

Translator's Corner

SWEDENBORG'S HIDDEN INFLUENCE ON KANT*

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I.4. KANT'S *TRÄUME EINES GEISTERSEHERS*—*ERLÄUTERT DURCH TRÄUME DER METAPHYSIK*—THE BEGINNING OF THE CRITICAL METHOD

I.4.1. The Philosophical Content Of the Polemical Tract

In summary the following can be said of the systematic, philosophical content of Kant's polemic tract against Swedenborg:

Kant proceeds from a concept of a "spirit" whose possibility of being recognized he rejects a priori, since according to his conviction it contains a contradiction. "Spirits" would by their nature be immaterial and therefore extrasensory beings. Appearances, however, can only be material, i.e., what is perceivable by the senses. Therefore it would be impossible for spirits to appear:

For only through experience can one become aware that things of this world which we call material have such a power; but one can never comprehend how they are possible. If I now propose substances of another kind present in space with powers different than that productive power whose effect is impenetrability, I can of course have no concrete idea whatsoever of any activity they may possess which has no analogy with anything of which I have a mental picture from experience; and if I deprive them of the property to fill the space in which they are active, then I give up a concept whereby things coming into my mind are normally conceivable to me, and consequently a kind of inconceivability must result.²²⁶

* Continued from *The New Philosophy* vol. 96, nos. 3 & 4 (July-Dec., 1993), pp. 277-307.

²²⁶ *Träume* 15.

This is not to say that no spirits could exist in themselves, but only that under no circumstances could they come to view in our world of experience, since by their nature they lack the requirements for being sensibly perceptible—namely extension and impenetrability—and since by our nature conversely we lack the requirements for perceiving such extrasensory objects:

But these cannot on that account be regarded as a known impossibility, simply for the reason that what is opposite, due to its possible nature, will likewise remain unobservable, although its reality is conceivable.²²⁷

In Kant's conception, in the case of a hypothetically assumed "spirit" as an immaterial being the subjective requirements for perception therefore do not agree with the objective requirements for the knowledge of a thing. "Spirit-seeing" therefore must be—*tertium non datur*—a fallacy of the senses, since it could certainly not be a genuine perception.

Kant now compares these "dreams of sensation" with the phenomena of dreams. A dream differs from reality in that in a dream each authors his own world; whereas in a wakeful state we share a common world. One could then in passing invert this observation and say that we are dreaming when each one has his own world:

When we are awake we have a commonly-shared world; when we dream, however, each has his own world. I fancy one could well turn the last statement around and say, If among different men each one has his own world, it is to be presumed that they are dreaming.²²⁸

Dreaming while awake, as in Kant's view was a continual occurrence with Swedenborg, would be a certain sign of insanity, of a disturbed mind:

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 f.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

He who while awake immerses himself in the fabrications and chimeras produced by his ever fruitful imagination to such a degree that he scarcely pays attention to the testimony of the senses, which are now supremely important to him—he is a person who can be rightly called a waking dreamer.²²⁹

For a “spirit-seer” by his visions, which are accessible only to himself, forsakes the commonly shared world of sensorial experience, within which of course no spirit appearances can be possible:

Accordingly spirit seers differ totally from waking fantastical visionaries not merely in degree but also in nature. For in a wakeful state, and often more intensely than other sensations, these report actual objects among the physical places of other things which they actually perceive around themselves; and the question here is only, how does it come to pass that they place the delusion of their imagination outside themselves, and in fact in relation to their bodies, which they likewise experience through their outer senses?²³⁰

How this fallacious imagination could turn a phantom of the brain into a sensorily perceptible appearance is for Kant easily explainable as a consequence of an unhealthy mental state whereby the normal mode of perception can be as it were inverted:

The peculiar characteristic of this disease consists in this: the confused person merely places the objects of his imagination outside of himself, and then regards the things before him as real.²³¹

Kant gives a swift judgment of this kind of mentally ill people, which in his classification of “Illnesses of the Head” he lists under the category of The Fantasizer, assigning them their appropriate place:

²²⁹ Ibid., 58.

²³⁰ Ibid., 61 f.

²³¹ Ibid., 66 f.

Therefore I in no way blame the reader if, instead of regarding the spirit-seer as a half-way citizen of the other world, he summarily dismisses him as a candidate for the hospital, and in so doing gives up all further inquiry.²³²

Nevertheless, in making any sharp condemnation of these daydreamers and fantasizers, let the critical rationalist exercise his customary philosophical magnanimity:

...while in former times it was found necessary to burn a few individuals who were like this, at the present day it will suffice simply to purge them.²³³

Swedenborg's visions are for Kant nothing other than dreams of a spirit-seer, who should be taken for mentally ill and treated accordingly.

Now, since there are manifestly dreams of sensation, there could just as well be dreams of reason, that is to say, dreams when one by abuse of reason comes up with concepts just as fantasy fabricates sensory illusions. Spirit-seeing falls in the first category, the related metaphysics in the second:

There is a certain relationship between dreamers of sensory experience and dreamers of reason, and among them are generally counted dreamers of reason as long as they have to do with spirits, for the same reason as the others—they see something that no other healthy person sees, and they enjoy their own social relationship with beings who manifest themselves to no one else, however good a mind he too may have.²³⁴

Again Kant has recourse to the established comparison with a dream. The similarity of the dream of sensation with that of reason is even further evident from the fact that among metaphysicists each constructs his own

²³² *Ibid.*, 72.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

system, which in every detail contradicts that of the rest of the “rationalists”:

...if we consider the airy architects of the various thought-worlds, each of whom serenely inhabits his own while locking out others...²³⁵

The metaphysicists also dream, when, leaving the common world of sensorial experience, they hypostatize extrasensory, mental objects—immaterial beings, for example,—from the mere concept of which they think they also can at the same time draw a conclusion about their actual existence.

If, from the mere conceivability of an idea as of simple, immaterial substances, one could in addition draw a conclusion about their existence, which is nowhere perceptible, then one would by all means also have to grant to Swedenborg the ability he claimed of being able to physically experience these “spirits.” Since, for Kant, however, both avenues to the transcendental world are closed—the rational as well as the empirical way—one could do just the inverse and explain the “Dreams of a Spirit-seer” by the “Dreams of Metaphysics”:

It is also appropriate to designate it as dreaming when one assumes the premise that these aforesaid appearances arise from mere fancies of the brain, in so far as they themselves, the one as well as the other, are properly speaking hatched up pictures, which nevertheless deceive the senses as being true objects.²³⁶

The metaphysicists spin themselves in the cocoon of their own respective world when they step beyond the common, sensible world of experiential knowledge in favor of a presumed knowledge of a transcendental world. The metaphysics criticized by Kant and the science based on experience are related to each other as an imagined world to the real world, and are thereby mutually exclusive.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59 f.

However, the more we concentrate on researching the real world, the less we need to interest ourselves in the dreamed of world.:

Just as on one side one learns to realize through somewhat deeper inquiry that the convincing and philosophical insight in the case of which we are speaking is impossible, so also on the other one must admit with a serene and prejudice-free mind that it is superfluous and unnecessary.²³⁷

Also, beyond this, for Kant morality as the goal of human life needs no presumption of an extrasensory state, since for him it is rooted directly in pure reason:

What! Is it good to be virtuous only for the reason that there is another world? Or will not actions rather be rewarded because they are good and virtuous in themselves?²³⁸

Nevertheless Kant's hypothetical consideration of the Beyond as a moral world, to the speculative description of which he lets himself in a few striking places in *Dreams* be carried away from his critical intention, suggests a certain ambivalence in Kant's own feeling:

For if in the end the association of the soul with the physical world were terminated by death, life in the other world would only be a natural continuation of that connection which it already had in this life, and the combined consequences of the morality practiced here would again find expression there in those actions that a being standing in an indissoluble association with the whole spirit world has already previously practiced according to pneu-

²³⁷ Ibid., 125.

²³⁸ Ibid., 126. Here Kant is already intimating expounding his later categorical imperative of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). The categorical imperative or his *Critique of Practical Reason* reads: "Act in such a way that the maxim for your willing could always apply as a legislated law." Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, W. Weischedel, ed. (Frankfurt, 1968) A 54.

matic laws. Present and Future would therefore be as it were a one and form a perpetual whole, according to the very order of Nature.²³⁹

It is relevant to the subject of my inquiry that in such a hypothetical communion of spirits, which the human soul would enter after death and take its proper place in accord with so-called “spiritual laws,” even Swedenborg's activities that go beyond space and time would be completely possible.

Although in these striking quotations from the section, “A Fragment of Occult Philosophy, the Purpose of Which is to Reveal Our Community with the Spirit-world,” Kant first claims to criticize himself, in order to then move on to a critique of Swedenborg's alleged spirit-seeing, in the context of these satirically intended comments occult phenomena that break through the sensible space-time continuum seem to him thoroughly plausible:

According to the cited concepts, however, heaven would actually be the spirit world, or, if one prefers, the blissful region of it; and this one would have to seek neither above oneself nor below oneself, because such an immaterial whole must not be conceived of according to the distance or nearness of physical things, but rather in the spiritual connection of its parts among one another. At least the members must be conscious of themselves only according to such relationships.²⁴⁰

Within that hypothetical community of spirits in the moral world, which agrees with Kant's intelligible world of reason, Swedenborg's extra-sensory perceptions, together with the occult phenomena of spatial and temporal clairvoyance as well, would therefore be quite possible, since spatial and temporal distance would play no role in that transcendent realm. Everything would depend on the—moral—state of the soul. The human soul would then be fittingly arranged according to “pneumatic

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 45 f.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

laws" in that spiritual community in which it had already also stood in its lifetime, without being aware of its spiritual nature:

All these immaterial natures..., according to these concepts, would have a place in a form of association determined by their individual nature. This association is not based on the conditions to which physical relationships are restricted. The distance of places or time periods, which in the visible world constitute the great cleft that dissolves all human association, disappears.²⁴¹

According to Kant's own statement, therefore, the clairvoyance that goes beyond space and time by the agency of an occult connection of the human soul with the mental, moral world, such as Swedenborg claimed to enjoy, would be quite possible—under the here forbidden presupposition, of course, that clairvoyance would in principle be possible, and under the equally contested presupposition that Swedenborg actually possessed a gift of seership.

In spite of the striking parallels between Kant's and Swedenborg's teachings about rational psychology already summarized above, for the reasons of systematic thought, the critical rationalist could not put the Nordic seer's alleged "proofs from experience" about a morally based spirit association and relationship and its occult influence on the physical world to use in favor of his own postulation of a moral world.

