

**PANENTHEISM AND THE “MOST NONSENSICAL SUPERSTITION”  
OF POLYTHEISM: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF K.C.F.  
KRAUSE’S RECEPTION OF VEDĀNTA AND HINDU RELIGION**

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**Abstract.** The German philosopher K.C.F. Krause (1781–1832) found deep conceptual parallels between his panentheistic system and the Indian philosophy of Vedānta. This article critically examines Krause’s understanding of Vedānta and popular Hindu religion. I argue that while Krause was correct in viewing the mystical panentheistic doctrine of Vedānta as a precursor to his own philosophy, he was also frequently misled by unreliable translations and secondary texts. Krause, I suggest, was mistaken in characterizing the Hindu practice of image worship as “polytheism” and “idolatry,” and I contend, from a Vedāntic standpoint, that Krause’s denial of the divinity of Jesus is inconsistent with his own panentheistic metaphysics.

The German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832), perhaps most famous for coining the term “panentheism” (*Panentheismus*), took an unusually strong interest in the Indian philosophy of Vedānta. He not only endeavored to learn Sanskrit but also read voraciously the burgeoning contemporary European literature on Vedānta. Krause found deep resonances between Vedānta and his own panentheistic system and played a major role in introducing Vedānta to the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, his more famous contemporary and one-time neighbor.<sup>1</sup>

While Schopenhauer’s reception of Indian thought has been a major topic of scholarly discussion,<sup>2</sup> Krause’s reception of Indian thought has received far less attention. As far as I am aware, only two scholars have discussed the latter theme to date. Over sixty years ago, Helmuth von Glasenapp discussed the conceptual parallels between Krause’s metaphysical system and Vedāntic

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1 Benedikt P. Göcke, *The Panentheism of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832)* (Peter Lang, 2018), 141–53.

2 See, for instance, Arati Barua, *Schopenhauer and Indian Philosophy: A Dialogue between India and Germany* (Northern Book Centre, 2008).

thought.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Claus Dierksmeier has begun to explore some of the ways that Krause's philosophical thinking might have been influenced by his study of Vedānta.<sup>4</sup>

This article has two main aims. First, it aims to shed new light on Krause's reception of Vedānta by discussing issues not addressed by Glasenapp or Dierksmeier. Second, it aims to explain, and critically assess, Krause's understanding of popular Hindu religion and its relation to Vedānta. In particular, I will suggest preliminary answers to the following questions. What did Krause mean by the "*Vedanta-Philosophie*"? On which primary and secondary sources did he rely for his understanding of Vedānta and the Hindu religion? How reliable were these sources? How adequate was Krause's understanding of Vedānta and the Hindu religion? Are Krause's criticisms of popular Hindu religion valid? Can we turn the tables on Krause by critically examining his own panentheistic system from the standpoint of Vedānta?

Section 1 addresses the question of whether Krause had read any Vedāntic texts in the original Sanskrit and also discusses his understanding of the panentheistic doctrine of the Upaniṣads and its affinities with his own panentheistic system. Section 2 examines Krause's remarks about the "Vedānta philosophy" and discusses the secondary sources on which he relied for his information about Vedānta. Section 3 outlines Krause's views on popular Hindu religion and examines the secondary sources on which he relied. As we will see, while he praised the philosophy of Vedānta, he harshly criticized popular Hindu religion for deviating from Vedānta in its embrace of "polytheism" and "idol worship." Section 4 identifies some of the limitations of Krause's understanding of Vedānta and argues that his criticisms of popular Hindu religion stem from his failure to recognize the Vedāntic underpinnings of the Hindu practice of image worship. I also contend that the Vedāntic doctrine of multiple Divine Incarnations offers an attractive dialectical alternative to

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3 Helmuth von Glasenapp, "Indien in der Gedankenwelt des Philosophen Karl Christian Friedrich Krause", in *Ausgewählte Kleine Schriften*, ed. Heinz Bechert and Volker Moeller (Franz Steiner, 1956), 504–10.

4 Claus Dierksmeier, "Eastern Principles within Western Metaphysics: Krause and Schopenhauer's Reception of Indian Philosophy", in *Conversations in Philosophy: Crossing the Boundaries*, ed. Ed Brandon, F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo and Roxanne Burton (Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 63–72.

the orthodox Christian view that Jesus was the one and only Incarnation and Krause's view that Jesus was not an Incarnation at all.

## I. KRAUSE'S KNOWLEDGE OF SANSKRIT AND HIS REMARKS ON THE PANENTHEISTIC DOCTRINE OF THE OUPNEK'HAT

According to Rüdiger Safranski, "Krause, unlike Schopenhauer, mastered Sanskrit and produced his own translations."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, Safranski does not cite any evidence in support of this claim. According to Kurt Riedel, Krause, in 1808, purchased Bopp's and Wilkins's Sanskrit grammar textbooks and aimed to learn Sanskrit grammar within two months.<sup>6</sup> However, Riedel goes on to note that Krause failed in his endeavor, as he had "underestimated the difficulty of his undertaking."<sup>7</sup> Krause's disciple August Proksch remarked that Krause "recognized Sanskrit 'as the mother of our original language' and studied it assiduously."<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, in a journal entry from 1816, Krause himself noted that he was "learning" Sanskrit, though I have found no direct evidence that he "mastered" Sanskrit grammar, as Safranski suggests.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, I have found no evidence to support Safranski's claim that Krause "produced his own translations" of any Sanskrit texts. In fact, it is noteworthy that in his discussions of the Upaniṣads and Vedānta philosophy, Krause never directly quoted from the original Sanskrit editions of any Vedāntic texts. Moreover, all the sources he cited in his discussions of Vedānta were translations of Sanskrit texts by European and Indian scholars. Hence, as far as I am aware, there is no direct evidence that Krause actually read any Vedāntic texts in the original Sanskrit.<sup>10</sup>

5 Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer und die wilden Jahre der Philosophie* (Fischer, 2016), 302.

