

THE KINSHIP OF KANT AND SWEDENBORG[†]

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INTRODUCTION: TWO KANTIAN INSULTS

It is perhaps a sad sign of academic over-specialization that I have devoted an entire paper to two of Kant's insults, but I hope to connect them to matters of greater philosophical import. In his 1766 book *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, Kant says many negative and sometimes downright nasty things about Swedenborg, but for Kant's contemporaries probably the harshest was the accusation that Swedenborg was "des ärgsten Schwärmers unter allen" ("the worst of all enthusiasts").¹ A

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¹ All citations of Kant are to *Immanuel Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., ed. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (vols. 1-22), the Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (vol. 23), and the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (vols. 24-29) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1902-), cited as AK followed by the volume and page numbers. Two exceptions to this rule are my citations of Kant's *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (Königsberg, 1764) and his "Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes" (1764), both of which I shall cite to volume 2 of *Immanuel Kants Werke*, 11 vols, ed. Ernst Cassirer (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1912-1918) (henceforth cited as Cassirer, followed by the volume and page numbers).

The standard edition of *Dreams* is Immanuel Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, AK 2:315-73. The most useful German edition is *Träume eines Geistersehers erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, ed. Rudolf Malter (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976), which contains valuable supplementary materials which illuminate the composition and reception of *Dreams*.

There are three English translations of *Dreams*. Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, tr. Emanuel F. Goerwitz, ed. Frank Sewall (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1900); *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and other Related Writings* [sic], tr. John Manolesco (New York: Vantage Press, 1969); the best translation appears in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, ed. and tr. David Walford with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) (henceforth cited as Walford). Excerpts from *Dreams* are translated in *The Philosophy of Kant*, ed. and tr. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Modern Library, 1949) and in *Kant*, ed. and tr. Gabriele Rabel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963).

The passage quoted above is found at *Dreams*, AK 2:366; Walford, 352.

similarly harsh insult is that Swedenborg is “*der Erzphantast unter allen Phantasten*” (“the arch-visionary of all visionaries”).²

The German word “*Schwärmerei*,” which I translate as “enthusiasm,” has been a term of abuse at least since Luther.³ “*Schwärmerei*” is derived from the German verb “*schwärmen*,” to swarm, to riot, to revel, to throng. In colloquial German, a *Schwärmer* is an enthusiast, a visionary, a fanatic, or a crank. In our context, this is the primary meaning of the term. In entomology a *Schwärmer* is a kind of moth known in colloquial English as the hawk moth. In military jargon a *Schwärmer* is a sharpshooter or skirmisher. In the language of pyrotechnics a *Schwärmer* is a firecracker or squib. “*Schwärmerei*” is what Vico called an “imaginative universal.” It is likely based on the image of a swarm of insects: vengeful bees pouring forth from their hive or a suicidal swarm of moths frantically flapping around a source of light. It calls many images to mind: religious enthusiasts thronging around a charismatic preacher; mystics and dreamers following their private intuitions along stumbling, swerving paths; and, perhaps most to the point: heads like hives, infested with darting, stinging notions—abuzz with inner voices, intuitions, and mysterious commands. Indeed, the German *Schwärmerei* is roughly equivalent to the English idiom which describes mystics and eccentrics as having “bees in their bonnets.”

Kant defines *Schwärmerei* as follows: “Enthusiasm [*Schwärmerei*] is, so to speak, a pious arrogance [*andächtige Vermessenheit*], and is induced by a certain pride and quite excessive self-confidence to get nearer to heavenly natures [*himmlischen Naturen*] and to elevate itself by an astonishing flight over the usual and prescribed order. The enthusiast [*Schwärmer*] speaks only of immediate inspiration [*Eingebung*] and of contemplative life...”⁴

² *Dreams*, AK 2:354; Walford, 341.

³ Quoted in Peter D. Fennes, “A Note on the Translation of Kant,” in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant, Transformative Critique by Jacques Derrida*, ed. and tr. Peter D. Fennes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), xi.

⁴ I have consulted the following English translations of the *Beobachtungen: Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, in Kant, *Essays and Treatises*, 2 vols., ed. and tr. John Richardson (London: William Richardson, 1798-1799), 2:1-78, and *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, tr. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) (henceforth cited as Goldthwait). The passage quoted above is from *Observations*, Cassirer, 2:295; Goldthwait, 108.