On the other hand, in his own boldest speculations about a mental, moral world, Kant could not entirely get around admitting even Swedenborg's alleged extrasensory perception, which was after all said to be based on the latter's inner senses, as a possibility falling within the bounds of his own hypothetically proposed spirit association:

The reader is left free to judge. As far as I am concerned at all events, the scale weighs heavily enough on the side of the arguments of the second chapter to keep me serious and undecided on hearing these many kinds of strange tales.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Ibid., 36.

²⁴² Kant: *Träume*, 78 f.

In my opinion, this indecisiveness in Kant's attitude toward Swedenborg's alleged gift of seership and toward the associated occult phenomena is to be interpreted only as Kant's two-sided relationship to Swedenborg and occult phenomena, since the philosopher on the one hand apodictically denies these in his polemic tract, but on the other at the same time secretly values them highly as possible "experiential proof" of a moral community of spirits.

With Kant, the Enlightenment-influenced condemnation of Swedenborg's alleged extrasensory abilities lies on the balance-scale of reason; the inner inclination toward his teaching about the nature of a moral spirit world, on the other hand, rests on the scale of feeling. This inner conflict in Kant's valuation of occult phenomena such as clairvoyance and contact with spirits even Kant himself confesses to quite explicitly in a letter to Moses Mendelssohn:

It appeared to me therefore most advisable to anticipate others, by first ridiculing myself, going about the matter quite openly while my real state of mind in this regard is at odds with reason, and both as far as his tale is concerned I am unable to resist some affection for stories of this kind, and as far as the rational grounds are concerned I entertain some presumption of their correctness, regardless of the absurdities yielded by the former and the fantasies and unintelligible ideas about their value yielded by the latter.²⁴³

In spite of this "paradoxical indecisiveness" of Kant's, however, the critique of his polemic tract is directed against the imaginings of sensation and the fabrications of metaphysics. He starts by criticizing himself and his own metaphysical speculation in order to go on from this point and place Swedenborg too under reason's categorical ban. Kant also emphasized this critical intention to Mendelssohn:

This fabrication, however,...can never grant a proof of even the possibility, and the thought of it...is a mere delusion. As, for

²⁴³ "Kant to Mendelssohn, 1766," *Academy*, Vol. X, Letter No. 39, (Berlin and Leipzig, 1922) 67.

instance, when someone attacked the possibility of Swedenborg's dreamings, I ventured to defend them. And my attempt to make an analogy of a real moral influence of spiritual beings with common gravitation is not actually a serious opinion of mine, but an example of how far one can go and how very unrestrained one can be in philosophical fabrication when one lacks [sensory] data.²⁴⁴

From this it appears that Kant's own speculations about the possible concept of spirits and a mental world were not meant seriously, but were to serve for the self-critique of his own reason.

In his polemic tract Kant already clearly indicates the limitation of the role of metaphysics to the science of the bounds of the possibilities of human cognition:

Therefore metaphysics is a science of the boundaries of human reason, and since a small country invariably has a considerable border, generally speaking it is more important to be acquainted with and preserve its territories than to sally forth blindly in conquest, so this use of the science in question is the most unknown and at the same time the most important—albeit that it is attained only rather late and after long experience.²⁴⁵

While on the one side metaphysics shows the impossibility of extra-sensory knowledge and on the other the possibility of sensory knowledge, Kant is convinced that with their help the boundaries between immanent and transcendental worlds can be determined and that the prerequisites and scope of the human cognitive faculty can be discovered by research:

I have admittedly not precisely determined these boundaries here, yet I have so far pointed them out that the reader will find on further reflection that he could save himself the most fruitless of all research in regard to the question, to what purpose the data about a world other than the world in which he is conscious should be sought?²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁴⁵ *Träume* 115 f.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

Already in the year 1766 the change in Kant showed itself. It was a change from the dogmatic metaphysics, which in his opinion was to be rejected, to the yet to be worked out critical transcendental philosophy, in which, through reason's reflection on itself, the transcendental requirements for the possibilities of experience are stated.²⁴⁷ In Kant's epistemology presented in CPR metaphysics furnishes no further knowledge of *Dingen an sich* ("things in themselves"), but becomes the science of knowledge itself.

So it is that the final result of the later CPR is already present at the beginning of Kant's philosophy: the impossibility of a metaphysics of the extrasensory. And the formulation of the Swedenborg review, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer—Illustrated by the Dreams of Metaphysics*, appears to have given an essential impulse to Kant's later working out of the transcendental function of metaphysics, as he himself affirms to Mendelssohn:

I am so far away from considering metaphysics itself objectively as insignificant or dispensable that I believe that for some time I have been convinced that I realize its nature and its proper place among human knowledges...so I believe...I have reached important insights in this discipline, which define its performance and do not consist in merely general views but are usable as an actual standard of measure.²⁴⁸

From this sharp delimiting of the function of metaphysics in Kant's future transcendental philosophy, however, there at the same time grew an insolvable problem for him in the progress to his moral philosophy. The question about the puzzling interaction between soul and body is for Kant no longer answerable:

But what necessity causes a spirit and a body together to constitute one entity, and what causes, in the case of certain

²⁴⁷ Cf. regarding Kant's principle of reason's reflection on itself the essay of W. Deppert, "Gibt es einen Erkenntnisweg Kants, der noch immer zukunftsweisend ist?" A lecture at the German Philosophy Congress in Hamburg, September 1990.

²⁴⁸ Kant to Mendelssohn, 1766, Akademieausgabe X, 67.

disturbances, terminate this unity? These questions, together with various others, far surpass my insight.²⁴⁹

What significance Kant ascribed to this question according to the mysterious “commerce” between body and soul in his moral philosophy, as well as what regards the participation of the soul in the mental world, and also the immortality of personality, I will be setting forth in the chapter after next.²⁵⁰

I.4.2. PARALLELS BETWEEN THE POLEMICAL TRACT AND KRITIK DER REINEN VERNUNFT.

I.4.2.1. Parallels In Structure

I would now like to take up the question of whether the structure of the later *Critique of Pure Reason* (abbreviated CPR, 1781) can be discovered

²⁴⁹ *Träume* 28.

²⁵⁰ Regarding the account of the philosophical content of the polemic tract, cf. also: Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, Vol. 3; R.A. Hoffmann, *Kant und Swedenborg* (Wiesbaden, 1909); E. Meyer, “Kant und der Occultismus,” in *2. Jahrhundertfeier von Kants Geburtstag* (Albertus Universität: Königsberg, 1924); and also Roland Begenat, “Swedenborg und Kant—ein andauerndes Mißverständnis,” in E. Zwink (ed.), *Emanuel Swedenborg—Naturforscher und Kündiger der überwelt* (Stuttgart, 1988).

Regarding the question, What is the relationship between *Dreams* and Kant’s moral philosophy, cf. Giorgio Tonelli, “Kants Ethics as a Part of Metaphysics: A Possible Newtonian Suggestion? With Some Comments from Kant’s *Dreams of a Seer*,” and above all Walter Bormann, “Kantsche Ethik und Occultismus,” in *Beiträge zur Grenzwissenschaft*, Jena 1899, here a quote from this, p. 114:

Here it is a question of whether the moral law is conscious or unconscious. Kant assumes that sensual inclinations can unconsciously falsify the moral law. It is therefore clear that in the matter of the mental freedom of the will, which moral law enjoins upon us, for the purity of this law he requires full consciousness and, moreover, full consciousness for the purity of our will in the execution of this law. Unconsciously the gifted, creative human spirit brings to light the richest treasures of science and art; consciously, with unqualified consciousness, and driven by unremitting self-compulsion his will, as pure reason, acts solely in response to the moral law. Here he requires conscious awareness and this makes it possible to cast aside the veil of unconsciousness. And yet, according to Kant, here an unrecognized mystery is also a determining factor: the will’s interest. This interest, which reason honors in every law and its consequences, is unconscious; together with the “highest good” it belongs to the mental world—to the occult.!

As regards the history and form of the text of Kant’s *Träume*, cf. Rudolf Malter’s postscript to his edition of *Dreams*, which I have used as my textual base.

already in Kant's procedure in his polemic tract, although here it can still be conjectured as present in an intuitive way and not yet in conscious plan.²⁵¹

"A complicated metaphysical knot, which one can either unravel or cut as one chooses," reads the heading of the first chapter of the Kantian treatise.²⁵² Before Kant cuts through the knot and does away with the problem, with a reference to the future, to a future knowledge, his search for the spirit's independence from the body proceeds *nota bene* from an identification of two termini of knowledge, which so complexly interlock themselves in a knot:

For one must know that all knowledge has two termini, the one *a priori*, the other *a posteriori*.²⁵³

Already here Kant chooses the same formal divisions as later in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and attempts to maintain them also in the structure of his treatise, which is divided into a "dogmatic," theoretical part and an "empirical" part formed of "stories" and "fables," namely the reports about Swedenborg.²⁵⁴

The priority of the theoretical, *a priori* aspect over the empirical, *a posteriori* aspect is a priority not of time but rather of logic. This pattern of knowledge, which Swedenborg has already anticipated in his above cited cosmogony, later also forms the grand framework for Kant's critical investigation of pure reason. He uses it for the analysis of the bounds, conditions and scope of human cognitive faculty.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* the analysis of the *a priori* "conditions for the possibility of experience" will take precedence over experience itself, just as here in the polemic tract the discussion of the concept of a "spirit" takes precedence over the alleged "experience" of "spirits" by Swedenborg.

²⁵¹ Cf. also the essay by Liliane Weissberg, "Catarcticon," 111.

²⁵² *Träume* 7.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁵⁴ Cf. also Weissberg, "Catarcticon," 99.

In any case it is interesting not only that the general pattern of the later CPR is mirrored in the *Dreams*, but also indeed that the antithetical approach of transcendental dialectics is already intimated in this relatively earlier writing.²⁵⁵

The facts of the matter suggest that in the *Dreams* Kant had already come to the same conclusion as he would then come to in the argument of the *Transcendental Dialectic*: Kant demonstrated that rational psychology's fundamental conclusion concerning the spiritual nature of the soul, in the sense of its being essentially non-material, is false. In the CPR he will refer to the first paralogism as a sly conclusion of reason.²⁵⁶

Also, the *antithetical* method Kant used in the polemic tract, in which he investigates the essence and seat of the soul, clearly displays the antinomian mode of procedure with which reason in the transcendental dialectic deals with the three ideas of totality (soul, world, and God) and ultimately exposes as sham conclusions of reason.