6 *Fast vollständige Karl Chr. Fr. Krause — Bücherkunde und ausführliche Krause-Nachlaß-Bibliographie, Erste Abteilung: Nachlaß-Bibliographie, 7. Lieferung: Briefe von, an und über Karl Chr. Fr. Krause* (unpublished typed manuscript held in Univ. of Dresden Library, 1954), 215.

7 Kurt Riedel, "Schopenhauer bei Karl Christian Friedrich Krause" 37 (1956): 215.

8 August Proksch, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause: Ein Lebensbild* (Fr. Wilh. Grunow, 1880), 65.

9 K.C.F. Krause, *Anschauungen oder Lehren und Entwürfe zur Höherbildung des Menschheitens* (Otto Schulze, 1890), 161.

10 Riedel does claim that Krause "studied Sanskrit texts in Devanāgarī script in Paris," but he cites no evidence in support of this claim, and he does not suggest that these "Sanskrit texts" were Vedāntic texts. See Riedel, "Schopenhauer bei Karl Christian Friedrich Krause", 18.

Two of the most distinctive features of Krause's philosophy are his panentheism and his mystical doctrine that the foundation of all knowledge is the direct "intuition" (*Grundschaung*) of God.<sup>11</sup> In various places in his work, he claims that both of these features of his philosophy are also "contained in the Vedas and in the philosophy of Vedānta grounded therein" (*in den Vedam und in der darauf gegründeten Vedanta-Philosophie enthalten*).<sup>12</sup> Krause's panentheistic metaphysics is based on a key distinction between God as "*Urwesen*" and God as "*Orwesen*," and he claims that this distinction is already present in the "Vedānta system":

The knowledge of God as *Urwesen*, outside of and beyond the world, and as a wise, holy, and just Providence, is clearly explained in the Platonic dialogues, although the distinction between Essence [*Wesen*] as the one, self-same and whole Essence and Essence as *Urwesen* is not found in the Platonic dialogues. This fundamental distinction already seems to have been made in the Vedānta system and is, in particular, of decisive importance for the science of religion.<sup>13</sup>

In Krause's technical terms, God as *Urwesen* is the perfect and omniscient personal God who rules over the world while remaining distinct from it. In this passage, Krause distinguishes God as *Urwesen* from God as the one Whole that *encompasses* the world — which he elsewhere defines as "*Orwesen*."<sup>14</sup> For Krause, if theism conceives God as distinct from the world and pantheism conceives God as the world, panentheism conceives God *both* as the world (as *Orwesen*) and as distinct from the world (as *Urwesen*). It is highly significant that Krause finds this panentheistic distinction between God as *Urwesen* and God as *Orwesen* in the "Vedānta system." Indeed, in numerous other places in his work, he elaborates the panentheistic conception of God as "*Or-Omwesen*"<sup>15</sup> and notes that in the Upaniṣads, the word "Om" refers to the "Essence as the organismic structure of all things" (*Wesen als Wesengliedbau*

11 For discussion, see Göcke, *The Panentheism of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832)*, 49–51; Glasenapp, 17–19.

12 K.C.F. Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Otto Schulze, 1887), 471. All translations of passages from Krause's work are my own.

13 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 119.

14 See Göcke, *The Panentheism of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832)*, 81–128.

15 K.C.F. Krause, *Lebenlehre und Philosophie der Geschichte* (Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1843), 463.

*Seyendes allerding*s).<sup>16</sup> In the Upaniṣads, “Om” is the sound symbol that represents the ultimate reality Brahman as encompassing the entire world while also remaining beyond it.<sup>17</sup>

Krause goes so far as to claim that his own panentheistic doctrine is in perfect consonance with the “doctrine of the Vedas according to the *Oupnek’hat*”:

The Vedas contain the pure intuition of Essence [*die reine Wesenschauung*] and the universal recognition that everything that is — nature and man, body and mind — is in God, or rather, that God in Himself is everything that is; that God — that is, Essence [*Wesen*] — is present in everything, reigns in everything, guides and governs all life as a whole; that the souls of human beings are capable of becoming one with God, if they strive for the knowledge of God, if they grow inward and intimate with God, and imitate God by leading a pure moral life, behaving with others in a just, loving and peaceful manner, and without following the impulses of fear and hope and of pleasure and pain; if they become similar to God in knowledge, feeling, and willing in giving peace to all beings and loving even their enemies and persecutors. According to the explicit and repeated declarations of this ancient Indian teaching of the Vedas, the only means of union with God is the intuition of Essence [*Weschauung*] through true scientific knowledge and pure and unselfish virtue. But the Vedas recognize ignorance [*Unwissenheit*] as the first source of all perversion and evil — that is, the lack of the knowledge of God [*den Mangel an Gotterkenntniss*], which arises from the limitation of sensuality and the resultant distraction and carelessness.<sup>18</sup>

This is, for the most part, a remarkably accurate summary of some of the main teachings of the Upaniṣads.<sup>19</sup> The Upaniṣads do, indeed, teach that the ultimate reality Brahman is everything in the world and that we can attain knowledge of Brahman through ethical and spiritual practice.

It is significant, however, that Krause derived his understanding of the Upaniṣads not from the original Sanskrit scriptures but from Anquetil Duperron’s *Oupnek’hat* (1801–2), a Latin translation of Prince Dara Shikoh’s ear-

16 K.C.F. Krause, *Vorlesungen über das System der Philosophie* (Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1828), 416.

