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Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings edited by Gregory R. Johnson, translated by Gregory R. Johnson and Glenn Alexander Magee. Swedenborg Foundation, 2002. xxvi + 214 pp. \$19.95. ISBN 0-87785-310-X.

Over the last 30 years the traditional interpretation of Kant has come under increasing scrutiny. According to the traditional interpretation, Kant's philosophy establishes a two-fold distinction between things-as-they-appear and things-as-they-are-in-themselves. Some things—the *ding an sich*, freedom, God, the soul—are noumenal and some things—particular manifestations of chocolate cake and sub-Saharan snakes—are phenomenal. With the possible exception of freedom, the noumenal constitutes a realm of things that cannot be known and the phenomenal constitutes a realm of things that can be known. There is thus a strict separation or boundary line between these two realms. The traditional interpretation is also characterized by an exclusively moral explanation of religion and theology. If the Kantian paradigm provides any rational justification for religion and theology, if it allows for anything intelligible to be thought or said about God, such affirmations can only be made, says the traditionalist, on the basis of Kant's practical philosophy.

Gregory Johnson's new book, *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, joins a chorus of recent books challenging traditional assumptions about how to understand Kant's philosophy. Emerging from his own dissertation research on Kant's infamous pre-critical essay "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer" (henceforth "Spirit-Seer"), Johnson's book combines the fruit of his research with substantial translations of most of Kant's writings relevant to the debate over the meaning and importance of his encounter with the work of Emanuel Swedenborg. (Swedenborg, of course, is famous for his contributions to numerous fields of inquiry—from science and politics to philosophy and mysticism.) Also in Johnson's book are a number of other documents, including important letters written by Kant's friends and acquaintances related to this issue. Taken together, Johnson's commentary on the current debate surrounding Kant and Swedenborg and translations of relevant, but not often read, material provide an important and useful contribution to the field of Kant scholarship.

Kant on Swedenborg is divided into four parts. The first is the "Introduction" wherein Johnson spells out the significance of the book in the ongoing process of researching and interpreting the philosophy of Kant. This involves familiarizing the reader with the central features of the debate surrounding Kant

and Swedenborg, laying out the fruit of his own research on this topic, and justifying the new translations contained within the book. Those who are unfamiliar with the debate in general, and Johnson's work in particular, will find this section particularly helpful. Johnson is concise and clear, and succeeds in establishing the fact that there is more to Kant's position on Swedenborg in "Spirit-Seer" than is traditionally supposed. My sole criticism of this section is that a more thorough interaction with opposing positions, namely, those that see "Spirit-Seer" as Kant's attempt to sever completely the umbilical cord linking his pre-critical metaphysics with his critical philosophy, might have helped bring his arguments into even sharper relief.

The second part of the book offers a new translation of "Spirit-Seer." To this point in time, "Spirit-Seer" has been translated and published in English only three times. In 1992, Cambridge University Press (CUP) published a trustworthy translation by David Walford. What makes Johnson's and Magee's translation unique (as Johnson reminds us) is its inexpensive price relative to the CUP version, and the fact that it brings together nearly all the pertinent supplementary material for the discerning reader/researcher in English to explore the nuances of Kant's attitude toward Swedenborg. Thus we have a thematic collection of translations centered around one consistent problematic in Kant interpretation, rather than a collection of Kant's writings devoted to one aspect or another of his critical philosophy. (Thus it may be most useful to those scholars who come to the text with a previous knowledge of the broader issues in Kant's philosophy.) In the third and fourth parts of the book, Johnson includes 17 additional "Letters and Other Writings" and 12 useful "Appendices," respectively. They make for fascinating supplementary reading by presenting a kind of scholarly mystery for the thoughtful reader to unravel.

The traditional way of handling Kant's understanding of Swedenborg is to take the language and tone of "Spirit-Seer" at face value. Such an approach indicates that Kant (under the influence of the newly encountered writings of David Hume) disavowed his earlier intrigue with the Swede's mystical musings and clairvoyant experiences. "Spirit-Seer," on this read, is *prima facie* evidence that Kant held at best an ambivalent view of Swedenborg's written corpus and publicly expounded visions, and at worst a positively antithetical view toward the enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) that Swedenborg represents. It is often pointed out, for instance, that Kant vehemently criticized Swedenborg's account of his supposed mystical experiences for their lack of philosophical rigor, saying that they "contain not a single drop of reason" (2:360). His language is at times harsh and his tone often sarcastic and this too is marshaled as clear and unequivocal support for the traditional understanding of Kant's position.

