

# Translator's Corner

## **SWEDENBORG'S HIDDEN INFLUENCE ON KANT\***

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### **I.3 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE KANT-SWEDENBORG CONTROVERSY**

The goal of the investigation at hand is to show and sharply contrast, both historically and through the process of systematic philosophy, the conflicting, indeed contradictory positions taken by Kant to the possibility of transcendental knowledge in the form of Swedenborg's alleged "clairvoyance" and "spirit seeing."

First the historical development of Kant's reception of Swedenborg in his early creative period up to 1766 will be presented, as well as the intellectual transition to his chief work, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (= CPR, 1781/87). This will be done by drawing systematic inferences from his review of Swedenborg's, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer — Illustrated by the Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766).

Then Kant's fluctuating attitude to Swedenborg and occult phenomena will be systematically traced back to his philosophical affiliation. This again has its roots firstly in his cognitive theory of the CPR, and secondly, in his problematic moral philosophy.

In conclusion, on the basis of lectures from Kant's later creative period in the late 1780s, which up till now have gone unnoticed, after a detailed and systematic examination I will reach a conclusive judgment of the significance of occult phenomena for Kant's philosophy.

In the process, in the matter of the Kant-Swedenborg controversy, the demonstrated inconsistency in Kant's philosophical valuation of occult phenomena in connection with his cognitive system will lay bare blatant, intrinsic systemic inconsistencies in Kant's critical philosophy.

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\* Continued from *The New Philosophy* vol. 96, nos. 1 & 2 (Jan.-June, 1993), pp. 171-225.

### 1.3.1 Kant's Attitude Toward Swedenborg to the Year 1763

As an introduction to Kant's problematic and extremely ambivalent attitude toward the Swedish visionary I would like to call attention to a few, little-noticed documents, from whose content emerges the lively interest the normally rather restrained Königsberg scholar had for the possibility of transcendental knowledge in general and the impartial curiosity he had about Swedenborg's person and extrasensory abilities in particular.

#### 1.3.1.1 Kant's Early Writings About the Possibility of Transcendental Knowledge In Comparison To Swedenborg's Visions

Already in his early treatise, published in 1747, *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte* [“Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Powers”], which was intended as a scientific answer to the question disputed by Descartes and Leibniz about the “formula for power,” Kant openly admits the logical possibility of the existence of other, transcendental worlds:

If there are many such beings that stand in no connected relationship with anything in the world, but only with one another, out of this arises a totally separate whole; they form a totally separate world. Consequently it is not right to say, as is continually taught in the lecture hall of Wisdom, that metaphysically understood there is no possibility of the existence of more than one world. It is actually possible, and in a valid metaphysical sense too, that God has created millions of worlds. Therefore whether or not they actually exist continues to be undecided.<sup>140</sup>

Here, already, arises for the first time the thought of the possibility of an intelligible spirit world, which Kant later in his disagreement with Swedenborg, and in his polemical tract, takes up again and again.

Furthermore, here he develops the point that there would be no space, no extension, if the substances had no power beyond that of influencing

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<sup>140</sup> Kant, *Gedanken von der wahren Schätzung der lebendigen Kräfte*, 1747, AA I (Berlin, 1910), § 8.

themselves; that without the opposing, basic powers of “repulsion” and “attraction” there would be no connectedness, no order, and also no space; and that besides, the threefold dimension of space arises from physical powers that decrease as the square of the distance. From a different law of the interactions between substances a different dimension of space too would result. Since our souls also belong to those substances that receive their impressions according to the law of the square of the distance, it follows from this that we are incapable of imagining a space of more than three dimensions. In Kant’s conception, then, it is very improbable that only our three-dimensional world exists. There could be as many more worlds as there might be kinds of space.<sup>141</sup>

Already at the end of his cosmogonic dissertation published in 1775, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* [“General Natural History and Celestial Theory”], Kant indicates the possibility of an entirely non-spatial world. This intelligible spirit world would be closed to knowledge subject to the conditions of the spatial world. Only if the soul itself is one of the inhabitants of that spirit world would an insight into that transcendental world be possible. In this case the immortality of the soul would have to be taken in the sense of an elevation of the human nature, not simply as some sort of a transfer from planet to planet in nature. From now on this elevated nature, which bears in itself the source of all blessedness, will no longer be dissipated among external objects, seeking to find rest and peace in them.<sup>142</sup>

In place of the expectation of another world that counts on a transfer of souls to more perfect constellations, Kant sketches a different picture of the beyond, that anticipates the state after death as a release from earthly being, a new relationship to all of nature, and a closer conjunction with God. In this world man no longer directs his mind at all to outer things, but, being in a state of elevated nature, finds the source of blessedness within.

This picture of the beyond is that of Swedenborg, who describes it in his visions as nothing other than just this release from earthly being, the new relationship to nature which man comes into after his death, the

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. previous quotation.

<sup>142</sup> Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels*, 1756, AA I (Berlin, 1910) at end.

closer union with the Supreme Being—the very Swedenborg whom Kant in his *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* so strongly accuses of fantasizing.

Ernst Benz has pointed to the close relationship that exists between Swedenborg's visions of the inhabitants of the starry heavens and the speculations of Kant himself. The fact is that Swedenborg himself was not directed to the question of inhabitants of the starry heavens until after the manifestation of his visionary gift. Up till this time it has escaped the notice of research that thoughts similar to Kant's are found already at the beginning of his scientific period in his cosmological and astronomical studies.<sup>143</sup>

Still, Swedenborg longed for higher knowledge as well even during his scientific studies. The desire to penetrate into the far reaches of the universe remained with him even after his call vision. After his call he turned himself with the greatest devotion to visionary intuition. Now, by the grace of God, he felt himself freed from the state in which wisdom consists merely in knowing how little we know. Now Heaven itself opened itself to him. After his call vision, his reluctantly suppressed drive for acquiring knowledge roamed freely in the field which he had heretofore regarded as closed to him.

Now he himself speaks with the spirits of the inhabitants of Mars, Jupiter, Venus, with the spirits of [other] solar systems; and in his work, *Concerning the Earths of the Planets and of the Starry Heavens* sketches a picture of life on the distant and most remote planets. These are not some sort of heavenly tours in which he undertakes to speak with the inhabitants of the planets themselves. It is rather in the world of spirits and of angels that he meets the spirits of those who had inhabited the planets, and they give him accounts of the worlds on which they had earlier dwelt. The world of spirits and angels includes indeed the people-like beings not only of this earthly world, but of all heavenly bodies. The accounts of the other Earths and their inhabitants are therefore only a facet of his general view of the world beyond.<sup>144</sup>

It is unnecessary to reproduce Swedenborg's description of the inhabitants of the individual planets. Here it may suffice to indicate that the scheme of these visions is governed by a central thought:

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 472.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 476.

