

DID KANT DISSEMBLE HIS INTEREST IN SWEDENBORG?

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Regarding German culture, I have always had the feeling of *decline*...The Germans always come after the others: they are carrying something in the depths; e.g.—Dependence on other countries; e.g., *Kant*—Rousseau, Sensualists, Hume, Swedenborg. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*.¹

1. A Mystery

In the Winter of 1765–66, an anonymous book entitled *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*² was published in Königsberg and Riga. The subject was Emanuel Swedenborg. The author was Immanuel Kant.

The origins and intent of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* are shrouded in mystery. Elsewhere I have argued that an adequate interpretation of *Dreams* must answer six questions.³ First, one must explain why Kant was willing to take the professional risks of writing about Swedenborg, who was regarded as a disreputable enthusiast by Enlightenment intellectuals. Second, one must explain why Kant was willing to take the personal risks of writing about Swedenborg, who was considered a heretic by the Lutheran church. Third, one must explain why Kant was willing to take on the considerable practical difficulties of researching, writing, and publishing a book on Swedenborg. Fourth, one must explain the strange literary style and internal contradictions of *Dreams*. Fifth, one must explain why *Dreams* was published anonymously. Finally, one must explain the puzzling contradictions, both of facts and of evaluations, between *Dreams* and Kant's other discussions of Swedenborg.

Among Kant scholars, the most widespread interpretation of *Dreams* is that it attacks the metaphysics of the dominant "Leibniz-Wolff" school by likening it to Swedenborg's, which is assumed to be obviously absurd. But the received view does not adequately answer the six questions I have

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raised. If Kant's motivation for writing *Dreams* was to attack the dominant metaphysics of his time, this does not explain why Kant would adopt such a risky and indirect strategy when less risky and more direct ones were available. The received view also throws no light on the style of *Dreams*, its anonymous publication, and the strange contradictions between it and Kant's other discussions of Swedenborg.

The received view, moreover, raises another question. If *Dreams* represents a skeptical critique of metaphysics, then it is hard to explain Kant's forthrightly metaphysical *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770: "It is . . . surprising, indeed extremely puzzling, to find that in August 1770, Kant appears to revive speculative metaphysics in his inaugural dissertation, *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis dissertatio* (Dissertation on the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible Worlds). The conception of metaphysics that Kant outlines in this work seems to be the complete negation of that in the *Dreams*. The aim of metaphysics is not to determine the limits of reason, but to give us a rational knowledge of the intelligible world."⁴

2. The Esotericism Hypothesis

Because of the inadequacy of the received view of *Dreams*, I wish to offer an alternative account. In answer to questions one through three, I wish to argue that Kant was willing to take on the professional and personal risks and practical problems of writing a book on Swedenborg for two reasons. First, Kant took Swedenborg seriously as an interesting and important thinker, and to say that Kant took Swedenborg seriously is to say that Kant thought that Swedenborg's claims could possibly be true and are thus worthy of careful consideration, rather than summary dismissal. Second, before the publication of *Dreams*, it came to be rumored that Kant had taken an interest in Swedenborg. Such rumors could, however, have damaged Kant's career, providing him with sufficient motive to write a work exculpating himself of such suspicions. Thus in the Preface of *Dreams* and in chapter two of the Second Part of *Dreams*, as well as in letters to Moses Mendelssohn dated February 7 and April 8, 1766, Kant indicates that one of his motives for publishing *Dreams* was to stop the enquiries of "inquisitive" and "idle" persons, "both known and unknown."

In short, *Dreams* serves a double purpose. It *both* communicates a positive metaphysical teaching based upon serious study of Swedenborg *and* dispels the rumors that Kant took Swedenborg seriously by heaping ridicule upon him. How could a book do both of these things at the same time? I wish to argue that *Dreams* is written on two levels. On the surface, *Dreams* gives the overall impression that Kant has an extremely negative view of Swedenborg. If, however, one “reads between the lines,” Kant intimates that Swedenborg has discovered significant truths, which he hopes to appropriate and place on firmer foundations. *Dreams* is, in short, a piece of “esoteric” writing.⁵

The esoteric nature of *Dreams* provides my answer to questions four through six. The stylistic peculiarities and anonymous publication of *Dreams* can be explained by Kant’s desire to protect himself from persecution while advancing a heterodox teaching. The puzzling contradictions between *Dreams* and the *Inaugural Dissertation* and between *Dreams* and Kant’s other discussions of Swedenborg can be explained by the existence of exoteric and esoteric levels of Kant’s teaching.

3. C.D. Broad and the Esotericism Hypothesis

I am not the first reader of *Dreams* to suspect Kant of hidden sympathies toward Swedenborg. A number of scholars have suggested this sort of interpretation. The first was probably Moses Mendelssohn, one of the very first readers of *Dreams* and himself an accomplished practitioner of reading and writing between the lines.⁶ Mendelssohn notes that, “The joking pensiveness with which this little work [*Dreams*] is written leaves the reader sometimes in doubt as to whether Herr Kant intends to make metaphysics laughable or spirit-seeing credible.”⁷ Friedrich Christoph Oetinger also thought that Kant was engaging in esoteric writing. In a letter to Swedenborg dated December 4, 1766, Oetinger speculates that Kant’s contradictory tone is a rhetorical tactic adopted for prudential reasons: “We have a book, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, in which the author lifts you on high with praises, as much as he pushes you down with accusations lest he be regarded as a fanatic.”⁸ J.F. Immanuel Tafel, a nineteenth-century Swedenborg scholar, speculated that, “it was Kant’s fear of ridicule among his philosophical colleagues that led him to affect so trifling an

attitude toward an author who had in reality deeply and lastingly impressed him."⁹ Ernst Cassirer also suggests the possibility of esotericism: "In its [*Dreams*'s] paradoxical mixture of jest and earnestness, which was the decisive factor? Which was the author's true face and which the mask he had assumed? Was the book just a passing blow of free humor, or was there concealed behind this satyr play of the mind something resembling the tragedy of metaphysics?"¹⁰ J.N. Findlay claims that Kant, "had obviously been incited to write the treatise [*Dreams*] by skeptical friends, and wrote in a much more scoffing, polemical style than really accorded with his feelings. No one who reads the treatise carefully can doubt that Kant felt the same, wistful half-sympathy for Swedenborg's dreams that he also felt for the dreams of metaphysics."¹¹ Giorgio Tonelli observes that, "Kant is very prudent in presenting these views [of the spirit world]: he knows that it is fashionable to deride them as 'dusty and obsolete fancies', and he confirms in principle his allegiance to the mechanistic approach in science."¹² David Walford conjectures that the tone of *Dreams* could have been motivated by Kant's "embarrassment" at writing about Swedenborg.¹³ Richard L. Velkley also observes that the style of *Dreams* "is at once playful and reserved."¹⁴ T.K. Seung raises the possibility that, "Kant's caustic ridicule is only on the surface of the *Dreams*. Deep down, he is much more concerned with the reality of spiritual order."¹⁵

The most convincing case for the esotericism hypothesis, however, is C.D. Broad's.¹⁶ To argue persuasively that an author is engaging in esoteric writing, one must answer at least three questions. First, one must explain the author's motivation for publishing in the first place, for if an author has something to hide, then the best way to hide it is not to publish at all. Second, one must explain what would motivate the author to conceal his ideas, for most authors write precisely in order to communicate their views to as many readers as possible; therefore, it would require some special circumstances to motivate a writer to contravene that purpose. Third, one must offer an account of the techniques of esoteric writing deployed by the writer. One cannot stop simply at showing that the writer had good reason to employ esotericism; one must show how he employs it to intimate a dangerous esoteric teaching between the lines of a salutary or merely innocuous exoteric one. Broad answers the second of these questions quite successfully.

Broad proposes esotericism as a hypothesis to account for two strange features of *Dreams*: the fact that it was published anonymously and the marked contradictions of tone and content between *Dreams* and two other Kantian discussions of Swedenborg: the Letter to Charlotte von Knobloch of August 10, 1763, and the *Metaphysik L1* of the mid-1770s. Broad stresses the distinction between Kant's privately and publicly announced views of Swedenborg, noting that Kant's "less favorable attitude is expressed in a published though anonymous work [*Dreams*], whilst the more favorable attitude is expressed first in a private letter and then later in lectures not intended for publication" (Broad, 149).

