

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Swedenborg's Hidden Influence on Kant: Swedenborg and Occult Phenomena in the View of Kant and Schopenhauer (Swedenborgs verborgene Wirkung auf Kant: Swedenborg und die okkulten Phänomene aus der Sicht von Kant und Schopenhauer)** by Gottlieb Florschütz. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1992, 218 pp. n.p.<sup>1</sup>

Based on a doctoral dissertation defended at the University of Kiel in 1991, Gottlieb Florschütz's book is the most substantial contribution to date on the longstanding question of the relationship of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) to the theosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Swedenborg was a highly accomplished Swedish philosopher, scientist, and inventor, as well as a visionary, theologian, and clairvoyant. To the modern disenchanted mind Swedenborg seems an unlikely influence on any philosopher, much less the sober Kant. But in 1762 and 1763, Kant undertook extensive researches on Swedenborg's most famous clairvoyant feats, which are known as the affairs of the Stockholm Fire, the Lost Receipt, and the Queen's Secret.

The Stockholm Fire affair took place on July 19, 1759, in Gothenburg, which is 300 English miles from Stockholm. There Swedenborg astounded the town by clairvoyantly reporting that a fire had broken out in Stockholm in the Südermalm (the southern suburb). He then reported on the progress and the extinction of the fire, as well as the damage it caused, and the details of his reports were later confirmed by mounted couriers, who had been dispatched from Stockholm to Gothenburg to report on the fire.

The affair of the Lost Receipt took place sometime in the Spring of 1761. Madame de Marteville, widow of Count Louis de Marteville, the Dutch Ambassador to Sweden, who died on April 25, 1760, had been served with a bill by a goldsmith for a silver service her husband had acquired before his death. The widow was certain that the bill had already been paid but could find no receipt, so she asked Swedenborg to contact the spirit of her dead husband about the matter. Swedenborg reported that her husband's ghost had told him that the receipt would be found in a secret drawer in a cabinet in the Ambassador's room. The widow followed Swedenborg's instructions, discovered the secret drawer, and found the receipt inside it.

Finally, the affair of the Queen's Secret refers to a series of events that culminated on November 15, 1761. The Queen in question was Louisa Ulrica (1720–1782) Queen of Sweden, the sister of Frederic the Great of Prussia and the wife of Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp and later King of

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<sup>1</sup>Florschütz's book has been serialized in an English translation by Kurt Nemitz and J. Durban Odhner as "Swedenborg's Hidden Influence on Kant," in seven issues of *The New Philosophy: The Journal of the Swedenborg Scientific Association*, 96–99 (January–June 1993 to January–June 1996).

Sweden. There are many versions of the affair of the Queen's Secret, some of them quite different, but most of them agree on the following facts. Sometime in November of 1761, Queen Louisa Ulrica asked Swedenborg to contact the spirit of her younger brother, Prince Augustus William, Crown Prince of Prussia from 1744 to his death on June 12, 1758. After an indeterminate period of time, Swedenborg returned on November 15, 1761. In the company of the Queen's court, Swedenborg conveyed a message to the Queen from her dead brother. Swedenborg relayed the message in such a way that only the Queen could hear it, either by whispering it in her ear or by taking her aside from the assembled courtiers. The visible effect of the message was, however, apparent to all. The Queen was thunderstruck, turned pale, and nearly fainted. She claimed that only God and her brother could have known the secret Swedenborg had revealed to her.

Kant spent a great deal of time and trouble in researching these strange events. He wrote letters to a Danish friend and former student who had heard the details of the Queen's Secret; he then sent a letter directly to Swedenborg in the care of an English merchant with business in Stockholm; finally, Kant employed a second English merchant, a close friend with extensive business interests in Sweden, to interview Swedenborg himself, as well as witnesses to his clairvoyant feats in both Stockholm and Gothenburg. Kant summarizes his researches in his letter of August 10, 1763, to Charlotte von Knobloch to whom he states that he is quite convinced of the genuineness of Swedenborg's clairvoyant powers. He also mentions how he was awaiting the arrival of copies of Swedenborg's books with great anticipation. The tone of Kant's remarks about Swedenborg change drastically, however, in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer, Explained by Dreams of Metaphysics*, Kant's 1766 book on Swedenborg, which is filled with mocking and derisive comments on the Swedish visionary. However, the surviving student notes on Kant's lectures on metaphysics tell a very different story. Kant discussed Swedenborg's account of the Spirit World in his unit on "rational psychology" for 30 years, from 1763 to 1793, and here the tone of Kant's remarks are respectful, and even at times complimentary.<sup>2</sup>