In Swedenborg's visions of the inhabitants of the planets one finds the same fundamental concern as in Kant's speculation over the possibility of other, transcendental worlds. The nearer or more distant heavenly bodies are abodes of a further individuation of humanity, and in fact, in a measure that far surpasses the earthly limits of humanity. Just as in the whole animal kingdom all possible functions of animal life in endless forms experience an irreversible specialization, and all possibilities of awareness, of accommodation, of communities are represented in living forms and modes, so also with inhabitants of the planets—and this too is a thought of Kant's—is there a specialization of the abilities and the possibilities of human knowledge and love, and of community life.<sup>145</sup>

Kant's interest in metaphysics therefore shines through already in his early writings—his interest in non-committedly speculating about the “mental world,” to a knowledge of which the human senses normally have no access. Since, however, such extrasensory knowledge of a transcendental world was precisely what the “spirit-seers” claimed to possess, it is actually not any more surprising that in the year 1763 Kant still showed a rather extraordinary interest in Swedenborg's alleged gift of seership.

### 1.3.1.2 Kant's Reception of Swedenborg In a Letter of 1763

Kant's reception of Swedenborg is attested to by a letter to a lady friend, Charlotte von Knobloch, in the year 1763. In this letter Kant first reports his various efforts to acquire a closer knowledge of Swedenborg's alleged extrasensory gift, indeed, to establish a personal contact with him:

The credibility of such an account perplexes me...In order not to blindly repudiate the old prejudice about appearances and apparitions by a new prejudice, I found it sensible for me to inquire more closely into these stories.<sup>146</sup>

As further emerges from this letter, he arranged for special investigations to be made by two friends: first by a Danish officer and later more

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. Ernst Benz, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, 478.

<sup>146</sup> Kant über Swedenborg, 1763, 42, in, Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistesehers*, 101.

carefully by an Englishman, who had been present at the time and who had also spoken with Swedenborg himself. In spite of every painstaking attempt to come closer to Swedenborg, he was nevertheless not yet successful in establishing a direct correspondence with this amazing man:

I was told so far that Baron Swedenborg had received the letter favorably and promised to answer it. Nevertheless this answer was not forthcoming. Meanwhile I have made the acquaintance of a fine man, an Englishman who stopped here last summer, whom I...have entrusted to collect more exact information on his trip to Stockholm regarding the amazing gift of Baron Swed.<sup>147</sup>

In 1763, after receiving these second hand reports, Kant still had a respectful opinion of Swedenborg's person, doctrine and his alleged extrasensory abilities:

Swedenborg is a rational, pleasant, and open-hearted man. He is a scholar, and the friend I have spoken of has promised me that in a short time he would send me a few of Swedenborg's writings. He unreservedly told this friend that God had given him the singular capability of associating, at his pleasure, with the souls of the departed. As evidence he cited well-known demonstrative incidents.<sup>148</sup>

Although in this letter Kant has already indicated a certain restrained skepticism toward these presumably trustworthy "empirical proofs" of Swedenborg's extrasensory abilities, especially as regards his alleged contact with the "spirit world," in the year 1763 he still shows himself thoroughly open and well-meaning, yes, plainly thirsting for knowledge in reference to this amazing gift of the Nordic seer:

He [the Englishman] has at the same time reported a bit to me about the manner in which—according the declaration of Baron Swedenborg—this association he has with spirits takes place, and likewise about his ideas, the ones he gives about the state of

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistesehers*, 101f.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 42f, in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistesehers*, 102.

departed souls. The picture that is drawn is a singular one...How very much I wish that I could have questioned this extraordinary man myself, for my friend is not very well versed at asking just the questions that can shed the most light on such a subject.<sup>149</sup>

In a 1763 letter dealing with Swedenborg, Kant quite prudently restrains himself from making a hasty judgment about the mysterious Swede's alleged gift of seership until he can learn more precisely from Swedenborg himself. Not a word of contempt for or even simply serious doubt about Swedenborg's alleged extrasensory abilities occurs in this early commentary on Swedenborg's alleged gift of seership. On the contrary, here he still regards the stories that are put forth as evidence of Swedenborg's seer's gift as credible:

What can one put forward against the credibility of these incidents?...I am eagerly awaiting the book Swedenborg wants to publish in London. All the arrangements have been made for my getting it as soon as it comes off the press.<sup>150</sup>

Officially Kant felt himself far from competent enough in the field of metaphysics to deliver an expert, authoritative opinion when asked to do so by his princess. He wanted to leave an objective judgment of these occult things to "greater talents" than an unsalaried university lecturer in Königsberg (which he was at the time):

I do not know, gracious Fräulein, whether you would want to have the opinion that I need to venture to undertake to give on this elusive matter. Much greater talents than the small amount allotted to me will be able to produce little certainty on this matter.<sup>151</sup>

The fact is that the extrasensory realm is not Kant's professional home-territory—nor will it ever become so in his further development. On the contrary, Kant's own later metaphysics will be precisely at pains to estab-

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 45 (my additions in brackets).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 45, in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistersehers*, 105.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

lish the limits of man's ability to know. His later *Critique of Pure Reason* will show the conditions of the possibility of sense—and only sense—experience, and at the same time will sharply warn of any trespass across the boundary into the transcendental field of “things in themselves.” The human cognitive faculty is in principle inadequate for such speculation, as Kant shows in his later CPR, for in the last analysis it would be dependent on sense perception!<sup>152</sup>

It may be that already here in this early letter about Swedenborg is a manifestation of Kant's restrained circumspection regarding Swedenborg's alleged experiential evidence of the transcendental world, which in his polemical tract would climb to polemical skepticism. However, in this unusually frank Swedenborg commentary Kant feels far from qualified to form a final opinion of the possibility of Swedenborg's gift of seership and of the associated occult phenomena!

Swedenborg promised to answer Kant personally in his book, as the latter notes in his letter:

When he [Swedenborg] was reminded of my letter, he replied that he had indeed received it and would soon have an answer to it, although he had not intended to make this extraordinary matter publicly known to the eyes of the world. He would be going to London in May of this year, where he would publish his book in which the answer to all the points in my letters would be found.<sup>153</sup>

This was more than Kant asked for, and yet of less significance as evidence. In his polemical tract his longing for Swedenborg's book is transformed into the reproof of a worthless publication. *The Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* are, however, the belated defense of rationalistic skepticism—merely a poor, disagreeable answer to the unceasing demand for Swedenborg's visions, as Kant himself admitted in a letter in response to Mendelssohn.<sup>154</sup> The seduction had already taken place. That Kant at the

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. Chapter 5: “Swedenborg's Gift of Seership within the Framework of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.”

<sup>153</sup> *Kant über Swedenborg*, 46 (additions in brackets mind).

