

THE MADNESS HYPOTHESIS

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KURT SIMONS, GUEST EDITOR



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The Madness Hypothesis

As evolution has often been the materialist's alternative hypothesis to the hypothesis of God creating mankind, so madness has been the characterization frequently assigned to experiences otherwise claimed as revelation by those unable or unwilling to accept the possibility of revelation as authentic. The "madness hypothesis" is not of recent invention, but dates back to at least the accusations of this kind laid against Christ (John 10:20, Mark 3:21). In both the evolution and madness hypotheses, it is not difficult to see the hand of Providence, since both these alternatives provide a basis for preservation of free will in spiritual matters, a key axiom of human creation, according to the teachings of Swedenborg's theological writings (*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 2881, *Heaven and Hell*, n. 598, *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine*, n. 143). In other words, both the evolution and madness hypotheses provide alternative explanations for the phenomena involved, so that no one is forced to believe in either creation or revelation due to lack of a different explanation of the pertinent facts.

Swedenborg presents a particularly, indeed perhaps uniquely, daunting challenge to any observer attempting to evaluate the applicability of the madness hypothesis to his claims of revelation. Adequate evaluation requires, at the least, analysis of the entire body of his preparatory and later avowedly revealed body of theological work, which runs, in various editions, to more than 30 volumes of detailed and often ideationally dense prose.¹ To see the man in full context requires the still further investment of intellectual effort necessary to review not only an equally large shelf of pre-theological publications in areas ranging from mining engineering to biology, physics and philosophy—of the political as well as "pure" variety²—but also to become acquainted with the biography of his long and

¹J.K. William-Hogan, "Swedenborg: a biography." In E.J. Brock, E.B. Glenn, C.C. Odhner, J.D. Odhner, C.H. Walker, J.K. William-Hogan (eds.), *Swedenborg and his influence*. (Bryn Athyn, PA: The Academy of the New Church, 1988): 22ff.

²D. Goodenough, "A trust from God. Swedenborg's political thought." In Brock et al., *Influence*, 135–154.

event-packed life.³ And then there is the whole complex record of his transition into the theological period.⁴ Few of even the followers of Swedenborg's teachings have mastered more than a part of this huge body of work. It is thus hardly surprising that few of those interested only in finding support for the madness hypothesis in explaining his work have been willing to attempt more than a first approximation to understanding of all this material. Historical examples of the difficulty of arriving at a simple evaluation are illustrated by the initial enthusiasm for Swedenborg's work, followed by ultimate apparent rejection that in fact appears to disguise ambivalence, of his famous contemporaries, Immanuel Kant,⁵ and, according to Noble,⁶ John Wesley.

There is more than a little irony in the charges of Swedenborg being insane in view of the facts that Swedenborg was both a sufficiently acute student of neuroscience that he arrived at some constructs in that area far ahead of his time⁷ and that he was, as well, fully aware that people would think him insane as a result of his avowed revelatory experiences. For instance, Count von Höpken⁸ records that,

I once represented, in rather a serious manner, to this venerable man [Swedenborg] that I thought he would do better not to mix his beautiful

³ S. Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic* (New York: Bookman, 1952; reprinted, London: Swedenborg Society, 1981).

⁴ E.g. H.Lj. Odhner, "Emanuel Swedenborg. The relation of his personal development to his work as a revelator." *New Church Life* 85 (1965): 6–13, 55–62; E. Sandstrom, "Swedenborg's preparation as to the will." *New Church Life* 91 (1971): 7–17.

⁵ G. Florschütz, "Swedenborg's hidden influence on Kant." *The New Philosophy* 96 (1993): 171–225; 97 (1994): 347–396; 97 (1994): 461–498; 98 (1995): 99–108; 98 (1995): 229–258; 99 (1996): 341–385; G.R. Johnson, "The kinship of Kant and Swedenborg." *The New Philosophy* 99 (1996): 407–423.

⁶ S. Noble S. *An Appeal in behalf of news of the eternal world and state, and the doctrines of faith and life held by the body of Christians who believe that a New Church is signified (in the Revelation, chap. XXI) by the New Jerusalem: including answers to all principal objections.* (London, 10th ed., 1881): 236ff.

⁷ Charles G. Gross, "Emanuel Swedenborg: A neuroscientist before his time." *The Neuroscientist* 3 (1997): 142–147.

⁸ Rev. Erik Sandstrom, Sr. writes that "Count von Höpken was one of the most admired Swedes of his time. He was one of the founders of the Royal Academy of Sciences and became its first secretary, was a director of the Swedish Academy of Belle Lettres ("Vitterhetsakademien"), became a councilor of state (member of the government), and for nine years held the post of President of the Chancery (equivalent to Prime Minister). This man was an admirer of Swedenborg's." (Personal communication, July 1998).

writings with so many *memorable relations*, or things heard and seen in the spiritual world concerning the states of men after death, of which ignorance makes sport and derision. But he answered me, *that this did not depend on him; that he was too old to sport with spiritual things, and too much concerned for his eternal happiness to yield to foolish notions, assuring me, on his hopes of salvation, that imagination produced in him none of his revelations, which were true, and from what he had heard and seen.*⁹

And in another place, where von Höpken raised the same question,

...whether it would not be best for him to keep them to himself, and not publish them to the world? But he answered that *he had orders from the Lord to publish them; and that those who might ridicule him on that account would do him injustice; for, said he, why should I, who am a man in years, render myself ridiculous for fantasies and falsehoods.*¹⁰

Indeed, in the Writings themselves Swedenborg also comments that he foresees that people will think some of the memorable relations “inventions of the imagination,” but makes his famous affirmation that they were “truly seen and heard” and goes on to point out biblical precedents of revelation and question why such revelation should be a “marvel” now, at the commencement of a new dispensation (*True Christian Religion*, n. 851).

More than this, Swedenborg was so far from being a proponent of seeking contact with spirits that he wrote that for people to attempt to do this was outright “attended with danger to their souls” (*Apocalypse Explained*, n. 1182:4, cf. also *Heaven and Hell*, n. 249). Nor is even this the full extent of the irony. Far from being unfamiliar with the concept, Swedenborg wrote extensively of insanity in his theological works, in the context of the state infused into the mind as the result of immersion in evil (e.g. *Arcana Coelestia*, n. 2568). Even more to the point in the present context, he also recorded, with his typical detached meticulousness, his initial spiritual

⁹ R.L. Tafel RL (ed.) *Documents concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg* (London, 1877), Vol. II, Document 252, p. 409. (Rev. Sandstrom suggests that the italicized statements probably indicate underlining in von Höpken’s original letter.)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 416.

experiences, in what has been published as the *Journal of Dreams*, despite some of those experiences ranging from embarrassing to what could be construed as evidence of madness. The irony here lies in the fact that, while Swedenborg wrote this material privately, he nonetheless must have known it could later be used as evidence against his sanity, yet he left it intact for posterity. Was this yet another instance of supporting free will, of providing that alternative explanation of a non-revelatory source of Swedenborg's—or God's—otherwise formidable theological system?

The temptation of any supporter of Swedenborg is to comment, with the Rev. Thomas Hartley, a friend of Swedenborg's, that,

If to write many large volumes on the most important of all subjects with unvaried consistency, to reason accurately, to give proofs of astonishing memory all the way [*Ed:* such as , in Noble's words, "the numerous references to other parts of his works"¹¹]; and if hereto be joined propriety and dignity of character in all the relative duties of Christian life; if all this can be reconciled with the definition of madness, why here is an end of all distinction between sane and insane, between wisdom and folly.¹²

Yet, in the final analysis, it seems more pertinent, not to say objective, to come full circle back to that question of interpretation, in free will, of just what Swedenborg's experience really was. In a quote also used to conclude one of the most sophisticated attempts yet made to "diagnose" Swedenborg's mental state,¹³ Swedenborg in a note to Cuno writes,

Read, if you please, what has been written in my latest work, *The True Christian Religion*, concerning the mysteries disclosed by the Lord through

¹¹ S. Noble S. *An Appeal*, 237.

¹² T. Hartley T, in Tafel, *Documents*, Vol. II, Document 259, no. 17, p. 384.

¹³ Elizabeth Foote-Smith and Timothy J. Smith, "Historical note. Emanuel Swedenborg." *Epilepsia* 37 (1996): 211–218, reprinted in this issue.

me, his servant, and afterward draw your own conclusion—but from reason—concerning my revelation.¹⁴

The intent of the present issue of *The New Philosophy* is to explore the madness hypothesis in greater detail, with the hope that the reader may find some assistance to “afterward draw your own conclusion.” □

¹⁴ Quoted in Sigstedt, *Swedenborg Epic*, 420.

HENRY MAUDSLEY ON SWEDENBORG'S MESSIANIC PSYCHOSIS[†]

John Johnson

Background. Creativity, religiosity and madness have long been thought to be aetiologically interrelated.

Method. Henry Maudsley's little known pathography of the 17th century Swedish philosopher and polymath, Emanuel Swedenborg, was examined.

Results. Swedenborg developed a messianic psychosis in middle life, considered by Maudsley to be a monomania, possibly due to epilepsy. Many of Swedenborg's contemporaries thought of him, however, as a religious eccentric. Under criticism from Swedenborg's followers, Maudsley avoided further reference to Swedenborg, and the pathography was lost from view.

Conclusions. Renewed interest is deserved in the contentious issues of the nature of religiosity and its relationship to psychotic experience.

British Journal of Psychiatry (1994), 165, 690–691.

Henry Maudsley (1869) wrote a controversial pathography of Swedenborg, proposing that his religious mystical experiences were psychotic in origin. This provoked violent criticism of himself and an angry response from Swedenborg's disciples. When a new edition of his *Pathology of Mind* appeared in 1895, all reference to Swedenborg's psychosis, present in the previous edition of 1879, had been omitted; Maudsley had presumably submitted to the pressures of Swedenborg's followers.

PATHOGRAPHY

The pathography was based upon a biography of Swedenborg by White (1867). He did not express any opinions about Swedenborg's mental state,

[†] Permission to reproduce this article was kindly granted by the Publication Department of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, London. It was originally published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* (1994): 165: 690–691.

apart from the single statement "There is no denying that in 1743, when Swedenborg was introduced into the Spirit World, he was for a while insane."

Swedenborg was born in 1688 into a deeply religious family; his father, a Professor of Theology, later became Bishop of Skara. After completing his PhD at the University of Uppsala, Swedenborg toured European universities, writing treatises on a wide variety of topics from algebra to cosmology. He gained the popular reputation of the "Swedish Aristotle." In 1724 he declined the Chair of Mathematics at Uppsala, and spent the next 12 years writing his monumental *Principia*.

In 1744 there was a dramatic change in Swedenborg's life, which Maudsley saw as "a morbid development." He abandoned all scientific interests and claimed that he had been admitted to the spirit world and had developed the power to talk with angels. Maudsley asserted that Swedenborg's subsequent history is that of a "learned and ingenious madman." Swedenborg wrote a diary of his dreams and ecstatic visions, and his spiritual interpretation of them. In 1744, while on a visit to London, he had an acute psychotic episode during which he proclaimed he was the Messiah and had come to be crucified for the Jews. He locked himself in his room for two days, finally emerging foaming around the mouth and stammering. Maudsley thought this was "a fit" and attributed it to epilepsy. Swedenborg feared he would be suffocated by spirits during sleep, and that alien influences would incite him to steal and commit suicide. He had hallucinations of taste and smell, and somatic hallucinations when he felt his hair was a multitude of snakes; he expressed a paranoid system of ideas about the Quakers and what he regarded as their obscene rites.

