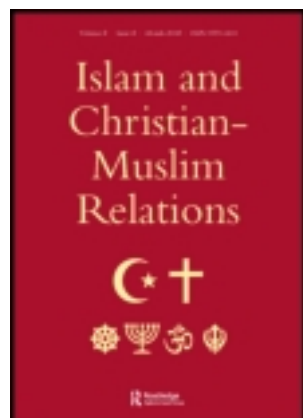


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‘The Poorest Form of Theism’: Schopenhauer, Islam and the Perils of Comparative Hermeneutics

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ABSTRACT *Even among Western philosophers open to religious and intellectual traditions of other cultures, such as Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), the hermeneutic reception of Islam has been highly problematic. In the case of Schopenhauer, we find an interpretation which aligns the Islamic tradition with philosophical themes which met his general rejection, the commitment to theism and the ‘optimism’ characteristic of a teleological view of existence. These themes are ones Schopenhauer finds refuted in his typologically classified cultural/religious complexes of Hindu and Buddhist traditions, which espouse either polytheism or atheism and a ‘pessimistic’ orientation. In Schopenhauer’s contorted hermeneutic, which considerably distorts all the religions he examines, it is these latter traditions which are ancient ancestors of Christian spirituality and show up Islam along with Judaism to be the religious ‘other’ to Europe. In Schopenhauer’s case, we can see the fully tragic outcome of a ‘monological’ stance, a stance which considers alien religious traditions as objects of classification rather than living, vibrant partners which can be engaged with and learned from in dialogue, the tragic outcome so endemic to European Orientalism.*

Like Hegel, otherwise his antipode, Arthur Schopenhauer viewed the non-European religious and philosophical traditions of the world through the filter of his own metaphysical system. This self-reflexivity is representative of European approaches to comparative religion and cross-cultural philosophy during the nineteenth century, and is an element of ‘Orientalist’ thinking as Said long ago characterized it.¹ Though occasionally better informed and often more insightful than Hegel’s typological historiography of world religions and philosophies, Schopenhauer’s broad-ranging investigations into other traditions are usually conducted from within, and always appropriated into, his own systematic depiction of reality. This is especially true of Schopenhauer’s encounter with Islam, which did not take place until the 1840s and 1850s, the last two decades of the philosopher’s life, by which time his unique ‘metaphysics of will’ was long completed and undergoing revisions and addendums. His references to Islam during these years classify it into a schematization of religious traditions

that corresponds to what he views as metaphysically and axiologically valid and invalid doctrines and practices, Islam belonging to the latter. This negative assessment of Islam results from a wildly contorted comparison of Islam with Christianity, and very overtly leads to the conclusion that Islam, along with its supposed closest religious relative, Judaism, should be considered the spiritual and cultural 'other' to Europe. In this comparison and its implications, all the perils of 'monological' comparative hermeneutics reveal themselves.

Until the first major revision of his *opus*, *The World as Will and Representation* in 1844, Schopenhauer's references to Islam, or the beliefs and practices of 'Mohammadans', were scanty and negligible.² Indeed, most of his research and writing were devoted to the European, Hindu and Indian Buddhist traditions for the first two decades of his philosophical career, and this focus holds until he resigns his unsuccessful, indeed nondescript, professorship in Berlin in 1830. He only begins to read about Islam in the very late 1830s and the early 1840s, and his early remarks about the religion are curtly dismissive. He initially acknowledges that Islam has highly developed moral teachings, but quickly adds that straightforward theistic ethics are bankrupt.³ This curt dismissal is, however, fleshed out in pronounced hostility in 1844. In a lengthy and pivotal essay entitled 'On man's need for metaphysics' in the second edition of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer, turning first to religion as an expression of the fundamental human desire to understand existence, writes:

Temples and churches, pagodas and mosques, in all countries and ages, in their splendor and spaciousness, testify to man's need for metaphysics, a need strong and ineradicable, which follows close on the physical. The man of a satirical frame of mind could of course add that this need for metaphysics is a modest fellow content with meager fare. Sometimes it lets itself be satisfied with clumsy fables and absurd fairy tales. If only they are imprinted early enough, they are for man adequate explanations of his existence and supports for his morality. Consider the Koran, for example; this wretched book was sufficient to start a world-religion, to satisfy the metaphysical need of countless millions for twelve hundred years, to become the basis of their morality and of a remarkable contempt for death, and also to inspire them to bloody wars and the most extensive conquests. In this book we find the saddest and poorest form of theism. Much may be lost in translation, but I have not been able to discover in it one single idea of value. Such things show that the capacity for metaphysics does not go hand in hand with the need for it.⁴

This is the most extensive passage on Islam in Schopenhauer's entire corpus, and so one may be tempted not to take it seriously and simply revile Schopenhauer's reception of Islam as yet another unthinking European derogation of all things non-European. But two factors mitigate this interpretation. The first is that Schopenhauer, despite the fact that his appropriation of Asian, largely Indian, philosophical ideas was done from the perspective of his own system, as noted above, was no European exclusivist, as his deep immersion in and extensive writings on the Asian religious and philosophical traditions amply demonstrate.⁵ He went so far as to claim openly that study of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions

in the West could culminate in a new European Renaissance akin to the first, which blossomed from the rediscovery of the Greco-Roman tradition (a debt owed in many respects to Muslim scholars, of which he is aware).⁶ His derogation of Islam is not based on simple ethnocentrism, but is more ideologically complex. This leads to the second point. Schopenhauer practically never refers to Islam in a vacuum; rather Islam is always compared to at least two or three other religious traditions where it is mentioned. The passage above, for instance, which depicts Islam as 'sad and poor monotheism' and its literary masterpiece, the Qur'ān, as 'wretched', is immediately followed by high praise for the authors of the *Upanishads*, which according to Schopenhauer represent a much more authentic view of the real metaphysical order.⁷ That is to say, Schopenhauer rejected the tenets and literature of Islam because they did not contain a metaphysical picture of the world that could be reconciled in any way with his own, not because of mere ethnocentricity.

Other significant passages dealing with Islam assess it with respect to the amount of 'optimism' Schopenhauer feels the tradition embodies. In the third edition of *The World as Will and Representation* published in 1859, Schopenhauer says, on the face of it paradoxically: 'atheistic Buddhism is much more closely akin to Christianity than are optimistic Judaism and its variety, Islam'.⁸ This theme of optimism is continued in a late discussion of mystical aspects of religion; he writes: 'Mohammedan mysticism has a very cheerful, Christian mysticism a melancholy and painful character, while that of the Hindus, standing above both, holds the mean in this respect.'⁹ Later on in the same discussion, Islam, along with a few other traditions, again comes out unfavorably in comparison with Christianity:

In truth it is not Judaism with its 'all was very good,' but Brahmanism and Buddhism that in spirit and ethical tendency are akin to Christianity. The spirit and ethical tendency, however, are the essentials of a religion, not the myths in which it clothes them. Therefore, I do not abandon the belief that the teachings of Christianity are to be derived in some way from those first and original religions... Christianity belongs to the ancient, true and sublime faith of mankind. This fact stands in contrast to the false, shallow and pernicious *optimism* that manifests itself in Greek paganism, Judaism and Islam.¹⁰

Because Islam is found deficient in Schopenhauer's eyes because of its more 'fundamental' disagreements 'in spirit and ethical tendency' to his own thought and the religious traditions he feels most affinity with, we must find why he valued or did not value these traditions as such in accordance with his own peculiar systematic concerns. We must pay special attention to the hermeneutic of 'optimism' and 'pessimism', which he explicitly avows in comparing traditions.

This hermeneutic operates in the matrix of a comparison between the Indian traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The basic dichotomy runs thus: the Semitic, monotheistic religious traditions, Islam and Judaism, are 'realistic', inasmuch as they believe in an objective world

created by God, and 'optimistic' insofar as they posit that the world has a teleological purpose connected with historical salvation and redemption by God. The Indian religious traditions, on the other hand, are 'idealistic' in the sense that they hold the world to be a merely phenomenal, though eternal, appearance, and 'pessimistic' inasmuch as they represent release from the world of suffering through renunciation as salvation. Schopenhauer, it turns out, spurns 'realism' as a philosophical position, and holds 'optimism' in vehement moral contempt for its failure to take due stock of the suffering of the world, and as a result, the Indian religious traditions are held in much higher esteem by Schopenhauer. Christianity, although in some respects a theological 'sect' of Judaism, burdened as it is by the 'realism' of the latter's doctrinal heritage, is in essence 'pessimistic', as is witnessed by its tenets of original sin and its placement of human suffering and other-worldly salvation at the center of its concern. Christianity has 'Indian blood in its veins', is somehow of partly Indian origin, and interpreted correctly, is a 'true' religion.