<sup>154</sup> Cf. *Kant to Mendelssohn*, AA X, (Berlin and Leipzig, 1922), no. 39; also in Rudolf Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistessehers*, (Stuttgart, 1976) 112-117.

end is unable to resist the seduction by his own inclinations, but that he is ready to go along with Swedenborg's conception of the other world as organized on moral lines, is borne out by his late lectures on rational psychology.

### I.3.1.3 Kant's Commentary on Swedenborg and the Subject of Occult Phenomena in an Early Lecture on Metaphysics

In a careful manner Kant even let himself become involved in his own speculations about the spirit world and about its possible conjunction with the world of the body. This metaphysical openness of his pre-critical period emerges from a lecture on metaphysics delivered at that time. It is cited by Herder in Vol. XXVIII of the Academy's edition of Kant's works and is dated in the time between the years 1762 and 1764:

*The general question.* Could departed souls possibly have an association with men? I know of no influence, active or passive, of the soul on an entity of this world, other than that it has on the body. It does not follow from this, however, that it could not be directly and better aware of itself. *Answer.* There is perhaps a body so much more subtly organized that it can perceive perceptions as fine as magnetic matter: so that it can be conscious of the distant poles—as gross as the auras are which they produce. This is just a possibility.<sup>155</sup>

At this time, therefore, Kant did not deny the possibility of man having a contact with the spirit world, nor, by virtue of the soul's having a part in an immaterial aura, the possibility of spatial clairvoyance.<sup>156</sup> On the contrary, as will be seen from the following quotation, here he even quite speculatively pondered the conditions under which such a contact with

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<sup>155</sup> *Kants Vorlesungen über Metaphysik*, according to Herder, ca. 1762-64, (Dating by Rudolf Malter (ed.): *Träume eines Geistesehers*, 107), 184, Text as in AA XXVIII, 4. Abteilung, 5. Band, 1. Hälfte, (Berlin, 1970).

<sup>156</sup> Cf. the last sentence in the foregoing quotation.

“departed souls” could take place. He brings forward major factors such as “the linkage of the soul to the body” and imagines abnormal states, as for example, “sound sleep,” in which the soul could possibly temporarily free itself from the “prison of the body,” as emerges from the following quotes: —

Could the soul after death not also enjoy communal association without a body?

1) with spirits, a spirit: spirit = body: body?

2) with bodies? At present its fine perceptions can be captivated by the body, and therefore it can have no spiritual association. Perhaps once released—since the soul’s conjunction with the body now often does actually vary (e.g., in sleep-walking), the problem posed is an actual possibility—there would also be here, in the body, such a commerce of the soul with spirits. It would thus be interrupted by the influence of the body; and thus all dreams are confused, half mental images, half sensations—what a mixture!<sup>157</sup>

If one does not allow oneself to be disturbed by Herder's clichéd notes interrupting Kant’s train of thought, Kant here directly gives a philosophical theory about the ways spirits could have contact with one another, yes, and still more, also about how the bodiless beings could come into conjunction with souls possessing bodies.

It was, however, precisely through such an “inward working” of the spirit world in a soul half-loosed from the body, as Kant here once hypothetically had in view, that Swedenborg claimed to have received his clairvoyant information while by-passing the space-time continuum.

As is evident from Kant’s lectures on metaphysics, the Königsberg scholar raised the possibility of an interruption of sense perception by a kind of mental view, although this could happen only in abnormal mental states, such as were known to him from Swedenborg’s case. In his critical period Kant will very sharply contest this possibility of a change in the way of viewing things from a sensorial to an extrasensory one—to a

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. *Kants Vorlesungen über Metaphysik*, according to Herder, 185.

purely spiritual or mental way of viewing, yes, to even an overlapping of both fundamentally different ways of knowing—as he here in principal still grants. He will only take them up again and teach them anew in his senior lectures on rational psychology .

In these lectures on metaphysics the marked dualism between soul and body that Kant maintained even in his critical period unmistakably jumps out. In the CPR one finds the “body-soul” polarity again in the cleavage between the “*mundus sensibilis*” and “*mundus intelligibilis*.” The mysterious conjunction of the body with the soul, about whose so-termed “commerce” Kant here speculates, will remain an unsolvable problem for him, particularly in regard to the question of free-will in moral matters.<sup>158</sup>

Kant then consistently also further applied the logical consequences of these general considerations about a possible association with spirits during man’s earthly life derivatively to the special case of Emanuel Swedenborg:

Evidence about Swedenborg—that he conversed with a deceased prince, etc.. In Gothenburg he saw the fire in Stockholm. He speaks with brazen absurdity, *de statu post mortem, ex auditis et visis* [“about the life after death, from things heard and seen”], he sees clothing, food—perhaps he does see much, but the influence of the body stimulates him to imagine the rest. One can perhaps retain the residue, not throw out everything.<sup>159</sup>

Kant believes that in spite of the oddity of Swedenborg’s visions one must at least admit the fundamental possibility of a contact with spirits even during earthly life, thus of a real “*commercium*” between the body and the soul. For “he who rejects everything, must needs deny [the] soul or [the] state after death.”<sup>160</sup>

According to Kant’s own conviction too, in this way, namely, by way of the mysterious “*commercium*” between soul and body discussed by him in his lectures on metaphysics, from a purely hypothetical standpoint a

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. the detailed discussion of Kant’s polemic tract in the following chapter.

<sup>159</sup> *Kants Vorlesungen über Metaphysik*, according to Herder, 186.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* (additions in brackets the author’s).

clairvoyant leap over the space-time continuum would be imaginable—and indeed a leap by means of a direct conjunction of the soul with the spirit world, and thus with the souls of the departed. In addition in these early lectures he also follows up on this speculative, spiritistic assumption more closely:

“There have always been people who have foreseen events,”<sup>161</sup> Kant says, and by way of example of this temporal clairvoyance cites Plato’s Daimion and Apollo of Thyana, who themselves were “as if conscious of the distant poles.”<sup>162</sup> Here Kant without reservation additionally also grants to Swedenborg’s miraculous soul a sphere of perception extended in such a manner: Swedenborg may perhaps really be fantasizing, nevertheless one ought not scorn everything that he reports “*ex auditis et visis*” [from what has been heard and seen] in the spirit world.<sup>163</sup>

Here, in any case, in his pre-critical phase, as a simple unsalaried university lecturer, he still does not allow himself to lock in any feeling of scornful contempt, nor even a rejection of the basic possibility of an access to the spirit world and thereby also to occult phenomena. Herewith one must acknowledge Kant’s positive disposition to involve himself with the Nordic seer and his miraculous gift, and in so doing also to take under careful philosophic consideration the possibility of occult phenomena, such as clairvoyant acts of a spatial and temporal nature, as well as a kind of “mediating dialog (*medialen Dialog*)” with “bodiless souls”—although here certainly subject to a degree of skepticism:

Ghosts have deceived us 99 out of a 100 times. One is therefore inclined not to believe what seems true in the majority of the cases. But do not dismiss everything too quickly! Do not say that a thing is a lie, but rather say *non liquet*.<sup>164</sup>

Kant, to be sure, applies his skeptical “*non liquet*” (= “it is not yet clear”) to the reports reaching his ears. However, he does not simply

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Ibid., 186.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 186.

dismiss them out of hand, but in his own speculations about the spirit world and the commerce between the soul and the body ponders the suppositions necessary for extrasensory cognitions. As to form, this philosophical method is for the most part quite analogous to that used in CPR, where he of course investigates and states the necessary conditions for sensorial cognition.