17 See especially the Māṇḍūkya and Praśna Upaniṣads, which Krause himself cites in *Vorlesungen über das System der Philosophie*, 416.

18 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 39.

19 As far as I can tell, the only significant lacuna in Krause’s summary of Upaniṣadic doctrine is that he overlooks passages in the Upaniṣads — like Śvetāśvara Upaniṣad 6.11 — which suggest that Brahman is not only personal but also impersonal and without attributes (*nirguṇa*).

lier Persian translation of fifty Upaniṣads.<sup>20</sup> Krause remarked that he had read the *Oupnek'hat* “repeatedly since 1805” and effused that it “has an extraordinary clarity, and one comes to know from it the Indian brahminical spirit purely and truly [*rein und echt*].”<sup>21</sup> However, as recent scholars have noted, the *Oupnek'hat* actually deviates from the original Sanskrit Upaniṣads in significant ways. As Urs App has shown in detail, Dara’s Persian translation of the Upaniṣads, entitled *Sirr-i Akbar*, was not a “pure translation project” but a composite work that included not only the Persian translation of the original Sanskrit Upaniṣads but also extensive explanations and interpretive glosses in Persian that were sometimes provided by Dara himself and more often provided by “the learned experts who consulted various Upanishad commentaries and often relied on Shankara.”<sup>22</sup> Crucially, in Dara’s *Sirr-i Akbar*, the explanations and glosses were not clearly distinguished from the Upaniṣad texts; accordingly, Anquetil-Duperron’s Latin translation of the Persian *Sirr-i Akbar* — which Krause read — presented these explanations and glosses as part of the Upaniṣad texts themselves. For instance, the first few paragraphs of the *Eischavasieh* (Īśā) Upaniṣad contain not the text of the Upaniṣad itself but Dara’s own extensive explanation of key terms and ideas from this Upaniṣad.<sup>23</sup> As a follower of Sufism, Dara aimed to show that the Upaniṣads teach the doctrine of pure monotheism.

Strangely, Krause praised the *Oupnek'hat* for its faithfulness to the original Upaniṣads and nowhere acknowledged the countless amplifications and modifications to the texts. Indeed, Krause, like Schopenhauer, seems to have wrongly assumed that the explanations and glosses in the *Oupnek'hat* were part of the Upaniṣad texts themselves. Since Schopenhauer did not know Sanskrit, it is not surprising that he made this mistake. However, Krause *did* seem to know Sanskrit, and if he had read the original Sanskrit Upaniṣads, he would have immediately recognized that the *Oupnek'hat* is not a faithful translation. Therefore, I am led to infer that Krause did not read the original Sanskrit Upaniṣads.

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20 Krause also referred to Rammohun Roy’s English translation of four Upaniṣads in Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 44.

21 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 36.

22 Urs App, *Schopenhauer’s Kompass* (Univ.Media, 2014), 140–41.

23 App, *Schopenhauer’s Kompass*, 141–44.

## II. KRAUSE'S REMARKS ON THE "VEDANTA-SYSTEM"

Krause claims that of all the orthodox Indian philosophical schools (i.e. schools that accept the authority of the Vedas), the "*Vedanta-System*" — as presented in Vyāsa's *Brahmasūtra* — comes closest to the doctrines of the Upaniṣads.<sup>24</sup> He summarizes the philosophical system of Vedānta as follows:

The main tenet of this system is that the One Indivisible Being, as such, has no particular qualities, and therefore can be said to be Nothing [*das Nichts*] — that is, nothing finite [*nichts Endliches*]. When God is at rest, there is no world of physical matter [*Leibwelt*] or of living beings [*Geistwelt*]. But when God is subject to the drive of infinite longing [*Triebe des unendlichen Sehns*], the world comes forth as the infinite dream of the divine imagination, of Maya. God, as Maya, creates the world in which God reveals Himself to Himself. Nothing in the world has an independent existence. God, as the Principle, and the soul are One. God as the infinite spirit is distinct from God as the One unconditioned being. As long as the soul does not recognize God and God's relationship to it and to the world, it is in deception. Likeness to God [*Gottähnlichkeit*] is achieved through inactive quiet and by not attaching special importance to any human relationship.<sup>25</sup>

If Krause's summary of the doctrine of the Upaniṣads was largely accurate, his summary of the "*Vedanta-System*" is highly problematic for two main reasons. First, Krause mistakenly conflated Vedānta with Advaita Vedānta, the particular school of Vedānta codified by Śaṅkara. Krause was led to make this conflation likely because of his reliance on the work of contemporary scholars like J. Taylor and Rammohun Roy, who similarly conflated Vedānta with Advaita Vedānta. It is interesting to note, however, that Henry Thomas Colebrooke, another scholar cited by Krause,<sup>26</sup> did explicitly acknowledge that "the followers of the *vedānta* have separated in several sects,"<sup>27</sup> and Colebrooke further remarked that apart from Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, there were many other commentaries by followers of non-Advaitic schools of Vedānta like Rāmānuja, Vallabha, Madhva, and Nīlakaṇṭha, "whose interpretations differ essentially on some points from ŚANCARA'S."<sup>28</sup>

24 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 41.

25 *Ibid.*, 41.

26 *Ibid.*, 38.

27 Henry T. Colebrooke, "Essay on the Philosophy of the Hindus: Part V" 2, no. 1 (1829): 2.

28 Colebrooke, "Essay on the Philosophy of the Hindus: Part V", 7–8.

Unlike Colebrooke, however, Krause adopted a monolithic understanding of the “*Vedanta-System*” and failed to acknowledge the many non-Advaitic sects of Vedānta, including Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, Madhva’s Dvaita Vedānta, Nimbārka’s Bhedābheda Vedānta, and Vallabha’s Śuddhādvaita Vedānta. In fact, in section 4 of this article, I will argue that Krause’s oversight is a serious one, as his own panentheistic system comes much closer to Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta than to Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta.