By July 1745, Swedenborg had devoted himself entirely to that

"sacred office to which the Lord himself has called me...his unworthy servant in a personal appearance in the year 1743; to converse with Spirits and Angels and to hear and see things in another life which are astonishing, which have never come to the knowledge of any man nor come into his imagination."

He maintained that the Lord Jesus Christ had made through him His second advent for the institution of the Church of the New Jerusalem, described in Revelations. From 1749 to 1771 he wrote thirty volumes in Latin, including his famous *Arcana Coelestia* (Heavenly Secrets).

Swedenborg lived a solitary life in Stockholm, and it was said he never washed or brushed his clothes, maintaining that no dirt would adhere to them. He attributed his persistent toothache to possession by "evil Spirits," insisting that the devil had entered his brain and was attempting to kill him; he could often be heard shouting at his accursed "evil Spirits" at night. At other times he was accessible and affable to visitors, but always refused to see women alone. In 1772, he visited London again, where he died at the age of 84. His body was eventually buried in Uppsala Cathedral in 1908. Swedenborg never proselytized his beliefs, although his writings about his unique experiences in the spirit world were, after his death, responsible for the foundation of the Church of the New Jerusalem, which was established in London in 1780. His teachings have appealed to a distinguished group of followers, such as Blake, Balzac, Baudelaire, Emerson, Strindberg and Yeats. Nisbet (1891) concluded his study of Swedenborg in *The Insanity of Genius* by stating cynically that Swedenborg conversed with the inhabitants of all the planets, except Uranus and Neptune, which unfortunately for his pretensions, had not then been discovered.

DISCUSSION

Maudsley considered that Swedenborg suffered an attack of "acute mania" between 1743 and 1744, followed by "chronic mania." This persisted for the rest of his life, and he was dominated by revelatory experiences and the conviction that he was the Messiah and the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Messianic delusions of this type are common in acute schizophrenic psychoses, and were described by Jaspers (1959) under the heading of 'cosmic experiences'. Jaspers (1959), in common with Lewis (1961), was in no doubt that Swedenborg had a schizophrenic illness. Kleist (1928) considered revelatory psychoses under the heading of a

marginal psychosis, in which autochthonous delusional ideas intrude into consciousness and are attributed by the patient directly to God, angels, or what Kleist termed the 'Weltgeist' (world spirit). He emphasised that such experiences could also be reactive to acute alcoholism and acute epileptic states.

Maudsley considered that several episodes of Swedenborg's "fits," accounts of which were taken from White's biography, were possibly epileptic in origin. Less than four years after Maudsley's pathography, Howden (1873) published five cases of intense religiosity occurring in epileptics, and included Swedenborg along with other epileptics, in particular Ann Lee, founder of the Shaker Movement, and the Islamic prophet, Mohammed. Maudsley later included Swedenborg in the section on "Epileptic Insanity" in *Pathology of Mind* (1879), and said

"Swedenborg, who professed to receive manifold holy revelations and to have habitual intercourse with the inhabitants of Heaven and Hell, suffered from seizures which were closely akin to if they were not epilepsy."

The hypothesis that Swedenborg suffered from temporal lobe epilepsy could be advanced. Dewhurst & Beard (1970) described five patients who had intense religious conversion experiences while suffering from temporal lobe epilepsy, but the evidence in Swedenborg's case is somewhat dubious.

Maudsley acknowledged Swedenborg's scientific and cosmological achievements, but aligned him with George Fox, founder of the Quakers. Maudsley was of the opinion that Fox would have been incarcerated in a lunatic asylum if he had lived in the 19th century, and that Quakerism would have been "blasted in its germ." He further compared Swedenborg to Benvenuto Cellini and Auguste Comte as other men of outstanding talent who had suffered psychotic illnesses. Maudsley was convinced that Swedenborg had become psychotic in 1743, and that his religious experiences were rooted in this. Whether Swedenborg's messianic psychosis was due to acute schizophrenia or an epileptic psychosis will remain a diagnostic enigma.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Prof. William Johnson for stimulating my interest in Swedenborg and for his helpful comments in the preparation of this paper.

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SWEDENBORG'S ALLEGED INSANITY[†]

Brian M. Talbot, B.A., Dip. Ed[‡]

How do you know that someone is telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Maybe the person's reputation for honesty and integrity, or his or her expertise or specialty or interest in the subject under discussion, or even our past experiences of the person concerned? Maybe the person's beliefs, biases or presuppositions are enough like ours or exactly like ours to justify believing the person? If we're talking to someone, maybe it's their body language or their facial expressions, which convince us of their sincerity, or then maybe we rely wholly or solely on our instincts or 'gut reaction'? Maybe it's because their argument or case is reasonable, or their explanation of known or agreed facts is the best? Maybe a lot of their case is based on a commonly accepted authority figure or book, such as the inspired books of the Bible? Maybe we can be convinced by how confident or erudite the speaker is? I remember one of my Mathematics lecturers at university, warning us undergraduates never to believe anyone who said something was "clearly true," and there are advocates on both sides of any debate who use superlatives and state how clearly, obviously and indisputably true their opinion is.

How do we know that anyone from over 200 years ago is telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Some of my suggestions listed above, such as the person's body language or facial expressions, will not be able to be brought into finding an answer. This is the question people will have to ask when they consider the story which originated with a certain John Paul Brockmer, a Londoner of the Moravian faith, in whose house Swedenborg lodged around 1744 and possibly later,¹ and who

[†] Permission to reprint this study was kindly granted by the author. It was originally published in a series as follows: "Swedenborg's Alleged Insanity." *New-Church Magazine* Part 1 (March 1996): 22: 2-28; Part 2 (May 1996): 23: 2-28; Part 3 (December 1996): 24: 4-6. Note: In endnotes to Swedenborg's works, the numbers refer to paragraphs. Where reference is made to articles formatted in columns, "a" and "b" refer to the column on a given page.

[‡] Rev. Talbot is a member of the clergy of the General Conference of the New Church in Great Britain.

claimed that Swedenborg called himself the Messiah, foamed at the mouth, ran into the street naked and jumped into the mud. (This story will be examined in much greater detail later on this article.)

Whatever the truth of this story, there is a variety of opinions among New Church people as to the truthfulness of the tale. Some dismiss it outright in whatever version it has come down to us, others believe some of it to be true, others choose to interpret what they assume to be true very tentatively. Whether people choose to believe that Swedenborg was insane or sane, their judgment is not based solely on this supposed incident.

A controversy such as whether or not Swedenborg was insane certainly has aroused strong passions in the past, not only from those who believe it implicitly, but those who disbelieve it. Exasperation and anger have been expressed by a number of New Church people, such as the following two opinions from 1906 and 1914 respectively:

These charges are like so many nine-pins which have been set up again and again during the course of a century and a half, and as often struck down by irrefutable proofs—only to be merrily set up again just as if nothing happened.²

From time to time, the opponents of Swedenborg have attempted to bring discredit upon his life-work by raising the cry that he was a madman. This theory, in the past, has easily been exploded by a scrutiny of the life-history of the seer, and all the contemporary stories of his insanity have been proved to be fabrications.³

One New Churchman in 1890 wrote:

It is humiliating to have to discuss the subject. Brockmer is cited as the sole authority, and he denies the story in every essential particular, and adheres to only one feature of it, namely, that Swedenborg once called himself the Messiah. The story says that Swedenborg was removed to the house of Mr. Caer, and put under the charge of Dr. Smith. Where is the evidence of this Mr. Caer and this Dr. Smith? The Swedish envoy was a witness of this escapade. Where is the evidence of this functionary? Swedenborg pulled off his clothes, rolled himself in very deep mud in the

gutter, and distributed money from his pockets among the crowd. Here is a case of public notoriety—where is the evidence of any one among the crowd? The footmen of the Swedish envoy found him in this stage—where is their evidence? The whole thing is so glaringly and ridiculously false, and it has been so repeatedly and so fully exposed and refuted, that Dr. Ireland has not a grain of reason for believing it, except that his case is weak, and in his desire to establish it he works up every shred of evidence however rotten or foul.⁴

A New Church Minister wrote in 1913:

We thought this fallacy concerning Swedenborg's vision and his sanity had long been exploded, and we think it quite possible that Dr. Jones did not arrive at his conclusions by reading Swedenborg's Biography or works. If this is correct, it is very unfortunate.⁵

This brings us to the issue of the uncritical acceptance of another's opinion. Why should I believe the New Church people I've already quoted? I have tried as much as possible to consult the original sources and read as widely as I can. This will go some way to objectively evaluating the evidence, but we human beings can't be totally objective. It seems psychiatrists want Swedenborg to be an example of someone who was insane, so that's what they find, and they support their view by quoting like-minded psychiatrists. Swedenborgians want a seer or revelator, and so quote other Swedenborgians who are of similar opinions.

A New Churchman in 1901 in talking about psychiatrists, like Henry Maudsley, Wm. W. Ireland, Sir T. Lauder Brunton, Andrew Wilson, and J.F. Nisbet, obtaining "their 'information' (about Swedenborg) from the same source," writes:

The adage "One fool makes many" must in this connection be modified into "By one misleader many are misled."⁶

The question is, who is the "fool"? At one point in Jesus' life his family thought that he was mad, whereas his theological opponents just thought he was possessed by evil spirits (Mark 3:21–22, 30). In John 10:19–21 Jesus

again divided his Jewish listeners into those who thought he was possessed and insane, and those who thought he was sane and a miracle worker. The disciples regarded Rhoda, the servant girl of John Mark's mother, as mad, because she told them that the Apostle Peter was out of prison and standing at the door (Acts 12:15). In Acts 17:18 the Apostle Paul was described as a "babbler." Festus, the Roman governor of Judea, accused the Apostle Paul, of being "out of his mind" due to his great learning, which Paul denied (Acts 26:24-25). In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul talks about being "fools for Christ" (4:10), and teaches that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1:18). Another passage which talks about self-destructive attitudes in us, which block out or distort the truth from God, occurs in the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea:

The days of punishment have come,
the days of recompense have come;
Israel cries,
The prophet is a fool,
the man of the spirit is mad!
Because of your great iniquity,
your hostility is great. (Hosea 9:7) (NRSV)

But the psychiatrists I have mentioned would probably, given the chance, ask us Swedenborgians, why can't the fool or the misleader be Swedenborg⁷ or even Swedenborgian authority figures we admire? One of the most challenging statements for me in William White's second biography of Swedenborg, is to be found in his preface:

As a critic of Swedenborg my difficulties have not been slight. With a few exceptions, he had undergone no criticism. He has been cursed without reserve, and he has been blessed without reserve, but he has been rarely appreciated. I have therefore had to form many judgements, which I feel sure would be modified had I enjoyed the discussion of liberal and enlightened minds.⁸

I suppose that, to be as objective as we can, we must acknowledge our presuppositions, and at the same time explore the arguments and presuppositions of those who don't agree with us, so that hopefully we will become wiser, more enlightened people.