The same hypothetical propositions about the possibility of a penetration of the spirit world into ours, or as the case may be the inverse, about a penetration of our souls into the transcendental kingdom of God, and about extrasensory acts of cognition that could take place in this occult way, are also found in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer—Illustrated by the Dreams of Metaphysics*. They are found here, of course, in an ironizing form and are imbedded in his dawning critical philosophy, which will allow no extrasensory but only sensorial cognition.

This kind of plainly spiritistically appealing conceptions emerges in serious philosophical dress for the first time again in his senior lectures of 1790, where Kant appears to take up again the pen of his early creative period.<sup>165</sup>

### **I.3.2 The Radical Change In Kant's Relation to Swedenborg in the Years 1763-1766**

When Kant takes up the case of the example of Emanuel Swedenborg in the polemic tract, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer—Illustrated by the Dreams of Metaphysics*, composed only three years after his letter about Swedenborg, he judges quite differently of occult phenomena than in the document referred to in the previous section.

With the publication of his polemic tract in 1766, first done anonymously, Kant attacked Swedenborg personally. But next he here also quite basically declared all imaginable metaphysics to be impermissible speculation, insofar as such speculation threatened to be beyond the scope of experience firmly defined by the senses and the understanding.

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. Chapter 7.2.

In framing this radical critique of absolutely all possible “spirit-seeing” and of the “sophistry”<sup>166</sup> resting upon it, Kant could not yet in 1766, of course, have recourse to an inclusive critique of the possibilities, limits, and compass of human cognitive power. Such a staking-out of the field of possible empirical knowledge and its *a priori* conditions would not be made until fifteen years later, by his famous *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Nevertheless, in attentive retrospect the germs of the fundamental thoughts and reflections concerning the human cognitive faculty and its clearly demarcative limits are to be found already here in this Swedenborg review.

### **I.3.2.1 Kant’s Attitude To Swedenborg In His Polemical Tract In Comparison To His Swedenborg Commentary In His “Letter”**

Kant’s battle tract against Swedenborg and the metaphysicists, *Dreams of a Sp.*, is divided into two parts, the dogmatic and the historical. The dogmatic part in turn comprises four main sections, in which Kant intellectually comes to terms with the subject, “spirit-seeing.” The historical part comprises three main sections, in which Kant especially reports on Swedenborg’s alleged extrasensory abilities.

In the polemic tract’s historical part Kant, using a lightly ironic tone, recounts the three best known Swedenborg stories. While previously, in the “letter” of 1763, he had reported two of these occult incidents to Frau von Knobloch in a respectful tone, here, in his description of the very same extra-sensory documents, he stoops all the way to irrelevant attacks on the people involved.<sup>167</sup>

The story about Frau von Marteville’s lost receipt was the one most commonly brought forward as exemplary documentation of the Swedish visionary’s “spirit-seeing.”<sup>168</sup>

Kant too can himself, from his own personal source, very proudly inform his princess about this occult incident in his letter about Swedenborg. In so doing he here, on the other contrary, introductorily pays due respect to the seer:

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. Kant, *Träume*, 59.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 85-88.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Chapter 2.5.

Gracious Fräulein, in order to provide you with a few bits of evidence, where the whole thing is still a matter of public witness and the man who reported it to me could investigate it directly at the very place it occurred, please consider only the following two incidents.<sup>169</sup>

In contrast to this, Kant in his polemic tract supplies the shorter formulation of these stories with a defamatory introduction:

The following tales have no other warranty than common rumor, whose evidence is quite problematic.<sup>170</sup>

As empirical documentation for Swedenborg's alleged spatial clairvoyance Swedenborgians ever again bring forward the story of the Stockholm Fire, whose exact progress Swedenborg is said to have seen at the time in spirit from Gothenburg, over 170 miles away, and to have accurately described in every detail.

On the basis of his own information Kant, too, himself knew of this alleged act of spatial clairvoyance so as to be able to tell about it in detail in the "letter." There he introduces his faithful commentary with the following respectful words:

The following occurrence seems to me to be the most convincing of all and really dispels all imaginable doubt.<sup>171</sup>

Quite otherwise is the shorter version of this occult happening in the polemic tract, where it is laden with a few doubts:

It was toward the end of the year 1759, if I am correctly informed, when Herr Schwedenberg, coming from England, landed in Gothenburg one afternoon.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Kant über Swedenborg* 53.

<sup>170</sup> *Träume* 86.

<sup>171</sup> *Kant über Swedenborg* 44.

<sup>172</sup> *Träume* 89, cf. also Chapter 2.5.

Striking here is the knowing misspelling of Swedenborg's name. Whether this was done intentionally or from pure carelessness cannot be further determined. But the fact remains that Kant had known how to write Swedenborg's name correctly.<sup>173</sup>

Kant immediately follows the subsequent, relatively cool commentary in his polemic tract with a hard, deprecating critique. In this he characterizes the rest of the Swedenborg stories as "fables" and "deceiving tales," whose content it shames him to spread further.<sup>174</sup>

The third generally known occult occurrence, namely Swedenborg's meeting with Queen Louisa Ulrica of Sweden and his resulting, alleged contact with her deceased brother, is re-told by Kant in his polemic tract in an equally deprecating tone. He manifestly cannot restrain himself from reproaching the princess involved in Swedenborg's "clairvoyant activity" for pure naiveté:

Toward the end of the year 1761 Herr Schwedenberg was called to a princess whose great understanding and insight it is said to be almost impossible to deceive in such cases.<sup>175</sup>

In order to highlight the defamatory intention which permeates Kant's polemic tract, in Section I.2 I have already compared Gollwitzer's factual, impartial account of this Swedenborg story with the formulation given by Kant.

In Section I.2 I have also adduced the irrelevant commentary that permeates this philosophic polemic tract. I agree consequently with the judgment of Ernst Benz who assesses this work of Kant more as emotional discharge against Swedenborg the "spirit seer" than as philosophically factual argument with Swedenborg the metaphysicist.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>This is evident from his letter three years earlier to Charlotte von Knobloch (= *Kant über Swedenborg*).

<sup>174</sup>*Träume* 89, 114.

<sup>175</sup> Kant, *Träume*, 85.

<sup>176</sup> Ernst Benz, *Swedenborg als Wegbahner*, S.10.