From "opening up the secret philosophy, the philosophy of the association with the spirit world," in the second chapter of the dogmatic part, Kant passes directly in the third "to invalidating the common philosophy, the philosophy of association with the spirit world." This he does in order to arrive at the "theoretical conclusion arising from the collective considerations of the first part." Here in the first place he explains the impossibility of determining anything definite about the nature of "spirits," likewise of the human soul; in the second he also refers to the uselessness of this undertaking:

From now on I lay aside this whole matter of spirits, a wide-ranging piece of metaphysics, as finished and done with. From now on it has no concern for me. In the process of better pulling together my plan of inquiry and of freeing myself from a few entirely fruitless investigations, I hope to be able more advantageously to apply my meager intellectual capacity to the remaining objects.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Cf. also Josef Schmucker, "Kants kritischer Standpunkt zur Zeit der *Träume eines Geistersehers* im Verhältnis zu dem der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*," in I. Heidemann und W. Rike, ed., *Beiträge zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781, 1981 (Berlin/New York, 1981) 21.

²⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Träume* 81.

That the higher standpoint has not yet been worked out in this close analogy to the transcendental dialectic's antithetical mode of procedure follows especially from the "disorder" with which Kant, according to his own words to Mendelssohn, has composed this tract:

I do not know whether on reading through this **rather disorganized paper** you will have noted any indication of the reluctance I have had in writing it.²⁵⁸

The fundamental principle of the later CPR, pure reason's self-critique, can also be read already in *Dreams*. Kant criticizes Swedenborg's "dreams of experience," first by forbidding his own metaphysical speculations, and, of course, doing this with the rational process of his own reason. In this way *Dreams* received its following dialectical form:

1. "A metaphysical knot, which can be either untied or cut as one pleases." Here the problem of contact with spirits is explained in the framework of a concept of a "spirit," which proves itself to be in principle unthinkable.
2. "A fragment of occult philosophy, the purpose of which is to reveal our community with the spirit world." Here Kant outlines his own metaphysical speculations about a suprasensuous spirit world, in order to comment by means of his own *Dreams* on Swedenborg's experience of that world.
3. "A fragment of ordinary philosophy, the purpose of which is to cancel community with the spirit world." Here Kant's reason first exposes his own metaphysical speculations as pure "dreams of metaphysics," in order next to disqualify Swedenborg's contact with spirits, as mere "dreams of experience."
4. "Theoretical conclusion to the first part." Here the impossibility as well as the uselessness of this kind of imagined contact with the suprasensuous world is rationally argued yet again.

²⁵⁸ Kant to Mendelssohn, 66.

In the second part, which is historical, there then follows the report of Swedenborg's supposed visions, for the sake of illustrating the first, theoretical part.

Kant himself comments on his logical-rational method abiding by the principle of pure reason's self-reflection, in accord with which he had constructed his polemic tract against Swedenborg and the metaphysicists—again also in his letter to Mendelssohn:²⁵⁹

It was in fact difficult for me to think out the way in which I had to clothe my thoughts without exposing myself to ridicule. Therefore it seemed to me highly advisable to anticipate others by **first ridiculing myself.**²⁶⁰

But just as with these formal points of agreement, rather notable parallels in content between the polemic tract and Kant's chief work are also to be found.²⁶¹

I.4.2.2. Parallels In Content

That the pre-critical system which Kant outlines in the *Dreams* already anticipates the cognitive structure of the later CPR in essential points may be shown with the aid of the following systematic arguments from Kant's polemic tract in relation to the cognitive system of the CPR:

On the basis of the concept of a "spirit" as an immaterial being Kant explains "spirit seeing" to be a priori impossible, since it is exclusively material objects that are perceptible. Taking the material world as the only world accessible to human perception, he characterizes it already here by the two properties of extension and impenetrability. The later concept of matter as the "substance which appears in space"²⁶² is already suggested here:

²⁵⁹ The concept of "self-reflection" with Kant I owe to an inspiration from Wolfgang Deppert, who used this expression for the first time in his lecture "Is there a cognitive method with Kant that points to the future?" Report to German Philosophers Congress in Hamburg, September, 1990.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁶¹ Cf. in this regard the argument of *Critique of Pure Reason* in Chap. 6.1.

²⁶² Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1787 B 321.

Simple beings of this kind become immaterial beings and, if they have reason, are called spirits. Simple substances, however, whose composition gives an impenetrable and extended whole, become material entities; their totality, however, is called matter...All matter resists intrusion in its space and is therefore called impenetrable. That this is the case, experience teaches, and derivation of this experience produces the common concept of matter.²⁶³

While here the concept of matter is learned simply from experience, Kant in his CPR presupposes the qualities of impenetrability and consequent extension as a priori identifying characteristics:

For when conceiving of matter I do not think of enduring existence, but merely of its presence in space by filling space.²⁶⁴

Later, in the CPR, these a priori identifying characteristics of matter—impenetrability and extension—lead to the a priori recognizable characteristics of the extensity and intensity of perceptions.²⁶⁵

In the concept of matter presented in *Dreams* Kant clearly removes himself from the "soul monad" which he had earlier adopted,²⁶⁶ which he already here conceives of as being a hypostatization of a logical subject, entirely analogous to the "paralogism of reason".²⁶⁷

In the writings of the philosophers one finds very good, trustworthy proof that all that thinks must simply "be," that every rationally thinking substance is an entity of nature, and that the

²⁶³ *Träume* 12 f.

²⁶⁴ Kant, *KrV*, 1787 B 18.

²⁶⁵ In the axioms of observation, extensity, and in anticipations of perception, intensity of all experiences, become a priori demands. (cf. Kant: *KrV*, 1787, B 212).

²⁶⁶ In the year 1756 Kant still accepted simple substance as existing as such (Cf. on this point Kant, *Metaphysicae cum geometrica iunctae usus in philosophia naturali, cuius specimen I continet monadologiam physicam*, 1756, AAI (Berlin, 1910) 1st parag.

²⁶⁷ It is only through a faulty conclusion of reason, by a so-called "paralogism," that, in Kant's conception, from the purely logical unity and identity of "I think" one makes an individual, simple, indestructible soul-substance (Cf. on this point Kant, *KrV*, 1787 B 409).

indivisible "I" cannot be divided into a whole composed of many things joined together. My soul will therefore be a simple substance. However with this proof it remains still undetermined..., whether a being of such a nature, as is called spiritual, is ever possible.²⁶⁸

With this definition of purely hypothetical, conceptual postulates of the factual, empirical experience of speculatively proposed concepts, Kant in *Dreams* already puts into effect the sharp division between the material and therefore sensorially perceptible world of appearance and the sensorially imperceptible suprasensuous world, which correspond to the later distinction in the CPR between sensible "phenomena" and merely thinkable, but nowhere in experience perceptible "noumena."²⁶⁹

From the explanation of what the concept of a spirit involves, it is still a very long step to the position that such beings really, or even possibly, exist.²⁷⁰

Yes, and what is more, already here Kant coins the concept of a suprasensuous world, as an aid to making the empirically unprovable assumption that there are immaterial beings, among whose number is one's own soul:

Since these immaterial beings are self-active principles, consequently substances and independently existing natures, the first consequence of this which one meets is this: directly united with one another they might form a great whole, which one can call the intelligible world (*mundus intelligibilis*).²⁷¹

The concept of "a noumenon in a negative sense," which is used in the CPR as a boundary-concept between the immanent world of appearances and the transcendental, suprasensuous world, also emerges already here:

²⁶⁸ *Träume* 13 f.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Kant, *KrV*, 1787, B 311.

²⁷⁰ *Träume* 13.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30 f.

But with the philosophical doctrinal concept of spiritual beings the case is quite otherwise. It can be complete, but *in a negative sense*, namely in that it establishes the boundaries of our insight with certainty...²⁷²

In regard to this generally sound differentiation between the “phenomena” of the sensorially perceptible world of appearances and the merely thinkable but empirically never provable “noumena” of the suprasensuous world, the question poses itself to him already here of the puzzling connection between the soul and body, which is to be insolvable even later. This is the question that was to emerge again and again—not for the last time in his moral philosophy—as the “body-soul problem.”

The interaction between spirit and body, Kant declares in his polemic tract, is unfathomable, if not totally impossible:²⁷³

For how could an immaterial substance stand in the way of matter, so that matter in movement might bump up against a spirit; and how can physical objects exert an influence on a foreign being, that does not obstruct them with impenetrability, or that in no wise prevents them from occupying the same space in which it is present?²⁷⁴

From this results the inverse, that our sense-perception exists in an unbroken space-time continuum. Therefore, already in *Dreams* Kant suggests the continuity of sense-perception which he will refer to in the CPR as the a priori identifying characteristics of the pure, observable forms, space and time.

Besides this rough separation between the world of appearances existing in the space-time continuum and the immaterial, suprasensuous world, however, finer differentiation is certainly also intimated here—within the human cognitive faculty, between physical sensation, which in the CPR is

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 79 f.

²⁷³ On this point one may recall Kant's speculation about a possible relationship between pure spirits or between soul and body in his above cited early metaphysical lectures of 1762-64.

²⁷⁴ *Träume* 26 f.

designated as a lower cognitive faculty, and the understanding, which later on is conceived of as a higher cognitive faculty:

From this one also further sees that since the sickness of the fantasizer does not actually concern the understanding, but the deception of the 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 an immediate testimony that far surpasses all other persuasion.²⁷⁵

From this detailed explanation of the fantasizer's "sickness of the head" the hierarchical ordering of these two levels of cognition already arises, according to which, in the CPR, the understanding is described as the higher cognitive faculty, which can only be operable on the basis of sensory perception as the lower cognitive faculty. For due to their objective reality the categories of the understanding necessarily remain dependent on the perceptions of the senses.²⁷⁶

Furthermore, here already Kant introduces the faculty that mediates between physical sensation and understanding, the faculty which in the CPR is still more precisely differentiated into the so-called "reproductive" and "productive imaginative power." The productive imaginative power, which later also designs the so-called "schemas," in turn has two additional different functions: its so-called "transcendental" function provides the objective synthesis of the manifold observation from which the "schemas" are formed; beyond this, however, their subjective synthesis is also capable of arbitrary imagination and thereby of the construction of fantasy images. As Kant says in his later *Anthropology*:

The power of imagination...as a faculty of observation even without the presence of objects is either productive, i.e., a faculty

²⁷⁵ *Träume* 70.