Broad finds a developmental interpretation of the contradictions between the Letter (1763), *Dreams* (1766), and *Metaphysik L1* (mid-1770s) to be implausible: "If we take the contemptuous tone of [*Dreams*] to be a sincere expression of Kant's feelings at the time, we must . . . hold that his attitude toward Swedenborg underwent two changes, first from more to less favorable and then in the opposite direction" (Broad, 149). He decides, therefore, that we should *not* "take the contemptuous tone of [*Dreams*] to be a sincere expression of Kant's feelings at the time" (Broad, 149).

The second element of a case for esotericism is an account of the author's motivations for writing between the lines. Broad is acutely aware of this problem: "If...the scorn expressed in *Träume eines Geistersehers* was merely assumed, what motive was there for an almost morbidly conscientious man like Kant to go out of his way publicly to simulate a contempt, which he did not feel, for an aged and amiable foreigner, of the highest intellectual distinction, who at worst suffered from a bee or two in the bonnet?" (Broad, 150).

Broad offers a finely drawn account of Kant's motives for publishing anonymously and adopting a condescending tone. Broad claims that Kant's contemptuous tone was adopted to protect himself from his censorious senior colleagues in the circles of the German Enlightenment: "It is reasonable to suspect that, in 'enlightened' academic circles in East Prussia in the middle of the eighteenth century, a reputation for having carefully read Swedenborg's writings and having paid serious attention to the evidence for his alleged feats of clairvoyance, would be enough to condemn a *privat dozent* [sic] to remain in that position for the rest of his life" (Broad, 127). Broad expands upon these reasons: "Kant no doubt wished to keep a good

reputation as a level-headed burgher, scholar, scientist, and philosopher, and not to incur the contempt of his colleagues and fellow-townsmen or to prejudice his chances of eventual election to a professorship" (Broad, 127). Broad holds that these motives are sufficient to account for both Kant's anonymity and his tone.¹⁷

Broad might also have mentioned the danger of religious persecution. As Gottlieb Florschütz notes, "Swedenborg fell into great danger of being persecuted and declared insane, from 1761 on by the German Lutheran church and from 1768 on also by the Swedish state church...[A]ll those who seriously engaged themselves with his works and his doctrines could thereby easily lose their public reputation."¹⁸

One might object to Broad's account as follows. Although Broad has offered a plausible motivation either for anonymity or for a condescending and ironic tone, he has not offered a sufficient motive for adopting both strategies together, for using both seems like overkill. If one were to publish heterodox opinions anonymously, why not state one's views as clearly as possible, rather than muddying the waters with a confusing style? And if one decides to muddy the waters with a confusing style, why not publish openly in one's own name?

Broad avoids this problem deftly, by subtly qualifying his conception of anonymity: "[C]ould Kant possibly have hoped to preserve his anonymity? This seems to be almost incredible." But if anonymity could not win Kant . . . anonymity, then what good would it do him? Broad's reply is quite credible: "I can only suggest that the conventions of the time and place permitted a *privat dozent* [sic] to flirt with this disreputable subject, provided that he made an honest man of himself by maintaining the form of anonymity and by adopting a sufficiently bantering and condescending tone towards the alleged phenomena and the persons to whom they were narrated. If these were the conditions, Kant certainly complied with them" (Broad, 127). Broad, in short, regards anonymous publication as a device that allowed an author to publish on disreputable topics without becoming a disreputable man. Anonymity did not achieve this by concealing the author's identity, but by signalling that the author would pay lip-service to the accepted standards of public decorum and academic legitimacy.

Historical evidence suggests that Broad's suppositions are substantially correct. First, Swedenborg and his followers were widely attacked, ostracized, censored, and persecuted: both by the advocates of Enlightenment and by the established churches, sometimes working in unholy alliance.¹⁹ Second, Broad's hypothesis regarding the meaning of anonymous publication is confirmed by the historical record. Throughout most of Europe in 18th century, there was a climate of unofficial tolerance for heretical and/or politically subversive authors, so long as they followed the conventions of publishing anonymously and on the presses (or merely under the imprints) of foreign publishers. Anonymity hid nothing, for the identities of the authors of anonymous works were usually common knowledge. But following the form of anonymity did signal willingness to "play along" with the system and not to give public scandal.

Swedenborg, for example, published his theosophical works anonymously in London and Amsterdam to evade Sweden's heavy censorship and harsh penalties for heresy. In Sweden, people who professed to have psychic or spiritualist powers were regularly executed for witchcraft well into the eighteenth century. From 1760 on, Swedenborg was widely known as the author of his anonymous writings, but no action was taken against him. In 1768, however, Swedenborg published *Conjugial Love* in his own name and included a list of all of his anonymously published theological works.²⁰ Predictably, once Swedenborg acknowledged the authorship of heretical works, two of his followers were tried for heresy. Swedenborg himself escaped such persecution only by virtue of "the support of friendly bishops and parliament members as well as the intervention of the Swedish king [Adolphus Frederick]." (Rousseau's career followed a similar course. He was widely known to be the author of dangerous and heterodox, if not outright heretical, works but was not persecuted until 1762, when he published *Emile* in his own name.²²)

In short, Swedenborg was caught in the crossfire of both the Enlightenment and the church. Any writer who treated him positively would come under similar fire. Kant had, therefore, ample reason to treat Swedenborg with circumspection and prudence.

4. Two Alternatives to the Esotericism Hypothesis

There are two other explanations for the textual enigmas of *Dreams*. I shall dub these the “developmental” and “psychological” strategies.

The developmental strategy is premised on the idea that all of an author’s statements are honest and adequate expressions of his considered views. Every change in an author’s statements therefore reflects a change of viewpoint; every contradictory statement therefore reflects a contradictory viewpoint.

The psychological strategy is premised on the idea that no author would consciously fill his texts with contradictions and other enigmatic features. Therefore, such features are to be explained by reference to psychological factors of which the author was unaware.

By way of contrast, the esotericism hypothesis is premised on the fact that writers and speakers accommodate their discourses to their audiences, saying different things—and the same things differently—to different (kinds of) people. On this assumption, contradictions within or between an author’s texts may be the intentional products of a deliberate rhetorical strategy and may serve as clues to the presence of an esoteric teaching.

Developmental strategies are most plausibly employed to explain the changes of an author’s statements from one text to another. It is, however, possible to offer developmental accounts of contradictions and other enigmas appearing within single texts. Werner Jaeger, for instance, is famous for arguing that Aristotle’s major writings are collections of materials dating from different periods of his philosophical development.²³ Norman Kemp Smith has argued the same regarding Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.²⁴ Such arguments are most plausible when dealing with books which were put together by later editors (such as Aristotle’s) or which were patched together by their authors in a short period of time from materials written over a number of years (such as the *Critique of Pure Reason*). Developmental strategies are, however, less plausibly employed with works like *Dreams*, which was written in a short period of time and published under its author’s supervision.

I classify as developmental another approach that shares a common premise. This strategy treats contradictory statements as accurate reflections of contradictory points of view. This approach shares with the devel-

opmental view the assumption that all of an author's statements are accurate and honest reflections of his considered views at a given time. Thus if an author offers contradictory statements, this is merely the reflection of his contradictory thoughts. This approach has been adopted by some interpreters of *Dreams*, who claim that Kant adopted a "schizophrenic" style and offered schizophrenic judgments of Swedenborg because, on the matter of Swedenborg at least, Kant himself was a bit schizophrenic, i.e., he was of two minds about Swedenborg, and this ambivalence affected the style and tone of his treatment. As Keith Ward puts it, "Visionary speculation and rational skepticism seem to be equally strong, if competing, forces in Kant's mind at this time, and this strange work expresses a very strong attraction for, and an equally strong revulsion against, the sort of spiritual vision which Swedenborg presented."²⁵ This explanation is offered by many interpreters, chief among them Kant himself. In his letter to Mendelssohn of April 8, 1766, Kant replies to Mendelssohn's queries about his style and tone, claiming that they were, "actually quite honest, since my mind is really in a state of conflict on this matter."²⁶