John Johnson's article

The main reason for looking at this topic was due to an article in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* of 1994, written by a Manchester-based psychiatrist named John Johnson (FRCPsych) entitled "Henry Maudsley on Swedenborg's Messianic Psychosis."⁹ As the title suggests, Johnson's article is based on the theories of Maudsley, a 19th century psychiatrist, some of whose work is known in New Church circles.¹⁰

As the title suggests, Johnson claims that

Swedenborg developed a messianic psychosis in middle life, considered by Maudsley to be a monomania, possibly due to epilepsy. (p. 690a)

In 1744 there was a dramatic change in Swedenborg's life, which Maudsley saw as "a morbid development." He abandoned all scientific interests and claimed that he had been admitted to the spirit world and had developed the power to talk with angels. Maudsley asserted that Swedenborg's subsequent history is that of a "learned and ingenious madman." (p.690a)

In 1744, while on a visit to London, he had an acute psychotic episode during which he proclaimed he was the Messiah and had come to be crucified for the Jews. He locked himself in his room for two days, finally emerging foaming around the mouth and stammering. Maudsley thought this was "a fit" and attributed it to epilepsy. (p.690b)

Maudsley considered that Swedenborg suffered an attack of "acute mania" between 1743 and 1744, followed by "chronic mania." This persisted for the rest of his life, and he was dominated by revelatory experiences and the conviction that he was the Messiah and the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. (p.691a)

Maudsley was convinced that Swedenborg had become psychotic in 1743, and that his religious experiences were rooted in this. Whether Swedenborg's messianic psychosis was due to acute schizophrenia or an epileptic psychosis will remain a diagnostic enigma. (p.691b)

We will deal with this allegation that Swedenborg claimed to be the Messiah later in the article. Suffice to say at this moment that I know of no place where he claimed to be "the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ." Johnson comes a lot closer to Swedenborg's genuine claim, when he writes:

He maintained that the Lord Jesus Christ had made through him His second advent for the institution of the Church of the New Jerusalem, described in Revelations. (p. 690b)

Of course, Swedenborgians are disappointed that neither Johnson nor Maudsley have considered a third option, and that is that Swedenborg was sane and his unusual experiences were genuine. Johnson's use of Swedenborgian sources is extremely limited. His treatment of Swedenborg is almost completely based on psychiatrists who viewed him as being insane. The only biography he consulted is White's second of 1867, but doesn't note in his bibliography that it comes in two volumes, so I suspect that he has never consulted it first hand but relies on what Maudsley drew from it. This "diagnostic enigma" of Swedenborg's condition will be taken up later in this article, when we look at what psychiatrists have thought of Swedenborg.

Johnson writes that Maudsley's psychopathography of Swedenborg was in his first edition of his book *The Pathology of Mind* (1879), but not in his second edition (1895), and puts the reason down to criticism and pressure from "Swedenborg's followers." This seems to be an unsupported hypothesis of Johnson's. In a letter to Dr. Johnson of 23rd October 1995, I suggested an alternate explanation, namely, that Maudsley "realised that his conclusions were based on errors and lies contained in White's 1867 biography of Swedenborg." It seems a bit far fetched that people from what is possibly the smallest Christian denomination in England,

could pressure a psychiatrist into changing his mind!¹¹ However, in White's defense, he only argued that Swedenborg was insane during the *Journal of Dreams* period, namely 1743–1744.¹² I wonder what Maudsley or Johnson made of the following comment of White's?:

It is only pert scientific ignorance which imagines, that Swedenborg's life and writings for seven and twenty years subsequent to 1745 are accounted for by asserting, that he was out of his mind in 1744. Not all the jargon gathered from the most approved treatises of the most enlightened 'mad Doctors' will avail to impose such a conclusion on any intellect in which common sense is stronger than scientific credulity.¹³

How carefully Maudsley or Johnson read White's biography of 1867 might be shown by an error such as that Swedenborg completed "his PhD at the University of Uppsala."¹⁴ This point is made by White, but corrected in an appendix.¹⁵ Johnson writes that Swedenborg "expressed a paranoid system of ideas about the Quakers and what he regarded as their obscene rites," not realizing that Swedenborg is describing some spirits in the spiritual world, who happened to be Quakers before their death. Not all the deceased Quakers Swedenborg met in the next world were depraved.¹⁶ Johnson is correct in stating that Swedenborg believed he was being suffocated by spirits, or that spirits were inciting him to steal or commit suicide. He readily admitted to being possessed by evil spirits, but that the LORD protected him by ensuring that he could see through the pretenses and delusions of the possessing spirit. Johnson says that Swedenborg "had hallucinations of taste and smell, and somatic hallucinations when he felt his hair was a multitude of snakes," but by using the loaded word "hallucinations," betrays a dismissive attitude to these particular types of visions experienced by Swedenborg. To quote Rev. Arvid Ferelius' comment, that Swedenborg "never washed or brushed his clothes, maintaining that no dirt would adhere to them," is uncritically mischievous and naively libelous, since no mention is made of the more numerous testimonies of Swedenborg's contemporaries to the contrary.¹⁷

But it seems that Johnson, like some of his psychiatric predecessors, judge Swedenborg *in absentia*, or in his own absence, to use Miss Signe

Toksvig's phrase. Toksvig was not a Swedenborgian¹⁸ and while talking about many religious teachers from the East and the West having visions and hearing voices, writes:

As has been said before, it comes down to whether it is believed that such "projected" religious experience is always due to a neurosis.

Some of the psychoanalysts who believe this—religiously—have attempted to deal with Swedenborg *in absentia* mainly by the aid of excerpts from his so-called dream diary and 'spiritual' diary. They do not seem to have been well acquainted with his scientific work, nor do they seem to have studied history with a view to finding out whether Swedenborg could not at the time have held certain ideas without differing much from his contemporaries.¹⁹

Where is the mention in Johnson's article of Swedenborg being an active member of the Swedish House of Nobles all his life, writing memorials to it and attending its sessions when in Sweden? Why has the testimony of Prime Ministers and leading Swedish politicians of the time been ignored? More questions like these could be asked. This explains the quotation above that the theory of Swedenborg's insanity "in the past, has easily been exploded by a scrutiny of the life-history of the seer."³

Maudsley on Swedenborg

Sadly, I have neither the time nor the specialist training needed to wade through Henry Maudsley's book *The Pathology of Mind*, in either of its editions of 1879 and 1895, to which Johnson refers. However, although it is secondhand testimony, it would be remiss of me not to mention a review of one of Maudsley's earlier books entitled *Body and Mind*. His second edition of it was reviewed in the *Intellectual Repository and New Jerusalem Magazine* for 1874.²⁰ *Body and Mind* is apparently a collection of lectures delivered to the College of Physicians and articles in various magazines collected in one volume.²¹

It needs to be emphasized that this section is entirely based on comments by a New Church writer on Maudsley's ideas and theories from

1874. Maudsley's ideas may or may not have been different in 1879, when he wrote the book Johnson refers to.

The Swedenborgian reviewer had certain difficulties with Dr. Maudsley's ideas of 1874. He claims that Maudsley believes people are all body and no mind,²¹ and "everything supernatural he dismisses with a summary sneer"²² (p. 260). With these presuppositions seemingly based on a belief in scientific empiricism and materialism, they are diametrically opposed to the Divinely-enlightened rationalism of Swedenborg and Swedenborgians, which views the supernatural in a more balanced way. Maudsley claims that some fanatics, madmen and imposters claim supernatural powers, so all who claim such experiences, including Swedenborg, must be insane.²³ The trouble is, if all visionaries are mad, so are all the Old Testament prophets, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Apostles John and Paul!²⁴ As we've already seen, there were some people in Biblical times who also believed this to be so.

Maudsley complains that Swedenborg's heaven is "rather a vulgar and commonplace invention," and he much prefers Dante's without realizing that at least one of the latter's illustrious commentators regards Dante's as vulgar!²⁵ Maudsley doesn't seem to have offered us his own vision of how heaven will be.

Maudsley believed that Swedenborg had a sudden epileptic fit around 1744, which began his lifelong madness of claiming to speak to spirits and angels.²⁶ Swedenborg himself says it was a gradual awakening to an awareness of the next world, so not only Swedenborg himself contradicts Maudsley,²⁷ but also a French neurologist nearly 30 years later!²⁸ Of course, we have the advantage of hindsight, but it's interesting that at least one psychiatrist didn't put Swedenborg's spiritual experiences down to a fit. Our reviewer then goes on to accuse Maudsley of circular reasoning based on Brockmer's story:

He says, "The outbreak of acute insanity," was one such as any medical psychologist, acquainted with what had gone before, might have almost ventured to predict. (p. 234)

We cannot, but fear that in this sentence we get the clue to Dr. M.'s ready authentication of this confused and baseless story.

To make out the case as Dr. M. explains it, Swedenborg ought to have been mad about that time. If he was not, why, so much the worse for him; but to make the diagnosis of his case complete from Dr. M.'s point of view, he SHOULD HAVE HAD AN ACUTE ATTACK, THEREFORE HE HAD. It is another version of the case of the French theorizer. If the facts do not suit the theory, why, so much the worse for the facts.²⁹

Our reviewer also accuses Maudsley of being uncritically over-reliant on White's 1867 biography of Swedenborg, which contains a "farrago of facts and conjectures which Mr. White calls history," and hopes that Maudsley would read Swedenborg first-hand.³⁰ White believed that anybody who had written the *Journal of Dreams* should have been locked up in a mental asylum, so consequently White was "careless to contest"³¹ that Swedenborg was mad during 1743 and 1744. As has been said, White didn't believe that Swedenborg was mad subsequently.¹³

Maudsley claimed that Swedenborgians "have impugned the veracity of Brockmer's story."³² But how would he know? White believes that Mathesius' account of Brockmer's story is:

Plainly a straightforward and well authenticated story, possibly somewhat coloured by the influence of Mathesius, and by the inevitable treachery of a twenty-four years' memory; but fitting into the incoherences of the Diary with singular credibility.³³

In 1868 White added the following sentence to this quotation: "Attempts have been made to discredit the narrative, but altogether in vain." (These will be explored more fully later in this article.) But at the end of the day this is White's opinion. Maudsley's work was based solely on White's biography of 1867, so if there were any errors in White, they would be repeated by Maudsley. One of the basic criticisms of White's treatment of the Brockmer story of Swedenborg's alleged insanity is summarized by a New Church Minister in 1867:

the object of this biographer of Swedenborg appears to be to credit whatever has been said against Swedenborg, and to discredit what has been alleged against his traducers.³⁴

The only way of checking whether this is true or not is to read more widely than the opinion of one commentator. Whether White's account is true or not, and I don't think it is, Maudsley is still guilty of being uncritically over-reliant on White.

It all comes down to a question of bias. In a reply to my letter of 23rd October Dr. Johnson curtly dismissed any Swedenborgian apologetics as biased. But every human being, including Johnson, has biases. It is appropriate at this point to say that it doesn't matter whether Swedenborg had momentary mental illness, which I would suggest is yet to be proved; we Swedenborgians place a much higher value on discovering the truth. I could put it no better than Maudsley's reviewer of 1874:

We demur altogether to the objections taken to our investigation of this matter, because we are admirers of Swedenborg. We claim to be as faithful to truth, as sincere in our adherence to fact, as those who take other views than ours of his character and writings, and we suggest that the objection is unscientific and unworthy.