²⁷⁶ The great significance of this treatise for Kant's development in criticism has recently again been pointed by A. Philonenko: "...c'est ici que s'accomplit le premier passage au criticisme." (in *La philosophie critique*, tome 1: "La philosophie pré-critique et La Critique de la Raison pure," [Paris, 1969] 52).

of the actual depiction of the latter..., which therefore precedes the experience; or it is reproductive, of a derivative depiction..., that brings a previously experienced observation back to mind...In so far as the power of imagination also produces images involuntarily, it is called fantasy. He who is accustomed to regard these as (inner or outer) experiences is a phantasizer.²⁷⁷

Normally, Kant says in *Dreams*, one can easily distinguish the imaginative power originating in sensory data from fantasy:

Consequently, because in the clear sensations I have when awake the *focus imaginarius*, where the object is re-presented, is located outside me, whereas in fantasies—which I may at times have—it is set within me, as long as I am awake I cannot fail to distinguish imaginations like my own personal daydreams from a direct sense impression.²⁷⁸

With the fantasizer, however, the subjective synthesis of the involuntary imaginative power superimposes itself on the objective synthesis originating in empirical perception. In this process the direction of normal perception, from sensory perception to the understanding, is simply reversed, so that the fantasy images that are projected from within to without are taken for objective sensations:

...the focus of imagination is thus placed outside the thinking subject, and the image which is a product of mere imagination is put forward as an object, present to the outer senses.²⁷⁹

However, the question whether such a transposed "*focus imaginarius*" is to be unconditionally attributed to the activity of the productive imaginative power, as is Kant's opinion in his polemic tract regarding

²⁷⁷ Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Absicht*, 1798, text of Akademie edition, Vol. VII (Berlin, 1917) Part 1, 28.

²⁷⁸ *Träume* 66.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 67 f.

Swedenborg's "spirit seeing," or whether the inner mind of a seer like Swedenborg could possibly bring to light objective knowledges through this reversal of the normal mode of perception, is left untouched.

As a summary of the above systematic final conclusions of the polemic tract the following can be established:

Although in his pre-critical system Kant neither completes the later differentiation between the levels of knowledge—understanding as the faculty of concepts and reason as the faculty of principles—nor works out the individual categories of the understanding in detail, yet as regards its system of thought *Dreams* can nevertheless be regarded as the precursor to the later CPR. From his argument with Swedenborg and his alleged occult abilities Kant obviously acquired the essential impulses to the working out of his cognitive system in the later CPR. This evaluation is confirmed by the Kantian, Kuno Fischer, in his Kant dissertation:

If one desires to find out how the critique of pure reason arose in Kant's mind, it is important to know which of its results was established earliest. It was that which the critique proved last: the impossibility of a metaphysics of what is beyond the senses.²⁸⁰

As Kant explicitly states in his polemic tract, his motivation in composing his polemic review of Swedenborg was definitely that it first served to rid him of his uncomfortable inquiry into Swedenborg's alleged spirit contacts and clairvoyance, however, secondly, it also served his higher philosophic purpose to mark out already here at this point the framework for his own critical metaphysics, in order to be able to work these out more exactly in the CPR's transcendental philosophy:

I have worked on a thankless matter, which the demands and importunity of impertinent and idle friends have laid upon me... If no other intention had inspired this work, I would have wasted my time... However, I in fact had another purpose in view, which seems more important to me than that which I asserted; and I believe I have attained this purpose. Metaphysics—with whom it

²⁸⁰ Kuno Fischer: *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, S. 232.

is my fate to be in love, even if I can but seldom boast her favor—
has produced a two-fold benefit.²⁸¹

As is further evident from this affirmation of metaphysics by Kant at the end of his polemic tract, at just this time he conceived its function as being the science of the boundaries of the human cognitive faculty and therewith as the transcendental philosophy of the prerequisites of experience:

The first benefit is that of dealing with those problems that the inquiring spirit raises when it uses reason to track down the more hidden properties of things. However, here the result only all too often disappoints the hope, and it once again eludes our grasp... The second benefit is more suited to the nature of human understanding, and consists in realizing whether the problem can be worked out from that which one knows, and what relationship the question has to those concepts of experience upon which all our judgments must always be founded.²⁸²

This expresses Kant's essential insight, that pure, transcendental forms of observation and of thought must logically precede all experience. These a priori, intuitive and discursive requirements for every possible experience, which he here designates "concepts for experience," are given a detailed analysis in CPR.

Irrespective of Kant's fundamental turn from a transcendental metaphysic to transcendental philosophy, the foundations of his critique of cognition in its major lines have already been laid down in his polemic tract of 1766.²⁸³

1. Here Kant already carries out the fundamental division between the world perceptible to the senses on one side and the suprasensuous world on the other, a world that is conceivable, to be sure, but that for

²⁸¹ *Träume* 114 f.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁸³ Cf. in this regard the account of the "Critique of Pure Reason" in Chapter 5.1.

him will never be provable. It is from this distinction that the later division of the world into the "world of appearance" on the one side and the "thing in itself" appears to proceed.

2. In *Dreams* he already introduces the further differentiation between the basic, lower cognitive faculty of sensation and the higher cognitive faculty of understanding that builds upon it. Nevertheless he does not yet carry out the further, finer differentiation within the foregoing cognitive faculties—between the understanding as the faculty devoted to concepts, and reason as the faculty devoted to principles.
3. Here he already determines the essential characteristic of the later pure observable forms, space and time, that is to say, the uninterrupted continuity of sense-perception.
4. Finally, in *Dreams* he introduces also the imaginative power, as the intermediating faculty between physical sensation and the understanding, which in the CPR designs the schemas and which is then still more precisely subdivided into productive and reproductive imaginative power.
5. Beyond this Kant here already also enumerates some of the "pure concepts of the understanding" or "categories" which will take their permanent place in the CPR in his table of a priori categories: such as the concept of "matter"—characterized by the a priori properties of impenetrability and extension—which could be regarded as precursor to the later concept of substance, as well as the "basic relationship of cause and effect" as precursor to the later category of causality. While these concepts are of course characterized here as "concepts of experience" and are thus only derivative concepts, in the CPR they appear as a priori and primitive "pure concepts of the understanding"

After the historical and philosophical critique of Kant's polemic tract that now follows, I shall attempt to present Kant's cognitive system in its entirety, in order subsequently to make possible a classification of occult phenomena such as reported by Swedenborg in Kant's theoretical as well as practical philosophy.

I.4.3. Critique Of Kant's Polemical Tract

I.4.3.1. Historical Reviews

The following reviews of *Dreams* show that Kant not only failed to attain his goal of putting an end to the rumor of his suspected knowledge about Swedenborg,²⁸⁴ but that through his polemic tract he in fact gave occasion to new and stronger reactions.

Among the partially quite annoyed reviewers are outstanding philosophers like Moses Mendelssohn and Johann Gottfried Herder,²⁸⁵ who in the judgment they gave showed themselves just as perplexed by Kant's two-sided presentation as are many of his modern critics. But Johann Georg Heinrich Feder as well as the theologians Friedrich Christoph Oetinger and Heinrich Wilhelm Clemm also gave expression to their annoyance with Kant's polemic tract and defended Swedenborg against the defamations which Kant in several places stooped to. Lastly there is yet another review, published anonymously by Gottlieb Löwe in 1786, which is of philosophical significance, because it very meticulously analyzes and criticizes Kant's procedural method in *Dreams*.

As I have already discussed in Chapter Two, one can classify this polemic tract rather as an emotional discharge, than as a dissertation to be seriously taken in a philosophic sense.²⁸⁶ Some of the reviewers also share this impression.

So it is that Mendelssohn himself, either in spite of or because of Kant's personal letters, can pass no clear judgment on Kant's polemic tract; but he suspects the germ of a new metaphysics, which one has already been able to get a notion of in the polemic tract :

The jocular profundity with which this little work is written leaves the reader at times in doubt as to whether Herr Kant wants to make metaphysics absurd, or to make spirit-seeing believable. But for all that, it does contain the seed of important new considerations—several new thoughts

²⁸⁴ As Kant wrote to Mendelssohn, *loc. cit.*

²⁸⁵ For further listing of reviewers, see the complete treatment in what follows.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Ernst Benz, *Swedenborg als Wegbahner* 10 ff.

about the nature of the soul, as well as several objections against the commonly known systems—that deserve a detailed treatment.²⁸⁷

Six years after the anonymous publication of *Dreams*, Johann Gottfried Herder in a letter to Lavater finally undertook a review of the polemic tract, without knowing who its originator was. He too comes to no unequivocal conclusion regarding the real opinion of its unknown author regarding “spirit-seeing,” and he criticizes the unorganized fashion in which the whole tract has been composed:

The whole tract seems to lack unity, and one part seems to lack adequate connection with another. The author presents the truth of both sides, and says like that Roman, “one says No!, the other Yes! You Romans, whom do you believe?”²⁸⁸

In spite of this harsh critique of the form and content of the polemic tract, Herder too has a sense of a growing spirit of genius in the unknown author and feels stimulated to further thought by this tract :

Reading him sharpens one’s attention, and one sees everywhere that the author has the spirit of philosophy for his friend, just as Socrates himself spoke in his holy dreams with his Demon. In short, if the best moral book is the one that leaves the strongest impression on my feelings, then the best philosophical book is without doubt the one that occasions me to a series of thoughts, and in this respect, the present book has a great claim.²⁸⁹

As I have noted above,²⁹⁰ Kant’s tract is riddled with satirical-polemical insertions, which can easily confuse the reader. This impression is also shared by J.G.H. Feder in his 1766 review:

²⁸⁷ Moses Mendelssohn, “Rezension der *Träume*,” Königsberg, 1766, in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistesehers* (Stuttgart, 1976) 118.

²⁸⁸ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Rezension der *Träume*, 1766, in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistesehers* 118-124, here 123 ff.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, S. 124.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Chapter 1.3., “Swedenborgs Influence on Kant”, and Chapter 4.2.: “The Philosophical Content of *Dreams*”.

After reading through these pages we are in doubt as to whether he is writing in earnest or is joking, at least both elements almost always occur together.²⁹¹

Feder, however, like Herder feels stirred by this polemic tract and praises its critique of metaphysics, while nevertheless at the same time rebuking its polemic tone:

But one can learn from it that certainly in philosophy and particularly in psychology it is a far more advantageous to guard oneself against useless questions, against prejudices, against sly statements and a too hasty contradiction of others. The author utterly disagrees to practicing philosophy on an academic note.²⁹²

Nevertheless, Feder presumes quite correctly that Swedenborg has stirred the author of the polemic tract to first build up his own system, and sees in this no competition between Kant and Swedenborg, but rather an unintentional cooperation. In this sense he defends Swedenborg against his sharp-minded critic:

Would he [the author] indeed now be in position to reproach him [Swedenborg] so sharply if he had not first built himself a small system with his aid, where he could subsequently expand, change, tear down and build onto, when his further research finds it worthwhile?²⁹³

F.C. Oetinger, a theologian closely connected with Swedenborg, likewise defends Swedenborg against Kant's unseemly critique. He did this in a personal letter to Swedenborg, emphasizing his merits as a scholar in Sweden:

²⁹¹ J.G.H. Feder, "Rezension der *Träume*, in Malter (ed.) *Träume eines Geistesehers* 125-127, here 125.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁹³ *Ibid.* (additions in brackets mine).