Second, Krause was also misled by contemporary scholars in his understanding of Advaita Vedānta. According to Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta, the sole reality is the attributeless (*nirguṇa*) and nondual Brahman, so the personal God (*sagūṇa* Brahman), individual souls, and the world are empirically existent but ultimately non-existent, since they are all, at bottom, one and the same *nirguṇa* Brahman distinguished only by their respective unreal “limiting adjuncts” (*upādhis*). In his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.14, Śaṅkara explains the ontological status of the personal God (*īśvara*), as follows:

Thus *īśvara*’s rulership, omniscience, and omnipotence are dependent on the limiting adjuncts conjured up by ignorance; but from the ultimate standpoint, such terms as “the ruler,” “the ruled,” “omniscience,” etc. cannot be used with regard to the Ātman shining in Its own nature after the removal of all limiting adjuncts through knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

For Śaṅkara and his followers, the impersonal, attributeless (*nirguṇa*) Brahman and the personal God (*sagūṇa* Brahman or *īśvara*) are not equally real. Rather, from the ultimate standpoint, only the impersonal nondual Brahman is real, while the personal God is empirically real but ultimately unreal, since it is the same *nirguṇa* Brahman with the unreal “limiting adjuncts” (*upādhis*) of “lordship” (*īśvaratva*), “omnipotence,” and so on. Likewise, all living beings are, in fact, identical with the impersonal nondual Brahman but are unaware of this fact because of their ignorance of Brahman and their consequently mistaken identification with the body-mind complex. Śaṅkara also upholds *vivartavāda*, the doctrine that the world is an illusory appearance. As he puts it in his commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.27, Brahman “ultimately remains unchanged,” even though it *appears* to transform into the world “on account

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29 Śaṅkarācārya, *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* (Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 334.



of the differences of aspects, constituted by name and form, ... which are imagined through ignorance."<sup>30</sup>

Tellingly, in the passage quoted two paragraphs earlier, Krause mischaracterized Śaṅkara's system of Advaita Vedānta as a monotheistic philosophy. According to Krause, God "has no particular qualities" in the sense of having no "finite" qualities. However, as I just noted, Śaṅkara understands *nirguṇa* Brahman in the much more radical sense of being *impersonal*, since it is devoid even of all the omniattributes of the personal God such as omniscience and omnipotence. Krause, instead of characterizing God as the impersonal Absolute, claimed that the God of Advaita Vedānta is the personal monotheistic God who exists in two states: when God is in a "state of rest," there is neither a world nor any living beings, but when God is subject to "infinite longing," He "creates the world" through his "Maya." Krause seemed to have been unaware that Śaṅkara relegated the personal God, individual souls, and the world to an inferior ontological status, since they are not ultimately real. For Krause, the world is God's "infinite dream" not in the sense of being ultimately non-existent but in the sense of having no "independent existence." Moreover, Krause mischaracterized the soteriological goal of Advaita Vedānta as the achievement of "likeness to God" (*Gottähnlichkeit*), whereas Śaṅkara held that the goal is to realize our absolute identity with the impersonal nondual Absolute. In short, Krause transformed Śaṅkara's *non*-theistic philosophy of the nondual Absolute into a system of monotheism.

Krause can hardly be blamed for this mistake, as he did not seem to have read any of Śaṅkara's texts but relied instead on the secondary work of scholars who tended to interpret Śaṅkara as a monotheist. Krause noted that his summary of Advaita Vedānta quoted above was indebted especially to J. Taylor's account of Vedānta in the Appendix to his translation of the *Prabôdha Chandrôdaya*.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, parts of Krause's summary are an almost word-for-word translation of Taylor's own summary, which runs as follows:

The fundamental principle of the Vêdanta philosophy is, that the universe is one simple, unextended, indivisible Being, who is denominated the true, the living, the happy, to distinguish him from illusory, inanimate, visible appearance. It is evident that no description can be given of this Being; hence in answering enquiries the Vedântas sometimes say that He is

30 Śaṅkarâcârya, *Brahma-Sûtra-Bhâṣya of Śrî Śaṅkarâcârya*, 356.

31 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 43n.

nothing, which must be understood merely to intimate a negation of sensible qualities, figure, extension, &c., and also of the mental affections, passion &c. Whilst this Being remains in a state of rest there is no visible world or sensitive existences; but when at the impulse of desire motion is excited in him, all the variety of appearances and sensations which form the universe are displayed. The first condition of this Being is called Nirgúna, without quality; the second condition is that of Sagúna, with quality. The question, how does desire or volition arise in this simple Being, forms the subject of many disputes; and I believe that even the subtlety of Hindu metaphysics has not yet furnished a satisfactory reply.<sup>32</sup>

In this passage, apart from mistakenly conflating “the Vēdanta philosophy” with Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta, Taylor also seriously mischaracterized Advaita Vedānta as a monotheistic philosophy. Notice that Taylor seems to conceive the *nirguṇa* Brahman of Advaita Vedānta as the personal God — “the true, the living, the happy” — who is devoid of all “sensible qualities” and “mental affections.” Further, Taylor fails to acknowledge that *sagūṇa* Brahman — the creator God — is not ultimately real, claiming instead that it is merely the “second condition” of the non-dual Being. Finally, there is no suggestion here that the world is ultimately non-existent. Krause clearly followed Taylor in interpreting Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta as a monotheistic philosophy.