Schopenhauer's philosophy is of course most frequently associated with pessimism, and his employment of pessimism as a comparative hermeneutic has been found by a few scholars to be the most pernicious manifestation of his anti-Semitism and general cultural naïvety. J. I. Gesterling thinks that the major legacy of Schopenhauer's encounter with Indian thought was his association of it with his own brand of pessimism.¹¹ Schopenhauer tries, according to Gesterling, to solve all cultural problems with his notion of 'denial of the will-to-live', and this kind of unreflectivity leads him to entirely fail to notice that his assessments of Indian religion reflect 'axiological principles inherited from his own culture'.¹² Schopenhauer's unrelenting focus on concepts of 'anthropological negativity' causes him to fixate on the Buddhist emphasis on suffering or Hindu notions of 'renunciation' so obsessively that he treats India as if it needs 'no hermeneutic', and this treatment proves just how 'ethnocentric' Schopenhauer really is.¹³ J. J. Clarke has taken note of the fact that Schopenhauer's hermeneutic of pessimism compels him to use Indian thought to 'drive a wedge between Christianity and Judaism', and by extension, Islam.¹⁴ India is the tool with which Schopenhauer, on his own terms, validates the Christian tradition and denigrates the Jewish and Islamic.

To focus exclusively on Schopenhauer as, to use Fredrick Copleston's phrase, 'the philosopher of pessimism' and thus to treat his association of Indian religious thought with this pessimism as the overriding legacy of his encounter with India is to make too static and total those characterizations. No such labels as 'pessimistic' or 'optimistic' are applied by Schopenhauer to any religious or philosophical system in the first edition of his 'main work': these words appear nowhere in Schopenhauer's writing until the *Nachlass* of the late 1820s.¹⁵ Occasional reference is made to pessimism in the 1844 edition of *The World as Will and Representation*, but not until the 1850s did the terms 'pessimism' and 'optimism' come to be used with any consistency.¹⁶ Schopenhauer's categorization of philosophies and religions according to these labels became important to him only in the last two decades of his life, and only systematically so during the last ten years.

This qualification, however, does not help make much sense out of the

comparative hermeneutic Schopenhauer ends up thematizing and applying. He articulates the hermeneutic in the following way:

I cannot, as is generally done, put the *fundamental difference* of all religions in the question whether they are monotheistic, poly-theistic, pantheistic or atheistic, but only in the question whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, in other words, whether they present the existence of this world as justified by itself, and consequently praise and commend it, or consider it as something which can be conceived only as the consequence of our guilt, and thus really ought not to be, in that they recognize that pain and death cannot lie in the eternal, original and immutable order of things, that which in every respect ought not to be. The power by virtue of which Christianity was able to overcome first Judaism, and then the paganism of Greece and Rome, is to be found solely in its pessimism, in the confession that our condition is both exceedingly sorrowful and awful, whereas Judaism and paganism were optimistic.¹⁷

The testing of a philosophical system can also be done through this hermeneutic, for as Schopenhauer reminds us, metaphysics begins with the 'wonder' or 'astonishment' at the world's existence, and matures through the astonishment at the amount and degree of suffering and evil in the world.¹⁸ For this reason, he considered Spinoza's idea that this was 'the best of all possible worlds' not only logically odd, but morally pernicious, for it divested the ethical consequences of evil of their real significance. Schopenhauer believes that 'the world' is 'the consequence of our guilt', presumably since we are manifestations of the will-to-live, which compels us as individuals to egoism, and from an ethical point of view, really 'ought not to be'. But the issue of whether a philosophy 'praises' or 'condemns' the world betrays its total unreliability as a hermeneutic criterion of religious comparison already in the instant passage. Schopenhauer displays an amazingly naïve 'historical sense' by insisting that Christianity achieved its cultural and political ascendancy in its first four centuries of existence 'solely' by virtue of its pessimism, along perhaps with the unspoken hope that his philosophy would achieve similar acclaim throughout the world in the future for the same reason. A very strange wish.