For Kant, the category of heavenly natures would include, not only God, but also angels, spirits, *daimonia*, and other *arcana coelestia*, as well as the objects of traditional metaphysical enquiry. For Kant, then, "*Schwärmerei*" denotes all attempts to achieve immediate, intuitive knowledge of the supersensible, and especially knowledge of the first principle(s) of all things; its species would include religious mysticism, gnosticism, spiritualism, Platonic "divine madness," and traditional "dogmatic" metaphysics; its ultimate instrument is mystical or intellectual intuition.

Kant claims that the visionary or *Phantast* is prone to projecting the creations of his imagination into the external world, where he mistakes them for real objects. Kant's words for the visionary, "*Phantast*," and his visionary flights, "*Phantasterei*," are derived from "*phantasm*," the Scholastic—and ultimately Greek—term for the images of the imagination. Those visionaries who claim knowledge of supersensible realities fall under Kant's definition of *Schwärmerei*, hence Kant often uses the words interchangeably. Visionaries need not, however, claim knowledge of supersensible realities. Nor do enthusiasts necessarily appeal to the modality of vision as a visionary would. Swedenborg is both a *Schwärmer* and a *Phantast* because he claims to have knowledge of supersensible realities and because he claims that this knowledge is in some sense visual.

During the Enlightenment, *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* were regarded as politically dangerous phenomena, for the claim of direct knowledge of God's will leads to the proliferation of absolute and non-negotiable declarations about matters of ultimate concern—declarations based on non-rational, non-verifiable intuitions, leading almost inevitably to force and bloodshed to resolve disputes that can never be decided on rational grounds. To confirm this, one need only consult a history of the Thirty Years' War or the English Civil War.

One would expect Kant to be an enemy of *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei*. Kant, after all, is a defender of Enlightenment, of *reason*. He sought to establish reason as the sole medium and arbiter of public discourse. This is to say that Kant is a defender of *liberalism*, of peaceful and voluntary social interactions, regulated by rational persuasion and free of force and fraud. The chief challenge to making reason the language of public discourse and liberty the principle of social order comes from revelation. Kant is, there-

fore, a defender of “religion within the bounds of reason alone”⁵ and an enemy of revelation, both the canonical revelations of religious orthodoxy and the private revelations of *Schwärmerei*. Kant was, furthermore, a critic of all forms of dogmatic metaphysics that appeal to intellectual intuition, calling such alleged intimations (*Ahnungen*) of the supersensible, “the death of all philosophy.”⁶ Given this, it is not surprising that most scholars depict Kant as an implacable enemy of enthusiasm.⁷ According to most Kant scholars, Kant regarded *Schwärmerei* as “an ungrounded, hence unstable, and dangerous pathological condition”⁸ which he found “wholly repugnant.”⁹

Since Kant refers to Swedenborg as a *Schwärmer* and a *Phantast*, it is not surprising that most scholars think that his attitude toward Swedenborg was wholly and unambiguously hostile. *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* is commonly thought to be an attempt to criticize the metaphysics of the dominant “Leibniz-Wolff” school by linking it to Swedenborg—on the assumption that Kant regarded Swedenborg’s work as so self-evidently absurd that simply to liken any position to Swedenborg’s would be enough to reduce it to absurdity. Although many elements of Kant’s mature philosophy first appear in *Dreams*, most scholars claim that Swedenborg could not have exercised any *positive* influence on them. At best Swedenborg

⁵ Kant’s primary critique of revealed religion is *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (Königsberg, 1793), AK 6:1-202; *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, tr. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

⁶ Kant, “Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 27 (May 1796): 387-426; AK 8:389-406. There are two English translations of this essay: John Richardson’s translation, “Of a Gentle Ton [sic] Recently Assumed in Philosophy,” appears in Kant, *Essays and Treatises*, 2:159-87, and Peter D. Fenves’ translation, “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy,” appears in Fenves, *Raising the Tone of Philosophy*, 51-72. The passage cited is at AK 8:398; Fenves, 62.

⁷ Two recent works which have argued vigorously and at great length for Kant’s implacable opposition to *Schwärmerei* are Robert E. Butts’s *Kant and the Double-Government Methodology: Supersensibility Kant and Method in Kant’s Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984), esp. the Appendix, “Central Nervous System: Philosophers as Dieticians of the Mind,” and John H. Zammito’s *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. ch. 1, “Kant and the Pursuit of *Aufklärung*” and ch. 11, “The Pantheism Controversy and the *Third Critique*.” A work which depends heavily upon this presumption, but offers no support for it, is Peter D. Fenves, *A Peculiar Fate: Metaphysics and World History in Kant* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), esp. ch. 3.