The first part of Florschütz's book offers an extensive narrative of Kant's encounter with Swedenborg and the aftermath, an account of Kant's discussions of Swedenborg in the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* and the *Lectures on Metaphysics*, and extensive comparisons between Kant's statements and Swedenborg's parallel teachings. The parallels are impressive, particularly in matters discussed in the *Lectures on Metaphysics*. Florschütz establishes a good *prima facie* case for a positive, though hidden, influence of Swedenborg on Kant's metaphysics and moral philosophy.

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<sup>2</sup>For a complete account of Kant's researches into Swedenborg's clairvoyant powers, see my Ph.D. dissertation: Gregory R. Johnson, *A Commentary on Kant's Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (The Catholic University of America, 1999). For complete translations and detailed commentaries on the discussions of Swedenborg in Kant's lectures on metaphysics, see Gregory R. Johnson, "Kant on Swedenborg in the *Lectures on Metaphysics*: The 1760s–1770s," *Studia Swedenborgiana*, 10, 1 (October 1996): 1–38 and "Kant on Swedenborg in the *Lectures on Metaphysics*: The 1780s–1790s," *Studia Swedenborgiana*, 10, 2 (May 1997): 11–39.

I have two lines of criticism. The first concerns how Florschütz handles his materials and his apparent lack of a larger view or context within which to evaluate these materials. (1) Florschütz explains away the negative tone of the *Dreams* book simply by claiming that Kant changed his mind for awhile. He does not explore the possibility suggested by the interesting fact that Kant's *public, published* comments on Swedenborg are negative, but his *private, unpublished* comments are positive: namely, the possibility that in *Dreams* Kant is simply *dissembling* his interest in Swedenborg in order to avoid the censorship and persecution that could be expected from an endorsement of Swedenborg's controversial and heretical ideas. (2) Florschütz also opens himself to the objection that Kant, in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*, does not necessarily speak for himself, but instead dialectically plays many positions off of one another, while keeping his own views in the background. (3) Florschütz makes no attempt to determine whether or not Kant was right to grant so much credence to Swedenborg's apparent clairvoyant feats; he does not seriously reflect upon, even if only to dismiss, the possibility of fraud. (4) Finally, the reader will find Florschütz's argument rather rambling and hard to follow on the first reading.

My second line of criticism deals with the argument of Florschütz's book. In my view, there are six aspects of Kant's thought which emerge only after his encounter with Swedenborg and that bear traces of Swedenborg's positive influence.

First, Swedenborg offers a dualistic account of the cosmos as being divided into both spiritual and material worlds, the spiritual world being governed by "pneumatic" laws, the material world being governed by physical laws. More precisely, Swedenborg offers a "dual aspect" metaphysics, which claims that all beings exist simultaneously in the spiritual and the material worlds, that all beings have both spiritual and material aspects, and that even disembodied spirits exist in relationships of "correspondence" to material objects. These claims correspond precisely to Kant's dual aspect metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which claims that all being exist in both the phenomenal (= material) and noumenal (= spiritual) worlds.

Second, Swedenborg's account of his spiritual visions as spatiotemporal representations of a non-spatiotemporal reality accommodated to the requirements of a finite intellect was a decisive influence on the development of a central tenet of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: the thesis of the ideality of space and time, which took shape in the years 1765–1770. If one grants that there are genuine cases of clairvoyant "remote viewing," in which a person has knowledge of something which is too distant in space and time to be known by normal sensory means, or by technological extensions of normal sensory means, and then one seeks to explain how this is possible, it is very tempting to follow Kant in arguing that space and time are not transcendently real, but instead are the transcendently ideal "forms" that make sensuous intuition possible, and that the distances of space and time are therefore not

impediments to an extrasensory form of awareness. [Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who is the topic of the second part of Florschütz’s book, makes explicit use of Kant’s principle of the ideality of space and time to explain the possibility of paranormal phenomena.]