The hermeneutic of optimism and pessimism was conceived by Schopenhauer, as mentioned above, in several ways. There was a metaphysical component to the hermeneutic as well as an ostensibly ethical one. On one occasion, Schopenhauer thematized the metaphysical component of the hermeneutic simply with respect to his metaphysics of will, writing that optimism was the 'unwarranted self-praise of...the will to live', while pessimism was the 'denial' of this will, as is found in 'Brahmanism, Buddhism, and also genuine Christianity'.¹⁹ This component however had a wider scope than this, appealing to the connection of realism and monotheistic creationism as opposed to idealism, atheism and the mere phenomenality of the world. In the 1848 edition of *The Fourfold Root*, Schopenhauer claims:

It is positively scandalous how, even today in the works of German scholars, religion and theism are usually regarded without more ado as

identical and synonymous, whereas religion is related to theism as a genus to a single species. In fact only Judaism and theism are identical. Therefore all races who are not Jews, Christians or Mohammedans are stigmatized by us with the common name of heathens. Because of the doctrine of the Trinity even Christians are reproached by Mohammedans and Jews with not being pure theists. For whatever anyone may say Christianity has Indian blood in its veins, and thus has a constant tendency to be rid of Judaism. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the most serious attack ever made on theism, and this is why the professors of philosophy have hastened to put his work on the shelf. If it had appeared in Buddhist countries, then...one would have perceived in it nothing but an edifying treatise on the more thorough refutation of its heretics, and the more salutary confirmation of the orthodox doctrine of idealism, namely that of the merely apparent existence of this world that is presented to our senses.²⁰

Schopenhauer begins this point by critiquing a pervasive tendency in Romantic scholars who had engaged with the Indian tradition, namely Herder, the Schlegel brothers, Schelling and even Friedrich Majer, to find in the religious traditions of Indian antiquity a 'pure, original monotheism' from which the Christian tradition had become separated through its centuries of theological development. This 'monotheistic prejudice' had begun to corrupt, in Schopenhauer's view, newer translations of the *Upanishads* by Poley, Roer, Colebrooke and even Rommohan Roy, for despite the facts that they were made directly from Sanskrit and many of the 'middle' *Upanishads* make frequent reference to a single 'God', Schopenhauer believed that these translations falsely projected 'Jewish theism' into these scriptures.²¹ Schopenhauer was convinced that Christianity and Islam were, inasmuch as they subscribed to monotheism, 'sects of Judaism' and had created in Europe the pretension that genuine religion was as such monotheistic, even though these three traditions squabbled amongst themselves and with one another over how to formulate that commitment theologically. Christianity, however, was somehow partly exempt from these errors, for its doctrine of the Trinity was one of the signs that it had 'Indian blood in its veins' and thus always exhibited a tendency to 'be rid of Judaism'.²² One of the important components of Indian religion that helps undermine this 'Jewish monotheism' is idealism, which proves the world to be merely an epistemological phenomenon 'presented to our senses'. In an interesting piece of hermeneutic speculation, Schopenhauer imagines that while modern German professors reject Kant out of their theological and religious beliefs, Kant's idealist assault on theism would be received favorably as 'orthodox' in 'Buddhist countries'. The 'realist' view of Jewish theology posits that God created an objective world, but the logical consequence of a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is that Judaism can have no 'doctrine of immortality', whereas 'Brahmanism and Buddhism', along with Christianity, which 'is Indian in spirit, and therefore, more than probably, of Indian origin, although indirectly, through Egypt', can espouse that the fundamental nature of the human being is with that of all other things, eternal, even though individuals are born and die.²³ This equips Hinduism, Buddhism and 'Indian Christianity' with a much greater capacity to reconcile their worshippers

to death than Judaism and 'Jewish-European Christianity' possess.²⁴ These arguments are combined with Schopenhauer's earlier arguments in support of idealism and against realism in order to buttress the superiority of Christianity and the Indian traditions over Judaism and Islam.