A more straightforward developmental approach has been used to explain the contradictions between *Dreams* and the letter to Charlotte von Knobloch. On this account, *Dreams* is different from the letter simply because Kant changed his mind about Swedenborg. One's developmental interpretation is, of course, dependent on the order in which *Dreams* and the letter were written. Based on his dating of the letter to 1768—now universally recognized to be mistaken—J.F. Immanuel Tafel argues that Kant's initial judgment of Swedenborg, as expressed in *Dreams*, was negative. But between 1765-66 and 1768, Kant's opinion of Swedenborg became much more positive, as attested by the letter. Tafel also argued that this more positive opinion of Swedenborg is also attested to by Kant's distinction between the sensible and the intelligible worlds in his *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770, a distinction central to Kant's entire critical system, and a distinction which Tafel claims is derived from Swedenborg.²⁷

Those who start out from the correct dating of the letter to 1763 also offer developmental interpretations. David Walford, the principal translator of the new Cambridge edition of *Dreams*, half-heartedly raises the possibility of a developmental explanation, but notes that, "It is not at all

clear what can have induced Kant so radically to have revised his estimate of the reliability of the reports he cites in both the letter and in the *Dreams*.”²⁸

Here is one possible explanation. The developmental interpretation of the change in tone between the letter and *Dreams* does have one major historical fact in its favor. In the letter, Kant indicates that he has not read, but will soon read, Swedenborg’s theosophical writings. In *Dreams* he indicates that he has read the *Arcana Coelestia* and the text offers clear evidence that this claim is true. Therefore, one could argue that Kant’s positive tone in the letter was based on the reports of Swedenborg’s visions, and his change to a negative tone in *Dreams* came about when he made first-hand acquaintance with Swedenborg’s writings about the spirit world. C.D. Broad offers this hypothesis, although he is not particularly wedded to it:

I would suggest very tentatively that what may have happened is this. Instead of getting the book which he was expecting, viz. an account by Swedenborg of those of his ostensibly supernormal cognitions which were open to verification in this world, together with adequate testimony for them, he was landed with the eight volumes of the *Arcana Coelestia*. This is largely occupied with an elaborate symbolic interpretation of every word and sentence in the books of Genesis and Exodus. It may fairly be described as one of the most boring and absurd productions of any human pen. After reading it Kant may well have been inclined to dismiss with contemptuous impatience the alleged supernormal feats of a person who could devote a large part of his life to writing such stuff...(Broad, 126)

There are to my mind two insuperable difficulties with such a developmental reading.

First, the sets of notes on Kant’s lectures on metaphysics known as the *Metaphysik Herder* and the *Nachträge Herder* document that Kant was still speaking about Swedenborg in a very positive tone shortly *after* he had received and read the *Arcana Coelestia* but shortly before he began writing *Dreams*.²⁹ Kant’s encounter with Swedenborg’s writings cannot, therefore, by itself account for his change of tone. Unless other information is forth-

coming, it does not, therefore, count as evidence for a developmental reading.

Second, and even more problematic for a straightforward developmental reading, such an interpretation cannot account for all of the contradictions between *Dreams* and the letter to Charlotte von Knobloch. For instance, Kant's suggestion in *Dreams* that someone might want to interview eyewitnesses to Swedenborg's clairvoyant feats fails to mention the fact, revealed in the letter to Charlotte von Knobloch, that he himself did arrange for such interviews. Later in *Dreams* Kant asserts that such eyewitnesses do not exist, but this directly contradicts the evidence of the letter. These sorts of contradictions cannot be explained as changes of Kant's interpretation of the facts; they represent the *willful concealment* of the fact that certain kinds of data were gathered in the first place. The concealment of facts cannot be explained by the development of ideas.

It is also possible to offer a developmental interpretation of the contradictions between *Dreams* and Kant's later references to Swedenborg in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*, *Reflexionen*, and in *The Conflict of the Faculties* and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. To do so, however, begins to stretch the reader's credulity and the developmental method's credibility. Kant's later treatments of Swedenborg span a period of 32 years following the publication of *Dreams*. If, therefore, one were to offer a developmental account of Kant's opinions of Swedenborg, one would have to judge that in 1763-74 (the time of the letter to von Knobloch and the *Metaphysik Herder* and *Nachträge Herder*³⁰), Kant was favorably disposed toward Swedenborg; that in 1765-66 (the time of the writing and publication of *Dreams* and the Letter to Moses Mendelssohn of April 8, 1766), Kant was quite negatively disposed toward Swedenborg; that in 1770 (the time of the *Inaugural Dissertation*), Kant had again warmed to metaphysics; that in the mid-1770s Kant had soured on Swedenborg, as reflected by a couple of *Reflexionen*³¹; that from the mid-1770s to 1789 or 1790—after his critical turn, when he had, presumably, soured on metaphysics again—Kant had nonetheless somehow become more favorably disposed toward Swedenborg, as attested to by his *Lectures on Metaphysics*³²; that in 1789 or 1790, however, Kant had sufficiently soured on Swedenborg again to claim that he was, “apparently a deliberate fraud”³³; that next year, however, Kant changed his mind again and was speaking of Swedenborg in a

more balanced and favorable manner³⁴; but that by 1798 Kant was back to calling Swedenborg an enthusiast (*Schwärmer*) in the *Anthropology* and *The Conflict of the Faculties*.³⁵

If one were to take all of Kant's claims about Swedenborg at face value and plot their ups and downs, as well as the ups and downs of Kant's attitudes toward metaphysics in general, one would arrive at a sort of developmental roller coaster ride—a roller coaster which strains credulity, especially since Kant's opinion of Swedenborg seems to rise again in the mid-1770s, at the very time Kant was writing the *Critique of Pure Reason* and his opinion of the metaphysics of the supersensible should have been at its lowest. It is a picture that raises the plausibility of an alternative explanation.

Specifically, it raises the plausibility of the esotericism hypothesis, which holds that Kant's attitude toward Swedenborg was more or less constant from 1763 to 1798. Now, on the surface, this claim may seem preposterous, for it seems to deny or ignore a universally-acknowledged development in Kant's thought: the transition, in the decade of the 1770s, from his pre-critical to critical philosophy, from which issued, in 1781, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But while there is no question that Kant's ideas did develop over time, that does not imply that all of his ideas developed over time, or that every different statement reflects such development. Contradictory statements can also be explained rhetorically.

I have dubbed the second hermeneutic strategy for explaining the tensions between *Dreams* and Kant's other treatments of Swedenborg "psychological." In the Introduction to his translation of *Dreams*, John Manolesco offers a psychological version of the developmental explanation that is consistent with what appears to be Kant's deliberate concealment of evidence in *Dreams*. In spite of its melodramatic tone, it is a suggestion that must be seriously entertained:

The tone of the entire letter [to Charlotte von Knobloch] shows that Kant had the greatest respect and admiration for Swedenborg. Would it be farfetched to assume that Kant's sudden hatred for speculative metaphysics...was the sequel to a deep psychological change due to unrequited love, not by metaphysics, but by Swedenborg himself? The disappointment at not receiving a reply to his letter, addressed to

Swedenborg, and his final hope that such a reply might have been included in Swedenborg's latest book which was to come off the printing press shortly, a promise made but not kept, must have caused the deepest revulsion and hatred for his former idol. From the general tone of the *Spirit Seer* [sic] one cannot fail to notice that Kant was carrying on a personal vendetta against the Swede.³⁶

Manolesco then goes on to describe the Kant of 1766 as "a complex-ridden man" and speculates that Kant, a poor commoner, may have been motivated in part by petty envy for Swedenborg, a rich nobleman.³⁷ Manolesco does make it clear that he thinks that such mean-spiritedness and intellectual dishonesty is out of character for Kant, but the very fact that it is out of character seems to him further evidence that Kant was not fully in control of himself.³⁸

Manolesco's explanation is farfetched. Manolesco does have the virtue of being attuned to the extremity of Kant's changes of both tone and judgment. He also has the virtue of being attuned to the hints of intellectual dishonesty on Kant's part. But extreme changes in a writer's tone and judgments do not necessarily result from psychological motivations of which he is not fully aware or in control. It is, of course, true that all authors have such unglimped and uncontrolled motivations and that readers must be attentive to this possibility. But while there is no a priori way of ruling out the possibility that a psychological explanation will be fruitful, such matters can be determined on a case-by-case basis. And in Manolesco's case the explanation is farfetched.