Third, Swedenborg claims that since man straddles the divide between the spiritual and the material worlds, we are subject to both spiritual and material laws. Swedenborg identifies the laws of the spirit world with the moral law. The moral law enters our ordinary consciousness as an “influx” from the spiritual world. For Swedenborg, the moral life is the task of living in the material world by the laws of the spirit world. Unfortunately, however, the laws which govern our material bodies frequently contradict the moral law. Therefore, the moral life requires a constant struggle to master the passions and subordinate them to the moral law. We must, furthermore, be always careful to follow the moral law for the right reason. Swedenborg claims that our actions are not moral if we follow the moral law for any reasons other than the fact that it is the moral law. These teachings clearly anticipate the central tenets of Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason*, particularly his accounts of the human actor’s divided and conflicted nature, the moral law’s status as an influx from the noumenal to the phenomenal self, and the requirement of acting upon “duty for duty’s sake” if one’s actions are to be truly moral.

Fourth, Swedenborg’s descriptions of the spirit world and its pneumatic laws in the *Arcana Coelestia* are the models for Kant’s accounts of the moral world as a “kingdom of ends” (*Reich der Zwecke*) in the *Groundwork* and of the afterlife in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Indeed, Swedenborg actually refers to the spiritual world as a “kingdom of ends” (*regnum finium*) in the *Arcana Coelestia*, which is the earliest use of this phrase that I can ascertain.

Fifth, Swedenborg’s doctrine of intelligible correspondences between the spiritual and material worlds and his elaborate symbolical interpretations of Scripture motivated what I call Kant’s “hermeneutics.” One of Kant’s goals in the second and third *Critiques*, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, and in various historical essays was to lay the foundation of a hermeneutic which can interpret the moral experiences of obligation and respect, the aesthetic experiences of the beautiful and the sublime, such historical events as the French Revolution, and holy Scripture itself as “signatures” of the noumenal, as phenomenal intimations of a transcendent, intelligible world. At the same time he tried to offer evidences of an intelligible world, Kant hoped to avoid Swedenborg’s lapse into a mystical enthusiasm which replaces intersubjectively available and rationally verified truths with authoritative, oracular opinions.

Sixth, Kant’s attempt to take Swedenborg seriously and to separate the truthful from the fanciful elements of his visions was a significant factor in what might be called Kant’s “anthropological” turn of the early 1760s: Kant’s turn from a theoretical interest in cosmological and metaphysical issues, to a

morally motivated concern with the nature of the human knower and the powers, limits, and manifold derangements of human reason — in part under the influence of Rousseau's critique of the morally and politically corrupting influences of the unbounded exercise of theoretical reason and technical-instrumental rationality uninformed by moral wisdom.

Florschütz discusses only the first two of these topics, and he never fully enters into their inner logic, contenting himself merely with the indication of parallel teachings.

Overall, I find Florschütz's treatment of the Kant–Swedenborg relationship to be more suggestive than conclusive. Even with these criticisms, Florschütz's work is still the place to start for a serious examination of the relationship between Kant and Swedenborg's ideas and mutual influence. This project has much to recommend it, for today the annals of paranormal research are crowded with attempts to carve out a place for paranormal phenomena within the paradigm of modern scientific naturalism, which confines itself to empirical investigations of spatiotemporal phenomena. I suspect, however, that these attempts are doomed to frustration. Thus it is useful to study the reactions of Kant and Schopenhauer to Swedenborg, for their transcendental idealism allows us to find a place for both paranormal phenomena (which transcend space and time) and “normal” phenomena (which fall inside space and time) in a single, comprehensive world-view.

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**North America's Great Ape: The Sasquatch** by John A. Bendernagel. Courtenay, British Columbia (POB 3286, V9N 5N4): Beachcomber Books, 1998, 270 pp., \$25.00, (p). ISBN: 0-9682887-0-7, beachcom@island.net, <http://www.island.net/~johnb/>

Sasquatch (long a, broad a) is a Coast Salish (Amerinds of British Columbia and Washington) word translated as “wildman of the woods” and equivalent to “bigfoot” in the popular press. Two wildmen, Enkidu and Humbaba, are characters in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the first recorded human adventure. Synonymous terms in Chinese, French, and German are *ye ren*, *homme sauvage*, and *wildermann*. A hundred news reports of wildman sightings are found in the North American English press of the 19th century, and thousands — by various names — in the 20th. John Green (personal communication) suggests, on the basis of his four plus decades of cataloging reports, that with Web input included, several hundred sightings a year, at least, are currently reported in North America. Who has best sampled and analyzed this robust, long-standing stream of data? John Bendernagel (broad a).