This truth of the metaphysical view of the world endorsed by Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity over Judaism and Islam is for Schopenhauer supplemented by their ethical superiority:

The innermost kernel and spirit of Christianity is identical with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism; they all teach a heavy guilt of the human race through its existence itself, only Christianity does not proceed in this respect directly and openly, like those more ancient religions.²⁵

While the Hindu and Buddhist religions have at their center doctrines which prove that the desires of the phenomenal world are deceptive and lead to suffering, and that the proper orientation toward the unitary metaphysical essence of all beings is compassionate identification with others and will-renunciation, Christianity's approach is more metaphorical. It pictures 'original sin' as coming from the guilt of the first human couple, with Christ serving as the divine example of compassionate love and renunciation. All the same, the Christian myth makes the same point about the evil of worldly existence and the necessity for transcending it as the Indian religions do; it contains their 'kernel':

However it may be in other respects, that (verse) 'All is very good' in the Old Testament is really very foreign to Christianity proper, for in the New Testament the world is generally spoken of as something to which we do not belong, which we do not love, the ruler of which, in fact, is the devil. This agrees with the ascetic spirit of the denial of one's self and the overcoming of the world. Like boundless love of one's neighbor, even of one's enemy, this spirit is the fundamental characteristic which Christianity has in common with Brahmanism and Buddhism, and which is evidence of their relationship.²⁶

The words of God in Genesis after he had created the world, 'it is very good', are the cornerstone for Schopenhauer of Jewish 'optimism'.²⁷ The world is good, it is meant to be good, and it is the mission and destiny of the Jewish people in history to be safeguarders of that goodness as a witness to the benevolent God of creation. Schopenhauer claims that in Christianity, Europe relearned 'what all of Asia' knew long before, that worldly life is evil, ephemeral and burdened by suffering and injustice, and was as a result completely transformed.²⁸ Hinduism and Buddhism are religions that teach that release from the world of birth and death, not a historical progression to moral perfection as in Judaism, is the only road to true salvation, and in this lies their pessimism.²⁹

An entirely separate study would probably be required to unravel all of the generalizations Schopenhauer makes with regard to Judaism, Islam, Christianity and the Hindu and Buddhist traditions with the comparative hermeneutic he employs, and I will not attempt to solve Schopenhauer's extremely problematic characterizations of these traditions here.³⁰ Our immediate concern is how this 'pessimist's hermeneutic' is used to pit Christianity fundamentally against

Judaism and Islam through the former's purported origination from Hindu and Indian Buddhist thought, and to identify the Indian religious traditions by their 'pessimism'. As to the first point, Clarke's observation is certainly accurate, that Schopenhauer uses Indian thought to 'drive a wedge between Christianity and Judaism'.³¹ Just as above, where Indian philosophical thought was solicited as evidence to verify the tenets of the *philosophia perennis*, or more properly Schopenhauer's representation of those tenets, here the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, constructed as monolithic entities with hardly any distinction between them, are aligned with Christianity in the most tenuous, obscure and arbitrary fashions against Judaism and Islam, which are themselves treated as religious monoliths. It is completely unclear, in any of these cases, how idealism logically implies a pessimistic worldview, for this was not the conclusion either Kant or Hegel came to. It is even more curious how idealism must entail atheism, since Schopenhauer's near and actual contemporaries, Berkeley, Kant, Jacobi, Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling and even Hegel, all held their own unique brands of religious faith. Theism can be and has been attacked or supported on realist, empiricist, nominalist, solipsist, skeptical and idealist grounds, and so it is at least problematic to say how any particular ontological position could decide the matter of theism with any logical necessity either way unless it had done so *a priori*. This is perhaps what Schopenhauer could have learned, but failed, from the Kantian antinomies, instead of taking them as outright refutations of the monotheistic position. It is also what could have been gleaned from early Buddhist skepticism, but again what Schopenhauer took from Buddhism was the implication that, because the Buddha remained silent on questions concerning God's existence, this silence constituted denial. One could ask conversely how realism necessarily leads to the conclusion that God exists, or that creationism must presuppose a realist ontology, for had not Berkeley fitted God's existence into a different ontological picture? To say that the *Upanishads* and Vedanta in general, taking into account its Advaita, Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita interpreters, espoused an idealistic atheism is of course also in gross contradiction to the facts, not to mention the whole religious matrix he abstrusely referred to as 'Hinduism'. Of course, as a philosophical thinker interested in building a system, Schopenhauer is at liberty to attempt to find his own positions on these matters. But to take those solutions and convert them into a hermeneutic that receives every true idealism as atheistic and every consistent realism as monotheistic, and considers every available departure from this as an aberration of some kind, is to be not merely historically naïve, but willfully historically blind. It is not the case, as many have believed, that Schopenhauer was 'ahistorical', but it must be conceded that in this case the historical judgments he made about the world's religious traditions and their various philosophical positions were woefully inadequate. Schopenhauer, in his late works, is not concerned with these facts. He has found what to him must have seemed an ingenious interpretation of Christianity that grounded it in the spiritual soil of India, an interpretation which not only 'saved' the better parts of Christianity and made the study of Indian thought that much more important to Europeans, but also showed up Judaism and its heritage, along with Islam, which he perceived to be most closely aligned to Judaism, to be religious impostors in Europe.