⁸ Fenves, *A Peculiar Fate*, 243, n.

⁹ Fenves, *Raising the Tone of Philosophy*, xi.

exercised only a negative influence, by stimulating Kant to break with dogmatic metaphysics and develop his mature critical philosophy.¹⁰

This paper is part of a larger project which is dedicated to revising the received view of the Kant-Swedenborg relationship by arguing that it is possible to discern a number of *positive* Swedenborgian influences on Kant.¹¹ Kant, I argue, took Swedenborg *seriously*, which is to say that Kant thought that some of Swedenborg's ideas could possibly be *true*. This is not, however, the impression one usually takes away from *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. Thus to make my thesis wholly convincing, I must dispel this impression of *Dreams*. I have argued elsewhere at great length that the received view of *Dreams* is based upon a one-sided and superficial reading of a text that is not in fact unambiguously hostile to Swedenborg but is rather systematically ambiguous and ironic. Kant, I argue, constructs his text on two levels, placing his criticisms of Swedenborg in the center while subtly negating, undermining, or qualifying them in the margins, intimating his serious interest in, and positive debts to Swedenborg, "between the lines." I also argue that Kant adopts this rhetorical strategy because of his fear of persecution from both the Prussian ecclesiastical and Enlightenment establishments, both of which were quite hostile to Swedenborg.¹²

In this paper, I argue a different point. Whereas elsewhere I have argued that Kant subtly cancels his criticisms of Swedenborg with praise, here I argue that the worst of these criticisms are themselves systemati-

¹⁰ The *Urtext* of the received view seems to be Ludwig Ernst Borowski, *Darstellung des Lebens und Charakters Immanuel Kants von Ludwig Ernst Borowski, von Kant selbst genau revidiert und berichtigt* (Königsberg, 1804), 221-5, in *Immanuel Kant: sein Leben in Darstellungen von Zeitgenossen, Die Biographen von L.E. Borowski, R.B. Jachmann und A.Ch. Wasianski*, hrsg. Felix Gross (1902), 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980). To my knowledge, Borowski's is the first discussion of the place of *Dreams* in the development of Kant's thought. The canonical statement of the received view is Kuno Fischer's *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, vol. 4, *Immanuel Kant und seine Lehre*, part 1, *Entstehung and Grundlegung der kritischen Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1869). Fischer's interpretation has been repeated, pretty much without question, by all major Kant scholars ever since. There is an extensive survey of the received view of *Dreams* in the Bibliographical Appendix to my dissertation on the Kant-Swedenborg relationship, *A Commentary on Kant's Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*.

¹¹ I would argue that Swedenborg influenced Kant's conception of the ideality of space and time, which is a crucial tenet of his transcendental idealism; his concept of the Kingdom of Ends, which is a central element of his moral philosophy; and his hermeneutics, which is pivotal for his moral philosophy, philosophy of history, and philosophy of religion

¹² These arguments are to be found in my dissertation, *A Commentary on Kant's Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*.

cally ambiguous. Kant, I contend, felt a certain kinship with visionaries and enthusiasts; he thought that *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* were often combined with great genius; and he thought that they were also compatible with genuine knowledge of transcendent reality. My conclusion, therefore, is that Kant's use of such terms as *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* to describe Swedenborg does not imply that Kant refused to take seriously the possibility that Swedenborg's powers might be genuine and that his claims might be true. In other words, it is possible on Kant's own terms for Swedenborg to be a *Schwärmer* and a *Phantast* and still have genuine visionary powers. It should be noted, however, that to argue that Kant thought that Swedenborg's claims might *possibly* be true is not the same as arguing that he thought that they were *actually* true. To establish the latter conclusion would require another argument altogether.¹³

ON THE ORIGINS OF SCHWÄRMERIEI AND PHANTASTEREI

First we must examine Kant's accounts of the origins and nature of *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei*.

In his 1764 writings *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* and "Essay on the Sickesses of the Head," Kant offers a twofold explanation of the origins of *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* in terms of the concepts of melancholy (*Melancholicus*, *Schwermut*, *Trübsinnigkeit*, *Tiefsinnigkeit*) and delusion (*Verrückung*).