Nevertheless, there is more to "Spirit-Seer" than mere appearances. We can penetrate to the "noumenal" significance of "Spirit-Seer" by exploring the various documents in his book. Johnson asks essentially three questions to those who advocate a traditional reading: (1) Why did Kant choose to publish "Spirit-

Seer" anonymously? (2) Why does Kant here depart from his notoriously stolid academic prose? (3) Why does Kant vacillate between such extremes of scorn and admiration, indifference and fascination, for Swedenborg's work? Johnson points to the possibility that Kant was "two-faced" in his dealings with Swedenborg—interested as much in career advancement as with being perfectly transparent about his real affinities for a controversial figure like Swedenborg. Johnson proceeds to forward six layers of evidence for Kant's hidden attitude of indebtedness toward and identification with Swedenborg. This sets the stage nicely for the translations that follow and encourages readers to seek to unravel the mystery of this indebtedness for themselves. Johnson's intention in bringing these disparate sources together into one book is to give the reader ample access to an array of writings thought to support his thesis, namely, that there exists an unacknowledged "hidden debt" in Kant's work to the writings of the Swedish mystic.

Admittedly, the whole debate over whether or not (and, if so, to what extent) Kant secretly held a positive view of Swedenborg's ideas appears at first blush to dangle on the outer extremities of Kant research. Traditionalists are quick to point out, for instance, that Kant late in life disavowed his pre-Dissertation writings by not allowing his biographer to include them in an edition of his collected writings. This fits well with a traditional interpretation of the first *Critique* with its supposed destruction of metaphysics, and with an interpretation of "Spirit-Seer" as a scathing attack on the work of Swedenborg. Despite appearances, however, Johnson's work fits well with recent trends that challenge the myopic nature of these traditional readings. What is particularly important about this work is that it exposes the hidden roots of Kant's interest in the metaphysical without denying the critical distance from the excesses of mysticism that Kant clearly advocates in "Spirit-Seer" and his subsequent critical philosophy. Johnson's work joins that of du Prel, Florschütz, Manolesco, and Palmquist in making a convincing case that there is more going on in this publication than has been often thought.

Of course, Johnson's choice of which texts and letters to include in this volume is itself a kind of interpretation and may perhaps be regarded as a critical advocating of metaphysically affirmative readings of Kant. This provides my one criticism (or pseudo-criticism) of the volume, namely, that there is no clear indication given, other than the fact that they all have something to say about Swedenborg, for why these particular texts were chosen. Nevertheless, Johnson has now made contiguous most of the textual ground over which this continuing interpretive battle must be fought, and this is no mean service. As far as the translations themselves are concerned, Johnson's and Magee's work is lucid and readable. At no point is the reader aware of the intense amount of mediation that goes into a translation of this kind, especially with a writer like Kant, prone as he is to endless qualification and insightful complication. Kant on Swedenborg is of great interest to the scholar who sees in Kant's philosophy the seeds of a theologically affirmative outlook, yet who has not been exposed to the

substantial arguments for positive metaphysical soil in Kant's pre-critical writings.

CHRIS L. FIRESTONE
Trinity College
2065 Half Day Road
Deerfield, Illinois
cfirestone@tiu.edu

Basic Research in Parapsychology by K. R. Rao. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001. 408 pp. \$39.95 (paper). ISBN 0-7864-1008-6.

Parapsychology is a difficult subject for the interested novice to become familiar with. Few university libraries subscribe to any of the main journals in the field (fewer still take all of them) and none of these periodicals is readily available through full-text subscription services such as Science Direct. Hopefully this latter will be addressed in time. The problem of availability is compounded by the discipline's natural inclination to the esoteric—which other subject would have as one of its principal outlets an annual convention Proceedings with a print run so small as to be virtually inaccessible to the general public?

Yet an increasing number of institutions are offering parapsychology courses as part of undergraduate curricula, so that there may be a growing demand for well-written and considered support materials that would encourage a balanced treatment of the evidence. A number of textbooks, such as Irwin's (1999) *Introduction to Parapsychology*, Radin's (1997) *The Conscious Universe*, and Broughton's (1991) *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science* represent admirable attempts to meet that demand, but of course these are necessarily general and can only serve as a substitute for access to original sources. Parapsychology certainly needs an anthology of key journal papers such as Dr K. R. Rao's *Basic Research in Parapsychology*, and this updated and expanded edition must be broadly welcomed.

The book has been substantially increased during revision; from 264 pages to 408, and from 16 chapters describing 15 papers to 19 chapters of 18 papers. The choice of material has also changed somewhat, with some empirical papers making way for summary reviews that allow the collection to cover yet more ground. Nevertheless, I admit that I do not envy Rao's task in reducing the achievements of an experimental science, which according to the author began with Rhine's arrival at Duke in 1927 (though others might place it much earlier) and has consisted of thousands of contributions, to a "representative" collection that takes up fewer than 20 chapters. Any manageable collection of papers must necessarily involve some tough decisions about what to include and what to leave out, and inevitably will not be to the taste of all readers. It would be churlish to point to the omission of one or other favourite paper. However, in