Let it be shewn that an admirer of the principles of Swedenborg is too feeble-minded to investigate a fact, or too insincere to be trusted in his investigations, or let us hear no more from professed scientific inquirers that such or such a one is not to be regarded because he is a Swedenborgian. We claim that a Swedenborgian, or, better, a New Churchman, is one who has the most sacred reverence for truth, and the delicacy and clearness in its perception which come from habitual thoughtfulness and care in research. We reject the testimony of no honourable person, because he has either in science or religion different views from those we conscientiously take, and we respectfully but firmly request that our own may stand upon its merits, and not be rejected from sectarian repugnance.²⁹

Again, every single human being has biases, including White. Mr. White was the agent or manager of the Swedenborg Society, until he was sacked by the Committee, for turning the Swedenborg Society into a book shop for spiritualist publications.³⁵ Dr. Johnson, as he admitted in his reply to my letter of the 23rd October 1995—and I'm sure others—was unaware that White wrote "a small competent and sympathetic biography of

Swedenborg in 1856," but his 1867 biography was "a hostile biography," as was his 1868 revision, due to his dismissal at the Swedenborg Society.³⁶ An American reviewer of White's second biography of Swedenborg, writes very succinctly:

ten years before the publication of the volumes before us, their author had given to the world a little volume bearing the same title, every page of which glows with enthusiastic admiration of the very man whom now it seems to be his chief object to malign.³⁷

Tafel talks about White

turning a complete somersault in his convictions...on the literary and personal character of a man, dead for nearly a century, all whose writings, and all the important particulars of whose life were as fully known to the writer in the one case, as in the other.³⁸

Tafel is not absolutely correct as White was not aware of Swedenborg's *Journal of Dreams* in 1856, as it was first published in 1859 in Swedish, and was shortly afterwards on arrival in England translated by Dr. J.J. Garth Wilkinson for the use of members of the Swedenborg Society. It appeared first publicly in English translation in the magazine *The Dawn* of 1861.³⁹ It is strange that White in his 1856 biography mentions Swedenborg being considered mad by various Swedish clergymen, and even mentions John Wesley, but doesn't mention Wesley considering him mad. Neither does White mention Brockmer.⁴⁰ It is tempting to suggest that White in 1856 considered the whole Brockmer story in its various recensions as a lie and not worth writing about, since he doesn't mention it. But arguments from silence are not very satisfactory.

Another reference to Maudsley's ideas about Swedenborg's mental state occurs as an aside in a lecture by the Rev. J.R. Rendell on Swedenborg's contribution to science, given at the International Swedenborg Congress in 1910, which was to celebrate the centenary of the Swedenborg Society. In a section devoted to talking about Swedenborg's flying machine, Rendell hints that Maudsley was a bit presumptuous to use this invention of

Swedenborg's (which only reached the planning stage) to support his theory that Swedenborg was insane:

He [Swedenborg] quoted approvingly a humorous passage from Fontenelle: "Do we pretend that we have discovered everything, or have brought our knowledge to a point where nothing can be added to it? Oh, for mercy's sake, let us agree that there is still something for the ages to come to do." I may add parenthetically, that this anticipation of the flying machine was one of the evidences of aberration alleged by Dr. Maudsley about fifty years ago. We know now who was the wiser of the two.⁴²

It has already been mentioned a number of times that biases or pre-suppositions will color how we see something, or affect our conclusions regarding something. It doesn't matter whether we are a Swedenborgian, or a psychiatrist, or an atheist, or a scientist, or a materialist, or whatever. We all have our own belief-system. I have also already mentioned the accusation that some people who have adjudged Swedenborg to be mad have done so without looking at his life-story,³ or have judged him in his own absence.¹⁸ This point was also made by the American clinical psychologist, Dr. Stephen Larsen, in a lecture to the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, held in San Antonio in 1980,⁴³ when he spoke about "epistemological intrusion" or "violation." Larsen does accept that historical figures from the distant past can be psychoanalyzed successfully, but is wary that some psychohistories merely reflect the beliefs of their authors:

These observations should make it less defensible to adjudge someone "mentally ill" based on the assumptions of a particular 'school' or psychological system.⁴⁴

The question of Swedenborg's sanity then, must be considered within the socio-cultural climate of his times, and must include evaluations of his personal happiness, productivity and freedom from anxiety. Swedenborg was never adjudged insane, nor institutionalized. It was only later than psychiatrists would ex-post-facto judge him insane.⁴⁵

Some other psychiatrists on Swedenborg

Johnson mentioned that Maudsley believed that Swedenborg suffered from “a monomania, possible due to epilepsy,”¹⁴ but Maudsley is not the first psychiatrist to diagnose Swedenborg as being a monomaniac. In 1833 Dr. Elliotson, the Professor of Medicine at London University wrote in the *London Medical Gazette* that he believed that Swedenborg should be so diagnosed. His Swedenborgian reviewer, who I assume was also a physician, as he signed himself “Hippocrates Junior,” wrote that Elliotson had listed Swedenborg “among a great number of instances, some of them very ludicrous ones, of the species of mental hallucination to which medical writers have given the name of *monomania*.”⁴⁶ As Rev. W. Mason pointed out 30 years later, the basis of the diagnosis is due to Swedenborg claiming to have supernatural communication with deceased people:

The allegation against his state of mind rests wholly on his assertion of intercourse with spirits, and his statements of a multitude of particulars relating to the unseen world, as resulting from such intercourse.⁴⁷

Mason’s nontechnical definition of a monomaniac has certainly helped me understand this allegation:

A monomaniac has always been considered as one who acts sanely, so long as his mind is kept disengaged from that one subject on which it is diseased; and in order to put a monomaniac to the test, it is usual to lead him to the subject on which, if a monomaniac, he will be sure to betray himself. A change then is seen to pass over him.⁴⁸

The picture that some psychiatrists, such as Dr. Elliotson, and Dr. Johnson (and presumably Dr. Maudsley) draw, is that Swedenborg was normal apart from when he had his “hallucinations”¹⁷ or when he talked about them. (Swedenborgians would term them visions or spiritual experiences, not hallucinations.) The word “hallucination” and its connotations incited Rev. Mason to write about:

that unhealthy state of mind implied by the term hallucination. In fact, the charge of the latter always appears, to those who are well acquainted with Swedenborg's writings, to be the most contemptible piece of impertinence that conceited ignorance and impudence ever exhibited, even although it is backed, as it may be, by the confident testimonies of a certain description of medical men, who have not read, and will not read his writings; or, what is the same, will not read them in that careful manner in which works in general estimation are read, by which alone a just judgment can be formed.⁴⁹

It is somewhat curious that Dr. Elliotson wrote about Swedenborgians, who believe that Swedenborg "had communication with the Almighty for thirty years," in the following way:

Many think he was right; but no one could have that idea without some insanity.⁴⁶

How convenient! How circular can an argument get? If I think that Swedenborg did have Divinely-inspired communication with deceased people, then I'm suffering from "partial insanity" as well!⁴⁶

Elliotson's reviewer regarded the allegation that Swedenborg was a monomaniac as a "calumny," and expressed "regret" that Elliotson,

has suffered himself to be seduced into the ranks of the partial and prejudiced maligners of truth. May he not reasonably be asked, whether it is not a mark of great intellectual rashness, and almost amounting to one of the forms of monomania, to charge a person with madness, simply because he makes an assertion, which however extraordinary, cannot be proved to be false. Can Dr. E have considered the matter with sufficient attention to the consequences, seeing that, on this principle, all the great characters of scripture are chargeable with madness?⁵⁰

Hippocrates Junior appeals for fairness in determining Swedenborg's state of mind:

In the mean time, let fair play be conceded to Swedenborg's advocates, and they will prove quite competent to vindicate that excellent man from all the slander and calumny which malicious ignorance has cast upon him. A fair opportunity has never yet been afforded to those who are zealous in the cause of truth for its own sake. Fair discussion is all that they require to enable them to shew, how superior a man Swedenborg is to all those who have ignorantly pronounced him a monomaniac.⁵¹

Rev. W. Mason once asked

a highly respectable member of the College of Physicians, who has acquired eminency in the treatment of the insane, and who justly appreciates the writings of Swedenborg, publicly to meet this charge of monomania, when he indicated, in reply, that he knew not how to bring his faculties to occupy themselves with such a ridiculous employment. He felt as if he could as soon sit down to prove that darkness is not produced by the presence of the sun!⁵²

I have already confessed to relying on secondhand sources for my evaluation of Maudsley's views of 1874. This direct borrowing of opinions without checking original sources has also been levelled at certain psychiatrists of the Victorian age, by someone writing in the Swedenborgian magazine *Morning Light* of 1901. It seems to imply that all the psychiatrists mentioned borrowed indiscriminately from the same source. Was this William White's second biography of Swedenborg of 1867?:

Sir T. Lauder Brunton and his reporter, Dr. Wilson, with their fore-runners, Dr. Maudsley and Dr. Ireland, are, unfortunately, not the only "scientific" men who are similarly "cocksure" on this subject [Swedenborg's insanity], and who obtain their "information" from the same source. Mr. J.F. Nisbet, in his book *The Insanity of Genius* (fourth edition, 1900), devotes to Swedenborg two pages, the second paragraph of which is amusingly paradoxical, thus:

Swedenborg was not only an epileptic, but at times an irresponsible maniac, who, nevertheless, in his writings exhibits much subtle philosophical insight."⁵³

One of the problems of scholarship, whether it's Swedenborgian, psychiatric, scientific, or whatever, is that sometimes open-ended words like "possibly" or "probably" get left out, or subjunctives like "might be" or "could be," become so easily indicatives like "is" or "was." Notice that Nisbet in the preceding quote says "Swedenborg was not only an epileptic," not *might have been*, or in all likelihood, *could have been*. Then compare it to the quotation of Dr. Johnson's almost inconclusive sentence: "whether Swedenborg's messianic psychosis was due to acute schizophrenia or an epileptic psychosis will remain a diagnostic enigma" (p. 691b). It is a lesson for us all that, when we use other people's opinions, we also need to convey the degree of certainty of the person we quote.

In his reply to my letter of 23rd October 1995, Dr. Johnson also made the point that non-psychiatrists don't realize that someone can be insane and function quite normally, which is explained above as "monomania." This is how Dr. Ireland in 1889 was able to reconcile Swedenborg's "extraordinary intellectual power with the wildest hallucinations,"⁵⁴ and admit that Swedenborg's writings were systematic.⁵⁵ The only difficulty I have with this is that if behavior is not the key to determining insanity, does it come down to the beliefs of the psychiatrist? This may sound like an incredibly inane, if not presumptuous, question, until we consider that Dr. Ireland considered Swedenborg to have suffered from "delusional insanity," because "he had experiences different to those of ordinary healthy minds."⁵⁴ If readers think that psychiatrists appealing to the lowest common denominator of human experiences to determine insanity is an isolated phenomenon, compare the beliefs of Dr. Ballet, the French neurologist, who held:

that the abnormal can only be judged by comparison with the everyday anomalies already brought to light and classified by clinical science. The

extraordinary and the miraculous he argues, must be held in suspense until explained or put out of court by science alone.⁵⁶

It could even seem that science or psychiatry has become its own self-authenticating "god." (If ever Swedenborgians were to argue in this way, then they too could be judged accordingly!) If this is true, it seems like a very circular argument to me. It is claimed by his reviewer that Dr. Ireland⁴ in 1889 collected facts from various biographies of Swedenborg which did not tend "to help his theory, but militat[ed] directly against it," and because Swedenborg's explanations fitted his experiences, Ireland accused him of systematizing his "hallucinations." As the reviewer asks:

If the things which Swedenborg said he experienced in the spiritual world were capable of being harmonized with his philosophical theories, and of being embodied into a system of god and the universe, where is the evidence of "hallucination"? Nowhere, except in the mind of Dr. Ireland. That gentleman set to work to show that his subject laboured under "delusional insanity," and, finding it impossible to prove the point, he quietly assumes it because of the unusual character of Swedenborg's statements, even while admitting that they are in harmony with his systematized theories!⁵⁴

Dr. Ireland further exasperates his reviewer by proposing to put Swedenborg to the test, but then failing to do so.