Taylor was not alone in interpreting Śaṅkara as a monotheist. In fact, several other scholars cited by Krause — including Rammohun Roy and Colebrooke — did likewise. Krause cited two of Rammohun’s works in particular: his summary of the *Brahmasūtra* entitled *Abridgment of the Vedant* (translated into German as *Auflösung des Wedant*) and his English translations of four Upaniṣads.<sup>33</sup> In both these works, Rammohun claimed to be expounding the Vedāntic scriptures from Śaṅkara’s standpoint but actually interpreted them as affirming the monotheistic doctrine that “one unknown, true being is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe.”<sup>34</sup> For instance, on the title page of his English translation of the Kena Upaniṣad, Rammohun characterized his translation as “according to the gloss of the celebrated Shancaracharya

32 James Taylor, *Prabōdha Chandrōdaya or Rise of the Moon of Intellect: A Spiritual Drama and Ātma Bodha* (Bombay Theosophical Publication Fund, 1893), 100–101.

33 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 43n.

34 Rammohun Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Bengal Press, 1901), 24. For a good discussion of Rammohun’s monotheistic interpretation of the *Brahmasūtra*, see Dermot Killingley, “Ramanuja: The Hindu Augustine” 11 (1981)151–69.

rya: establishing the unity and sole omnipotence of the Supreme Being and that He alone is the object of worship."<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, Colebrooke claimed to rely on the "interpretation by S'ANCARA," but he actually expounded "Védánta" as a monotheistic philosophy: "The principal and essential tenets of the *Védánta* are, that God is the omniscient and omnipotent cause of the existence, continuance, and dissolution of the universe. Creation is an act of his will. He is both efficient and material cause of the world..."<sup>36</sup> While Śaṅkara held that the personal God was the efficient and material cause of the world from the empirical (*vyāvahārika*) but not the absolute (*pāramārthika*) standpoint, Colebrooke omitted entirely Śaṅkara's two-tier ontology and simply affirmed the ultimate reality of the personal creator God. Colebrooke also wrongly claimed that Śaṅkara did not uphold the view that "the versatile world is an illusion (*máyá*)."<sup>37</sup>

In sum, Krause was misled by scholars like Taylor, Rammohun, and Colebrooke into making two fundamental exegetical mistakes. First, Krause conflated Vedānta with Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, thereby overlooking the many non-Advaitic subschools of Vedānta. Second, he misinterpreted Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta as a monotheistic and world-affirming philosophy, even though Śaṅkara explicitly denied the ultimate reality of the personal God and the world.

### III. KRAUSE'S CRITICISMS OF HINDU "POLYTHEISM" AND "IDOL WORSHIP"

Although Krause consistently praised the philosophy of Vedānta for its scientific depth and profundity, he claimed that only a small minority of high-caste brahmins studied and practiced Vedānta, while the vast majority of Hindus subscribed to crude superstitious beliefs like "crass polytheism" (*krasser Polytheismus*) as well as "idolatry and idol worship" (*die Abgötterei und der Götzendienst*).<sup>38</sup> Citing the travelogue of the British Christian missionary Claudius Buchanan, Krause proffers as an "example" of the "most nonsensical superstition" of Hindu idolatry the "horrible display of polytheistic idol worship in *Jagernaut* [i.e. *Jagannāth*]" (*die grauenvolle Erscheinung des polytheis-*

35 Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 46.

36 Colebrooke, "Essay on the Philosophy of the Hindus: Part V", 34–35.

37 Colebrooke, "Essay on the Philosophy of the Hindus: Part V", 39.

38 Krause, *Lebenlehre und Philosophie der Geschichte*, 334.

*tischen Götzendienstes in Jagernaut*).<sup>39</sup> Krause was referring to the Jagannāth Temple in Puri, Orissa, in which wooden images of Lord Jagannāth (which literally means “the Lord of the Universe”) and his divine siblings Subhadra and Balabhadra are worshipped daily by Hindus. Krause seemed to be thinking in particular of the “Ratha Yatra” (the Annual Chariot Festival), during which the images of Jagannāth and his siblings are carried on a wooden chariot in a public procession attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Buchanan, in his lurid description of this Chariot Festival, declares “that Juggernaut is a fountain of vice and misery to millions of mankind; that the sanguinary and obscene character of the worship is in the highest degree revolting; and that it will be a most happy event when our Christian nation shall dissolve its connection with that polluted place.”<sup>40</sup> Uncritically accepting Buchanan’s account, Krause assumed that the worship of Jagannāth is a paradigmatic case of “polytheism” and “idol worship,” which are diametrically opposed to the lofty monotheistic philosophy of Vedānta.

Krause’s understanding of popular Hindu religion was also strongly informed by the work of Rammohun Roy, who — as Krause noted — “wrote a Bengali treatise against the idol worship of the Hindus.”<sup>41</sup> Rammohun, the founder of the Brāhmo Samāj, subscribed to the monotheistic doctrine that there is one Supreme Being who is personal and formless, and he aimed to prove that the Vedāntic scriptures taught this monotheistic doctrine alone. In a work cited by Krause, Rammohun attacked “Hindoo idolatry”<sup>42</sup> and polytheism, claiming that “the Hindoos of the present... firmly believe in the real existence of innumerable gods and goddesses, who possess, in their own departments, full and independent power; and to propitiate them, and not the true God, are temples erected and ceremonies performed.”<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Rammohun, unlike Krause, argued that the Upaniṣads do not uphold any kind of panentheistic or pantheistic doctrine but hold, rather, that the Supreme Lord is *distinct* from the world. Accordingly, when confronted with panentheistic-sounding statements from the Upaniṣads, Rammohun consistently interpreted them in a non-panentheistic manner. For instance, he quoted the famous state-

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39 Ibid., 334.

40 Claudius Buchanan, *An Apology for Promoting Christianity in India* (Nathaniel Willis, 1814), 32.

41 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 44n.