That from a philosopher you should have become a seer and prophet has certainly very much amazed me... We have the book *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*, which exalts you with words of praise as much as, so as not to appear fanatical, it demeans you with accusations...²⁹⁴

Oetinger, who later became a Swedenborgian, also sees, as did Feder, not so much the competition between the two scholars, but takes the polemic tract as a thoroughly informative report of Swedenborg's doctrine, as he says in the "Gespräch von dem Hohepriesterthum Christi" ("Colloquy on the Highpriesthood of Christ") of the year 1772:

Besides, in the book, *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*, Swedenborg's whole doctrine, though mixed with idealism, has been presented in concentrated form. It is, namely, this: all men stand in the same inner conjunction with the spirit world, only they do not sense this, because they are too gross.²⁹⁵

It is an interesting fact that Oetinger too gives Kant's polemic tract as a source of instruction about Swedenborg. And, as above noted, Kant in the historical part of his tract does actually restate a large part of Swedenborg's doctrine.²⁹⁶ From reading it one does not exactly gather a sense of his antipathy for Swedenborg, but rather of his hidden interest, which his budding critical reason nevertheless denied him.

The puzzling circumstance that Kant, in view of his of declared intention of freeing himself from a rumor that he was interested in Swedenborg, first published his polemic tract posthumously, is also criticized by the theologian H.W. Clemm in his *Vollständigen Einleitung in die Religion und die gesammte Theologie* ("A Full Introduction to Religion and the Whole of Theology") in the year 1767:

²⁹⁴Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, from a letter to Swedenborg, 1766, translated by Rudolf Malter, Stuttgart 1977, in, Malter (ed.) *Träume eines Geistesehers* 127 ff.

²⁹⁵F.C. Oetinger, "Gespräch vom Hohepriesterthum Christi," 1772, in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistesehers* 128-130, here 128.

²⁹⁶Cf. Chapter 3.1., "The Radical Change in Kant's Relation to Swedenborg between the Years 1763 and 1766".

The Dreams of One of the Most Recent Spirit Seers, Elucidated by the Dreams of Metaphysics, which is treated in detail, are likewise in many hands. A certain preacher definitely wanted to make me out as the author—but he must have read little of what I have written, or else from the style he would judge differently. If he reads this, however, let this serve him as my answer: I have never in my life written a book anonymously, and I have never thought of doing so. If I write something, all the world may know who has written it; for I have no need to slink about in darkness. Even if I have unpleasant truth to tell the world, I say it openly; because the truth fears no one.²⁹⁷

An interesting detail emerges from this criticism of the anonymity of publication of the polemic tract: as an orthodox theologian Clemm guards himself against a preacher's suspicion that he had authored this tract about Swedenborg. From this one realizes that at that time Kant was conceived of as a spokesman for Swedenborg's doctrine in the same way as he is today conceived of as his opponent. This historically changing perception of the same thing shows how very dependent the judgment of a matter is on the then prevailing *Weltanschauung* of those making the judgment. In the next chapter I will more fully examine the framework of the *Weltanschauung* or ontology that lies at the base of the judgment of occult phenomena and also correspondingly modifies this judgment. For Kant also appears to have found himself between two incommensurable ontologies that kept up a battle in his spirit that never wanted to end.

In spite of his criticism Clemm too observed, however, just as did Herder and Feder, that the polemic tract must have been authored by a bright head:

Otherwise the author of *Dreams*, if I set aside his all too facetious thoughts and expressions, which could well have been omitted, whoever he may be, is not dull-witted.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Heinrich Wilhelm Clemm, *Vollständige Einleitung in die Religion und die gesammte Theologie*, 1767, 230, in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistesehers*, 130-142, here 131.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Then Clemm continues with his own critique of Swedenborg, derived from the orthodox understanding of the Sacred Scripture. Nevertheless he sees himself compelled to satisfy the historical truth in view of the defamation that the unknown author of the polemic tract meted out to the Nordic scholar:

Herr Emanuel Swedenborg, is a man who not only busies himself with speculations of the kind the author of *Dreams* has in mind, but has previously held important posts. Having been appointed to the position of overseer of the metallurgical and mining activities in the Kingdom of Sweden, also because of having taken many great journeys, which he is still accustomed to do, he seems to be secure against a hypochondriacal way of life. He has also applied himself to mathematics and physics from his youth onward, and indeed in such a way that he knows how to join the theoretical and practical together in a very skilled fashion.²⁹⁹

In 1771, when Kant's authorship of *Dreams* had already become known,³⁰⁰ Hieronymus Gottfried Wielkes in a personal letter invited Kant to please come himself to Leiden sometime to talk with the criticized Swedenborg:

You would perhaps delight in speaking with a man who has created quite a stir here and in Amsterdam and whose name is Swedenborg—a man who sees spirits and stands in a mysterious correspondence with all invisible beings.³⁰¹

How would Kant's judgment have ended up if he had actually once met Swedenborg? This question is difficult to determine considering the inner contradictions in which Kant's spirit must have found itself at that

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 231.

³⁰⁰ In his 1766 letter to Mendelssohn Kant already let it be known that he himself was the author of *Dreams*. It was possibly in this way that his authorship also became generally known.

³⁰¹ Hieronymus Gottfried Wielkes, Brief an Immanuel Kant, 1771, in Malter (ed.), *Träume eines Geistersehers* 142 ff.

time. The trip that was in view did not take place, and Kant never even received a personal reply to his questions to Swedenborg, but only the detested *Arcana Coelestia*. Swedenborg did respond to the polemic tract, as I will show at the end of this chapter, but not with a public paper, but by a private, revelatory experience.

What was certainly the most exhaustive review of the polemic tract issued likewise from an anonymous author. It appeared in Breslau from the press of Gottlieb Löwe, and twenty whole years after the publication of *Dreams*, when Kant was already known as its originator. The obviously philosophically trained and sharp-minded reviewer begins in his "Examination with the question whether it is an established fact that Swedenborg belonged to the fanatics," first of all with a critique of the title of the polemic tract. This he assesses as an "unfortunate waste-product of the learned Kant's brain":

The tract itself appeared twenty years ago, under the striking heading, "Dreams of a Spirit Seer—Illucidated by the Dreams of Metaphysics..." At first glance the title of this tract appears thoughtful and witty, but on closer examination, if I am not quite mistaken, it is title-humor that has miscarried...One has reason to doubt whether the most alert metaphysic is capable of giving explanations about the "dreams of a spirit seer," or more seriously, about the "connection of the natural-spiritual with the natural-earthly world, and also, whether and how far any man can receive further knowledge about these things through provisions by the Deity...Our author has precisely and extensively demonstrated, twenty years since the publication of this tract, that actually up to now no metaphysics has existed. Consequently, according to the title of the book at hand, metaphysics, which has withal no being, he has dreamed up his explanations about dreams. This is, as one might say, "the shadow of a shadow," the "dream of a dream."³⁰²

³⁰² Anonymous, "Prüfungsversuch, ob es wol schon ausgemacht sei, daß Swedenborg zu den Schwärmern gehöre, bey Gottlieb Löwe," 1786, in Malter (ed.) *Träume eines Geistesehers* 144-157, here 145-147.

The unknown reviewer's critique of the book title seems to me entirely justified, for dreams do not let themselves be dreamed purposefully, and certainly not with the purpose of quarrelling.

After this ingenious conceptual critique of the book's title, wherein the reviewer identifies himself as familiar with Kant's later works, which he values far more highly than this "unfortunate waste-product," he now goes through both parts of the tract in detail, beginning with the dogmatic part:

Whoever can find more in the present tract...more than a demonstration of clever reasoning to make one and the same thing true and apparently untrue, more than a proper and philosophically decent confession that one knows absolutely nothing at all of philosophy about the spirit and about the spirit world, at least that one is unable to make any assertion about these subjects—admitting my own weak-sightedness, I would gladly take instruction from the person who can find more than this in this tract.³⁰³

The reviewer attempts to pin Kant down on the point of the pure skepticism which peters out in merely negative judgment; but as soon as he has read the historical part he has to revise this estimation of Kant, for here he recognizes Kant as "dictatorial":

What is most curious, and certainly more curious than Swedenborg himself with all his claims of revelation, is that in the second part of this document, which is called historical, the previous skeptic is transformed into a total dictator. This, however, is inconsistent and ill-suits the character of a rational sage who is supposed to never change.³⁰⁴

The reviewer here rightly criticizes Kant's vacillating attitude to Swedenborg, which continually swings back and forth between genteel reserve, indeed even secret interest, and dogmatic rejection of "spirit-seeing":

³⁰³ Ibid., 148.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

Why do we not then remain, in practice as in theory, steadfast skeptics? In the face of our previously skeptical and ignorant disposition in the spiritual domain, when we get a partial glimpse of an extraordinary whom we with a disdainful expression call a spirit seer, why do we all at once transform ourselves into dictators?³⁰⁵

Then the reviewer goes on to rightly criticize Kant's negligence in not describing Swedenborg's person and offices, and he obviously sees himself required to rehabilitate Swedenborg's reputation from Kant's disparagement:

In the second, historical part of this little book one hardly recognizes the author anymore. The previous doubter is here the complete referee. After a few preliminary embellishments of philosophical decorum the historical part begins: "There is at present in Stockholm a certain Herr Schwedenberg (correctly, Herr von Swedenborg). Without a position or job, he is living on his rather considerable income." A certain Herr Schwedenberg? whose name is not even properly spelled? This is not one whit different than if someone in Stockholm were to write, "There is at present in Königsberg a certain Herr Cont, living on a professorship in philosophy." ...However when the then blossoming Herr Master of Letters wrote this he could have also known that Herr von Swedenborg had been Assessor of the Bergswerkskollegium (Department of Mining). On this man our up to now so very skeptical author passes this definite but admittedly unproven judgment, "he is certainly the arch-fanatic of all fanatics."³⁰⁶

As regards Swedenborg's historical significance, then, the reviewer reproaches Kant for either ignorance or rudeness. And not only does he declare Kant incompetent in the matter of Swedenborg as a person, but much more in the matter of the reports of his gift of seership than in circulation.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 151.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 152.