How plausible is it that a sober man such as Kant would be moved "to the deepest revulsion and hatred" not only for Swedenborg, but also for speculative metaphysics itself, simply because he never received a reply to a letter? Kant himself was a notoriously tardy correspondent. The mails of the time were notoriously slow and prone to loss. Surely Kant would have understood. And how does Manolesco know that Swedenborg never in fact did reply to Kant? We know that many of Kant's and Swedenborg's letters are missing. And how does Manolesco know that Swedenborg's writings did not answer Kant's questions—particularly since we do not even know what Kant's questions were? And how plausible is it that Kant, having been driven to hatred and revulsion by a small slight, would have

devoted his scarce time and energy to writing an entire book simply to avenge himself on Swedenborg? Kant would have to have been crazy, and it is never safe for an interpreter to assume that an author is crazy. In short, although I see no reason, in principle, why it would not be possible to offer a plausible psychological explanation for the tone of *Dreams*, Manolesco has not done so.

5. Kant, Mendelssohn, & the Esotericism Hypothesis

To my knowledge, the first person who advanced the esotericism hypothesis regarding *Dreams* was Moses Mendelssohn. The first person to deny it was Kant himself. These claims are based on three documents: two letters from Kant to Mendelssohn, dated February 7 and April 8, 1766, and Mendelssohn's review of *Dreams*, published in 1767 in Friedrich Nicolai's *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*.³⁹ The first letter accompanied Kant's gift to Mendelssohn of a copy of *Dreams* along with six other copies for distribution by Mendelssohn:

I have sent you by mail some dreams [*einige Träumerey*]. Please keep a copy for yourself and hand the others out to the following gentleman: Court Preacher Sack, Councillor of the Consistory Spalding, Provost Süßmilch, Professor Lambert, Professor Sulzer, and Professor Formey. It is, so to speak, a book extorted from me and contains more of a desultory sketch of the way one should judge such questions rather than the fulfillment of the same. Your judgment on this and other matters will be very valuable to me. Scholarly news of your area and acquaintance with the good minds in your district through your assistance will be useful and pleasant for me. I wish that, for my part, I could do something to your satisfaction and I am with deepest respect,

Mein Herr

Your most humble servant,
Immanuel Kant⁴⁰

In the second letter, Kant defends himself against Mendelssohn's criticisms of *Dreams*. Unfortunately, Mendelssohn's critical letter—which must

have been dated some time between February 7 and April 8, 1766—is lost. We can, however, infer some elements of Mendelssohn’s critique from Kant’s reply and from Mendelssohn’s review. The entire text of the review is as follows.

I. *Kants Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik. Königsberg, im Kanter. Verlage, 1766. 8 Bog. in 8.*

A certain Herr *Schredenberg* of *Stockholm*, who, in our incredulous times has accomplished most incredible marvels, and who has written eight quarto volumes full of nonsense called the *Arcana Coelestia*, is the spirit-seer whose dreams Herr Kant tries to illustrate through metaphysical hypotheses, themselves called dreams. The joking pensiveness with which this little work is written leaves the reader sometimes in doubt as to whether Herr Kant intends to make metaphysics laughable or spirit-seeing credible. Nevertheless, it includes the seeds of weighty considerations, several new thoughts on the nature of the soul, as well as several objections to the well-known systems, which deserve a serious-minded exposition.⁴¹

Four criticisms can be inferred from this brief notice. First, Kant’s style leaves his motivations in doubt, which raises questions about his intellectual honesty. Mendelssohn wonders if Kant’s purpose is “to make metaphysics laughable or spirit-seeing credible.” It should be noted, however, that for Mendelssohn, both alternatives are bad. Allan Arkush has convincingly argued that Mendelssohn himself practiced esoteric writing in the cause of Enlightenment.⁴² If this is true, then Mendelssohn would not condemn esoteric writing as such; he would condemn it only if he thought it were being used for reactionary, unenlightened purposes. Second, Mendelssohn was a defender of metaphysics; therefore, he did not warmly receive attacks upon it. Third, Mendelssohn was also a critic of mysticism and enthusiasm, of which spirit-seeing was a species; therefore, he would not welcome any attempts to make it respectable. Fourth, *Dreams* treats “weighty considerations” which “deserve a serious-minded exposition” in an inappropriately light and “joking” manner. Mendelssohn seems to have seen *Dreams* as a critique of the metaphysics of the Wolffian school,

of which he was a member, by linking it to Swedenborg's disreputable occultism. Mendelssohn, in short, seems to have articulated what became the received view—but, as he was uneasy about Kant's intellectual honesty, he was therefore unsure of his interpretation.

Kant's second letter to Mendelssohn, dated April 8, 1766, begins by thanking Mendelssohn for distributing the copies of *Dreams*. Kant then devotes his second paragraph to defending himself and *Dreams* from what appear to be just these sorts of criticisms. Kant's defense seems to grant the truth of Mendelssohn's interpretation of his project. If Mendelssohn's interpretation is wrong, Kant is at least content to allow him to persist in his error. What Kant disputes are Mendelssohn's reservations about his intellectual honesty.

The consternation you express concerning the tone of my little book proves to me that you have formed a good opinion of the sincerity of my character, and your very reluctance to see that character ambiguously expressed is both precious and pleasing to me. In fact, you shall never have cause to change this opinion, for though there may be flaws that even the most steadfast determination cannot eradicate completely, I shall certainly never become a fickle or fraudulent character, after having already devoted the greatest part of my life to studying how to despise those things that tend to corrupt one's character, and thus damage the self-respect that springs from the consciousness of unwavering character that would be the greatest evil that could, but certainly shall not, befall me. Although I think many things with complete conviction and to my great satisfaction which I shall never have the courage to say, never shall I say anything I do not think. (AK 10: 69; Zweig, 54; tr. Zweig, modified)

This paragraph responds to two different accusations or suspicions voiced by Mendelssohn. Both accusations were occasioned specifically by the *rhetorical* qualities of Kant's text, hence Kant's reference to the "tone" (*Ton*) and the systematically "ambiguous" (*zweideutig*) expressions of *Dreams*.

First, Mendelssohn seems to have questioned Kant's intellectual seriousness, hence Kant's denial that he is a "fickle" (*wetterwendisch*) person. In the sixth paragraph of his letter Kant denies that his views are the result of "frivolous inconstancy" (*leichtsinniger Unbestand*) (AK 10:70; Zweig, 55).

Second, and more seriously, Mendelssohn seems to have questioned Kant's intellectual honesty, hence Kant's rather breathtaking assertion that Mendelssohn's questions about Kant's intellectual honesty indicate that Mendelssohn had, in Kant's words, already "formed a good opinion of the sincerity of my character"; hence Kant's admission, regarding his own character, that "there may be flaws that even the most steadfast determination cannot eradicate completely," a claim which amounts to a tacit admission that there is something funny going on in *Dreams*, but that Kant struggled manfully against it and therefore should not be too harshly condemned for it, whatever it is; hence Kant's denial that he is a "fraudulent" (*auf den Schein angelegte*) person; hence Kant's assertion that he has "devoted the largest part of my life to studying how to despise those things that tend to corrupt one's character"—an assertion that is not, we should note, inconsistent with actually engaging in such activities; hence Kant's claim that damaging "the self-respect [*Selbstbilligung*] that springs from the consciousness of unwavering character [*unverstellten Gesinnung*]" would be the greatest evil that could, but certainly shall not, befall me." And, finally, there is Kant's frank admission that he practices prudent circumspection in his utterances (including, presumably, his utterances to Mendelssohn): "I think many things with complete conviction [*allerkläresten Überzeugung*] and to my great satisfaction [*grossen Zufriedenheit*] which I shall never have the courage [*Muth*] to say," followed by the qualification that, "never shall I say anything I do not think."

Although initially disarming, Kant's protestation of honesty is, however, quite consistent with deception. Kant is, in essence, stating that he always tells the truth and nothing but the truth, *but not the whole truth*. This, however, is a deeply deceptive form of "honesty." Indeed, as Alexandre Kojève points out, one of "the proven and classic methods of good works of propaganda...[is that] one says the truth, nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth. Thus, in passing off an isolated aspect of reality for an adequate description of that reality, one disfigures it profoundly without having 'invented' anything."⁴³ In view of the dishonesty of this form of truth-telling, we require those who testify to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." (It is telling that Montaigne, also an accomplished practitioner of the art of esoteric writing, makes

precisely the same avowal of honesty in the midst of a very circumspect discussion of esotericism.⁴⁴)

Kant's third paragraph introduces a deflationary strategy for allaying Mendelssohn's suspicions regarding Kant's intellectual honesty. Esoteric writing is an extremely artful form of writing, but it is an artfulness masquerading as accidentality. Therefore, if one wishes to deflect the suspicion of engaging in esoteric writing, one must downplay the artfulness of one's text and play up the role of accidentality. One must reinforce the impression that those features of a text that appear to be accidents *really are* accidents and not clues alerting the careful reader to a hidden subtext.