42 Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 6.

43 Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 4.

ment from Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.14.1 that "All that exists is indeed God" (*sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma*), and he claimed that it means that "nothing bears true existence excepting God."<sup>44</sup> For Rammohun, Upaniṣadic statements that everything is God just mean that everything *depends* for its existence on God. It is interesting to note, then, that Krause accepted Rammohun's attacks on Hindu "polytheism" and "idolatry" but differed from Rammohun in embracing panentheism and interpreting the Upaniṣads in a panentheistic manner.

#### IV. TOWARD A VEDĀNTIC CRITIQUE OF KRAUSE'S PANENTHEISM

It is well known that Hegel, Krause's more famous contemporary, caricatured and dismissed Indian philosophy, going so far as to deny it a place in the history of philosophy.<sup>45</sup> As Hegel confidently declared, "True philosophy first begins in the *West*" (*Die eigentliche Philosophie beginnt erst im Abendland*).<sup>46</sup> It is to Krause's great credit that he rejected Hegel's ethnocentrism and appreciated the philosophical importance and value of Vedānta philosophy. Moreover, in spite of the limited and sometimes unreliable translations and secondary texts upon which Krause relied, he was quite correct in identifying two fundamental similarities between Vedāntic philosophy and his own panentheistic system. First, the Upaniṣads do, indeed, propound the panentheistic doctrine that Brahman is both immanent in the universe and beyond it. Second, both Krause's system and the Upaniṣads uphold the mystical view that we can attain knowledge of God through ethical and meditative practices. As Krause noted in an 1815 letter to his father, "My scientific system is in perfect agreement with the fundamental teaching of mystics, and I have reached the firm conviction, through a rigorous investigation of human con-

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44 Ibid., 13.

45 For discussions of Hegel's reception of Indian thought, see Bradley L. Herling, *The German Gītā: Hermeneutics and Discipline in the Early German Reception of Indian Thought* (Routledge, 2006), 203–54; Aakash S. Rathore and Rimina Mohapatra, *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation with Texts* (Univ. Press, 2017); Robert Bernasconi, "With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin? Hegel's Role in the Debate on the Place of India within the History of Philosophy", in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. David Duquette (State Univ. of New York Press, 2003), 35–49.

46 Ignatius Vijayappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy* (Univ. Gregoriana, 1980), 222-n193.

sciousness, that every person can and should be led, in a purely scientific manner, to the intellectual intuition of God.”<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, it must also be said that Krause’s understanding of Vedānta and popular Hindu religion was impoverished in a number of respects, in large part because he based his understanding on the often unreliable translations and secondary texts that were available during his time. In this final section, I will identify some of the most serious mistakes in Krause’s exposition of Vedānta and Hindu religion and also interrogate aspects of Krause’s own panentheistic system from a Vedāntic standpoint.

As I already noted in section 2, Krause mistakenly assumed that the “*Vedānta-System*” was Advaita Vedānta alone, even though Colebrooke — one of the scholars whom Krause repeatedly cited — noted in passing that there were a number of non-Advaitic systems of Vedānta, including Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Madhva’s Dvaita Vedānta. However, even Colebrooke focused exclusively on the Advaita school of Vedānta and said that he might discuss non-Advaitic schools of Vedānta in the future (though, as far as I can tell, he never did). Krause clearly had no awareness of Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, since scholars during his time discussed the Advaita school of Vedānta alone. Moreover, although Krause claimed to find affinities between his own philosophy and the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta, these perceived affinities stemmed largely from the fact that he was misled by scholars like Rammohun Roy and J. Taylor into conceiving Advaita Vedānta as a monotheistic and world-affirming philosophy. In fact, Advaita Vedānta holds that the sole reality is the impersonal nondual Brahman and that the personal God, the world, and all individual souls are ultimately non-existent. By contrast, Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta is a genuinely monotheistic and panentheistic philosophy. According to Rāmānuja, Viṣṇu is the Supreme God who is perfectly pure, omniscient, omnipotent, and all-loving, and all the sentient creatures and insentient entities in the world comprise God’s “body” (*śarīra*) and, hence, depend entirely for their existence on God. As J. Calvin Keene notes, Rāmānuja conceived the “unity of God and the universe” as “the oneness which characterizes an organism; not a unity without distinction but one of harmonious interaction.”<sup>48</sup>

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47 Glasenapp, 18.

48 Keene J. Calvin, *Ramanuja, The Hindu Augustine* (Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 1953), 4.

Philip Clayton, a leading scholar of panentheism, remarks: “I consider Rāmānuja’s work to be one of the greatest expressions of panentheistic thought across the world’s tradition[s], and I hold it up unapologetically as a model for contemporary Western pantheisms.”<sup>49</sup> If Krause had the opportunity to study Rāmānuja’s Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and had a more accurate understanding of Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta, I think he would have recognized that his own panentheistic philosophy has much stronger affinities with Rāmānuja’s panentheistic system than with Śaṅkara’s supratheistic and world-negating philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. Indeed, Krause, very much in the spirit of Rāmānuja, often likened the universe to a “great organism” (*Gliederbau*)<sup>50</sup> and to an “organic whole” (*organische Ganze*) that is “worthy of its originator.”<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, Krause’s own preconceptions, as well as the unreliable sources on which he relied, led him to attack popular Hindu religion as a polytheistic and idolatrous doctrine that contradicts the lofty philosophy of Vedānta. As we saw in the previous section, Krause relied on the work of Rammohun Roy and the Christian missionary Claudius Buchanan. What Krause failed to recognize is that both Rammohun and Buchanan had a vested interest in portraying popular Hindu religion in the worst possible light. In Buchanan’s case, his attack on Hinduism was part and parcel of his broader agenda to convert heathen Hindus to Christianity. Indeed, Buchanan’s book is tellingly titled *An Apology for Promoting Christianity in India!* Likewise, Rammohun was bent on persuading his Hindu brethren to abandon their “polytheistic” and “idolatrous” ways and to embrace instead the monotheistic creed of his own Brāhmo Samāj, according to which the Supreme God is personal but formless.