Throughout its history, the concept of melancholy has had both physiological and characterological (or ethical) elements. As a physiological concept, melancholy is situated among the four humors or vital fluids: *blood*, *phlegm*, *yellow bile*, and *black bile*. Indeed, the word "melancholy" is derived from the Greek for black bile (*melaina chole*, *melancholia*). The synonym "atrabilious" derives from the Latin for black bile, *atra bilis*. As a characterological concept, melancholy is situated among the four temperaments: the *sanguine* (correlated to blood), the *phlegmatic* (correlated to phlegm), the *choleric* (correlated to yellow bile), and the *melancholic* (corre-

¹³I argue that Kant's belief in something like a Swedenborgian Spirit World allows one to make sense of his idea of the Kingdom of Ends, a notion crucial to his ethics, in my "Swedenborg's Spirit World and Kant's Kingdom of Ends," a paper presented to the American Association for the Philosophic Study of Society Symposium on "Themes in Kant's Pre-Critical Moral and Political Philosophy," at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Convention, New York City, December 27th, 1995.

lated to black bile). The relationship of the physiological and characterological dimensions of melancholy has never been clearly defined. The relationship is problematic, because melancholy, treated as a physiological concept, lies outside the range of the melancholic's volition; he cannot, therefore, be praised or blamed for it. Melancholy, as a characterological concept, however, lies on the boundary of the physiological and moral realms. It therefore partakes fully of the philosophical problems associated with the relationship of matter and spirit, soul and body, freedom and determinism.

Kant claims that *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* arise naturally from the melancholic temperament. A melancholic temperament must be distinguished from a melancholy or depressed state of mind. Melancholy is not a *state* of sadness, even an enduring sadness, but something far more fundamental than any particular feeling; a melancholy temperament is, rather, a kind of character, a pervasive and predominant *style* of feeling. The melancholy person feels all the normal passions, but they are sluggish and not easily roused; they are reticent and not easily displayed; but when they are stirred, they are deep, powerful, and long-lasting. Because his emotions are relatively placid and easily mastered, the melancholic is inclined toward reflectiveness, inwardness, and independence of judgment. These tendencies are pathologically intensified in the visionary and the enthusiast. Both of them seek, and discover, a higher reality within—whether by direct intuition or by interpreting feelings, visions, and dreams as signs.¹⁴

¹⁴Swedenborg himself in *The Spiritual Diary*, 5 vols., tr. George Bush, John H. Smithson, and James F. Buss (London: James Spiers, 1883-1902), vol. III, nos. 3624-3627, pp. 135-7, connects reflectiveness, melancholy, and enthusiasm:

...the reflections of thought, in which whoever is detained he is the more infested by evil spirits the longer the reflection is continued...Hence arises the melancholy of many persons, hence debilitated minds, hence the deliriums of many men, hence too insanities and phantasies; for those who are engrossed in thoughts of spiritual things, concerning the life after death, concerning misfortunes, into such persons spirits, from their own proprium, infuse many things which are of memory, and hold them a long time presented, even till they occasion insanities and phantasies. Wherefore those who affect a solitary kind of life are especially prone to fall into such things, for they are dispelled by varieties, and thus by (mingling with) societies. Still more does this arise from the solicitude of self-love, and more yet from the love of gain, and pondering upon the future, and especially if any signal misfortune comes into the account, so much the more are they driven into phantasies, and at length into insanities. (vol. III, no. 3625, p. 136)

For Kant this is problematic because such knowledge cannot be translated into the language of public reason. Kant, however, has a conception of rationality that is not purely private and individual, but intersubjective, public, or dialogical; the standard of truth may be agreement with reality, but the criterion by which we determine whether we have truth is the dialogical convergence of a plurality of investigators on a rationally motivated consensus. Therefore, rationality demands that even the most independent thinker must both formulate his ideas in the language of public reason and refer them to it for judgment. To fail to do so is not only to become a visionary or enthusiast; it is to flirt with madness: "The one universal characteristic of madness is the loss of common sense (*sensus communis*) and the substitution of logical private sense (*sensus privatus*)...For we have to attach our own understanding to the understanding of other men too, instead of isolating ourselves with our own understanding and still using our private ideas to judge publicly so to speak."¹⁵

Kant also claims that there is a common physiological root of *Phantasterei* and *Schwärmerei*. In his "Essay on the Sicknesses of the Head," Kant calls this common root "*Verrückung*." I translate it as "delusion." *Verrückung* arises from the perversion of an otherwise healthy function of the soul:

The soul of every human being, even in its healthiest states, is busy painting all sorts of images of things that are not present, or also completing any incomplete resemblance between representations and things presented, through one or another chimerical stroke [*Zug*], with which the creative power of the imagination [*schöpferische Dichtungsfähigkeit*] inscribes sensation [*Empfindung*].¹⁶

This activity goes on whether we are awake or asleep. Indeed, the activity can be most clearly observed in sleep. When we are awake, the "vivacious

¹⁵ *Anthropology*, AK 7:219; Gregor, 88; Dowdle, 117. Kant also makes this point in many *Reflexionen* (e.g., nos. 771, 778, 812, 897, 899, and 936, all in AK 15) and throughout "On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy," e.g., AK 8:389-90, 401; Fenves, *Raising the Tone of Philosophy*, 51-3, 67.