Like a dictatorial military general staff officer Kant, without real justification, since he had made no critical historical inquiry, had been willing to dismiss the Swedenborg stories being repeated as mere “fables.” Here one must recognize a fresh return to the skeptical standpoint:

Without having critical historical grounds for so doing, he flatly considers the given events, whose inner impossibility in itself he neither affirms nor disproves as fables. Is this acting like a skeptic or a dictator? Nevertheless, at that very moment the face of the skeptic again peers out. For he calls the “premiss philosophy a fairy tale from the fool’s paradise of Metaphysics.”³⁰⁷

In view of these apparent inconsistencies in the polemic tract and of Kant’s allegedly unfounded dogmatic judgment of Swedenborg, the reviewer comes to the conclusion that Swedenborg may in no way be designated a fanatic. Indeed, he concludes that Kant’s investigation has generally speaking contributed nothing to this polemic question:

So we see that these skeptical sophistries were nothing more than—a fairy tale. And if now this historical part too is fabulous, to say the least, I want to press on past this fairy tale with my critical remarks, and to give the reader the benefit of reading without these twenty year-old tales for himself and know for sure that dreams and fables can give him no illucidation concerning Herr von Swedenborg’s person and writings, and have not in the least established whether he is one of the dreamers or not.³⁰⁸

Beyond this the reviewer reproaches Kant for not having adequate research on and sufficient knowledge of his subject to be able to make a really objective judgment of Swedenborg’s person and gift of seership:

Surely a thoughtfully and thoroughly undertaken correspondence could have made the historical truth or untruth of these

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 153.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

three publicly known events concerning Swedenborg's claimed state of revelation through the spiritual world most convincingly evident. And this could still even be done by someone, for now only fourteen years have passed since the death of Herr v. Swedenborg.³⁰⁹

However, in the opinion of the reviewer not only had Kant negligently failed to make the effort to do this historical investigating, but he had also not studied Swedenborg's literature adequately enough to make a judgment about it based on fact:

As regards his writings, our skeptical philosopher has read the *Arcana Coelestia* (of his remaining subsequent writings, however, the one of which explains the other, he has read nothing). The *Arcana* he rejects most decisively as volumes of complete nonsense. *Ratio decidendi* ["the reason for this"]: because they contain the claim of a supernatural revelation of the spirit world. Well, according to this manner of judging, the Bible too must be complete nonsense.³¹⁰

The reviewer further comments that the defamation that Kant bestows on Swedenborg in his lampoon is unworthy of a philosopher of his importance:

On the whole our author should not have treated Herr v. Swedenborg so degradingly; he is a man who, (his yet unsettled, yet undetermined dreaming aside) was also a philosopher *ex professo* ["by profession"]...And now our author (p. 100), promising "to accommodate the delicate taste of his reader," wants to bring in a few drops of the quintessence of Swedenborg's books. But carefully considered by one who has read a number of Swedenborg's books, our author's chemical activity seems to be as little a success as it would have been if Herr Director Heinike had

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 154 ff.

attempted to bring the quintessence of Kant's critique of pure reason in a few drops. And Herr Heinike even has a liking for this work. However, when one contrarily reads a work with a prejudice against it, is it not inevitable that misunderstanding arises? This is so especially when certain contributing causes are also operative, e.g., a great lack of necessary supportive knowledge, a defective overall view of the whole, etc. Then even the most sharp-sighted minds often misunderstand works of the spirit and of truth. Certainly the critique of pure reason too has been misunderstood and misjudged by many in just the same way.³¹¹

This review shows, just like the preceding one, that the proper understanding of the polemic tract already presumes the knowledge of the author's further critical approach, which the last, anonymous reviewer indeed says he has, although he has not really sufficiently mastered it. Moreover, the reviews show that the tract did not suggest such an unequivocally negative valuation of Swedenborg as one finds today. Indeed, they show that even a kind of cooperative effort between Kant and Swedenborg was conjectured. As far as the polemic tract goes, this is a completely groundless conjecture, but it is perhaps a premonition of Kant's later good-will toward Swedenborg.³¹²

The last reviewer does not carry out the same design for which he reproaches Kant regarding Swedenborg, namely, defaming the author being reviewed. Rather, he wants to call upon Kant himself and all Kantians not to let this lampoon count as Kant's last and final judgment on Swedenborg. He questions,

...whether this philosophical tract has determined with finality that Swedenborg belongs to the Dreamers? Skepticism cannot, by its nature, determine this. It must, if it is to remain what it is, leave the matter fully unsettled and undecided. Dictatorial dogmatism, when one assumes and presumes what still remains to be proven, accomplishes ever so little.

³¹¹ Ibid., 155 ff.

³¹² See Chapter 7.2.

...Communicable experience, or experience gathered from factual events must, if I am not entirely mistaken, provide the data for decisions regarding such a phenomenon...For does visionary fanaticism have no identifying characteristic? No reliable picture from which one can recognize an authentic case of it? Yes, and now let Swedenborg be tested by it.³¹³

However my philosophical task here is not the testing of Swedenborg's gift of seership as proposed by the clear-sighted reviewer, but rather the testing of Kant's commentary on Swedenborg. For this purpose I now pass from the historical critique to the critique of the philosophical system in Kant's much discussed tract about Swedenborg.

I.4.3.2. The Philosophic Review of the Polemical Tract

According to Kant's conception in *Dreams* we can acquire no knowledge of a spirit as an immaterial being, because in principle immaterial beings cannot appear in space. For as Kant has it, a spirit lacks the requirement necessary for objects in space to be perceptible to our senses, namely extension and impenetrability.³¹⁴

Here of course, as in *Dreams* in general, Kant critiqued merely his own, spiritualistic concept of "spirit," but not the conception of "spirits" such as Swedenborg alleged to have seen and heard. For it is in no way a necessary qualification for Swedenborg's "spirits," as Kant here manifestly presupposes, to appear in physical space and to act in sensorially perceptible space. It is rather the case that they constitute their own suprasensuous universe, which as a rule is abstracted from our sensible world. "Spirits" have access to our space, according to Swedenborg's understanding, only through the medium of the seer, they themselves meanwhile being incapable of having any direct influence in our world.³¹⁵ Because "spirits" are incapable of exercising an influence on matter, according to Swedenborg

³¹³ Anonymus 156.

³¹⁴ *Träume* 15.

³¹⁵ Cf. Geymüller, *Swedenborg und die übersinnliche Welt*, Faksimile-Nachdruck Zürich, 65-75.

and the spiritistic viewpoint generally speaking, the “spirits” need an earthly medium like Swedenborg to bring about the “materialization” of that purely spiritual world into our world of matter.³¹⁶

Here, consequently, Kant is proceeding from a misunderstood interaction between the suprasensuous “spirit realm” and the earthly “human realm,” namely, from a direct interaction between the spiritual and the sensible, while as a rule Swedenborg and spiritism regard this interaction as possible only across the inner mind of a medium.

The fact that Kant based his critique on his own concept of space is a further circumstantial confirmation of my thesis that in his polemic tract Kant not only wanted to criticize Swedenborg but at least as much also his own inclination to metaphysical speculation, so that from this as a starting point he might find an approach to a critique of Swedenborg’s visions.

This self-criticism also relates to Kant’s own speculations in his early lectures on metaphysics, where he himself assumes such a direct interaction between a “spirit” and a body as he has imputed to Swedenborg.

In this central place in *Dreams* is clearly displayed Kant’s transition from metaphysics as speculative “dreaming” to metaphysics as transcendental philosophy, to which he will give support in the CPR.

As regards Swedenborg’s spirit world two questions present themselves to him: Are the claims about the spirit world true or false? and, Can this world be disproven or proven? According to Kant what applies to statements of the Swedenborg-world is precisely the indeterminability of their truth content:

One can assume the possibility of immaterial beings without fear of being disproven, though also without hope of being able to prove this possibility on rational grounds.³¹⁷

Not only is the truth content of Swedenborg’s visions undeterminable on rational grounds, but at this point Kant adds for the sake of complete-

³¹⁶Exceptions to this rule are the so-called parapsychical phenomena like poltergeists and psychokinesis. These occur much more rarely, however, than parapsychical phenomena like telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition. Regarding the classification of paranormal phenomena see the Introduction.

³¹⁷*Träume* 16.

ness that it is just as little determinable by experience, since Swedenborg's world eludes the possibility of being commonly experienced. In this way Kant approaches the Swedenborg-world negatively. Such Swedenborg-worlds, according to Kant, are by no means imperative in the same way as is the "mundus intelligibilis" of the universal concepts, "God, world, soul."³¹⁸

If we look at the issue from Swedenborg's lofty, supersensory point of view, a completely opposite perspective offers itself.³¹⁹

Then it can be said in Swedenborg's line of thought that there are actually two worlds. First, *World 1*—which is such that the human spirit is acting in the body and it can be said that, "I am where my feeling is, e.g., in my fingertips."³²⁰ This world would constitute the conjunction of soul and body, the "commercium" of the "mundus intelligibilis" and the "mundus sensibilis," as Kant assumes in his early and also again in his later lectures on metaphysics³²¹ and which could not but be a puzzle to him throughout his life, especially in regard to his moral philosophy. Beside this, from Swedenborg's perspective there is *World 2*—that immaterial world of ideas and spirits, which do not at all appear in the "mundus sensibilis." It involves a "commercium" of "spirits," of immaterial beings, insofar as these are conscious. It is an ideal community of intercommunication, for which any contact with the "mundus sensibilis" is purely coincidental. This spirit world of the "mundus intelligibilis" is divided into the world of heaven and of hell. Hell is a world of opposites to the world of heaven, and a world of privation. That the spirit world brings its opposition into the "mundus sensibilis" is actually a matter of accident. From Swedenborg's perspective it is even conceivable that the "mundus sensibilis" simply represents a by-product of the processes arising from the dynamic of the spirit world.

In any case, such speculation has a consequence that is in turn empirically unprovable—at least in principle—and hence whose truthfulness is indeterminable in the sense of Kant's requirement of mutual awareness.

³¹⁸In his CPR Kant designates these as ideas of pure reason, which he nevertheless regards as useable as regulative principles in the acquisition of experience.

³¹⁹ Cf. Radermacher, *Kant, Swedenborg, Borges* (Fankfurt, 1986) 33 ff.

³²⁰ Cf. *Träume* 19.

³²¹ See in this regard my argument concerning Kant's lectures on rational psychology in Chapter 7.2.