In summary let the following noteworthy contradictions between Kant's Swedenborg-reception in the "letter" of 1763 and his polemic tract Swedenborg-criticism from 1766 be adduced:<sup>177</sup>

1. In the "letter" Kant refers to Swedenborg by his proper name, the name which he bore since his elevation to the rank of nobility, "Herr von Swedenborg." Besides this he here describes him as a "scholar" and as a "rational, pleasant, and open-hearted man."<sup>178</sup>

In his polemic tract, on the other hand, be it from a defamatory intent or simply from pure carelessness, Kant refers to Swedenborg by a false name, "Schwedenberg." Besides this he represents him as "a certain Herr Schwedenberg, a gentleman without a position or job," as the "foremost of all fantastical visionaries," a "great enthusiast," whose "spirit is empty of any drop of reason."<sup>179</sup>

2. In the "letter" Swedenborg appears as a man of significant spiritual rank, whose personal acquaintance appears very desirable to Kant—a man with whom he enters into literary correspondence, of whom he regrets that he cannot have a personal conversation, and whose work he eagerly awaits.<sup>180</sup>

In the polemic tract, on the other hand, Kant downgrades Swedenborg to an "unknown fool," who has written "Arcana Coelestia"—a work which Kant disposes of as "eight quarto volumes full of nonsense," which he regrets acquiring, and, "which is yet worse, having read."<sup>181</sup>

3. The "letter" produces for each of the Swedenborg-anecdotes a precise enumeration of the partially identified eye-witnesses cited and emphasizes their credibility, in the course of which is precisely described the way in which and by whom the most careful on the spot verification had been undertaken. Yes, the entire "letter's" chief point of

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<sup>177</sup> In regard to the following comparison cf. also Ernst Benz. *Swedenborg in Deutschland*, 245f.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. *Kant über Swedenborg* (= Brief an Ch. v. Knobloch), 42f.

<sup>179</sup> Kant, *Träume*, 84.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. *Kant über Swedenborg*, 45.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. *Träume* 98, 6.

difference is the positive result of his investigation. Kant reports: He did not simply find “nothing,” not merely “fables,” but rather full confirmation of the “common rumor”—on the basis of the statements and investigations of very credible witnesses, “highly respected people in Stockholm.”<sup>182</sup>

In the polemic tract, on the contrary, the stories of Swedenborg’s visionary endowment are brought in as incidents that are proven simply by “the common rumor, whose evidence is problematic,” and after enumerating them Kant apologizes for having undertaken such a contemptible business.<sup>183</sup>

How did this striking break in Kant’s relation to Swedenborg come to pass, as regards his personal esteem for him and as well regarding his philosophic view of the Nordic visionary’s alleged gift of seership?

What occasioned the usually so painstakingly reflective and customarily cautious Königsberg scholar to compose this negative Swedenborg-critique with such absolutely rash zeal?

To what purpose was the uncustomary polemic tone in this radical criticism directed toward the “spirit-seer” and metaphysicist, and for what reason was the polemic tract at first published anonymously?

What happened in the three years between 1763 and 1766?

### I.3.3 Reasons For the Appearance of the Polemical Tract

Kant’s views in his letter to Frau Knobloch can scarcely be disposed of by reference to an early belief in spirits, nor the composition of his polemic tract by reference to a later change of mind. For in the first place in the lectures on metaphysics that Kant gave in Königsberg at the time of his composing this letter, he was already promoting a new metaphysics, and in the second, he was at the same time speculating about the double nature of man and a possible contact of the human soul with the mental kingdom of spirits, as I have shown above. Also, it is the same stories about Swedenborg that Kant repeats in this letter and that he later takes over in his essay.

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. *Kant über Swedenborg*, 42f.

<sup>183</sup> *Träume* 86; 89.

His letter and his essay differ from each more in that in the letter information was requested by a friend and that in his essay the issue is Kant the philosopher's professional view of Swedenborg. The composition of the polemic tract seems necessary to Kant for the determination of his own philosophic position, as even he himself admits in it:<sup>184</sup>

Indeed, no reproach is more bitter to the philosopher than that of gullibility and of being taken by popular delusions. Those who know how to appear intelligent cheaply pour their mocking laughter on everything, which reduces those who know and those who do not to more or less the same level—in that the matter is incomprehensible for both of them. So it is no wonder that the spirit appearances that are so often alleged to have taken place are very favorably received, although publicly they are either denied or indeed hushed up.<sup>185</sup>

It may be reasonably presumed that in his own mind Kant could never entirely harmonize the ambivalence between his rational ethos and his metaphysical ethic, and that therefore from the beginning to the end of his life he remained privately fascinated with Swedenborg. However, it was only after the completion of his principal critical work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, that he dared to make his personal convictions known openly.<sup>186</sup> Here he appears to have undertaken to make a sharp division between his personal opinions and those directed to the public. While he restrained himself during his professional teaching assignment as unsalaried lecturer in philosophy at Königsberg and held back his personal convictions from his philosophy faculty, at the end of his self-appointed task of laying the foundation of transcendental philosophy and thereby replacing visionary metaphysics, he allowed himself a flight into the “fool's paradise” of metaphysics, whose entry he himself had most sternly forbidden.

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<sup>184</sup> Also Liliane Weissberg: *Catarcticon und der schöne Wahn. Kants Träume eines Geistersehers—erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, in: *Poetica, Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, Amsterdam 1986, S.111.

<sup>185</sup> *Träume*, 82f.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. *Kants Vorlesungen über rationale Psychologie*, Pölitz (ed.), in Chapter 7.2.

The complete reversal in Kant's attitude toward occult phenomena and the metaphysical fanaticism that is based on it is therefore not so difficult to explain as is the more radical break in his estimation of Swedenborg as a person and Swedenborg's gift of seership. But the explanation is more than likely to be found in Kant's philosophical ambivalence between rational ethos and metaphysical ethics.<sup>187</sup>

Nevertheless, the striking turn about had, on the one hand, a philosophical basis and reason, which needs to be seen in the context of the development of Kant's thoughts on a critique of the cognitive process at just that time; and on the other, a personal basis as well, which lay in Kant's social surroundings.

I begin first with the personal reasons that had occasioned Kant to compose the polemic tract and to publish it anonymously, so that I may then come to the philosophical reasons.

### **I.3.3.1 Kant's Personal Reasons for the Composition of the Polemic Tract**

As I have already noted above, it was not simply Swedenborg himself who ran into great danger on account of his new exposition of biblical texts allegedly received from a Divine revelation "ex auditis et visis"—since in 1761 the German Lutheran and then in 1768 the Swedish state church had persecuted him and declared him to be insane. All those who seriously engaged themselves with his influence and his teachings could also thereby easily lose their professional reputation.<sup>188</sup>

This, danger, of being regarded as an "apostle of spirit-seeing,"<sup>189</sup> Kant presumably wanted to escape once and for all. Kant himself confesses to this motivation in a letter to Mendelssohn shortly before the anonymous publication of his polemic tract:

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. Chapter 6: "Swedenborg's Gift of Seership from the Perspective of Kant's Moral Philosophy."