¹⁶ I have produced my own translation of the "Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes," as "Essay on the Sicknesses of the Head." The passage quoted above is from "Sicknesses of the Head," Cassirer 2:308, my tr.

sensuous impressions [*lebhaften sinnliche Eindrücke*]” supplied by our senses eclipse the creative power of the imagination. In sleep, however, the outer senses are shut down and the creative power of the imagination has free play. The result is dreaming. Delusion takes place when, during waking life, the normal priority of external sensation over creative imagination is inverted, causing one to experience the creations of one’s imagination as objects in the external world. Kant offers a physiological explanation of this inversion, an explanation which, we should note, makes no reference to the agency of the humors:

Now, if one allows that certain chimeras, however they may be caused, have, so to speak, wounded one or another organ of the brain, to the extent that the impression [*Eindruck*] becomes deep and settled, as only a sensation [*Empfindung*] can make, then this brain phantom [*Hirngespent*], may nevertheless be taken for a real experience, even in waking, by a good, sound reason. This quality of disturbance, in which one is habituated, in the waking state, without an especially marked degree of violent sickness, to certain things presented as clear perceptions, which nevertheless are not present, is called *delusion* [*Verrückung*]. The deluded one [*Verrückte*] is thus a dreamer while awake.¹⁷

Hence the title *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*.

Kant admits that even people of “good sound reason” can fall victim to delusion. The difference between a person of sound reason who just happens to suffer from delusions, and a person who is habitually deluded, seems to be characterological: the person of sound reason submits his delusions to the judgement of the *sensus communis*; the *sensus communis* rejects them, and the sound reasoner puts his delusion behind him. The melancholic who suffers from delusions is, however, less likely to submit his experience to the adjudication of the *sensus communis*: he thinks for himself, even if his thinking is disturbed; he is fond of his own opinions, even if they are deluded; he is, therefore, likely to persist in his delusions,

¹⁷ “Sicknesses of the Head,” Cassirer 2:309, my tr.

even to cultivate them and to weave them into the overall fabric of his world view, which thus becomes progressively more detached from reality. The visionary or *Phantast* is one such sufferer of chronic delusions.

KANT'S KINSHIP WITH SCHWÄRMEREI AND PHANTASTEREI

There is no escaping the conclusion that Kant regarded *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* to be pathological states. But did he regard them as incompatible with genuine knowledge of transcendent reality? I believe not. I wish to offer five arguments against the common inference that Kant could not have taken Swedenborg's claims seriously because he refers to him as a *Schwärmer* and a *Phantast*.

First, Arnulf Zweig notes that "Kant did not always use this word [*Schwärmerei*] abusively."¹⁸ Indeed, Kant maintained friendly relations with people whom he described as enthusiasts, such as Johann Georg Hamann, Maria von Herbert, Johann Caspar Lavater, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and Heinrich Jung-Stilling. Kant even used *Schwärmerei* to describe Plato, Spinoza, and Rousseau, philosophers for whom he had enormous respect. (Kant also refers to Rousseau as a *Phantast*.¹⁹) In light of this, Giorgio Tonelli sensibly claims that Kant's apparently "indiscriminate indictment of enthusiasm seems to have been attenuated in respect to some personalities whom Kant wished not or dared not disavow, and only accentuated in respect to some inexcusable 'black sheep.'"²⁰ In short, Kant's attitude toward *Schwärmerei* is better described as one of *ambivalent* fascination, rather than of unalloyed hostility. The fact that Kant refers to Swedenborg as a *Schwärmer* does not, therefore, preclude the possibility of a friendly disposition toward him; nor does it preclude the possibility that Kant took

¹⁸ Arnulf Zweig, Introduction to Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence 1759-99*, ed. and tr. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 14. As evidence, Zweig cites Kant's reference to his correspondent Maria von Herbert as "*die kleine Schwärmerin*" in a letter to Elisabeth Motherby, dated February 11th, 1793 (Zweig, 204, n15). The letter to Elisabeth Motherby is number 559 in the Akademie edition. Fraulein von Herbert was mentally unbalanced and eventually committed suicide.