I don't know whether, in reading this rather untidily completed book [*ziemlicher Unordnung abgefassten Schrift*], you noticed certain indications of my reluctance [*Unwillen*] to write it. For I saw that my prying inquiry [*Vorwitzige Erkundigung*] into Swedenborg's visions would make a great stir among people who knew him personally or from his letters and published works and that I would never be at peace from their incessant questions [*unablässige Nachfrage*] until I had got rid of the alleged cognitions mentioned in all these anecdotes. (AK 10: 69; Zweig, 55; tr. Zweig, modified)

Mendelssohn did, of course, sense a certain "reluctance"—or, better, a lack of forthrightness—in Kant. Kant does not deny this impression outright; nor does he try to explain it; he simply allows Mendelssohn to believe that Kant's reluctance would be very much like his own reluctance to deal with such questionable topics; Kant does, however, tell Mendelssohn what led him to overcome his reluctance and publish; Kant's motives did not come from within, from his own desires and designs, but were imposed upon him from without, and in an essentially accidental fashion: the "incessant questions" of those interested in Swedenborg forced Kant to write *Dreams* to rid himself of the annoyance.

Now one must ask: What kind of inquiries would be so annoying to Kant that he would be willing to research, write, and publish an entire book to relieve himself of them? Such inquiries would have to threaten more than mere continued annoyance. Kant's references to them in *Dreams*

and in the letter to Mendelssohn of February 7, 1766, certainly have a note of menace. In *Dreams*, Kant writes: "But there was also another factor, which has already on a number of occasions extorted [*abgedrungen*] books out of modest authors: the insistent importunity of friends, both known and unknown"⁴⁵ and "In examining his subject, I have devoted myself to a thankless task, which the enquiries and insistent demands of inquisitive and idle [*vorwitziger und müssiger*] friends have imposed [*unterlegte*] upon me."⁴⁶ In the letter, Kant writes that *Dreams* "is, so to speak, a book extorted from me [*Es ist eine gleichsam abgedrungene Schrift*]."

Extorted under what threat? The letter of February 7, 1766, to Mendelssohn provides a clue to the identities of these "inquisitive and idle friends." It accompanied copies of *Dreams* for Mendelssohn himself and six other gentlemen: Friedrich Samuel Georg Sack (1738–1817), the court preacher; Johann Joachim Spalding (1714–1804), Councillor of the Consistory, the Protestant equivalent of the Holy Inquisition; Provost Johann Peter Süssmilch (1707–67), an academic politician of some power and a defender of Hamann's account of nature as symbolic theophany, a view very similar to Swedenborg's; Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728–77), whose accomplishments in philosophy, mathematics, and cosmology led Kant to describe him—in a letter addressed to Lambert himself—as "the leading genius of Germany" Johann Georg Sulzer (1720–79), a popularizing philosopher of the "Leibniz-Wolff" school, best known for his work in aesthetics (which influenced Kant, Schiller, and the *Sturm und Drang*) and for his translations of Hume; and Pierre Samuel Formey (1711–97), another popularizer of the Leibniz-Wolff school. The Issac Asimov of his time, Formey was the author or editor of nearly 600 books, including *La belle Wolfienne* (6 vols., 1741–53), directed to the bluestocking market; he carried on the most far-flung correspondence since Leibniz and whiled away his declining years by publishing his own *Oeuvres posthumes*.⁴⁷

Süssmilch, Lambert, Sulzer, and Formey were all members of the Berlin Academy. Indeed, they were among its most powerful members. Formey was the permanent secretary, and Lambert was the only individual admitted to all four classes (mathematics, natural philosophy, speculative philosophy, and letters). This list thus gives deeper meaning to the phrase "inquisitive and idle friends," for Spalding was, in effect, Prussian "Grand Inquisitor" and the other men were prominent scholars, a word

derived from the Greek word for idleness or leisure, *skole*. (The fact that Kant refers to “inquisitive and idle *friends*,” whereas the aforementioned men were mostly strangers, is not a problem, for he refers to “friends, both known and unknown.”)

Kant, in short, sent copies of *Dreams* to the leading figures of both the Prussian church and the Berlin Enlightenment, the very people whose disapproval of Swedenborg Kant would have feared the most. Kant’s primary purpose was to clear himself of all rumors of heterodoxy and enthusiasm, rumors which could have ruined his career.

But is there evidence that any of these men knew of Kant’s interest in Swedenborg before they received their copies of *Dreams*? Consider the letter dated November 6, 1764, from Kant’s sometime friend in Königsberg Johann Georg Hamann to Mendelssohn: “Perhaps I can also include for you a small treatise...from Herr Magister Kant, with whom I have presently restricted my dealings. Therein he will review, amongst others, the *Opera omnia* of a certain *Schwedenberg*, which runs to nine [sic] large quarto volumes and came out in London.”⁴⁸ This letter indicates not only that Kant was working on Swedenborg in the Fall of 1764, but that he predicted the imminent completion of a small treatise dealing at least in part with him.⁴⁹ If this treatise is not *Dreams* itself, it is at least its precursor. Given that Mendelssohn moved in the same circles as the aforementioned gentlemen, it seems highly likely that they were aware of Kant’s interest in Swedenborg. (Kant clearly thought it highly likely, or he would not have dispatched copies of *Dreams* to them.)

The third paragraph also plays up the force of accidentality in the composition and publication of the book, referring to *Dreams* as a “rather untidily completed book.” In the seventh paragraph, he refers to *Dreams* as “my superficial little essay” and spells out just what its lack of tidiness consists in: “I could have made it more clear if I had not had the treatise printed by the sheet one after another [*bogenweise hinter einander*], since I could not always foresee what would lead to a clearer understanding of later pages; consequently, certain explanations had to be left out, because they would have occurred in the wrong place” (AK 10:71; Zweig, 56; tr. revised). Surely, Mendelssohn was meant to conclude, in a book so hastily and haphazardly constructed, things that look like accidents are just that.

There is, interestingly enough, independent evidence that *Dreams* was written and printed just as Kant claimed. The 1766 edition of the University of Königsberg's *Actus Facultatis Philosophiae* indicates that *Dreams* was in print by 31 January 1766, that there was an irregularity in the censorship of the book (it was the printed book, rather than the manuscript, that was presented to the censor), and that the firm of Johann Jacob Kanter, the publisher of the first edition, was fined ten *Reichsthaler* for the irregularity. The publishers defended themselves as follows.

The manuscript of Magister Kant was very illegible...The manuscript was sent to the press page by page, with the result that so many revisions had to be made at the proof stage that this treatise only appeared in its final form after it had been finally printed. It was on account of these circumstances that it was, on the one hand, impossible for the professors to censor the treatise, and that, on the other hand, these same professors, had they submitted the work to you before it had been printed, would have censored an entirely different work.⁵⁰

Three facts are, however, noteworthy. First, there is no necessary conflict between artful writing and chaotic production; indeed, the printers make it clear that Kant exercised great care in revising and correcting *Dreams* in the proof stage. Second, if Kant had feared that his book might not have been approved by the censors in manuscript form, he might have adopted this apparently haphazard manner of working precisely to get the book into print *before* presenting it to the censors, perhaps reasoning that the censors would be more likely to approve a controversial book that was already a *fait accompli* than a controversial book still in manuscript form. Third, there is some evidence that Kant was accustomed to working in this chaotic manner. John Richardson, one of Kant's earliest, most accomplished, and most prolific translators, writes in a footnote to his "Sketch of the Author's [i.e., Kant's] Life and Writings," appended to an 1836 edition of his translations of Kant's *Logic* and *Prolegomena*:

The late Professor [J.S.] Beck of Rostock informed me that Kant had made himself so much master of his subject before he printed his Criticism [i.e.,

the *Critique of Pure Reason*], that he neither corrected nor transcribed the manuscript of it, but sent it sheet by sheet as he wrote it to the press.⁵¹

At least in the opinion of Kant's former student and able expositor J.S. Beck (1761–1840), there was no conflict between an unusual production schedule and a complete mastery of the book's contents—both its ideas and their specific formulations.