Since Krause uncritically accepted Buchanan’s and Rammohun’s accounts of Hinduism, he failed to recognize the Vedāntic basis of the popular Hindu practice of worshipping God in various images and wrongly dismissed the practice as “polytheism” and “idolatry.” In fact, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* — a text praised by Krause — can be seen as providing an elegant Vedāntic justification of image worship on the basis of its own monotheistic and panentheistic doctrine. *Gītā* 10.12 characterizes Kṛṣṇa in monotheistic terms as “the supreme Brahman, the supreme Abode, the supreme Purity, the one Permanent, the Divine Person, the

49 Philip Clayton, “Pantheisms East and West” 49 (2010): 187.

50 K.C.F. Krause, *Das Urbild der Menschheit* (Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1861), 6.

51 *Ibid.*, 7.

original Godhead, the Unborn, the all-pervading Lord.” At the same time, in 7.19 of the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa declares that He manifests as everything in the universe: “Vāsudeva [another name for the Supreme God Kṛṣṇa] is all that is” (*vāsudevaḥ sarvam*). In chapter 10 of the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa details many of the ways that He manifests in the world to an especially high degree — for instance, as “the radiant sun” (10.21), “the strength of the mighty” (10.36), and “the knowledge of the knower” (10.38) — and then concludes as follows: “I am here in this world and everywhere, I support this entire universe with an infinitesimal portion of Myself” (10.42). It should be clear, then, that the *Gītā* upholds monotheism and a strong form of pantheism, according to which the one Supreme God, while being beyond the universe, also manifests as everything in the universe.

It follows logically from the pantheistic metaphysics of the *Gītā* that the various deities — and images of these deities — worshipped by Hindus are *real manifestations* of one and the same Supreme God. The Hindu concept of the *iṣṭa-devatā* (“the chosen Deity”) is the key to understanding the nature and value of image worship. Since the one formless Supreme God manifests in the form of all the various deities, each person can choose to worship God in the form of the particular Deity who appeals to her the most. This view can be traced to the well-known statement from Ṛg Veda 1.64.46, “The Reality is one; sages speak of It variously” (*ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*). Likewise, in *Gītā* 4.11, the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa declares: “As people approach Me, so I accept them to My love” (*ye yathā mām prapadyante tāṃs tathaiva bhajāmy aham*).

More recently, the Hindu mystic Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) expressed this point as follows:

God is one only, and not two. Different people call on Him by different names: some as Allah, some as God, and others as Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, and Brahman. It is like the water in a lake. Some drink it at one place and call it “*jal*,” others at another place and call it “*pānī*,” and still others at a third place and call it “water.” The Hindus call it “*jal*,” the Christians “water,” and the Muslims “*pānī*.” But it is one and the same thing.<sup>52</sup>

Since God actually manifests as various deities and in various forms, many Hindus worship the Supreme God in the form of a particular cherished image of God, knowing all the while that God is by no means *limited* to that im-

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52 Mahendranath Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Ramakrishna-Vedanta Center, 1992), 264–65.



age. There are innumerable deities in Hinduism — such as Śiva, Kālī, Durgā, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Ganeśa, and Hanumān — and Hindus often worship one or more of these deities in various physical images, knowing that all these deities are different manifestations of one and the same Supreme God. Moreover, since *everything* is a manifestation of God, it stands to reason that the physical images of God worshipped by Hindus are also real manifestations of God.

Krause's superficial understanding of popular Hinduism led him to dismiss image worship as a form of "idolatry" and "polytheism," when in fact, Hindu image worship is grounded in the monotheistic and panentheistic doctrine of ancient Vedānta. Indeed, we could even turn the tables on Krause and argue that his rejection of image worship is inconsistent with his own panentheistic doctrine. If, as Krause holds, "God in Himself is everything that is,"<sup>53</sup> then it logically follows that it is possible to worship God in any of His infinite manifestations, including in physical images. Here again, Krause would have done well to study the panentheistic philosophy of Rāmānuja, who conceived consecrated divine images as literal "embodiments of God" (*arcāvatāras*).<sup>54</sup>

Finally, and relatedly, we can interrogate Krause's views on Jesus Christ from a Vedāntic perspective. According to Krause, Jesus, like the Buddha, was a great saint and teacher of humanity who was fully aware of his unity with God. At the same time, Krause rejected the orthodox Christian view that Jesus was the incarnation of God. As he put it, "Jesus is and was not God, not the Essence itself as *Urwesen*."<sup>55</sup> For Krause, Jesus is God only to the extent that *all* beings are God — that is, a "part of God" (*Theil-Gott*).<sup>56</sup> Jesus is an "incarnation" of God only insofar as all of us are "incarnations" of God in this sense, but Jesus does not enjoy any kind of unique ontological status as a divine incarnation.

Vedānta can be seen as offering a dialectical alternative to the orthodox Christian doctrine of Jesus as the only incarnation of God and Krause's view that Jesus was not divine in any special sense at all. As we have already seen, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* propounds the panentheistic doctrine that everything in the world is a real manifestation of God and that each individual soul is a

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53 Krause, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 39.

54 Svāmī Tapasyānanda, *Bhakti Schools of Vedānta* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1990), 51.

55 Krause, *Anschaunungen oder Lehren und Entwürfe zur Höherbildung des Menschheitens*, 171.

56 *Ibid.*, 172.