This consequence is that thoughts of the "*mundus intelligibilis*" can be read and received in the "*mundus sensibilis*."³²² Particular immaterial spirits would so to speak use specific (re)incarnated spirits for the purpose of looking into the "*mundus sensibilis*" as through a peep-hole. Thereby in the "*mundus sensibilis*" there would from time to time appear an altogether different world of the "*mundus intelligibilis*" as occult phenomena. One could consequently describe Swedenborg as a "window of heaven." With these metaphysics of inspiration, of possibly automatic writing, of the occurrence of revelation, on this point Swedenborg turns Kant against him. As a consequence, for Kant one could not go beyond the "*mundus sensibilis*." In no case was it a by-product of the "*mundus intelligibilis*," but it was rather the only world that is accessible to physical beings.³²³

From this comparison of perspectives it can be seen that in spite of the parallels in content between Kant and Swedenborg pointed out above, they obviously base the respective worlds they are constructing on incommensurable rules.

For Kant this subjective idealism would be splendid but absurd, if one wanted to develop a concept on the basis of experience. Kant definitely wants to establish a concept from experience, free of "unregulated fantasy."

Of course Kant allows two realms which permit the legitimate use of fantastical concepts apart from the sure field of experience: the realms of insanity and of art.³²⁴

As concerns the psychiatric aspect. After Kant's methodical process of dismissal of Swedenborg one finds an analysis of the boundary situations of normal empiricism that was pointing to the future.³²⁵ It is namely so that in sickness, in dreams, in hallucinations, and even in the experience of death, Kant discerned boundary situations where the power of fantasy is accelerated. Thus he speaks of the dreamers of sensation contrasted with the dreamers of reason; obviously people to whom wakeful consciousness in the normal sense is a problem. The difference between the sleeping,

³²² Cf. Radermacher, *Kant* 35.

³²³ Cf. *ibid.*

³²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 37 ff.

³²⁵ Cf. Kant, *Essays on Diseases of the Mind*, 1764 *loc. cit.*

dreaming and wakeful state is also important. Here, to be sure, one finds no access to the spirit world in the sense of a Swedenborg-world, but here is offered an empirical basis for the "reality of obscure images."³²⁶

As regards the second aspect, according to Kant art is a privileged area of fantasy, of variation. If one considers Kant's aesthetic theory of "free" (vague) and subject-related beauty, one sees that he regards artistic production as the realization of the suprasensuous world in the sensible world. Arabesques, rug patterns, free designs are for him particular examples of the intelligibility of the physical realm. The freedom of the power of the imagination frequently approaches the grotesque.

In Kant's aesthetic theory there are two arguments: a) There is a freedom (from the law) of association, whereby material we have certainly borrowed from nature "can be worked up" to produce something different, something that transcends nature. Here there is a mixing process, e.g., the mixing of elements of processes (e.g., tones) and fixed objects. b) Rational ideas are assumed to have a phenomenal nature, such that the poet dares to bring to the senses the kingdom of the blessed, "the kingdom of hell,...eternity." Art makes the metaphysics of the "*mundus intelligibilis*" visible.³²⁷

Insanity and art, therefore, are the two empirical approaches which Kant leaves unresolved after he has methodically dismissed the realistic metaphysics of one like Swedenborg.

These two empirical approaches to the suprasensuous world are not, needless to say, referable to general experience; art and madness are still inevitably in the subjective realm.

It is quite different with the suprasensuous world of reason from which Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1788), deduces the moral law, the "categorical imperative." This is rigorously inferred to be necessary and to have objective general validity. It may be, therefore, that one must propose a differentiation within Kant's concept of the "suprasensuous world." This concept can be divided into a subjective "suprasensuous world" of the understanding, in which madness and art may develop, and

³²⁶ Cf. Radermacher, *Kant* 38.

³²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 39.

an objective, "suprasensuous world" of reason, in which the moral codes of action are to be found.³²⁸

Beyond this it can be assumed that analogously to the categorical imperative yet other generally valid communications could arise from that moral world of reason, which would come into view in the physical world as items of supernatural information.³²⁹

To begin with it is clear that Kant and Swedenborg construct their respective worlds proceeding from opposing standpoints: Kant proceeds from the "*mundus sensibilis*" and attempts to state the requirements for the possibility of physical, generally valid experience under the—unprovable—premise that the material "*mundus sensibilis*" known to us is, of all possible worlds, the only one accessible to us. Swedenborg on the other hand constructs his suprasensuous spirit world without consideration for the general, accepted norms and mutually perceivable verifiability of his own subjective, mystical experience.

Considering these principally differing ontologies of both philosophers, the fundamental question to be asked is therefore whether the two worlds are at all comparable with one another. In the case of their incomparability, Kant's critique fails from the outset, insofar as it provides no overall ontology from which one can compare both worlds with each other and pick one of the two.

Swedenborg works visionarily on a new interpretation of the Bible and devotes himself to problems of theology and of the Christian way of life. Kant on the other hand is occupied with the boundaries of knowledge, and that means primarily exact, scientific knowledge, oriented toward mathematics. His question is, Is metaphysics possible in this framework?

A comparison between Swedenborg and Kant is therefore impossible, because in concept and method they worked too differently, and they were engaged with different things with distinctly different purposes.³³⁰

These differing purposes are clear in the treatment of the body-soul problem by Swedenborg and Kant. Swedenborg, with his doctrine of

³²⁸ Regarding the difference between the Kantian concepts of the "mental world (*intelligible Welt*)" und "thing in itself (*Ding an sich*)" cf. Chapter 5.3.

³²⁹ On this point see Chapter 6.

³³⁰ This is also maintained by Roland Begenat in his article, "Swedenborg und Kant. Ein andauerndes Mißverständnis," in Zwink (ed.), *Emanuel Swedenborg* 74 ff.

correspondence and of the different levels of being, develops a conception of how the relation of body (matter) and soul (substance, being, essence) is to be thought of. Kant on the other hand is of the opinion that nothing can be known of this relationship. The "thing in itself" (*Ding-an-sich*) remains in principal beyond all knowledge, transcends the realm of knowing, but must at the same time be presupposed.³³¹

Swedenborg stays with the view of "enlightened" knowledge, and holds to the unity of belief and knowledge, which for and since Kant has no longer enjoyed any great respect. Swedenborg's visions lack the possibility of being validated in the horizon of experience. For the philosopher from Königsberg the valid judgment of experience is the empirical judgment, which is valid for all subjects. Thereby Kant dissociates himself from the orthodox concept of metaphysics and in rejecting the Scholastic metaphysics of his time arrives at another view of metaphysics. He formulates metaphysics as philosophy about the primary foundations of cognition and defines it as the science of the boundaries of reason. Consequently he arrives at the differentiation of the metaphysical from the transcendental. Kant does not deny what is extrasensory, but demonstrates that it cannot be proven. To distinguish knowledge and belief Kant states the following criteria in CPR:

Persuasion, or the subjective validity of judgment, in relation to conviction (which is at the same time objectively valid) has the following three stages: *thought, belief, knowledge*. Thinking is an awareness that is a subjectively as well as objectively inadequate persuasion. If the latter is merely subjectively adequate and is at the same time regarded as objectively inadequate, it is called *belief*. Lastly, persuasion that is both subjectively and objectively adequate is called *knowledge*. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (which is valid for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (which is valid for everyone). I will not spend time explaining such readily comprehensible concepts.³³²

³³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 74 f.

³³² Kant, *CPR* A 822.

For Kant Swedenborg is but a believer, whose doctrine can certainly be convincing for himself and for all who believe in him, but whose visions can never reach the level of generally valid certainty:

No matter how clear and intuitive such representations of the world of spirits might be, they can never be sufficient to make me as a human being conscious of them. Even if the representation of the self, *i.e.*, the soul as a spirit, is acquired deductively, it can never become a concept of experience or observation for any human being.³³³

In contrast to rationalism, which equates *ratio* (the logical reason for a thing) and *causa* (the actual reason), Kant here divides both by the additional dimension of experience. Swedenborg, on the other hand, treats the images he receives as reliable knowledge and explains these images. The way in which the Swede declares and treats of his visions, a way that can be called virtually rational, is unacceptable for Kant. He contests the ostensible facticity of transcendent happenings in a knowledge about them devoid of mutually perceivable experience. From Kant's perspective the alleged presence of the spirit world cannot be set forth as definite knowledge. Swedenborg's attempt to construct a suprasensuous world appeared to Kant as philosophical naiveté. All the same a misunderstanding in Kant's critique of Swedenborg must be mentioned. This misunderstanding has to arise from the incongruity of their starting points: for Swedenborg it is belief ("the mind's understanding enlightened by the Lord"),³³⁴ for Kant it is independent knowledge ("making use of one's understanding without the guidance of others").³³⁵

³³³ *Träume* 49.

³³⁴ Swedenborg an Oetinger, 11/11/1766, quoted in Begenat, "Swedenborg und Kant," in Zwink (ed.), *Emanuel Swedenborg* 76.

³³⁵ Kant, "Answer to the Question, What Is Enlightenment?" 1784, quoted in Begenat, "Swedenborg und Kant," in Zwink (ed.), *Emanuel Swedenborg* 76.

A noteworthy passage in Kant's Transcendental Deduction by all means suggests the a priori possibility of occult phenomena:

The categories of understanding on the contrary do not at all present us with the conditions under which objects can be perceived. Consequently objects could certainly appear to us without their necessarily being related to functions of the

The characterization of this controversy as a misunderstanding becomes yet more warranted when one considers Swedenborg's reaction to this "speciously reasoned" critique of Kant's. Swedenborg generally avoided public dispute about his work. When he did reply he did so through reports of personal experiences in the spiritual world, through renewed visions. Now Benz believes he has found a vision that is concerned with the critique of Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* ("Secrets of Heaven"). This vision contains a Divine judgment upon the *Arcana Coelestia*. The book lies open on a cedar table, under a green olive tree, whose trunk is encircled by a grapevine. Swedenborg interprets this special placement of his work as a confirmation of the truth it contains.³³⁶

This justification in regard to Kant which Swedenborg experienced in the suprasensuous world also shows that he himself eschewed a scientifically oriented, empirical proof, in that he denies himself the "*sensus communis*," the horizon of collective experience. And here I must again come back to Kant's fundamental misunderstanding. He applies a criterion of proof to Swedenborg's visions which from the beginning could not be met, since Swedenborg chose a different starting point *a priori*.