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Section I.1.3., "Swedenborg's Influence on Kant; cf. also Ernst Benz, *Swedenborg in Deutschland*, 257-268.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; cf. the following quotation.

I do not know whether on reading through this rather loosely formulated paper you have noted any indication of the resentment I have had in writing it. For since, as a result of my inquisitive research into Swedenberg's visions, both by contact with people who had the opportunity to be acquainted with him personally and through a limited correspondence, and ultimately through the procurement of his works, I once had much to say, I realized that I would indeed have no rest from endless inquiry until I had rid myself of the knowledge I was presumed to possess of all these stories.<sup>190</sup>

Nevertheless, why Kant, with this purpose in mind, had published his Swedenborg review anonymously, remains all the more a riddle. I can only explain it to myself by the thought that he was embarrassed to sign his good name to a treatise that discussed Swedenborg—even if it did so only critically.

### **I.3.3.2 Philosophical Reasons for the Composition Of the Polemical Tract**

In addition to these personal reasons Kant had for pulling himself out of the wheels of the dilemma in which his careless manifestation of his interest in Swedenborg had enmeshed him, in just those years between 1763 and 1766 he had also developed a skepticism of any kind of metaphysics, insofar as it pretends to lie outside the bounds of human experience, rationally or empirically.

As early as the year 1764 Kant had outlined a classification of "Diseases of the Brain," under which fell, as one of the not least significant disturbances of the spirit, "fantastication."

Here Kant distinguished between "those whose mind is disturbed in such a way that they draw correct conclusions from wrong ideas, and those who draw conclusions in a distorted manner from correct ideas...With those of the first kind, the fantasizer, or insane person, the faculty of understanding is not actually damaged, but merely the power which

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<sup>190</sup> Kant to Mendelssohn, 1766.

wakens the concepts in the soul that the judgmental faculty uses for the purpose of comparing them. These sick people one can definitely confront with a rational viewpoint, if not so as to cure their illness, still at least to mitigate it.<sup>191</sup>

Among those in the first category “who draw correct conclusions from wrong ideas” Kant in his polemic tract numbers also the “foremost of all fantasizers” Swedenborg, whose actual sickness concerns not his faculty of understanding but the deception of his senses:

Furthermore, one sees from this that since the sickness of the fantasizer is actually not a matter of his understanding but of the deception of his senses, the unfortunate creature cannot dismiss his delusions by any amount of sophistry because the real or apparent perception of the senses takes precedence over all judgment by the understanding and bears a direct evidence that far surpasses all other persuasion.<sup>192</sup>

In the above quotation from “Diseases of the Brain” as well as in the inclusion of Swedenborg’s “spirit-seeing” among the categories listed there, the very significant division made later in the CPR stands out very clearly. This is the division between the lower cognitive faculty of sensation and the higher cognitive faculty of understanding, whose functions Kant already in his pre-critical period conceives as necessarily harmonizing with each other in a hierarchical fashion.

The Kantian Kuno Fischer in his Kant dissertation proposes a systematic connection between the treatise composed in 1764, “Essays on Diseases of the Brain,” and the polemic tract published only two years later:

While the name of this great visionary was now spreading over the world, Kant makes his study of diseases of the brain and finds that visionaries deserve one of the foremost places among those whose brain is affected with insanity. Swedenborg was

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<sup>191</sup> Kant, “*Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes*,” 1764, Text according to the Akademie edition (Berlin, 1912) II, 269f.

<sup>192</sup> *Träume* 70.

without doubt the most distinguished case...for the refutation or confirmation of the Kantian theory. Kant could not evade this universally known phenomenon from the realm of spiritual magic. After having applied his theory on brain diseases to miserable goat prophets, he must now prove it in Swedenborg's case.<sup>193</sup>

Combined with this systematically pleasing integration of the general classification of diseases of the spirit with the particular case of Swedenborg was Kant's personal wish to once and for all distance himself from being reputed a philosophical specialist in "spirit-seeing," as well as his increasing antipathy to the speculative metaphysics of that time. Fischer too verifies these connections:

One can imagine that Kant was assailed on many sides over his opinion of Swedenborg. He himself in a letter to Mendelssohn speaks of such questions that were raised to him, which he felt he could best answer by giving a public explanation. In addition to this there was a still higher philosophical purpose that required that he write about Swedenborg. The fact was that he had discovered a surprising parallel between the visionary and the metaphysicists of his era, and that at the moment nothing could suit him better than to develop this comparison. Swedenborg and metaphysicists were, to use the common expression, two flies that he could kill with one swat. He swatted, laughing.<sup>194</sup>

Besides all these good reasons for precipitously composing and anonymously publishing the polemic tract, what had very probably finally caused the already full barrel of philosophic indignation to overflow was Kant's reading of Swedenborg's works titled *Arcana Coelestia*. For in his Swedenborg review Kant shows himself badly disappointed by the esoteric content of the chief work of the Nordic seer that had appeared in 1749-56. In the historical part of *Dreams* he reproduces the essence of Swedenborg's theories. These include primarily Swedenborg's allegorical

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<sup>193</sup> Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, 217.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

exposition of the text of the first two books of the Old Testament and, of course, the alleged revelations of spirits, “*ex auditis et visis*” (“from things heard and seen”). Besides this, Kant says, from this religious revelatory work one gathers much about Swedenborg’s ideas of the conditions in the “spirit world” and its enduring relationship to men by way of their inner mind.

The nature and manner of the “spirit appearances” Kant does not discuss, “because such wild fancies would only disturb the reader’s sleep at night.”<sup>195</sup> In the polemic tract he expresses regret at having acquired these “eight quarto volumes full of nonsense”<sup>196</sup> of a “foremost of all spirit-seers” and a “foremost of all fantacizers”<sup>197</sup> and, “what is worse,” at having read them.<sup>198</sup> In 1766 he expressly distanced himself from their “hypochondriacal vapors, tall tales, and hocus-pocus.”<sup>199</sup>

However, as is found in *Dreams*, in the meantime nothing could more definitely distance him from Swedenborg’s doctrine than his ensuing reading of Swedenborg’s work, in which, indeed, neither any alleged acts of the author nor any sorts of proofs at all play a role.<sup>200</sup> This work in its full extent is rather a spiritual exegesis of the first two books of Moses, in which the author reveals a hidden, higher meaning behind the direct, literal sense. Interspersed between these purely doctrinal interpretations are found the actual *audita* and *visa* (“the things heard and seen”). They occur as single episodes in which Swedenborg recounts all that he has experienced in his daily social contact with the spirit world. And what these bring to light is just the thing that exhausted the schoolmaster Kant’s patience, and finally made him feel a fool. From this he could not be saved even by the truly amazing agreement of Swedenborg’s assertions with, as Kant himself said, “that which the subtlest pondering of reason can produce on such a subject.”<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Träume* 113.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Julius Ebbinghaus, “Kant und Swedenborg,” 1943, in Julius Ebbinghaus, *Gesammelte Aufsätze, Vorträge und Reden*, (Darmstadt, 1968) 58-80.