¹⁹ "Sicknesses of the Head," Cassirer, 311.

²⁰ Giorgio Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779): Part I," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1966):109-32, 122.

Swedenborg's ideas, like Plato's and Spinoza's, seriously; nor does it preclude the possibility that Swedenborg, like Rousseau, exercised a positive influence on the development of Kant's philosophy.

Second, a careful examination of Kant's genealogy of *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* turns up a surprising result. Kant thinks that the enthusiast, the visionary, and himself are close kin. Ernst Cassirer is correct to point out the resemblance of Kant's portrait of the melancholy man to Rousseau.²¹ But it also has an unmistakable ring of self-portraiture, as Hans Vaihinger, Hannah Arendt, and others have observed.²² But it would be closer to the truth to say that Kant's portrait of the melancholic is less a portrait of any particular melancholic, than of a particular type of melancholic. Kant's melancholics are concerned above all with truth—and not just with any truth, but with the truth about permanent things. Kant, in short, offers us a portrait of the most exalted type of melancholic: the philosopher. Ever since Aristotle, melancholy has traditionally been regarded as the temperament of the thinker. Book 30 of the pseudo-Aristotelian work *Problems* begins with the question, "Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry, or the arts are melancholic?"²³ The answer is that any great achievement, intellectual or artistic, moral or political, requires self-discipline, and the melancholic finds his emotions far easier to master than do others. According to Kant, the melancholy philosopher tends toward inwardness, reflection, and therefore toward autonomy, individuality, and personal integrity; hence he "cares little for what others judge, what they consider good or true; he relies in this matter simply on his own insight." Because he finds it relatively easy to subordinate the particular to the universal and passion to reason, "his grounds of motivation take on the nature of principles, he is

²¹ Ernst Cassirer, "Kant and Rousseau," in *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe*, tr. James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), 12.

²² Those who read Kant's portrait of the melancholic as a self-portrait include Hans Vaihinger, "Kant als Melancholicus," *Kant-Studien* 2 (1898): 139-41; Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 25-6; and Paul Arthur Schilpp, *Kant's Pre-Critical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1960), 3-4.

²³ Aristotle, *Problems*, 30. As Cicero puts it in the *Tusculan Disputations*, I xxxiii. 80, "Aristotle indeed affirms, all ingenious men to be melancholic."

not easily brought to other ideas...He looks on the change of fashions with indifference and their glitter with disdain."²⁴ It is true that Kant regarded philosophy as the most perfect fruit of the melancholic temperament and thought *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* to be slightly blemished; but he did regard them as close kin, and I would argue that this sense of kinship was based not merely upon his abstract appreciation of a common intellectual genealogy, but also upon his personal experience of the degenerations toward which his own melancholic character was prone—degenerations which included crankiness, hypochondria, and a morbid fascination with the grotesque, pathological, and paranormal.²⁵

Third, Kant shared more with the *Schwärmer* and the *Phantast* than merely a melancholic temperament. He also shared their erotic openness to, and drive to attain, knowledge of "heavenly natures." Thus Kant writes of metaphysics in the opening lines of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "Human reason has this peculiar fate [*besondere Schicksal*] that it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer."²⁶ In the language of *eros*, human reason is destined always to fall in love with metaphysics, but never to possess her. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant speaks of "Metaphysics, with which, as fate would have it, I have fallen in love [*verliebt*] but from which I can boast of only a few favors..."²⁷ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he writes fetchingly that, no matter how unsuccessful our metaphysical efforts may be, "we shall always return to metaphysics as to an estranged beloved [*entzweiten Geliebten*]."²⁸ Finally, David Lachterman makes much of Kant's description, in section four of the *Prolegomena*, of metaphysics as "*Meerschaum*," "sea-foam," which Lachterman characterizes as "the natal source and

²⁴ *Observations*, Cassirer 2:267; Goldthwait, 74.

²⁵ I treat this matter in detail in "The Tree of Melancholy: Kant on Philosophy and Enthusiasm," unpublished ms.

²⁶ *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), Avii.

²⁷ *Dreams*, AK 2:367; Walford, 354.