Now, one might object that the considerable difficulty of the first *Critique*, the publication of the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), and the extensive revisions made to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), indicate that Kant's manner of working was not conducive to complete mastery of the text. But this does not follow. First of all, there is ample evidence that Kant's style is obscure by design, not by default: Kant did not wish to make the first *Critique* accessible to the general reading public, for he regarded it as necessarily technical and esoteric. In the first edition he writes: "this work can never be made suitable for popular consumption."⁵² He repeats this sentiment in the preface of the second edition: "That critique [the *Critique of Pure Reason*] can never become popular."⁵³ Furthermore, Kant disliked the "loquacious shallowness [*geschwätzigem Seichtigkeit*]" of the movement of "Popularphilosophen," who sought to popularize technical philosophy, in Kant's opinion to the detriment of both philosophy and the public.⁵⁴ This resistance to popularization is evident in the undimmed barbarism of Kant's prose in the *Prolegomena* and the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Some of Kant's other works, however, including *Dreams*, clearly show that he could express difficult philosophical concepts in a relatively accessible style *when he wanted to*. Thus, paradoxically, Kant may have written the *Prolegomena* and revised the first *Critique*, not because he failed in his intentions as a writer, but because he succeeded too well. He deliberately made the first *Critique* so obscure and esoteric that even his chosen audience failed to grasp crucial steps of his argument, necessitating a new exposition.

Kant's fourth paragraph in his letter to Mendelssohn provides even stronger evidence for the esotericism hypothesis.

It was in fact difficult for me to devise the right technique [*Methode*] with which to clothe my thoughts [*meine Gedanken einzukleiden*], so as not to expose myself to mockery [*Gespötte*]. It seemed to me wisest to forestall other people's mockery by first of all mocking myself; and this procedure was actually completely honest [*ganz richtig*], since my mind is really contradictory [*widersinnlich*] on this matter. (AK 10:69-70; Zweig, 55; tr. Zweig, modified)

Kant, having raised Mendelssohn's suspicions that he was engaged in rhetorical subterfuge, openly admits it, saying that, "It was...difficult for me to devise the right style with which to clothe my thoughts." (Presumably clothed thoughts would look different than naked ones.) However, Kant immediately qualifies this admission. First, he says that his main motivation for adopting such rhetorical strategies was neither to ridicule metaphysics, nor to make spirit-seeing more plausible, but rather the harmless and understandable desire "not to expose myself to mockery." "It seemed to me wisest to forestall other people's mockery by first of all mocking myself" (AK 10:70; Zweig, 55; tr. Zweig, modified). Second, Kant admits that the rhetoric of *Dreams* has a schizophrenic quality, but insists that this was not a tool for dissembling his views, because he really was of two minds on the regarding Swedenborg: "this procedure was actually quite honest, since my mind is really contradictory on this matter" (AK 10:70; Zweig, 55; tr. Zweig, modified).

Kant then devotes the rest of the letter to responding to two other charges, charges which are also found in Mendelssohn's review: namely, that Kant was trying "to make metaphysics laughable or spirit-seeing credible."

In conclusion, Mendelssohn was probably the first advocate of the esotericism hypothesis, and Kant the first critic. Kant's letter to Mendelssohn of April 8, 1766, read in conjunction with Mendelssohn's 1767 review of *Dreams*, allows us to conclude that Mendelssohn very likely did accuse Kant of some form of intellectual dishonesty based on the rhetorical features of *Dreams*. In his reply, Kant denies Mendelssohn's charges—on the surface at least. Read carefully, however, his protestations of innocence turn into admissions of guilt. Kant admits to a certain reserve and

circumspection in expressing his views, while insisting on the truthfulness of his statements. Telling the truth, but not the whole truth, is, however, one of the classic techniques of esoteric writing. Kant admits, moreover, to practicing some form of rhetorical *legerdemain* in *Dreams*, but downplays the artfulness of his writing, insists upon his good intentions and good character, and admits only the most trivial and accidental motivations for adopting his unusual style. But if Kant's sincerity has been called into question, we cannot settle the matter by taking his protestations of sincerity as sincere. Mendelssohn, moreover, was practiced in the art of reading between the lines, and the fact that he published substantially the same accusations to which Kant responded in the letter of April 8, 1766, in his review of 1767 might indicate just how believable Mendelssohn found Kant's defense to be. I concur with Mendelssohn's judgment in this matter.

6. Robert E. Butts on the Esotericism Hypothesis

The esotericism hypothesis has also been criticized by Robert E. Butts.⁵⁵ Butts characterizes Broad's suggestion of esotericism as "a questionable sociological explanation of Kant's reasons for writing *Träume* as he did" (Butts, 73). He claims that, "Broad's sociological explanation is considerably weakened by imperfections in his efforts to make out the intellectual history of Kant's early concern with questions of spirit location" (Butts, 74). Butts also claims that filling in the gaps of Broad's account, "provide[s] a decisive refutation of Broad's sociological account of Kant's interest in the paranormal" (Butts, 82).

Butts surely does find gaps in Broad's account. Broad's essay is based solely on the Letter to Charlotte von Knobloch and *Dreams*, which he claims are Kant's *only* treatments of Swedenborg (Broad, 116). In a later appendix to his essay, Broad also discusses the evidence of *Metaphysik L1*, but gives no sign of being aware of Kant's treatment of Swedenborg in the other sets of *Lectures on Metaphysics*, in the *Reflexionen*, in the *Anthropology* and *The Conflict for the Faculties*, and in his letters to Mendelssohn.

Butts's case against Broad, however, rests upon only one of these texts: Kant's letter to Mendelssohn of February 7, 1766, which I have quoted above. According to the letter, Kant sent seven copies of *Dreams* to Mendelssohn in Berlin, one for Mendelssohn, the others for Court Preacher

Sack, Councillor of the Consistory Spalding, Provost Süssmilch, Professor Lambert, Professor Sulzer, and Professor Formey. As Butts remarks, "This must count as an impressive array of highly-placed individuals to whom to send copies of an anonymously authored book. If Kant had really intended to keep a secret of his authorship...he did nothing that I could learn to promote that secret. Instead, he seems actively to have sought reactions from prominent churchmen, academic politicians, and quite important philosophical scholars" (Butts, 76). Elsewhere, Butts writes: "[A]lthough the book appeared anonymously, Kant took special pains to get it into the hands of just those official and semiofficial persons who could have done him the most harm, and not to try to hide the authorship of the book from them" (Butts, 72). Butts concludes, therefore, that Kant's anonymity and stylistic peculiarities were not dictated by the desire to hide his interest in Swedenborg from the establishment. This, he claims, constitutes a "decisive refutation of Broad's sociological account."

But does it? I think not. Butts does not refute Broad's position; he refutes only a misrepresentation of it. Butts represents Broad as claiming that the purpose of Kant's anonymity was to hide his authorship of the book from his colleagues in Berlin. Given this description of Broad's view, it is refuted by the fact that Kant sent copies of *Dreams* to his Berlin colleagues. Broad, however, has different opinion:

But could Kant possibly have hoped to preserve his anonymity? This seems to be almost incredible...I can only suggest that the conventions of the time and place permitted a *privat dozent* [sic] to flirt with this disreputable subject, provided that he made an honest man of himself by maintaining the form of anonymity and by adopting a sufficiently bantering and condescending tone towards the alleged phenomena and the persons to whom they were narrated. If these were the conditions, Kant certainly complied with them. (Broad, 127)

Broad does not, in short, think that Kant's anonymity was to hide his identity, but rather a "form" or "convention" signalling his submission to the prevailing standards of academic respectability. On this account of the meaning of Kant's anonymity, there is nothing inconsistent about sending copies to members of the religious and intellectual establishments. Butts

surely overlooked this aspect of Broad's account, for although he quotes the passage from Broad given immediately above, he elides the following sentences: "But could Kant possibly have hoped to preserve his anonymity? This seems to be almost incredible..." (Butts, 74).

There is a second problem with Butts's assertion that Broad's esotericism hypothesis is rendered false by Kant's interest in disseminating *Dreams* to prominent clerics and scholars. In lodging his objection, Butts confines his discussion of Kant's alleged esotericism to the question of anonymity, ignoring the stylistic peculiarities of the text. But it is just these stylistic peculiarities that would make it possible for Kant to place his book in the hands of potential persecutors, confident that they would not be able to offer an airtight case against him should they be inclined to react in a hostile manner.