<sup>201</sup> *Träume* 97.

Here, in point of fact, right before our eyes we find mention of that double-membership of man in the material and in the spiritual world—of which it is said, of course, the majority are unaware, this dependence on the spirit kingdom remaining a mystery to them.<sup>202</sup> Swedenborg himself is one of the exceptional cases, even from Kant's way of looking at things, for he describes himself as one who has conscious association with spirits already in this life.<sup>203</sup> Spirits interact with one another, as is in fact, rationally considered, quite conceivable, since every spirit exerts an influence on the inner mind of another directly, that is, without a material agency. The interaction therefore consists in a continual thought-reading, i.e., reception of the thoughts of others.<sup>204</sup> In the case where the inner aspect of a person is not open to spirits, then they on their side cannot perceive the thoughts which he has in conjunction with the material world. Swedenborg's inner aspect, however, is just as accessible to them as theirs is to him. Therefore they are able to be aware of everything that enters his head as a member of the material world, and are likewise able to use him as a peep-hole, to get a view into the world of our minds which is closed to their sight.<sup>205</sup>

However, the rational system outlined by Kant is in closest agreement when Swedenborg has the spirit's outward circumstances, that is, the way in which spirits are arranged in relation to each other, be determined by their inner relationship to Good and to Truth.<sup>206</sup> According to this explanation the place which each takes in the spirit world is not a place in an actual space, but is the place which he is allotted by his inner states as regards acts of love and knowledge of truth. Therefore, although in the spirit kingdom there is no distance, no change of location, and no spatially

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<sup>202</sup> Cf. Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, 8 volumes, 1749-56, English: *Arcana Coelestia* (Swedenborg Society: London, 1983) nos. 69, 687.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 5, 1634.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 314, 318, 1388.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 1880. This mode of representation was described by Goethe in the closing scene of *Faust*, where he has Pater Seraphicus take up into himself the early deceased blessed boys with a generously paradoxical gesture, so that with the help of his eyes they can get a look at the ravines of anchorites: "Climb up here into the world and earth seeing organ of my eyes, you may use them as your own, boys, just behold this region!" (in J. Ebbinghaus, "Kant und Swedenborg" (Darmstadt 1968) S. 73.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, nos. 66, 450ff.

extended being, according to Swedenborg spirits nevertheless appear in spatial relationships and in human shapes.<sup>207</sup> According to the similarities of their inner constitution they form particular communities.<sup>208</sup> All the communities together, however, appear as the immense image of a Greatest Man, in whom each spirit and each group of spirits see themselves in that place which corresponds to their function in the spiritual whole.<sup>209</sup> This correspondence exists, accordingly, not only between the spirits and their outward appearance, but also between the spirit world and physical beings, which on their part exist only because of the spirits. Due to this, physical things can be known in two ways: firstly through their mutual effect on one another, and secondly as effects of their fundamental spiritual powers. This is the basis of the new exegesis of the Sacred Scriptures that Swedenborg attempted. But generally speaking, it is the basis of his doctrine as a doctrine of the awareness of physical things as symbols of the spiritual world.<sup>210</sup>

Even if this doctrine is fantasy, even if Swedenborg's claim that he himself has seen all this is unbelievable—what then is it now that in the end, in spite of its agreement with reason's subtlest ponderings, makes such an absurd impression that, due to it, Kant felt himself exposed to ridicule for his interest in Swedenborg?

One can begin to understand this when one reads *Arcana Coelestia* himself. What I have reported so far regarding Kant's penetrating study of this literature actually concerns only the general makeup of the spirit kingdom and its relationship to the material world, as Swedenborg claimed to have been directly informed of it. However, if one now follows on to the reports of all that he claims to have glimpsed on the other side, right to the individual scenes, it is scarcely possible to react otherwise than Kant did. Even if one has swallowed that picture of a Greatest Man—in which the good fill the places of the nobler body parts, while the evil lead a barren life in places whose graphic description reasons of good taste render

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 1376ff, 444.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 684ff.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 684ff, 1276.

<sup>210</sup> "Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis" ("All that is transitory is only a likeness")—this line from the final scene of *Faust* seems to be a result of Swedenborg influences (cf. J. Ebbinghaus, *Kant und Swedenborg*, 73).

impossible—this is only a small beginning of all that lies ahead. Next one hears of the soul's awakening in the Beyond, how it experiences the odor of the corpse as aromatic,<sup>211</sup> how the membrane of the left eye is rolled back by the angels toward the nose, thereby opening the eye;<sup>212</sup> one hears, what is more, that there are some four-hundred and seventy-eight kinds of joy of the spirits in heaven<sup>213</sup>—but the disclosures begin to become really rewarding when the seer, still acting as a neutral reporter, is let down into hell. This takes place with a protective escort of angel spirits, who surround him like a column.<sup>214</sup> And now in the first hell he sees the haters of men who so delight in the stench that prevails there that they prefer it to the loveliest perfume, while it makes him retch.<sup>215</sup> He sees the hell of adulterers, who torment each other with grinding pestles and threshing flails, with axes and augers.<sup>216</sup> He comes further to the avaricious, whose skin has been bleached by a steaming vapor as when swine are being skinned. And these make such a noisome quarrel with a swarthy looking fellow who will not let himself be bleached and whom they consequently take to be a robber, that he must be returned to heaven.<sup>217</sup> After these examples is further apology really necessary for Kant's exasperated exclamation that he is "tired of transcribing the wild fantasies of the worst of all fantastical visionaries or of going on with such stories to Swedenborg's descriptions of the conditions after death"?<sup>218</sup>

So it is understandable that Kant, once having sampled these fruits of Swedenborg's gift of seership, felt duped and from now on looked quite indifferently at the truth or untruth of the reports that Swedenborg's supernatural talents supposedly attested to and in which he at first appeared to have displayed so much trust:

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 175.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 457.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 457.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 699.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 814.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 824.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 939.

<sup>218</sup> *Träume*, 112.

To us these are in actuality matters of indifference, and a momentary flash of reasons for or against may win the acclaim of the intellectuals, but it is scarcely going to determine the future fate of the upright.<sup>219</sup>

The great insight regarding cognitive theory he had developed in the year in which he wrote *Dreams* was this: reason has the ability to critique itself and through its self-critique to limit its possibility for knowledge to sense experience. Only by this self-limitation of reason to commonly accessible sense experience does our knowledge first become universally valid and binding.