²⁸ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A850=B878, tr. Kemp Smith.

sense of Aphrodite," and which Kant claims is always slipping through his fingers.²⁹

Fourth, in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant is careful to note that it is possible that genuine influxes from a supersensible reality may be at the root of *Phantasterei*. In *Dreams*, Kant argues for a position that he holds in his mature critical writings as well: that human beings have a dual citizenship in both the sensible and intelligible (or noumenal, or spiritual) worlds. The objects of the phenomenal world exist in space and time; the objects of the noumenal world exist outside of space and time. Since Kant denies the existence of a non-spatial, non-temporal intellectual intuition, he argues that embodied human beings can experience the intelligible world only if supersensible influxes take on the form of sensuous phenomena. These sensuous manifestations are not transparent presentations, but *symbolic representations*, of supersensible realities, the supersensible meaning of which must be recovered by an act of interpretation. Kant allows that these genuine symbolic representations of supersensible realities might appear as phantasms in the imaginations of people who possess some sort of abnormal psychic sensitivity. If, however, such a person suffers from the delusion characteristic of visionaries, he will project these phantasms into the phenomenal world and mistake them for external realities. His delusion does not, however, detract from the fact that he may have genuine psychic powers. We must conclude, therefore, that for Kant to accuse Swedenborg of *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* is not incompatible with taking seriously the possibility that his powers were genuine. Although Kant was convinced that Swedenborg was to some extent mad, he was equally convinced that he might have a case of what Plato calls the "divine madness," i.e., a genuine visionary power.³⁰

Fifth, Kant thinks that there is a deep connection between *Schwärmerei*, *Phantasterei*, and genius. Kant claimed that *Schwärmerei* is a weakness

²⁹ *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (Königsberg, 1783), AK 4:253-383. In English: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that Would Present itself as Science*, tr. Paul Carus, rev. James Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977). The passage being cited is found at AK 4:271; Carus, 19. David R. Lachterman, "Kant: The Faculty of Desire," *Graduate-Faculty Philosophy Journal* 13 (1990): 181-211, 202.

³⁰ *Dreams*, AK 2:337-41; Walford, 34-9. Cf. *Metaphysik Herder* (1763-64), AK 28,1:121-2 and *Nächtrage Herder* (1763-64), AK 28.1:905-6.

toward which men with "greater genius" (*grosseren Genie*) and "good minds" (*gute Köpfe*) are prone. He admitted that enthusiasts, "may one and all have genius, be full of sensibility [*Empfindung*] and spirit [*Geist*], even some taste [*Geschmack*]." ³¹ In two sets of student notes from Kant's lectures on metaphysics from the academic year 1763-1764, known as the *Metaphysik Herder* and the *Nachträge Herder*, Kant refers to Swedenborg as an example of "people of greater genius" ("*Leute von grossern Genie*") who often suffer from "a kind of derangement" ("*eine Art von Wahnsinn*"). ³² Kant even ventures that there is a causal connection between the two, but it is not clear whether he thinks that genius may be caused by derangement, or derangement may be caused by genius.

But what is genius? Giorgio Tonelli has offered a remarkable speculative reconstruction of Kant's early theory of genius from unpublished notes from the 1770's. ³³ Kant claims that all human knowledge, both of self and of nature, is limited to the world of appearance, the world of phenomena. The phenomenal world is, however, only a part of the whole, namely, the part that can show up to a finite human knower. For Kant, the finitude of the human knower is just the fact that knowledge consists of sensory experience construed by the categories and rules of the understanding. Anything that can be given to the senses and construed by the understanding can become an object for us. Anything that cannot be so given cannot become an object for us. Kant calls those aspects of the whole which transcend our knowledge "noumenal" or "intelligible." We may be able to *think* of them, but we cannot *know* them, for we cannot have sensory experience of them. For Kant, then, all knowledge is inherently *partial* (for phenomena are only part of the whole) and it is *rule-bound* (the only things that can become phenomena are those things that can be given to sense experience and construed by the rules of the understanding). Indeed, we can say that knowledge is partial *because* it is rule-bound.

Unfortunately, however, knowledge of the phenomenal world cannot explain the phenomenon of life and the order and harmony of nature. Nor

³¹ *Reflexion* no. 771 (1774-1775), AK 15:337, my. tr.

³² Kant, *Nachträge Herder*, AK 28.1:906; cf. *Metaphysik Herder*, AK 28.1:122.