But the utter incapacity of Dr. Ireland to discuss the subject is shown by the following extracts:

As for Swedenborg, we know so much of his mental condition that, as already said, the choice lies between receiving his supernatural pretensions or declaring him subject to insane delusions. Had Swedenborg fought with his delusions, or had he been led by his friends to turn his thought from them, his mind might have recovered his former clearness and power: but he did the very contrary. He nourished his delusions, he gave up all his scientific studies, and passed his whole time in reading the Bible and a few religious books.

The Doctor here presents two alternatives. Either Swedenborg had supernatural gifts, or he was insane. We admit it. We ask that the test should be applied and that judgment should be given. But Dr. Ireland applies no test, and gives judgment in favour of "delusion" without calling for reasons for the opposite view. Is this just?⁵⁷

The one test that careful readers of White's second and third biographies will know about, is that,

Truth is attested Divine through meeting the appetite of the Mind, and ministering to its growth, precisely as bread is verified by its adaptation to the Body. Than such congruity between demand and supply, between the Mind and the Truth there can be no evidence of Divine appointment, which is worth repeating. He who seeks for better will never find it, and he who is content with less will get gorged with wind and poisoned with rubbish.

To this test must Swedenborg's teachings be brought; *a priori* none can tell whether they are Divine or not. Whether his bread is good or bad, or innutritious as sand or sawdust, or somewhat good and somewhat bad, must be decided by trying. In the matter of Truth, quite as much as that of Pudding, the proof is in the eating. Any one who reads Swedenborg and finds his mind nourished and strengthened by his words may safely shut his ears to the clatter of controversialists, prating concerning a feast of which they know nothing save the names of the dishes.⁵⁸

Of course, what is beneficial to our mental health depends on our presuppositions, and our willingness to challenge them and grow beyond them, by learning from peoples whose beliefs are at most diametrically opposed to our own. This openness requires courage, humility, patience, and other God-given virtues, at least according to my belief-system.

Ireland in his book of 1889,⁴ believed that Swedenborg was insane for four reasons: (1) he inherited his insanity from his parents; (2) when Swedenborg was 10 years old he was continually thinking about God, salvation and people's spiritual diseases, which his parents put down to him talking to angels; (3) Swedenborg saw lights, that is, photism, and

heard voices; and (4) Swedenborg "had dreams connected with the things of which he was writing, and he tried to interpret his dreams."⁵⁹

I personally don't find these reasons convincing. The last two are anti-supernaturalist, and would convict many Biblical characters of insanity, such as the Apostle Paul, particularly in regard to (3).^{24, 50} As the Rev. Edwin Paxton Hood wrote in his 1854 biography of Swedenborg, the charge of insanity is "very easily levelled against a character whose movements we do not clearly understand," such as Jesus, Paul and Swedenborg.⁶⁰ I suppose (4), if taken on its own, would judge every Jungian psychologist or psychiatrist as insane. The first two reasons are agreed by the Swedish psychiatrist Dr. Emil A.G. Kleen in 1914. Kleen argues that Swedenborg inherited a nervous disposition from both his parents, which resulted in paranoia.⁶¹ Kleen's Swedenborgian reviewer wrote:

All these and other accusations are based mostly on "little knowledge" (which we know is a dangerous thing), or on bias, which is worse. The biography of the venerable bishop is a lasting testimony to his integrity and sincerity. The only fact which might be construed in support of the insanity charge is the unfortunate fate of Swedenborg's maternal grandmother who shortly before her death suffered from a disease which affected her mind so that she committed suicide, but this is hardly a sufficient ground for such an elaborate theory.⁶²

Rev. James Spilling in his review of Dr. Ireland's book, states that Dr. Ireland

professes to believe the utterly foolish and unbelievable story that Mathesius set afloat on the authority of Brockmer, who, however, when the question was put to him, emphatically denied four-fifths of it, and said that "the whole was exaggerated and unfairly stated."⁶⁴

Dr. Ireland says that it is clear that Swedenborg became possessed "during a period of nervous excitement and mental derangement, which culminated in an attack of mental insanity."⁶³ Obviously this presumes or at least assumes that Brockmer was telling the whole truth, which we will explore later in this paper.

Dr. Ballet, the French neurologist and Professor of Medicine in Paris around 1903,²⁸ believed that Swedenborg suffered from:

the hallucinations of a mind habitually surrendering itself to sheer automatism. He comes to the conclusion that Swedenborg's was a ratiocinating or reasoning Theomania...and, finally, a "megalomatacal delirium"—which Dr. Ballet is satisfied to deduce from the fact that Swedenborg had "an absolute faith in his mission," a faith which, he thinks, led him to aggrandize his spiritual *role* and calling.⁶⁴

His reviewer concluded that "Swedenborg's transparent sincerity and modesty are the best answers to such a charge."⁶⁴ But note that again if a psychiatrist has anti-supernatural presuppositions, then Swedenborg cannot have had spiritual experiences, and so the only category left for him, is some sort of insanity. Dr. Ireland, Dr. Ballet and Dr. Johnson (and presumably Dr. Maudsley) seem to share the same circular argument, as can be seen by their use of the "loaded" word "hallucination."^{54, 64}

Dr. Robert Jones⁵⁴ in 1912 thought that Swedenborg was an epileptic because he (1) alternated between extreme wickedness and extreme piety; (2) he had "an extraordinary tenacity and correctness of memory for the smallest events of past years, an accuracy which would be rare even in a sound mind."; (3) he had sudden "visual illusions" as recorded in his "diary";⁶⁵ and (4) Brockmer "described automatic actions after a sudden seizure, in which he foamed at the mouth and fell."⁶⁶

Again Brockmer has a lot to answer for, but with all diagnoses, Jones wrote that "many" epileptics may have these symptoms, which implies that not all do. I can't comment any further than that, as I have neither a medical nor psychological background.

Dr. Emil A.G. Kleen gave a talk to the Swedish Medical Society in Stockholm, on May 19th 1914. Kleen

considers that not only were Swedenborg's parents abnormal and Swedenborg neurotic even during his childhood, but that later on he developed all the symptoms of a kind of insanity formerly designated as *paranoia tardiva expansiva religiosa*, described more recently by the French

school of Magnan and Serieux as “le Delire Chronique a evolution systematique” and by the German school of Kraepelin as “paraphreni.”⁶⁷

We know from the members of the Swedish New Church, that Dr. Kleen’s grandmother, Madam Fredrika Ehrensberg, was a prominent Swedenborgian, who, in 1860 wrote an article “Reflections on the lately discovered dreams of Swedenborg” [Woofenden 1974, p. 17; Swedenborg’s *Journal of Dreams* (1977, Preface ii–iii)]. Madam Ehrensberg, unlike most Swedenborgians, was a spiritualist. Kleen “received, in his youth, at Stockholm, Lund and Linköping, a thorough knowledge of the doctrines of the New Church, which he now utterly rejects.”⁶⁸ One wonders whether as a reaction against his grandmother’s spiritualism, some of which the majority of Swedenborgians would possibly agree with, he went to the opposite extreme of being anti-spiritualist to the extent of being an anti-supernatural materialist. A Swedish “Who’s Who” of the time describes him as being “a polemic of rank who has shown that he thoroughly knows the art of casting ridicule upon the side which he attacks, in a witty, but rather ruthless manner.”⁶⁹ Once again, however, our presuppositions can be ideologically-based or morally-based. Nobody, no matter how scientific a psychiatrist, can be totally objective. Presuppositions color our conclusions. In Kleen’s case Swedenborgians can postulate more accurately about why he turned against his upbringing.

Apart from the psychiatrists mentioned, Larsen⁷⁰ notes that:

Karl Jaspers diagnosed him as schizophrenic (in a study comparing Swedenborg to Strindberg, Van Gogh, and Holderlin).^[71] Lagerborg, a Finnish scholar, believed the diagnosis to be paranoia, marked by regression.^[72] Von Winterstein postulated an inverted Oedipal attachment to his father with repressed homosexuality.^[73] Emil Kleen’s diagnosis was “*paranoia tardiva expansiva religiosa*,” presumably a rare subspecies of paranoia.^[74] The paranoid is “delusional” because he believes unusual or grandiose things to be true: Swedenborg’s “appointment by the Lord” to reveal the inner sense of the scriptures has been construed in this way. The “special mission” syndrome is in fact known to many clinical consulting rooms.

In my letter of the 23rd October 1995 I asked Dr. Johnson how he resolves the different types of insanity from which his psychiatric colleagues have adjudged Swedenborg to suffer. He replied that each psychiatrist uses different terminology. I'm sure that's part of the answer, but I don't think it's the whole of the answer. It doesn't seem reasonable to assume that all schizophrenics are repressed homosexuals, or does it?

Larsen's reasons for believing that Swedenborg was sane were that

Swedenborg was clearly able to distinguish his visions from waking consciousness. He sought solitude when the visionary world became dominant. Only on a few noteworthy occasions, such as his clairvoyant seeing of the Stockholm fire hundreds of miles away, did visions disrupt his ordinary social composure. His social persona is described in different places as "polite," "gallant," "kind," "open-hearted."

Swedenborg went through a heroic struggle to reconcile his visions with this ingrained Christian belief system of "the Lord" and a literal heaven filled with winged angels above, and Satan's pit yawning beneath.⁷⁵

Drawing on his clinical experience treating those with the "special mission" syndrome, to which he refers above:

I have personally spent considerable time with those strange wounded modern visionaries called "paranoid schizophrenics." At best they are filled with a burning intensity of purpose and belief. At worst, and far more often, they are boring and exasperating. They harangue one with their monomyth to exhaustion. They ignore the satisfying give-and-take of human communication; often, in fact, belabouring the mythic and ignoring the human. There is a "blaming" aspect, in which the world and its deficiencies are responsible for their own shortcomings. There is an emphasis on others' evil and a literally projected "devil."