As regards cognitive theory, considering these contrary, indeed incommensurable starting points, it is to be asked whether an overarching criterium could be posited, from which a value judgment of these two world-constructions would be possible. As Kurt Hübner argues in his book, *Kritik der wissenschaftlichen Vernunft*, about the way in which scientific theories are bound to history, the criteria for what is and what is not

understanding, and therefore these contain the conditions themselves *a priori*...Appearances [of the spirit world] would not any the less present objects to our view, for sight in no way requires the functions of thought. (Kant, CPR, A 90.)

In the Transcendental Deduction which follows Kant seeks to show, to be sure, that not only are the pure forms of sensation necessary for the constitution of an object, but equally so the categories of understanding as well; nevertheless, in the last analysis he cannot exclude the possibility that phenomena which are only sensorially perceptible, and fall into none of the categories of understanding, could appear in our minds. Such occult phenomena would certainly be perceptible, since they would of course make their appearance in space and time; but they would not be classified as part of the space-time-causality continuum, which begins its existence through the activity of the understanding.

³³⁶ This vision may be read in Swedenborg's work, *The True Christian Religion*, where it is recorded in the Memorable Relation no. 461. Cf. also Chapter 4.3.3.: "Swedenborg's Answer to Kant's Critique". Cf. also Ernst Benz, *Swedenborg in Deutschland* 285.

scientifically true and is thereby generally valid knowledge rests on pre-rational stipulations. These stipulations are not formulated in an empirical, and even less in a rational way, but have their origin in a context lying outside science, which Hübner calls an historical situation:

I begin with the thesis: an historical situation determines scientific facts and principles and not vice versa. To clarify this I will first define the concept "historical situation" with the aid of two categories of the history of science, which I call "historical system" and "historical system-aggregate." The category "historical system" refers to the structure of historical processes in general and not simply to scientific processes. Such processes develop in harmony with laws of nature, with laws of biology, psychology, physics, etc.; however also in harmony with rules made by men. Here it is only to the latter that I want to direct attention. There are as many rules of this kind as there are fields of life. One may think of the rules of daily association between people, generally speaking of the manifold relationships in which people stand to one another—the rules of the business world, of economics, of government, the rules of art, of music, of religion, and not least, of language. Since such rules have on one hand arisen historically and therefore are also subject to historical changes, and since on the other hand they give our life something of a systematic structure, I speak of an historical system of rules, and in what follows of systems in short.³³⁷

And concerning the concept of "historical system-aggregate" he elaborates as follows:

By a historical system-aggregate—the second previously named category of the history of science—I mean a structured aggregate formed partially of present, partially of traditional systems, that stand in manifold mutual relations to each other and within whose circuit a community of people move at some point

³³⁷ Kurt Hübner, *Kritik der wissenschaftlichen Vernunft* (Freiburg, 1979) 193.

in time. Scientific systems, namely theories and hierarchies of theories as well as the rules of scientific procedure are therefore also a part of this system-aggregate that constitutes the world of rules in which we live and work at any given time,...With the aid of the just explained categories of the history of science I can now more closely define the concept of "historical situation." By this I mean a historical period that is governed by a particular system-aggregate; and I herewith maintain that each historical period has this structure.³³⁸

Obviously at precisely the time Kant was disputing with Swedenborg over the valid world, a shift in the "historical system-aggregate" had just taken place. Kant's polemic tract can be flatly assessed as a paradigm of the enlightenment.³³⁹ At this time the conflict between the different possible worlds—in which Kant was an authoritative participant—was decided in favor of the empirically examinable world of experience. Nevertheless, as Hübner further explains, no transcending ontology was to be found from which it could be determined anew whether or not the norm of empirical examinability could be applied to a constructed world. For again, which world we decide upon, either upon the common, empirically examinable world of Kant or upon the mystical, subjective world of revelation of Swedenborg, does not depend on experience itself, as Hübner shows, since what must be determined first is the stipulation of what is to be the valid criterium of truth—common experience or belief in mystical revelation. And this determination depends again on the historical situation in which we at the time find ourselves.³⁴⁰

Consequently, just what Hübner says about the relationship between the scientific and the mythical world applies by analogy to the choice

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 194 f.

³³⁹ This assessment is also shared by Ernst Cassirer in his biography of Kant, *Kants Leben und Lehre* 80-97.

³⁴⁰ Although today Kant's scientifically oriented, intersubjectively verifiable world of experience may be generally accepted, considered in this light it remains left to the individual himself to stipulate his criterium for truth and falsehood. According to whichever ontology one feels himself more strongly committed, one will be inclined either to the Kantian world of experience or the Swedenborgian higher world.

between Kant's material world of experience and Swedenborg's mystical world of enlightenment:

Mythical and scientific experience, mythical and scientific reason, are in a certain sense incommensurable..., we can understand them as alternatives; but we have no overarching criterion by which we can judge them both. Every judgment always proceeds either from the mythical or the scientific standpoint.³⁴¹

Since there is simply no transcending ontology, no overarching criterion for the comparison of Kant's and Swedenborg's philosophy, a judgment must always proceed from one of these two worlds. This is just what Kant has done in his polemic tract, he has judged Swedenborg from his—already postulated—normative stipulations of general examinability.³⁴²

But since a fundamentally different normative stipulation for the truth or falsity of an idea, namely the truth criterion of subjective enlightenment, was valid for Swedenborg than was for Kant and the German Enlightenment, Kant's and Swedenborg's worlds as a consequence cannot in principle be compared. Nor can one fundamentally be given priority over the other. Therefore the critique to which Kant wanted to subject the Swedenborgian visions is also defective insofar as he always proceeds from his own normative truth criterion—empirical examinability—without being able to establish this further. And a transcendent ontology based on this was not possible. Therefore when all is said and done, Kant could not dispute Swedenborg, as he did in his polemic tract; he could only believe his visions or not.

Perhaps this was the reason it was so difficult for Kant to hit on the right way to deal with Swedenborg.³⁴³ That his mental state was contradictory³⁴⁴ is shown by his earlier commentary on Swedenborg,³⁴⁵ as well

³⁴¹ Hübner, *Kritik der wissenschaftlichen Vernunft* 424.

³⁴² Today, to be sure, such a transcending ontology could be presented, but not at the time of the origin of these two incommensurable ontologies.

³⁴³ As Kant states in his letter to Mendelssohn, *loc. cit.*

³⁴⁴ As Kant states in his letter to Mendelssohn, *loc. cit.*

³⁴⁵ As Kant writes in his letter to Charlotte von Knobloch in 1763, *loc. cit.* and in his early lectures on metaphysics in 1762-64 *loc. cit.*

as by his later reconciliation with Swedenborg's essential positions in his lectures on rational psychology.³⁴⁶

Not least might this fluctuation of Kant follow as a result of the two ontologies, in spite of their fundamental incommensurability, meeting on one single point: Swedenborg's visions seem to be subject to an empirical confirmation due to the fact that from the suprasensuous world on the other side "spirits" occasionally communicate impressions that refer to our sensible world on this side. This seems to be shown by the Swedenborg stories that Kant himself researched and reported about the projection of the "spirit world" into ours. Here Kant also appears to see a relation between Swedenborg's "*mundus intelligibilis*" and his own "*mundus sensibilis*." He wants to obtain confirmation of Swedenborg's visions from the ostensibly actual occult experiences that the seer reported, and these would of course be empirically examinable. On the other hand, Swedenborg's "heavenly secrets" seem to have led to a conclusion in Kant's thinking concerning the genuineness of the Swedenborg stories. His initial, lawyer's concern for the authenticity of the occult facts that he himself had researched (the lost receipt, the fire in Stockholm, and Swedenborg's contact with the deceased brother of Lovisa Ulrika, the Queen of Sweden) coincide with his antipathy for Swedenborg's description of the higher world. Otherwise his adverse commentary on Swedenborg in the "letter" of 1763 and in the polemic tract of 1766 would scarcely be explainable.³⁴⁷

It was manifestly this unacceptable mixing of two incommensurable ontologies, a mixing of empirically examinable experience and of in principle unexaminable experience, that brought confusion to Kant.

Still, even if the Swedenborg stories should prove to be genuine on the plane of experience, this would not allow one to make a decisive judgment as to the amount of truth in his visionary reports. It is not necessary that everything Swedenborg believed he heard and saw be accepted as true, even if in several instances he is said to have actually

³⁴⁶ Cf. in this regard Chapter 7.2, "The Philosophical Content of Kant's Lectures on Rational Psychology."

³⁴⁷ See in this regard Chapter I.3.2.1, "Kant's Relation To Swedenborg In His Polemical Tract In Comparison To His Swedenborg Commentary In His "Letters."

been in a state of extrasensory perception, indeed not even if he may actually have stood in contact with spirits.³⁴⁸

However, Kant has obviously not taken notice of this fundamental differentiation between the provinces of the mystical and the empirical, and consequently this disadvantageous commixing of ontologies in his mind inevitably led to a kind of contradiction.

Faced with these two fundamentally incompatible ontologies Kant spoke out in his polemic tract first against Swedenborg's visions, and in so doing also against his gift of seership. However, this same mixing of ontologies then led him in his later lectures to the place where, along with his acknowledgment of Swedenborg's doctrine of a moral world, he also had to grant that Swedenborg had an intellectual intuition.³⁴⁹

The case of Swedenborg presented Kant with two difficulties. The first was a mystical theory of revelation that was in principle incompatible with his own transcendental philosophy; the second, which had to do with revelations and empirically verifiable stories, was the additionally aggravating mixing of two ontologies. Considering these difficulties the polemic tract, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer—elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, could be no more than a temporary "cathartic," whose function was to exorcise false philosophy, as Kant himself terms his polemic tract in his letter to Mendelssohn:

The simplicity of a sound but uninstructed understanding needs but an organon to attain insight; but the pseudo-insight of a corrupted brain needs first a cathartic.³⁵⁰

The organon of true philosophy was to be Kant's masterwork, the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

³⁴⁸ Parapsychological research recognizes that many individuals gifted as mediums are manifestly in a position to have examinable extrasensory perceptions and that nevertheless their descriptions of the other side are the product of pure fantasy. In any case, by the criteria of scientific parapsychology the truth of the esoteric teachings of those gifted as mediums cannot be conclusively decided on the basis of their empirically verifiable talent. The two must fundamentally be sharply separated from each other! The results of parapsychology demonstrate this, as is shown, for example, by Hans Dreisch in his postscript to Geymüllers work, "Die wissenschaftliche Parapsychologie der Gegenwart," in Geymüller, *Swedenborg und die übersinnliche Welt*, (Facsimile Reproduction, Zürich) 349-367.

³⁴⁹ In this regard see the discussion of Kant's lectures on rational psychology in Chapter 7.2.

³⁵⁰ *Träume* 67.

(To be continued)