³³ See Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779): Part I," and Tonelli's "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779): Part II," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1966):209-24.

can phenomenal experience of *what is* provide us any knowledge of unconditional values, of norms, of *what ought to be*. We must, therefore, rise above the phenomenal world, and if our knowledge is to move from the parts to the whole—from the immanent to the transcendent, from the sensible to the intelligible—then we must have a capacity to leap ahead of the orderly unfolding of empirical experience, to bend or break the settled rules of the understanding, and to venture forth a speculative account of the whole. This capacity is genius. Thus, according to Tonelli, for Kant

Genius is...a quite astonishing capacity of the mind. It is a creative force, bringing about what can neither be found in experience nor rationally deduced from the universal laws of the mind; it is spontaneous, free, and cannot be accounted for...it is a power enabling man to reach some otherwise unattainable analogs of God's ideas, i.e., of the transcendent patterns of the world as it should be.³⁴

Tonelli argues that, for Kant, genius is made possible because of the participation of the deepest layer of the self, the noumenal self, in the wider noumenal dimension of reality, which in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* is identified with Swedenborg's Spirit World and which in a note from the 1770's is identified with the Soul of the World (*Weltseele*). In Kant's words, "Spirit" (*Geist*)—which is in this context interchangeable with genius—"is referred to the universal, because it is a kind of *divinae particula aerae*, and it draws from the Universal Spirit. There is only *one* genius: It is the unity of the soul of the world [*die einheit der Weltseele*]." ³⁵ The World Soul is, of course, a central fixture of the perennial philosophy, from Plato to the Stoics to the Hermetic tradition. In various writers the World Soul has been identified with God, the mind of God, the world of forms, the source of life and mind, and the world of spirits. By identifying spirit and genius with sparks of the divine mind or World Soul, Kant is claiming that genius is the phenomenal site of influxes from the noumenal world. In Tonelli's words:

³⁴ Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779): Part II," 209.

³⁵ *Reflexion* no. 938 (1776-1778), AK 15:416.

Empirical concepts and rules have but a limited range. Beyond them, patterns of reality and of moral duty may be grasped only if the deepest layer of the subject (which represents at the same time the source of the subject and of the world, i.e., the soul of the world) breaks through the frame of pure forms and intellectual structures, *creating* a new awareness directly out of the spirit of God; it is nature *in personam*, in its most secret and solemn attire and in its dutiful striving for perfection, to be revealed in and realized by man.

This metaphysical background is especially recommended by us to the attention and edification of those who are used to considering Kant as a cold intellectualist refraining from every transcendent distraction.³⁶

Elsewhere, Tonelli claims that, on this matter, "It is clear that there is a considerable similarity between Swedenborg's and Kant's positions." He also claims that Swedenborg was likely the most significant of the thinkers who influenced Kant on these matters.³⁷

Kant, it is true, thought that the most perfect genius is possessed by the philosopher, while the genius of the *Schwärmer* or *Phantast* is flawed. But again, we must conclude that Kant's use of terms like *Schwärmerei* and *Phantasterei* did not preclude him taking seriously the possibility that Swedenborg was a true genius, i.e., that his powers could be genuine and his claims could be true.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Kant's assertions that Swedenborg was a *Schwärmer* and a *Phantast* are not inconsistent with his taking Swedenborg's ideas *seriously*. On Kant's own terms, it was possible for him to think Swedenborg was a *Schwärmer* and a *Phantast* but nevertheless to think that Swedenborg's ideas were possible candidates for *truth* and thus worthy of careful exami-

³⁶ Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779): Part II," 209-10.

³⁷ See Tonelli's "*Divinae Particulae Aurae*; Genial Ideas, Organism, and Freedom: A Note on Kant's *Reflection N. 938*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 7 (1969): 192-8, esp. 194.

nation. Underlying this open-mindedness was a felt kinship between Kant and Swedenborg. Both thinkers shared a melancholic temperament, a reflective and independent cast of mind, and a powerful drive to know heavenly natures. Both thinkers also shared what might be deemed an expansive sense of the intellectually possible, a sense that the rational methods of philosophy and science on the one hand and mystical and psychic experiences on the other need not be regarded as mutually exclusive, but instead might all be considered as live options, options that must be integrated into a comprehensive account of the whole. It is regrettable that Kant's expansive sense of the intellectually possible is consistently overlooked by contemporary scholars who are laboring within the constricted intellectual horizons of the contemporary naturalist bias, a bias which seeks to confine thought to the sphere of immanence and dismisses out of hand all pretenses of transcendence. It is no irony, but rather a testament to the success of Kant's self-protective rhetorical strategy, that *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* both exploits and contributes to this bias, a bias that has rendered the text unreadable to most scholars for more than two centuries. □