It is worth recalling my thesis regarding the double motivation behind *Dreams*: to communicate a metaphysical teaching and to clear Kant of suspicions of Swedenborgian sympathies. Both of these purposes could be carried out by sending copies of *Dreams* to leading establishment figures, for they were simultaneously the men from whom Kant had the most to fear and the most to hope. In constructing *Dreams* on two levels, Kant gambled on the likelihood that any like-minded recipients would be able to understand his esoteric teaching while the unsympathetic would be content with the exoteric one, on the reasonable assumption that those who might expect to gain something from a book on Swedenborg would read it carefully, while those inclined to be dismissive would give the book only a desultory glance.

Butts offers his own alternatives to Broad's explanations of why Kant published in the first place, why Kant published anonymously, and why Kant adopted his peculiar style. Butts accepts at face value Kant's claim that he wrote *Dreams* to answer the prying inquiries of friends. Butts is, however, rightly suspicious of this reason. Kant was a very busy man. He did not have the time to waste on writing a book simply for the purpose of satisfying idle inquiries. Therefore, Butts draws a distinction between Kant's flimsy occasion and his much more substantive purpose for publishing. As Butts writes: "The good reason Kant had for writing *Träume* is simply that it is a book on metaphysics embodying his continued interest in locating the methodological limits of empirical knowledge. Given that

context, Swedenborg's claims, precisely because they were made by a well-connected scientist who was himself of widespread repute, were exactly the kinds of claims to take serious as test cases..." (Butts, 72). Elsewhere, he writes: "Kant took the message of his book very seriously and wanted that book to be regarded as an important contribution to his studies into the foundations of metaphysics" (Butts, 76). And still elsewhere: "[Kant] took both Swedenborg's ponderous science of the supersensible and his reputation as a storied clairvoyant to be threats to ... [his philosophical method] as a scientific manifesto and as ultimate protector of public morality. Kant's interests as revealed in *Träume* are soteriological in a suitably secular sense" (Butts, 77).

I agree with Butts's claim that behind the rhetorical playfulness of *Dreams* is serious business, although I am not wholly convinced by Butts's account of what precisely this business is. What is unsatisfying about Butts's account of Kant's motivations is his failure to raise the question: Why did Kant feel that he had to justify *Dreams* by appealing to flimsy and accidental "occasions," rather than by reference to his serious metaphysical concerns? Why did Kant feel it necessary to veil serious business with playful rhetoric? Why did he hide his purposefulness behind the mask of accidentality?

Butts's alternative explanation for Kant's anonymity is also unsatisfying: "It is one thing to accept authorship of a work dealing with matters of current debate; it is another to want one's name affixed in perpetuity to a hastily written book, one with themes not fully developed, one written in an unscholarly style" (Butts, 73). This explanation is problematic on a number of counts. First, as I have argued above, the claim that *Dreams* was written in haste is not incompatible with Kant's exercise of considerable control over the form and contents of the text, thus Kant's appeal to hasty composition may simply be an attempt to hide his artifice under the cloak of accidentality. The claim that the themes of *Dreams* are not fully worked out is ambiguous. On the one hand, this statement is true of all books, to the extent that they open up questions for further development. On the other hand, it is clearly possible to distinguish between works that are or are not developed enough to be published on their own. *Dreams*, I think, is clearly developed enough to merit publication. The claim that *Dreams* is written in an unscholarly style is true enough, but it explains the enigma of

anonymity by reference to the enigma of style, but leaves the style unexplained. It would, however, be better to explain both enigmas, and better still to explain them both by reference to a single reason, which is one virtue of the esotericism hypothesis.

To be fair, Butts does in fact offer an explanation of Kant's unusual style: "That Kant's style in dealing with spiritualism is partly playful and partly scornful seems to me to present no special problems. It is not easy for a serious philosopher to drive the nails into the hands of a distinguished and popular foreign colleague" (Butts, 81-82). But this explanation is unconvincing, for it is not clear how adding insult to injury would make Kant's task any easier for him. If, as Butts suggests, Kant found it somehow emotionally difficult to devastate Swedenborg's ideas, surely it would have been even harder for him to insult Swedenborg personally as well.

Thus I conclude that the objections of Butts do not constitute insuperable challenges to the thesis that *Dreams* is a piece of esoteric writing.

CONCLUSION

In closing, let me summarize the argument so far. There are six questions that must be answered by any adequate interpretation of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*: Why was Kant willing to take the professional risks of writing about Swedenborg? Why was Kant willing to take the personal risks of writing about Swedenborg? Why was Kant willing to take on the considerable practical difficulties of researching, writing, and publishing a book on Swedenborg? Why did Kant adopt such a puzzling and self-contradictory literary style in *Dreams*? Why did Kant publish *Dreams* anonymously? What explains the puzzling contradictions, both of facts and of evaluations, between *Dreams* and Kant's other discussions of Swedenborg?

I have argued that Kant saw significant truths in Swedenborg's writings. He published *Dreams* both to communicate these ideas and to clear himself of the rumor that he took Swedenborg seriously as a thinker. To accomplish both tasks, he had to write *Dreams* on two levels, an exoteric level which mocks Swedenborg and an esoteric level where he is taken seriously. The distinction between these two levels explains the textual

peculiarities of *Dreams* as well as the contradictions between it and other Kantian texts. I have also argued that the alternative developmental and psychological interpretations of *Dreams* do not adequately answer these six questions. Finally, I have argued that the contrary protestations of Robert Butts and Kant himself do not undermine the esotericism hypothesis.

I have also introduced three questions that need to be answered by any esoteric reading of a text: Why did the author publish in the first place? Why did the author conceal his ideas? How, precisely, does the author both conceal and reveal his ideas? I have answered the first two questions above. I have answered the third at length in my doctoral dissertation. In the sequel to this article, I shall offer a more concise case study of Kant's esoteric strategies, by turning to *Dreams* itself and discussing its accounts of its origins and aims.

Notes

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), 92, p. 56.

2 Although it first appeared in late 1765, *Dreams* bears the publication year 1766—a standard practice of publishers to this day. The standard edition of *Dreams* is Immanuel Kant, *Träume eines Geistesehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, in *Immanuel Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., ed. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (vols. 1–22), the Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (vol. 23), and the Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (vols. 24–29) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1902–), henceforth cited as AK followed by the volume and page numbers. *Träume* is found in AK 2: 315–73.

The most useful German edition is *Träume eines Geistesehers erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*, ed. Rudolf Malter (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976), which contains valuable supplementary materials which illuminate the composition and reception of *Dreams* (henceforth cited as Malter). The most useful English translation appears in the Cambridge Edition of The Works of Immanuel Kant: *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, in *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, ed. and tr. David Walford with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) (henceforth cited as Walford).

3 See Gregory R. Johnson, *A Commentary on Kant's Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2000), ch. 1.

4 Beiser, "Kant's Intellectual Development: 1746–1781," *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 47. Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Work*, tr. James Haden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 94; Keith Ward, *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 42; Paul Guyer, "Introduction: The Starry Heavens and the Moral Law," *Cambridge Companion to Kant*, 10; and Robert E. Butts, *Kant and the Double-Government Methodology: Supersensibility and Method in Kant's Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984), 88–9.

5 On esotericism, see John Toland (1670–1722): “Clidophorus, or of the *Exoteric and Esoteric Philosophy*, that is, of the *External and Internal Doctrines* of the Ancients: the one open and public, accommodated to the popular Prejudices and the established Religions; the other private and secret, wherein, to the few capable and discrete, was taught the TRUTH stripped of all disguises,” in *Tetradymus* (London, 1720). See also Toland’s *Pantheisticon: or the Form of Celebrating a Socratic Society* (London, 1751), esp. 96–99. See also Paul J. Bagley, “On the Practice of Esotericism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 231–47; David Berman, “Deism, Immortality, and the Art of Theological Lying,” in *Deism, Masonry, and the Enlightenment: Essays Honoring Alfred Owen Aldridge*, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987); Julian Hibbert, “On the Supposed Necessity of Deceiving the Vulgar,” *The Library of Reason*, no. 4 (1851): 1–7; and Leo Strauss, “Exoteric Teaching” and “On Classical Political Philosophy,” in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), “On a Forgotten Kind of Writing,” in *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” in his *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

6 On Mendelssohn’s esotericism, see Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany: A Fragment* (1834), tr. John Snodgrass (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1882), 95–96; see also Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), esp. 274–81, where Arkush argues convincingly that Kant was clearly aware of Mendelssohn’s use of esoteric writing.