Perhaps most amazingly, this comparative hermeneutic of 'optimism' and 'pessimism', along with the dichotomy it creates between traditions, is further turned by Schopenhauer into a lens through which a fundamental schism within Islam can be detected. This is found in the several passages in which Schopenhauer records very positive impressions of Şūfism. In 1840 he observes that the philosophical truth of the ideality and thus illusory nature of the phenomenal world as the manifestation of an underlying unity of Being was defended by a whole host of European and Indian philosophers, but also by the Şūfī tradition.³² This list of great 'perennial philosophers' to which the Şūfīs, 'the Gnostics of Islam', belong is expanded four years later.³³ The fact that within the Islamic tradition is found a counter-current to the predominant ideology of its 'theistic, realistic optimism', namely Şūfism, provides in the end an ultimate 'mystical agreement' between all these traditions:

Existence is certainly to be regarded as an error or mistake, to return from which is salvation; it bears this character throughout. Therefore it is conceived in this sense by the ancient Samana religions, and also by real and original Christianity, although in a roundabout way. Even Judaism itself contains the germ of such a view, at any rate in the Fall of man; this is its redeeming feature. Only Greek paganism and Islam are wholly optimistic; therefore in the former the opposite tendency had to find expression at least in tragedy. In Islam, however, the most modern as well as the worst of all religions, this opposite tendency appeared as *Sufism*, that very fine phenomenon which is entirely Indian in spirit and origin, and has now continued to exist for over a thousand years.³⁴

In perhaps what can be seen as simultaneously an early German Orientalist reflex as well as a sign of his own personal convictions, all good things for Schopenhauer, including here even Şūfism, are 'Indian in spirit and origin'. This makes a statement that almost immediately follows the above quotation even more puzzling, which asserts that the equivalence of salvation and world-renunciation is 'the most universally recognized, fundamental truth in the whole of non-Mohammedan Asia'.³⁵ The distinction is then between a strand of Islam that is Arabic, or 'Semitic', in origin and historical evolution and another strand which is Indian in origin and perennialist in evolution, the latter of which allows for some affinity between Islam and Christianity not only from the viewpoints of their more 'fundamental' doctrines and ethics, but also in his eyes as progenitors of European thought, which is itself 'Indian in origin'.

The woeful inadequacies and distortions of Schopenhauer's comparative hermeneutics of religion have already been illustrated, and so a historical refutation of all these claims is unnecessary for our purposes. Schopenhauer's methodology of interpretation, comparison and contrast between the many religious and philosophical traditions of the world is disappointingly, hopelessly defective, especially for someone who devoted so much time and effort to such serious study of non-European cultures and who was otherwise as sophisticated a thinker as Schopenhauer. It is nevertheless important to understand that the failure of Schopenhauer's hermeneutic lies in its deepest form not in the fatally flawed logic of 'optimism' and 'pessimism' and their respective connections

with Schopenhauer's own thought, but in what I would call its trenchantly monological stance. Schopenhauer, in all his admirable study of the world's religions, learns what he learns through books and not encounters, and his characterizations of Western and Asian thought, far from arising out of dialogue and exchange, occur in the space of his own metaphysical reflections. Even the most enthusiastic of all Schopenhauer exegetes, Arthur Hübscher had to concede:

He was not a dialogical thinker like the Romantics, like those who tried to find fulfillment in the vibrant exchange of forces and ideas being passed back and forth in the debate halls and strengthened in their creative confrontations. In his view, the dialogue served the purposes of pursuing problems as well as testing and criticizing their solutions. But no philosophical truth was ever invented in the course of the interactive thought of the dialogue.³⁶

The circumstances of Schopenhauer's encounter with Islam, the Romantic Orientalist environment in which the scholarship he read was being produced, and his own predilection to interpret only from the perspective of his own metaphysical system combine to create a situation where, rather than letting Islam speak for itself in the 'debate hall', the European philosopher is speaking for it. And through his pen, one and all traditions dissolve from being living historical conversations which change and diversify into static, monolithic categories embedded in a conceptual system. In this light, we can see that, in addition to all that his works teach us about Islam, it is the resilient methodological commitment to dynamism, historical context and the living conversations which traditions are that is so valuable in the scholarship of Professor Ayoub.

Notes

1. Scholars have disagreed over the extent to which Schopenhauer can be classified as an Orientalist, and since his tenuous relationship to this movement is quite complex given his attitude toward different Asian traditions, I will not enter into a detailed discussion of this issue here. However, if one adopts Said's three facets of Orientalism, the academic interest in Asian cultures, the intellectual mastery of Asian traditions as a means of self-identification and the exploitation of Asian cultures by Europe through various means of intellectual subordination, then Schopenhauer may clearly fit the description of the first two of these facets. See E. Said (1979) *Orientalism* (New York: Random House), pp. 2–3, 115. However, even Said admits that Schopenhauer's interest in India and Asian thought could not historically have coincided with German colonial interests (*ibid.*, p. 19).
2. One illustrative comment, taken from Schopenhauer's early notes and published in the second edition of *The World as Will and Representation* of 1844, asserts that the absence of plastic and pictorial art in 'Mohammedan cultures' serves as evidence that they are not as essential art forms as poetry and music, which can be found in every culture (Schopenhauer, A. (1966) *World as Will and Representation II*, translated by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications), p. 425).
3. See *On the Basis of Morality* (1995), translated by E. F. J. Payne (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books), p. 170. Schopenhauer gives no more justification for his rejection of theism than brief reference to the Kantian antinomy on the proofs for God's existence, which he took to be conclusive evidence that thinking about God's existence was unreasonable (see *World as Will and Representation I*, pp. 507–510). He considered imperative ethics based on theological premises to be lacking an intelligible account for moral responsibility, since, if God were the creator of all, it is he and not human beings who must assume ultimate responsibility for human actions (*ibid.*, pp. 374–375).

