may occasionally seem mistaken to readers unfamiliar with historical orthography, it faithfully reproduces the originals. In-line page references always refer to the last full reference. Numbers preceded by a hashtag # refer to the note number in the first volume of Schopenhauer's *Manuscript Remains*. Due to my previous Schopenhauer-related publications (including transcriptions of the thinker's early notes on Asia-related subjects) and several books related to the history of Orientalism, I could unfortunately not avoid copiously referencing my own output; but do I hope that my work will inspire future researchers to make better use of manuscript and other primary sources and to study, in addition to modern Orient-related publications, the materials consulted by Schopenhauer himself.

Instead of using E.F.J. Payne's sometimes problematic English renderings of Schopenhauer's works I decided to furnish my own translations, accompanied in footnotes by the original German text from Arthur Hübscher's German editions of Schopenhauer's published works and *Manuscript Remains*. The new Cambridge edition that will soon

supersede Payne's English translations is also based on Hübscher's editions and features Hübscher's page numbers in the margin. Thus Schopenhauer's paragraph numbers along with the numbers of Hübscher's editions should enable the reader to easily examine quotations in their context both in Payne's old translations and the new Cambridge edition whose first volumes are already in print. Square brackets mark explanatory text or ellipses added by me; in my English translations of Anquetil-Duperron's Latin *Oupnek'hat* parentheses and brackets follow Anquetil's use, as should be evident from the original text that I reproduced adjacent to my translation.

I wish to thank those readers of my German manuscript of 2009 whose feedback contributed to improvements in style and content, in particular Dr. Thomas Regehly whose repeated suggestions have been helpful. I am also grateful to the members of the steering committee of the Schopenhauer Society in Frankfurt am Main and to the personnel of the Schopenhauer Archive at Frankfurt University's Senckenberg library for their help, the permission to photograph and reproduce Asia-related materials in the archive, and the permission to use my photo of one of the archive's Schopenhauer portraits as an element of Alexander Huwyler's beautiful cover design.

My deepest thanks, however, go to the muse of this project, my beloved wife Monica Esposito (1962–2011). It is for her perusal that I translated chapters 1–5 and 11 into English in early 2009, shortly after completing the German manuscript, and she was very much looking forward to this book's publication. To my utmost regret she did not live to see it in print. It is to Monica and her memory that this book is dedicated. If anyone profoundly understood and sought to live what the "North Pole" of Schopenhauer's compass is all about, it was her. Witness the last sentence of her testament, a sentence that Schopenhauer would have wholeheartedly approved: "You must never forget: what counts most, both in life and in death, is to abandon self."