7 Mendelssohn, Review of *Träume*, Malter 118, my tr.

8 Oetinger to Swedenborg, December 4, 1766, in *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 2 vols., ed. and tr. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1948–55), 629.

9 Tafel’s opinion is reported by Frank Sewall in Appendix IV, “Kant’s Private and Public Opinion of Swedenborg,” in Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, tr. E.F. Goerwitz, ed. Frank Sewall (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1900), 162.

10 Cassirer, *Kant’s Life and Work*, 78–9.

11 J.N. Findlay, *Kant and the Transcendental Object: A Hermeneutic Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 76.

12 Giorgio Tonelli, “Kant’s Ethics as a Part of Metaphysics: A Possible Newtonian Suggestion? with Some Comments on Kant’s ‘Dreams of a Seer’ [sic],” in *Philosophy and the Civilizing Arts: Essays Presented to Herbert W. Schneider*, ed. Craig Walton and John P. Anton (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974), 243.

13 Walford, 453, n46.

14 Richard L. Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason: On the Moral Foundation of Kant’s Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 110.

15 T.K. Seung, *Kant’s Platonic Revolution in Moral and Political Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 19.

16 C.D. Broad, “Immanuel Kant and Psychical Research,” in his *Religion, Philosophy and Psychological Research*, 2nd ed. (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 116. Henceforth cited in the text as Broad.

17 Walford also speculates that, “The reason for the anonymity was probably the fact that Kant was actually embarrassed at having published on such a theme so lacking in academic respectability” (Walford, lxviii).

18 Gottlieb Florschütz, “Swedenborg’s Hidden Influence on Kant,” part 1, tr. Durban Odhner and Kurt Nemitz, *The New Philosophy* 96 (Jan.–June 1993): 177–225, 191.

19 On the alliance of the Enlightenment and ecclesiastical leaders in attacking Swedenborg’s ideas and followers in Sweden, see Inge Jonsson, *Emanuel Swedenborg*, tr. Catherine Djurklou (New York: Twayne, 1971), 184.

20 Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Delights of Wisdom Concerning Conjugal [sic] Love, after which follows the Pleasures of Insanity Concerning Scortatory Love*, tr. Alfred Acton (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1953). On the circumstances of the publication of *Conjugal Love*, see Acton's Preface to his translation.

21 Gottlieb Florschütz, "Swedenborg's Hidden Influence on Kant," part 1, *The New Philosophy* 96 (Jan.–June): 191. On the heresy trials of Swedenborg's followers, see Cyriel Odhner Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1981), ch. 41.

22 On Rousseau, see J.H. Huizinga, *Rousseau: The Self-Made Saint* (New York: Viking, 1976), chs. 16-17; Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-1754* (New York: Norton, 1982), ch. 12; and Maurice Cranston, *The Noble Savage: Jean Jacques Rousseau, 1754-1762* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), chs. 10 and 12.

23 Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, tr. Richard Robinson, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934).

24 Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1923), Introduction, I. Textual.

25 Keith Ward, *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics*, 35.

26 Brief an Moses Mendelssohn, April 8, 1766, AK 10:69–73; in English, see Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-99*, tr. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 54–57, esp. 55. (Henceforth cited in text as Zweig.)

27 J.F. Immanuel Tafel, *Supplement zu Kants Biographie und zu den Gesamtausgaben seiner Werke, oder die von Kant gegebenen Erfahrungsbeweise für die Unsterblichkeit und fortdauernde Wiedererinnerungskraft der Seele, durch Nachweisung einer grossen Fälschung in ihrer Unverfälschtheit wieder hergestellt — nebst einer Würdigung seiner früheren Bedenken gegen — sowie seiner späteren Vernunftsbeweise für die Unsterblichkeit* (Stuttgart: Becker and Mueller, 1845). On the controversies surrounding the dating of the letter, see Kuno Fischer, *Immanuel Kant und seine Lehre*, vol. 1, *Entstehung und Grundlegung der kritischen Philosophie*, vol. 4 of Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1869), 289–92; Broad, 117; and Manolesco, 177–82. The Manolesco text is from his translation of Karl Kehrbach's Vorrede to his edition of the A-edition of Immanuel Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (Halle, 1880).

28 Walford, lxviii.

29 On the *Metaphysik Herder* and *Nachträge Herder*, as well as the other references to Swedenborg in Kant's *Lectures in Metaphysics*, see my papers "Kant on Swedenborg in the *Lectures on Metaphysics: The 1760s–1770s*," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1996):1–38 and "Kant on Swedenborg in the *Lectures on Metaphysics: The 1780s–1790s*," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1997):11–39.

30 Brief an Charlotte von Knobloch, August 10, 1763, AK 10:43–8; *Metaphysik Herder*, AK 28,1:114–14, 121–2; *Nachträge Herder* (1763–64), AK 28.1:897–8, 905–6.

31 *Reflexion* no. 1486, AK 15: 710 and *Reflexion* no. 5026, AK 18: 65.

32 *Metaphysik L1* (1770s), AK 28.1: 298–9.

33 *Fragment einer späteren Rationaltheologie nach Baumbach* (1789–90 or 1790–91), AK 28.2,2:1324–5.

34 *Metaphysik L2* (1790–91), 28.2,1: 593; *Metaphysik K2* (1791–92 or 1792–93), 28.2,1:768; *Metaphysik Dohna* (1792–93), AK 28.2,1: 689.

35 *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, AK 7:46; *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, AK 7:191.

36 John Manolesco, Introduction to *Dreams of a Spirit Seer by Immanuel Kant and Other Related Writings [sic]*, ed. and tr. John Manolesco (New York: Vantage Press, 1969), 15; cf. 23–24.

37 Manolesco, 15–16.

38 Monique David-Menard and Hartmut and Gernot Böhme also offer psychological explanations for Kant's strident tone in *Dreams*. They argue that *Dreams* in particular, and the critical philosophy as a whole, is Kant's essentially neurotic attempt to stave off and contain the "other of reason." They do not, however, offer an explanation for the differing tones of the letter and *Dreams*. See Monique David-Menard, *La folie dans la raison pure: Kant lecteur de Swedenborg* (Paris: Vrin, 1990) and Hartmut and Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft: Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), esp. 250–70.

39 Mendelssohn, Review of *Träume*, Malter 118.

40 Brief an Moses Mendelssohn, February 7, 1766, AK 20: 69; my tr.

41 Mendelssohn, Review of *Träume*, Malter 118, my tr.

42 See n6, above.

43 Alexandre Kojève, "Christianity and Communism," tr. Hugh Gillis, *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 19 (1991–92): 192–95, 194.

44 Michel de Montaigne, "Of Presumption," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, tr. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 491.

45 *Dreams*, AK 2: 318; Walford, 306; tr. Walford, modified; cf. Goerwitz, 39.

46 *Dreams*, AK 2: 367; Walford, 353; tr. Walford; cf. Goerwitz, 112.

47 Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and his Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 315, n17.

48 Johan Hamann, Aus einem Brief an Moses Mendelssohn (6 November 1764), Malter, 111, my tr.

49 Kant's predictions about the completion date of his own works were notoriously inaccurate.

50 Quoted in Walford, lxvii; tr. Walford.

51 John Richardson, "Sketch of the Author's [i.e., Kant's] Life and Writings," in *Metaphysical Works of the Celebrated Immanuel Kant*, ed. and tr. John Richardson (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1836). Richardson's sketch is reprinted in *Four Neglected Essays by Immanuel Kant*, ed. Stephen Palmquist, tr. John Richardson (Hong Kong: Philopsychy Press, 1994), 94, n1.

52 *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, A xviii; in English: *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), 12–13.

53 *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, B xxxiv; Kemp Smith, 31.

54 *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, B xxxv.–xxxvi.; Kemp Smith, 32–33; cf. A x.; Kemp Smith, 8–9. On Kant's critique and parody of *Popularphilosophie* in *Dreams*, see my *Commentary*, ch. 8.

55 Robert E. Butts, *Kant and the Double-Government Methodology*, henceforth cited as Butts. Another recent, but less substantive, critique of the esotericism hypothesis is found in Alison Laywine, *Kant's Early Metaphysics and the Origins of the Critical Philosophy* (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview, 1993). See my essay, "Kant's Early Metaphysics and the Origins of the Critical Philosophy," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 11, no. 2 (May 1999): 29–54, esp. 35–43.