4. *The World as Will and Representation II*, p. 162.
5. See W. Halbfass (1988) *India and Europe: an Essay in Understanding* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), pp. 106–120.
6. *The World as Will and Representation I*, pp. 356–357. Again, however, one is struck by the extent to which Schopenhauer believes the value of this study lies not in the encounter with these cultures themselves, but with what they can contribute to European self-understanding. Such a fact can be and has been interpreted both as a sign of Schopenhauer's ethnocentricity and as an inevitable consequence of any interpreter's hermeneutic circumstances.
7. *The World as Will and Representation II*, p. 162. To drive the point home concerning the fundamental contrast between Hinduism and Islam, Schopenhauer recounts in great detail the history of his favorite translation of the *Upanishads* by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French scholar, Anquetil Duperron, whose Latin renderings and commentaries on 50 of these classical texts were made from the Persian translation of 1657 of Dara Shikoh. The latter was executed by his brother Aurangzeb, his chief competitor for the Mughal throne, because of his belief that the *Upanishads* represented the pinnacle of metaphysical knowledge. See *Parerga und Paralipomena I, Werke in fünf Bänden* (1988), edited by Ludger Lütkehaus (Zürich: Haffmann Verlag), p. 348. Schopenhauer does not mention in this connection that Shikoh's actual conviction was that the *Upanishads* contained the first historical germs for monotheism which were revealed in perfection to the Prophet, and that it was only Shikoh's suggestion that the *Upanishads* and not the Hebrew scriptures were the first historical texts witnessing to this truth that got him in trouble with the Mughal court.
8. *The World as Will and Representation II*, p. 444.
9. *ibid.*, p. 613.
10. *ibid.*, p. 623.
11. *German Pessimism and Indian Philosophy: a Hermeneutic Reading* (1986) (Delhi: Ajanta), p. 35.
12. *ibid.*, p. 58.
13. *ibid.*, p. 59.
14. J. J. Clarke (1997) *Oriental Enlightenment: the Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (New York: Routledge), p. 68.
15. J. Atwell (1990) *Schopenhauer: the Human Character* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), p. 146.
16. *ibid.*
17. *The World as Will and Representation II*, p. 170.
18. *ibid.*, pp. 170, 172.
19. *ibid.*, p. 584.
20. *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1974), translated by E. F. J. Payne (La Salle, IL: Open Court), p. 187.
21. See *On the Basis of Morality*, p. 207.
22. This was only one of the signs of the fundamental divide between Christianity and Judaism Schopenhauer repeatedly emphasizes, and we shall visit more below. A further reason for Schopenhauer's suspicion that Christianity was of Indian origin had to do with the historical theories supporting it among the nineteenth-century Romantics. Schopenhauer adopted the view of Friedrich Majer that elements of Indian thought had found their way to Egypt long before the birth of the Christian religion, and the formation of the latter had much to do with the proximity of Buddhist missionaries, Greek sages and early Christian communities in Egyptian cosmopolitan cities like Alexandria (see Halbfass, *India and Europe*, pp. 73, 356). J. J. Clarke has recently reiterated the many historical contacts between India and the West from the Buddhist missionary ventures to the West sponsored by King Ashoka to Alexander's military campaigns into and philosophical encounters with India. Buddhist monks were known to the Hellenic and Roman worlds, and many abstract similarities do exhibit themselves between Christian and Indian 'mythologies', and while 'evidence is flimsy' and 'direct lines of influence are difficult to trace', enough points of contact and mythological and even ritual similarities exist to make room for the speculations of the Romantics (see Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, pp. 37–38).
23. *The World as Will and Representation II*, p. 488.
24. *ibid.*, p. 463.
25. *ibid.*, p. 604.
26. *ibid.*, pp. 624–625.
27. There is one thing, Schopenhauer claims, that 'reconciles' him to Judaism, and that is the myth of the fall,

a witness to human guilt and the suffering humans impose upon themselves as a result of this 'original' guilt. But this is not even an element native to Jewish thinking proper, for this was taken from the moral dualism of Zoroastrianism (*World as Will and Representation I*, p. 580). The myth of the fall provided the place where 'the stem' of Christianity, Indian thought, could be 'grafted' onto a religion otherwise ruled over by Jewish monotheistic dogmatism (*World as Will and Representation II*, p. 605).

28. *ibid.*, p. 627.

29. *ibid.*, p. 628.

30. Barbara A. Holdrege's outstanding recent study (1996), *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press) goes a long way toward undermining the superficial dichotomies generations of comparative religion scholars since Schopenhauer have been prone to make between the Jewish and Hindu traditions. The brahminical and rabbinic traditions both are constituted, as she says, as 'textual communities' by their scriptural traditions, the respective cosmologies of which give metaphysical, ritualistic, ethical and social order to their traditions as well as legitimate the roles of the 'cultural elites', the interpreters of these scriptural heritages (Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, p. 2). She believes that the structural similarities of these traditions and their social implications are much more fruitful areas of comparison than the doctrinal and ritual differences between them, which themselves have always tended to be overgeneralized.

31. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, p. 68.

32. *On the Basis of Morality*, p. 208.

33. *The World as Will and Representation II*, p. 612.

34. *ibid.*, p. 605.

35. *ibid.*

36. *Denker gegen den Strom: Schopenhauer: Gestern–Heute–Morgen* (1973) (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag), p. 192.