We see none of this in portraits of Swedenborg. If he even spoke of his visions it usually was at another's request. In ordinary social discourse he was a reasonable and urbane man. He could discuss politics, economics,

his travels, without intruding his visionary insights. Lacking a culture with which to share these, he wrote—for whoever would read. There was no coercion, no bombast. For over fifteen years he published his visionary writings anonymously. He blamed no one for his “predicament.” His image of the devil is, in fact, psychological—the principle of exclusive self-love in each of us. His devil (or Jungian “shadow”) not only is not projected but is considerably more sophisticated and *less* paranoid than that of his contemporaries.⁷⁶

So amidst all the psychiatric voices diagnosing Swedenborg to be a “paranoid schizophrenic,” we have a clinical psychologist with more knowledge of Swedenborg’s life-story saying he wasn’t. If the psychiatrists can only deny Larsen’s testimony because he is a Swedenborgian, then we Swedenborgians can humbly yet sincerely ask, why the work of Larsen has not been read and critically assessed by the contemporary psychiatrists who claim to be experts on Swedenborg’s mental health? But I know of another clinical psychologist whose testimony has been ignored, and that is of the retired American clinical psychologist Wilson van Dusen. In 1972 van Dusen wrote:

Rumours circulated that he was mad. He found too much, described too much. His reputation as a great scientist was overshadowed by his psychological/religious findings.⁷⁷

Two years later van Dusen wrote along similar lines, acknowledging that several Swedish clerics of the time regarded Swedenborg as

a crazy heretic upsetting the state religion. One simply did not speak of God and heaven and hell from direct experience, especially when this contradicted established doctrine. They failed. Swedenborg was too well known by too many, including heads of states.

Even in his eighties he was described as a vigorous, congenial social gentleman.⁷⁸

Whether we believe Swedenborg was a monomaniac or a paranoid schizophrenic, or not, and I don't, everybody, whether psychiatrist or Swedenborgian, is involved in a search for the truth. What is the real state of Swedenborg's mental health? Of course, if either camp, if there are only two, is not aware of vital information, then the other is duty-bound to gently and assertively draw their attention to it. I believe that Swedenborgians need to carefully and respectfully make the psychiatrists know of Larsen's work and his reasons why Swedenborg was not a paranoid schizophrenic. Also Swedenborgians need to make psychiatrists aware of the views of a non-Swedenborgian like Toksvig. We don't have anything to hide, and I believe that we have an emotional maturity to explore the sensitive issue of Swedenborg's sanity calmly, rationally and in a scholarly fashion.

We now proceed to the topic of "Brockmer's story" and a critical look at its different versions.

Brockmer's Story

John Paul Brockmer was a good watch chaser or engraver, who lived in Salisbury Court, Fleet Street, London. It was at his house that the Fetter Lane Moravian community met in 1743.⁷⁹ He was one of the officers of the congregation with the title "servant."⁸⁰ Higham calls him "an illiterate artisan" based on his misspelling of "desire" and "disease" in the inscription to his copy of the Moravian hymn book, and then proceeds to say that he was questioned "by four New Churchmen—a deputation of his fellow citizens of similar social standing to his own." Maybe they were more literate?⁸¹

In the *Arminian Magazine*⁸² of January 1781,⁸³ John Wesley printed a story about Swedenborg, which he had obtained from the minister of the Swedish Church in London, Rev. Aaron Mathesius. Mathesius had heard the story from Brockmer some time after his arrival in London in 1765, but before 1772, because he said that Swedenborg was still alive when Brockmer told him the story.⁸⁴ To quote the story in full would take up too much space, so I propose to summarize it.⁸⁵ The events are said to have taken

place in 1743, but according to Swedenborg's diary of the time, he wasn't in London until the 17th May 1744, after leaving the Hague on the 13th and arriving at Harwich on the 16th!⁸⁶ Its claim to being historically accurate doesn't start off too well!

At first Swedenborg "behaved very decently" in Brockmer's house in 1743: "he went every Sunday to the chapel of the Moravians in Fetter Lane."⁸⁷ He lived very much as a recluse though often talked to Brockmer. When he began to write his book *The Worship and Love of God* on 27th October 1744, he did not open his bedroom door for 2 days, to let the maid make his bed and sweep the room. The maid got somewhat agitated at this and found Brockmer at a coffeehouse. Brockmer returned home and knocked on the door. Swedenborg got out of bed but refused to let the maid in because he was working on his book. At 9 o'clock which was Brockmer's bedtime, Swedenborg ran after Brockmer and "looked very frightful: his hair stood upright and foamed a little at his mouth." After overcoming his speech impediment he told Brockmer that "he was the Messiah: that he was come to be crucified for the Jews," and that because of this impediment, Brockmer was going to be his spokesman at the synagogue the next day. Swedenborg repeatedly assures Brockmer that an angel will confirm what he has said to him during the night. Brockmer suggests that they send for Dr. Smith, a friend of Swedenborg's, but they eventually reach an agreement that Swedenborg will only go to Dr. Smith if the angel doesn't appear. Brockmer had a restless night and got up about 5 a.m. When Swedenborg heard this he raced upstairs to him, and questioned him whether the angel had appeared, "foaming continually." Brockmer insists they go to the doctor, to which Swedenborg replies that he is talking to one spirit on his right hand who says to go with Brockmer, the other says not to, because Brockmer is a "good-for-nothing." Swedenborg leaves Brockmer's room and cries "like a child" reassuring Brockmer that he won't hurt him. When Brockmer dresses himself and goes to Swedenborg's room, he finds him dressed also. While Brockmer went to Dr. Smith to arrange alternative lodgings for Swedenborg, eventually finding some with a Peruke-maker 3 or 4 doors from Dr. Smith, Swedenborg went to see the Swedish ambassador and not finding him at home, "He then went to a place called the Gully-hole, undressed himself, rolled in very deep mud, and threw the money out of his pockets among

the crowd." Some of the Ambassador's servants brought him home to Brockmer covered with mud. Swedenborg had a bath in the back room, but Brockmer feared for his safety and had the lock taken off the door. When they barged in they found Swedenborg washing his feet. He had used 6 towels and required 6 more. Leaving Swedenborg with 2 men, Brockmer got some medicines from Dr. Smith and informed the Swedish envoy what had happened. Brockmer continued to visit Swedenborg at his new lodging, but he would never dispute Swedenborg's continual claim that he was the Messiah. One day Dr. Smith had given Swedenborg a purging powder, and he went out in a field and outran his attendant, and sat on a stile laughing. Whenever the attendant caught up with him, he outran him to the next stile and so on. After this Brockmer didn't see much of Swedenborg to talk to him.

A critical look at Mathesius' accounts of Brockmer's story

Tafel regarded the first part of the story as true, that is, up to Brockmer retiring to his room at 9 o'clock, because "it is confirmed by collateral testimony. But the rest of his account...is an unmitigated falsehood."⁸⁸ Tafel then proceeds to list what books Swedenborg was writing between 1743 and 1745, and then lists what official duties, particularly at the Swedish College of Mines, he performed on his return to Sweden from August 1745 to July 1747. "In the Minutes of the College of Mines for 1745 he is marked 'unwell' five times, and in 1746 four times; and in 1747 he is never marked absent on account of illness," despite the other times when he was frequently out of the country researching and publishing books. He was unanimously nominated by his colleagues for the vacant councillor's position at the College of Mines in June 1747, but Swedenborg asked that the King release him on a pension of half-pay.⁸⁹ Tafel concludes by saying:

It is difficult to understand how, in the face of this testimony received from the King of Sweden in 1747, and from his colleagues at the College of Mines, who had daily an opportunity of watching and observing him, a Swedish minister of the Gospel could dare to publish a report that Swedenborg, ever since 1743 had been insane; and indeed on the

strength of an occurrence which happened thirty or forty years before he circulated this report; and still more difficult is it to understand how his biographer [White] who must have been acquainted with the real state of the case could conscientiously endorse, and publish as true, such testimony.⁹⁰

But there is more than one version of Brockmer's story. Mathesius had two versions: one he gave to John Wesley which was published in 1781, and one he wrote down in 1796. Wesley also published a much abridged version in 1783.

White in his last two biographies of Swedenborg published a translation of Mathesius' account of Swedenborg from 1796, which he claims only differs from the 1781 version in "two or three extra details."⁹¹ However Tafel says that "There is a considerable discrepancy between these two accounts, as we shall have occasion to show."⁹² Only people who weigh up the evidence will be able to make a sound judgment. In 1914 Higham sides with Tafel when he concludes, that Tafel "submits the two versions to a searching analysis and comparison, with effects disastrous to the reputation for veracity of the narrator, or his interviewer."⁹³ Well what do I make of Tafel's comparison of the two accounts?

In my opinion there are more than two or three differences between the 1781 version and the 1796 one. If Brockmer's story is to be regarded as important evidence for either a medical or psychological diagnosis, then the discrepancies between the two accounts need to be taken into account and explained. In weighing up the truth of the accounts it may be helpful to ponder how good a witness Brockmer was, because in the later version: "My wife and children were at the same time very ill, which increased my anxiety."⁹⁴ What state of mind was Brockmer in when he related the story to Mathesius? We don't know, but it doesn't justify Mathesius elaborating the story in 1796.

Mathesius' later account adds that Swedenborg "was a Godfearing man"⁹⁵ and that "I know you are an honest man...and, as you tell me, have never taken medicine,"⁹⁶ which is complimentary to his character and state of health. However, I would suggest that Swedenborg is more psychologically disturbed in the 1796 version, which of course is the version

White inserted in his last two biographies of Swedenborg, and the version on which I and other Swedenborgians, mentioned above, suspect psychiatrists have based their diagnoses of him.⁹⁷ Here are the reasons for my assertion:

In his 1796 account Mathesius elaborates his first, by saying that Swedenborg *continued* to complain *for several months* that the learned and rich must go to hell, whereas in the 1781 account Swedenborg complained once.⁹⁸ In 1796 Mathesius says that apart from his stammering or well-known speech impediment, “he could not utter his thoughts,”⁹⁶ which is important for a medical or psychological diagnosis. As is he “foamed a little at his mouth” and later on “He foaming continually cried” (1781), as against “he foamed round the mouth” and later on “He foamed and cried again and again” (1796).⁹⁹ Later Swedenborg went upstairs and “spoke, but so confusedly that he could not be understood,” and then Brockmer was worried that Swedenborg would injure him with “a penknife or other instrument,”⁹⁴ and yet in 1781 Brockmer claims that Swedenborg takes the initiative by expressing Brockmer’s concerns: “sitting down in a chair cried like a child, and said, ‘Do you think I should hurt you?’”¹⁰⁰ When Swedenborg locked himself in an inner room serving as a bathroom in 1781, Brockmer became apprehensive that Swedenborg might hurt himself, whereas in the 1796 account Swedenborg would not open the door despite their request. Two men in 1781 become six guards in 1796.¹⁰¹ Swedenborg’s attendant in 1781 becomes his “keeper.”¹⁰²

I cannot help but be sympathetic towards Higham’s position when he writes: “But, strange to say, the revised version of 1796 differs widely from the authorized version printed by John Wesley in 1781.”¹⁰³ However, I would have toned down “widely” to “to quite an extent.” But in conceding that, it seems reasonable to me, that Swedenborg was more psychologically disturbed in Mathesius’ 1796 version than the 1781 version. But how many psycho-historians have carried out this exercise? None that I know of, because they haven’t examined all the evidence, because they haven’t known about or bothered searching for it. I suppose in 1796 Mathesius could have remembered details that he had forgotten to tell John Wesley in 1781, but that becomes a bit doubtful, when we consider that the accounts were written 38 and 53 years respectively after the alleged event.¹⁰⁴

In his *Arminian Magazine* for 1783¹⁰⁵ Wesley began by quoting Swedenborg's autobiographical letter to one of his early English readers, Rev. Thomas Hartley,¹⁰⁶ and then wrote:

Many years ago the Baron came over to England, and lodged at one Mr. Brockmer's: who informed me (and the same information was given me by Mr. Mathesius, a very serious Swedish clergyman, both of whom were alive when I left London, and, I suppose, are so still,) that while he was in his house he had a violent fever; in the height of which, being totally delirious, he broke from Mr. Brockmer, ran into the street stark naked, proclaimed himself the Messiah, and rolled himself in the mire. I suppose he dates from this time his admission into the Society of Angels. From this time we are undoubtedly to date that peculiar species of insanity which attended him, with scarce any intermission, to the day of his death.¹⁰⁷

This 1783 account of Wesley's differs in a number of ways from his version of 1781. (It is intriguing that both Mathesius' and Wesley's later versions are more elaborate and exaggerated than their originals!) The fever in 1781 became "a violent fever" in 1783. Swedenborg is more psychologically disturbed in 1783 than 1781, because he is "totally delirious," and has to break out of Brockmer's grasp. Both details are missing in the 1781 version. In the 1781 version Swedenborg claimed he was the Messiah inside Brockmer's house and next day took off his clothes outside, whereas Wesley in 1783 switches the places these actions occurred around, and has them happen consecutively.