“portion” (*aṃśa*) of God.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, chapter 10 of the *Gītā* explains that God’s power and glory are present to a greater degree in His “special manifestations” (*vibhūti*). In *Gītā* 4.7–8, the Lord Kṛṣṇa explicitly declares that He incarnates in human form whenever the need arises: “Whenever there is a fading of righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth. I am born from age to age in order to protect the good, to destroy evil-doers, and to establish righteousness.” From a Vedāntic standpoint, then, we can hold that God incarnated not only as Jesus but also as Buddha, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya, and others at different points in history.

In modern times, Ramakrishna strongly championed this Vedāntic doctrine of multiple incarnations of God. Like Kṛṣṇa of the *Gītā*, Ramakrishna affirmed the panentheistic view that everything in the world is a manifestation of Śakti — his term for the personal God — while also holding that “the manifestations of Śakti are different in different beings.”<sup>58</sup> He justified the existence of divine incarnations on the basis of this premise, claiming that “the greatest manifestation of God is through His Incarnations.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Ramakrishna explicitly reconciled a Vedāntic panentheistic metaphysics with the doctrine of the divine incarnation: “It is God who has become everything, no doubt; but He manifests Himself more in some than in others. There is one kind of manifestation of God in the Incarnation of God, and another in ordinary people.”<sup>60</sup>

From the Vedāntic standpoint of the *Gītā* and Ramakrishna, we can ask whether Krause’s denial of the divinity of Jesus necessarily follows from his panentheistic metaphysics. The key question, it seems to me, is whether Krause would accept the Vedāntic premise that God manifests to varying degrees in different beings. Krause, like Neoplatonic philosophers, did subscribe to an ontological “hierarchy of being” (*Stufung der Wesen*), with humanity at the top and animals, plants, and insentient entities on respectively lower rungs of the hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> According to Krause, entities higher in the ontological hierarchy are those that are more like *Orwesen* in being self-sufficient, self-con-

57 See 15.7 of the *Gītā*.

58 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 243 (translation modified).

59 *Ibid.*, 355.

60 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 243 (translation modified).

61 K.C.F. Krause, *Zur Kunstlehre: Die Wissenschaft von der Landverschönerkunst* (Otto Schulze, 1883), 2.

scious, and free organisms than those entities that are lower in the hierarchy. Krause also seemed to have held that some human beings manifest *Orwesen* to a higher degree than other human beings, hence singling out world teachers like Jesus and Buddha for having attained "perfection in union with God" (*Vollwesenheit in Gottinnigkeit*).<sup>62</sup>

From a Vedāntic standpoint, God manifests Himself to the *highest* degree precisely when He incarnates in a human body — for instance, as Jesus, Buddha, or Kṛṣṇa. While Krause arguably accepted the Vedāntic premise that certain human beings manifest God to a much higher degree than other human beings, he definitely departed from Vedānta in denying the possibility of divine incarnations. I believe it would be a fruitful line of inquiry to explore why Krause parted ways with Vedānta on the question of whether it is possible for God to incarnate as a human being.

I will only initiate this inquiry here by suggesting briefly that the Vedāntic perspective opens up the possibility of an internal critique of Krause's panentheism: if Krause admits that certain people like Jesus and Buddha manifest God to a much higher degree than other people, then he should arguably be open to the possibility that God is manifest to the *highest* degree when He incarnates in human form. Krause's main argument against the possibility of divine incarnations is that it is not logically possible for a finite being to be the Infinite God. Accordingly, he claimed that it is a "sacrilege" (*Frevelrede*) to hold that "a finite being can take the place of God" (*ein endliches Wesen an Gottes Statt sein könne*).<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Ramakrishna explicitly rebutted this Krausian objection:

However great and infinite God may be, His Essence [*tār̥ bhitorer sār vastu*] can and does manifest itself through human beings by His mere will. God incarnates Himself as a human being from time to time in order to teach people devotion and divine love....Who can comprehend everything about God? It is not given to man to know any aspect of God, great or small. And what need is there to know everything about God? It is enough if we only realize Him. And we see God Himself if we but see His Incarnation. Suppose a person goes to the Ganges [River] and touches its water. He will then say, "Yes, I have seen and touched the Ganges." To say this it is not necessary for him to touch the whole length of the river from Hardwar to Gangasagar. If I touch your feet, surely that is the same as touching you. If a person goes

62 K.C.F. Krause, *Zur Religionsphilosophie und speculativen Theologie* (Otto Schulze, 1893), 35.

63 K.C.F. Krause, *Abriss der Philosophie der Geschichte* (Otto Schulze, 1889), 171.

to the ocean and touches but a little of its water, he has surely touched the ocean itself. Fire, as an element, exists in all things, but in wood it is present to a greater degree.<sup>64</sup>

A Krausian might argue that it is not logically possible for the infinite God to incarnate in a finite human being, just as it is not logically possible for God to create a stone so heavy that He cannot lift it. In response to this Krausian objection, Ramakrishna argues that while it is not logically possible for the *whole* of the infinite God to be present in a finite being, it *is* possible for God's "essence" to manifest in a human being. For Ramakrishna, the Divine Incarnation is the *greatest* manifestation of God, even if no finite creature can manifest the *whole* of the Infinite God. Indeed, Ramakrishna even had an overwhelming mystical experience of Jesus, during which "a voice from within told him, 'This is Jesus Christ, the great yogi, the loving Son of God who is one with His father, who shed his heart's blood and suffered torture for the salvation of humanity.'"<sup>65</sup> From Ramakrishna's Vedāntic perspective, that God can and does incarnate as a human being is not only a fact of direct spiritual experience but also a logical entailment of God's omnipotence. As he was fond of putting it, "Everything is possible for God."<sup>66</sup>

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