If the conviction that something could be knowable that can in no wise be raised to a commonly shared experience (such as association with spirits) were to become generally accepted, according to Kant's budding critical conviction this means that all human knowledge would be subjective. For just thereby one deprives oneself of the sole criterion by which, according to Kant, one can at all judge of a thing's specific characteristics—one deprives oneself of the universal validity of knowledge.

What is usually forgotten when one demands a scientific investigation of events that occur spontaneously and not according to fixed, theoretical laws (Kant mentions as such "paradoxical" things, "sympathy, divining-rods, presentiment, the effect of imagination on pregnant women, the influence of the phases of the moon on animals and plants, and the like"<sup>220</sup>) is the question, How in all the world is scientific knowledge then supposed to be possible if the fundamental principle that our perceptions must follow rules is altogether given up as a requirement for factual knowledge?

In the "practical conclusion" to *Dreams*, after once again giving attention to whether one could really be instructed about the possibility of purely spiritual powers merely through experiences not to be questioned, rather than by pure reason, he continues:

If, however, certain alleged experiences do not allow themselves to be brought under any law of conscious sensation agreed

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 127f.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 91.

upon by the majority of people and therefore would do nothing more than demonstrate an anomaly in the testimony of the senses (as is in fact the case with the spirit tales in circulation), the only intelligent thing to do is to let be with them: because the lack of agreement and uniformity and then of historical knowledge takes away and renders useless all their power as evidence, as a basis for any law of experience about which the understanding could make a judgment.<sup>221</sup>

This then shows why for Kant no theoretical interest attaches to the stories from the spirit kingdom, and they lack practical value besides. For even though it is doubtless Kant's conviction also that the belief in an extrasensory world ruled by moral law is unbreakably joined with man's innate moral sense, he is likewise convinced that for man an informed knowledge of this Beyond is not only, for reasons of insufficient intersubjectivity, impossible, but also entirely superfluous, indeed, downright harmful. He who first needs to know about the other side before he will decide to be good and virtuous, shows just thereby that he is not such:

"Hence it appears"—he says—"to be more in accord with the human character of the purity of morals to base the expectation of the future world on the sentiment of a well-disposed soul rather than conversely to base its good conduct on the hope of the other world."<sup>222</sup>

For evaluating Kant's total development, his polemic tract against Swedenborg holds therefore a two-fold interest:<sup>223</sup> on one side it shows him in close connection to the basic tendencies of the Enlightenment as regards their content; on the other side, it points to the fact that in its spirit this content has acquired a new form, because it has acquired a new foundation. If the philosophy of the enlightenment naively tempted one to reject what lies beyond the senses, to limit reason to the empirically graspable and to "this side," so with Kant the same thing happened as the result of a thought process which had covered all the stages of critical reflection. He stands on the ground of experience not simply from caution

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Kants Leben und Lehre*, 80-97.

or for comfort's sake, but because he has positioned himself on this foundation of generally valid experience consciously. Metaphysics is for him also still a field of knowledge; however it is no longer a knowledge about things of an extrasensory world, but about the limits of human reason. It relegates man to his proper, and for him appropriate circle, which is the only one which he needs for his moral decisions, for his decision to take action. The ethos of the Enlightenment has received its theoretical justification through Kant. He who still needs the prospect of metaphysics for his rationale for morality, still does not know what is moral in its autarchy and self-sufficiency, which knowledge alone determines its true merit. In this sense of ethical immanence Kant concludes his polemic tract with a reference to the "sincere" *Candide's* words:

Let us attend to our happiness, go out into the garden and work.<sup>224</sup>

The new pattern of this doctrine was immediately transposed into a new pattern for living. In the theoretical and in the ethical sense, in knowledge as in act, Kant has set the course of the pure life on "this side." He now believes that he forever stands immovably "in the place of man" and that he is secure against any enticing attraction that could force him out of this position. Now it is a matter of showing how it is possible to hold fast to the standpoint of pure "immanence" and still safeguard the absoluteness of moral norms;—how one can keep the "intelligible" aspect of ethics pure and yet, or just for that reason, renounce the extrasensory element of mystical fanaticism.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> *Träume*, 128.

<sup>225</sup> How both at that time made their mark on Kant's own over-all spiritual attitude and on the influence which he exercised upon others, about this we have a decisive and classic testimonial of Herder, which no account of Kant's life can pass by:

I enjoyed the good fortune to know a philosopher who was my teacher. In the flower of his years he had the happy cheerfulness of a boy, which, I believe, followed with him into his most gray-headed days. His thought-trained forehead was the home of an unflappable cheerfulness and joy, the profoundest words flowed from his lips, jokes,

The motivation for the composition of the *Dreams* was made up, therefore, of several thoroughly different factors, which entered into a perfectly ideal symbiosis with each other. Fear for his reputation among his colleagues on the one hand, and the growth of his critical spirit just at that time on the other, mixed themselves in his spirit beset, from without and from within, to form a highly explosive powder, for which the provoking readings from the *Arcana Coelestia* functioned as the igniting spark. The powder keg exploded in the form of the polemic tract, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer—Illustrated by the Dreams of Metaphysics*.

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puns and humor were at his command, his lectures were highly entertaining social occasions. With the same spirit with which he examined Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, and Hume, and with which he methodically dealt with the natural laws of Kepler, Newton, and the physicists, he also took up Rousseau's newly published works, his *Émil*, and his "Héloïse," as well as each new scientific discovery he learned about. He evaluated them and ever returned to his unaffected knowledge of the nature and moral worth of man. The history of man—peoples—nature, physics, mathematics and experience were the sources from which he animated his lectures and relations. Nothing worth knowing was a matter of indifference to him. For him no political advantage, no sectarian cause, no possibility of profit, no prospect of reputation held the least attraction for him against that of the broadening and enlightenment of truth. He encouraged and cheerfully required independent thought. Despotism was foreign to his nature. This man whereof I most gratefully and respectfully speak is Immanuel Kant; his pleasant image stands before me. (J. G. Herder, *Kommentar zu Kant in Briefen zur Beförderung der Humanität* (Berlin: von H. Stolpe, 1971) Brief 79.)

In his "Reisejournal," in which he looks back on the dry, abstract, fragmentary methodology of his first education in his childhood and youth, Herder also contrasts it with Kant's "living instruction" and pure "human philosophy." When he nevertheless again and again stresses the freedom and clarity of the soul as the underlying characteristic in Kant's being, it does not seem to have been fully clear to him that for Kant this harmonious balance was not any direct gift of nature or fate but that it was achieved through difficult intellectual struggles. With the epoch of "Dreams" the struggles appear to have come near to their conclusion. (Cf. Herders Reisejournal in: Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Leben und Lehre*, 87f.)

(To be continued)