Even White doesn't believe this second account of Wesley's, regarding it as "discreditable to Wesley's veracity" and "but we cannot forget, that he was a sad gossip, and that truth was nearly certain to suffer when it encountered his dislike or self-will. The instance before us is no more than characteristic of his loose and unscrupulous habit of writing and speaking."¹⁰⁸ In 1868 White wrote of Wesley that "in apparent oblivion of what he had printed in 1781, he entertained the readers of the *Arminian Magazine* in 1783 with the following creation of his lively imagination."¹⁰⁹ In support of this statement he mentioned Rev. Francis Okely's opinion of John Wesley and testimony concerning Brockmer's story, which was pub-

lished in an article by Rev. W.H. Benade in an American New Church magazine printed in New York.¹¹⁰ Higham had access to it and quotes Okely as follows:

As I rather suspect J.W.'s narratives, they being always warped to his own inclination, I enquired since of Mr. Brockmore concerning it, and have found all the main lines of it truth.¹¹¹

Okely only believed that Swedenborg was temporarily insane on the basis of Brockmer's story, but when he met Swedenborg, he describes him as "very composed in his countenance and whole demeanour."¹¹² Rev. Francis Okely was a Moravian minister who had met Swedenborg in 1771 in London,^{112a} and had discussed Mathesius' account of 1781 with Brockmer himself. In a letter to John Wesley, Okely testified that Swedenborg "spoke with all the coolness and deliberation you might expect from any, the most sober and rational man"¹¹³ and whose theological works are "most exceptional" to his critic.¹¹⁴

But there is a slight complication in taking Okely's validation of at least "the main lines" of Brockmer's story too literally. In 1783¹¹⁵ four Swedenborgian gentlemen went to visit Brockmer. We know two of their names: Mr. Robert Beatson, the first secretary of the General Conference of the New Church and Rev. Robert Hindmarsh. After Wesley's 1783 account was read to Brockmer he is quoted as saying:

That it was entirely false; that he never gave any information of the kind to Mr. Wesley, but supposed that some other person might have made such a report to Mr. Wesley, who he said was very credulous, and easy to be imposed upon by any idle tale, from whatever quarter it came. Mr. Brockmer further added, "That Baron Swedenborg was never afflicted with any illness, much less with a violent fever, while at his house; nor did he ever break from him in a delirious state, and run into the street stark naked, and there proclaim himself the Messiah." Mr. Brockmer acknowledged, "that he had heard a report, that Baron Swedenborg had rolled himself in the mire; but he could not be certain of the fact, because he did not see it himself, but was only told so."¹¹⁶

When asked about Wesley's account of 1781:

After reading it, he replied, "That to the best of his knowledge and recollection, some things in that account were true; that other things were absolutely false; and that the whole was exaggerated and unfairly stated." He said, it was true, that Swedenborg once called himself the Messiah; but not true that he always persisted in it, whenever he saw him afterwards, as Mr. Wesley insinuates. It was true that his hair stood upright, for as he wore a wig, it was necessary to keep his hair cut short, in which case any person's hair will stand upright; but it was not true that he looked frightful or wild, for he was of a most placid and serene disposition. It was true that he had an impediment in his speech, and spoke with earnestness; but not true, that he foamed at the mouth, as Mr. Wesley has represented him.¹¹⁷

Woodman is not far wrong with his summary: "Brockmer,...declared it to be in some things absolutely false, and in those which has a substratum of truth as exaggerated and unfairly stated."¹¹⁸ So what do we make of Brockmer's evidence which he made a few months before he died, that Swedenborg was never ill while lodging with him, that he never had a frightful appearance nor foamed at the mouth, but that Brockmer had heard from some unknown person that Swedenborg had proclaimed himself the Messiah?

White doesn't attach a great deal of significance to the evidence arising from the visit of four New Churchmen to Brockmer. He argues that Brockmer's four visitors questioned him so intensely "to the great alarm and confusion, we apprehend, of poor Brockmer's mind,"¹¹⁹ and their reading from *The Arminian Magazine* and cross-questioning "muddled Brockmer's memory,"¹²⁰ but offers no evidence to support this conjecture. Even his statement that "The interview with Brockmer is repeated by Hindmarsh in several works, and is a stock quotation of Swedenborgian apologists"¹²¹ is unsupported. I can't understand how White can conclude that Hindmarsh "did nothing substantially to upset Brockmer's testimony as delivered to Mathesius," even allowing for his "unsatisfactory" examination? I agree it would have been a good question to ask Brockmer, "under what circumstances he confided to Mathesius the story about his

lodger." In White's opinion it boils down to deciding who to believe, Mathesius or Hindmarsh, and he chooses the former.¹²⁰ One American New Church Minister, Rev. Ormond Odhner, comes to a different black-and-white judgment:

It could only have been with Brockmer that the insanity story originated. Later he vowed he had nothing to do with it. At one time or the other, then, he lied. His insanity story, therefore—if ever he told it—was the testimony of a liar. As such it is worthless.¹²²

It is one thing for a psychiatrist or anybody to be uncritically over-reliant on White's biography, that is, by ignoring other opinions of the same evidence, but Maudsley went too far by claiming that Swedenborgians "have impugned the veracity of Brockmer's story."³² Surely Brockmer has also brought into question the story attributed to him, by what he said to the four Swedenborgians? Also its accuracy is questionable because Wesley published it without consulting Brockmer, and only had Mathesius to authenticate it.¹²³

However the question of bias will not go away. In his third biography White elaborates on only Robert Hindmarsh being "a zealous Swedenborgian" to "Some zealous Swedenborgians" and "Whatever their verdict, their bias would have made it suspicious; but we are able to produce a voucher which ought to settle every cavil as to the general accuracy of Brockmer as delivered by Mathesius." White then goes on to quote Okely.¹²⁴ It is a shame that White never explained why Beatson and Hindmarsh's story of their visit to Brockmer was trivial or annoying.

In White's opinion Mathesius' account is the true one, that is, the 1796 version, and he then proceeds to accuse Swedenborgians of attacking Mathesius and slandering him by saying that he himself [I.e. Mathesius] went mad. He seems to single out Rev. Samuel Noble as the chief culprit.¹²⁵ White thought that Mathesius just disagreed with Swedenborg's theology,¹²⁶ whereas Noble said that Mathesius was a "personal and violent enemy."¹²⁷ Presumably Noble based his opinion on the testimony of two leading members of the Swedish Church in London: Eric Bergstrom and Christopher Springer.

In 1787, fifteen years after Swedenborg's death, Eric Bergstrom told the physician, Dr. Peter Provo:

Mr. Mathesius was an opponent of Swedenborg, and said that he was lunatic, &c; but it is remarkable that he went lunatic himself, which happened publicly one day when he was in the Swedish Church, and about to preach: I was there, and saw it; he has been so ever since, and sent back to Sweden, where he now is: this was about four years ago.¹²⁸

Bergstrom was a member of the church council and trustee of the Swedish Church in London,¹²⁹ besides being the innkeeper of the King's Arms Tavern, in Wellclose-square, London, with whom Swedenborg lived for 10 weeks.¹³⁰ Another leading council member of the Swedish Church in London, regarded as its "oldest pillar," was Christopher Springer.¹³¹ Robert Hindmarsh quotes Springer as saying that Mathesius "was known to be a professed enemy of Swedenborg, and had set his face against his writings: it was he that raised and spread the false account of Swedenborg's having been deprived of his senses."¹³² Springer testified to Benedict Chastanier, which the latter recorded in his book published in 1786, that Mathesius "had already expressed himself strongly against these doctrines" of Swedenborg's.¹³³ Springer had also told Chastanier in 1785:

that Swedenborg had presented his *Arcana Coelstia* to Mathesius, who was never willing to read the work, and who, from hostility he had conceived against the doctrines contained therein, had been constantly one of the greatest antagonists of Swedenborg; and who had contributed not a little to circulate and affirm the egregious falsehood which John Wesley, a minister of the Anglican Church and one of the chiefs of the sect called Methodists, was inconsiderate enough to insert in the January number of the "Arminian Magazine," I believe for 1781 or 1782. Wesley himself, however, is by no means the author of that falsehood, which he endeavoured to make as plausible as possible.¹³⁴

Chastanier also recorded that Mathesius "had become mad, and had in consequence of this been suspended from his ministry."¹³⁵ The records of the Swedish Church attest to Mathesius suffering "a severe illness,

whereby he was disabled from continuing his office"¹³⁶ so White is partially right in saying that "by the records of the Swedish Church" Mathesius didn't go insane,¹³⁷ but wouldn't they be circumspect in what they said about one of their ministers in their church records?

White thinks these accounts of Mathesius becoming insane, "are of next to no authority,"¹³⁸ and then goes on to say that "It is certainly of little consequence to us at this day whether Mathesius went mad or not; and the fact of his sanity or insanity in 1784 in no wise affects the truth of the narrative he drew out of Brockmer about 1770."¹³⁹

Attempting a critical examination of Brockmer's story is easy when comparing Mathesius' version of 1781 with his later one of 1796, or even John Wesley's abridged version of 1783. However, to weigh up Okely's estimation of Brockmer's story as "all the main lines of it truth"¹⁰⁴ against Brockmer denying four-fifths of it to Beatson and Hindmarsh, saying that "the whole was exaggerated and unfairly stated,"⁶³ is next to impossible. There seems to be less information or 'hard evidence' to go on, than opinions of individuals at the time and those of commentators some years removed. There is little if any corroboration of the testimony of Brockmer, Mathesius, Okely, Hindmarsh and Beatson, which leaves vast room for speculation.

At least we have quite a significant amount of information about Swedenborg's character and habits from Mr. Richard Shearsmith, with whom Swedenborg lodged for most of his stays in London.

Weighing evidence from Shearsmith with Brockmer's story

It seems to me imperative that if we are to evaluate Brockmer's story we must hear the various testimonies of the last English person with whom Swedenborg lodged, that is, the wig-maker and barber Richard Shearsmith. Swedenborg lodged with him "from July or August 1771 until his death, on March 29, 1772,"¹³⁹ which was his second time staying with Shearsmith,¹⁴⁰ for he stayed with him about seven months in 1769.¹⁴¹ We can easily gain an understanding of what it was like to have Swedenborg as a lodger, because many people had talked about this with Shearsmith.

Some evidence which was only published in 1885, which White did not have access to when he wrote his last two biographies of Swedenborg,

throws interesting light on Brockmer's tale as told by Mathesius. In fact this testimony of Shearsmith's may resolve some of Tafel's dilemmas while he tried to piece together the evidence.¹⁴² Tafel tried to identify the peruke-maker in Cold Bath Fields, to whom Dr. Smith found rooms for Swedenborg. In 1796 Mathesius names the wig maker as Mr. Michael Caer of Warner Street, Cold Bath Fields, who lived 3 or 4 doors from Dr. Smith.¹⁴³ When Shearsmith was interviewed by the physician Dr. Peter Provo in 1792, he said that Swedenborg lodged with a Mrs. Carr in Great Warner Street, next to the Red Lion in 1745,¹⁴⁴ after he stayed with Brockmer in Fetter Lane, and before he came to Shearsmith.¹⁴⁵ This would also suggest that he stayed with Brockmer and the Carrs or Caers (if they're one and the same people) in 1745 and 1769.¹

If Swedenborg's alleged "epileptic fit," for want of a better description, happened in 1769, it might explain why his good friend Brooksbank or Brocksbank related to Benedict Chastanier that Brockmer alleged this against Swedenborg for what he wrote about the Moravians in his book *Continuation concerning the Last Judgment* 86–90, which was published in Amsterdam in 1763.¹⁴⁶ The only difficulty with this is that it was first translated into English by Rev. Robert Hindmarsh in 1788, although presumably a few Latin copies were available, at least if one of Brockmer's Latin-reading friends were given access to Swedenborg's papers.¹⁴⁷

However, Shearsmith is of the opinion that Brockmer spread his false report concerning Swedenborg's sanity in 1745, and if there were any truth in it, both he and Mrs. Carr would have known about it since he had lived in the locality for 40 years, and Mrs. Carr was also a 'local'.¹⁴⁸ Shearsmith had told Rev. Robert Hindmarsh that "every report injurious to his character had been raised merely from malice, or disaffection, to his writings, by persons of a bigoted and contracted spirit."¹⁴⁹ In 1792 Shearsmith told Dr. Provo that, while Swedenborg was staying at Brockmer's

he and his maid were continually interrupting him in his studies, and wanted him to conform himself to their manner of living; and as to the story about his rolling himself in the dirt, I think it untrue, and more likely must have related to a Mr. Smith in whose house he lived in Cold Bath Fields, and who was a man of a strange turn of mind.¹⁵⁰

This allegation that Brockmer interrupted Swedenborg was also mentioned by Shearsmith to Mrs. E.O. Shaw a relative of Dr. J.J. Garth Wilkinson. Brockmer "used to meddle with his papers"¹⁵¹ and they "were so angry with his leaving them, that they spread a report that he was mad."¹⁵² Shearsmith goes on to say that,

it seems to me remarkable that Mr. Brockmer became insane before he died, as well as another person who had aspersed Mr. Swedenborg's character by saying he was so. That Dr. Smith is dead, and I know of no person in this part of the town who is now alive who knew him.¹⁴⁴

I know of no other person who says that Brockmer went insane, although he seems to have died in poverty according to Springer.¹⁵³ It is possibly a bit strange if Mathesius and Brockmer both have nervous breakdowns, but maybe Brockmer's poverty contributed to it. Probably we'll never know. With reference to Dr. Smith, is this the same Dr. Smith who Mathesius says that Swedenborg was "intimate" in 1781 and a mutual "friend" in 1796?⁹⁸ If so, who do we believe and why? Is the Mr. Smith Shearsmith refers to the same as the Dr. Smith he refers to?

Again we find gaps in the evidence. We can't corroborate whether Mathesius' Mr. Caer is the husband of Shearsmith's Mrs. Carr, or whether Mathesius' Dr. Smith is the same person as Shearsmith's Dr. Smith or Mr. Smith. Mathesius relates that Brockmer's maid did interrupt Swedenborg writing, as did Brockmer subsequently, which is confirmed by testimony obtained either directly or indirectly from Shearsmith. It also seems reasonable that Brockmer's overzealous maid meddled with his papers. How far we can stretch the other evidence depends on our opinion of Mathesius' accounts of Brockmer's story. Nobody seems to have dismissed Shearsmith's testimony.

What was it like to share a house with Swedenborg?

So what would it be like to have Swedenborg as a lodger, or indeed as a master? I would like to deal with this in two ways. Firstly, to let witnesses describe how he looked during his visions, and secondly, to talk about his sleeping habits.

Henry Peckitt (died 1808), the retired physician and pharmacist, was the first President of the General Conference of the New Church in 1789. When Peckitt spoke to Richard Shearsmith, he was told the following:¹⁵⁴

Mr. Shearsmith was affrighted when he first lodged with him, by reason of his talking in the night and day. He said, he would sometimes be writing, and sometimes would stand talking in the doorstead of his room,¹⁵⁵ as if he was holding a conversation with some person; but as he spoke in a language Mr. Shearsmith did not understand, he could not make anything of it.¹⁵⁶

Shearsmith told Dr. Peter Provo in 1792, that sometimes during these daytime and nocturnal conversations with invisible people, Swedenborg "often gave signs of approbation or disapprobation at what was said."¹⁵⁷ He further adds:

I have often seen a pleasant smile on his countenance, but did not ever observe him to laugh. At times, I think, he was under temptation of mind; for I have heard sometimes a kind of moaning or rather weeping.¹⁵⁸

...what he saw was in a wakeful state, as he generally stood between the bed and front room when conversing in the day with spirits or those who were invisible to others; which conversations would often also be held in the night, or towards 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning, and would last for an hour or more, he often appearing to be in a kind of conflict, and saying, Nay! nay! nay! often, and sometimes loud; but when it met his approbation, Yea! yea! was pronounced, and more often.¹⁵⁹

Back in his house in Sweden his gardener and his wife, who was his housekeeper, told Carl Robsahm, an accountant at the Bank²⁶² in Stockholm, that they slept in a nearby room and often heard Swedenborg call out in the night, due to being tempted by evil spirits. He was usually indignant with his tormentors or revilers and spoke to them thus. He was often heard to weep bitterly and cry out to the LORD not to leave him while he was in temptation. When they asked him about the cause of his crying out,

he replied that they weren't to worry because it was permitted by the LORD and that he wouldn't be tempted beyond what he could bear.¹⁶⁰

After one such incident of lamentation Swedenborg didn't get out of his bed for several days and nights, which greatly worried his servants. Not wishing to break down the door or worry his friends, the gardener peered through his window and eventually saw Swedenborg turn over in bed to their great relief and joy. The next morning when Swedenborg rang the bell, the housekeeper went into his room and expressed her own and her husband's fears about his well-being. Swedenborg cheerfully replied "that he was doing well, and that he did not need anything."¹⁶¹

After one such vision, the housekeeper saw that "the pupils of his eyes had the appearance of the brightest fire," at which she expressed her fears and concerns out loud to Swedenborg. On finding out how he looked, Swedenborg replied, "Well! well! don't be frightened. The Lord has opened my bodily eyes, and I have been in the spirit; but in a little while, I shall be all right again; and this does me no harm." Half an hour later he had returned to normal.¹⁶² In Abbe Pernety's version, Robsahm had told him that the fire in his eyes was due to spirits seeing into our world through them.¹⁶³

When Pastor Arvid Ferelius, the minister at the Swedish Church in London, visited Swedenborg one day, he heard him enthusiastically addressing a crowd, but when he asked Shearsmith's servant, Elizabeth Reynolds, later Shearsmith's second wife, she said that Swedenborg had been like that for 3 days and nights. When Ferelius entered his room, Swedenborg welcomed him "with great calmness" and asked him to sit down. Swedenborg then told Ferelius he had been infested and tormented by evil spirits, whose wickedness had been greater than any others he had previously experienced. Swedenborg then told Ferelius, he was then in the company of good spirits.¹⁶⁴

Mr. Eric Bergstrom the innkeeper of the King's Arms Tavern in Wellclose-square reported to Dr. Peter Provo in 1787, that he heard joyful noises coming from Swedenborg's bedroom one time during Swedenborg's ten week stay in his inn:¹³⁰

He commonly retired to his chamber in the evening, and once I heard some noise from that part, and went to speak to him about it; and as he seemed rejoiced, I asked him the occasion; when he told me that he had seen some extraordinary things which pleased him.¹⁶⁵

From Shearsmith's conversation with Mrs. E.O. Shaw, we learn:

Swedenborg desired Mr. Shearsmith never to disturb him, when in his spiritual state. Sometimes he was two or three days in it. Shearsmith remarked a very peculiar look about his face at such times, and sometimes feared Swedenborg was dead. He, however, told him never to be troubled: all would be well.¹⁶⁶

Swedenborg's instructions to Shearsmith are entirely consistent with his instructions to his Swedish housekeeper, who told Mr. C.F. Nordenskold,

That Swedenborg often lay for several days in his bed without eating. He gave orders that they were not to awake him, or to touch him in such a state, but to place a basin of water before his bed. When he awoke he did not feel the least weakness, but was strong and hale, as if he had partaken of hearty meals during the whole of that time.¹⁶⁷

Shearsmith told Peckitt that shortly before his death, Swedenborg "lay some weeks in a trance, without any sustenance; and came to himself again."¹⁶⁸

We have some idea of what would happen if Swedenborg was disturbed during one of his visions, from the testimony of General Christian Tuxen (1713–1792?), the head of Danish customs at the port of Elsinore.¹⁶⁹ In his enthusiasm to see his old friend, Tuxen burst into Swedenborg's cabin one day, with the ship captain's permission, and also found him in a trance:

I found the Assessor seated in undress, his elbows on the table, his hands supporting his face, which was turned towards the door, his eyes open, and much elevated. I was so imprudent as immediately to address him,

expressing my happiness at seeing and speaking with him. At this he recovered himself (for he had really been in a trance or ecstasy, as his posture evinced), and rising with some confusion, advanced a few steps from the table in singular and visible uncertainty, expressed by his countenance and hands, from which, however, he soon recovered, bidding me welcome, and asking me whence I came.¹⁷⁰

On captain Harrison's ship once, Swedenborg was in bed for the whole voyage talking to people. The cabin-boy and mate thought he was mad. Harrison replied that Swedenborg was quiet enough, and always spoke to him prudently and discreetly, and they always had favorable winds when Swedenborg sailed with them.¹⁷¹ Another sea captain also told Robsahm that "Swedenborg generally lay in bed and talked" while on his ship as well.¹⁷²

Christopher Springer (1704–1775) related to Abbe Pernety the time when he and Swedenborg were staying at an inn near the port of London (Harwich?). Swedenborg

went to bed, and I sat in another room with the landlord, with whom I conversed. We heard a noise; and not being able to tell the cause, we approached a door, which had a little window looking into the room where Swedenborg was sleeping. We saw him with his hands raised towards heaven, and his body apparently very much agitated. He spoke much for half-an-hour, but we could not understand what he was saying, except when he dropped his hands. When we heard him say with a loud voice, "My God!" but could not hear more. He remained afterwards very quietly in his bed. I stepped into his room with the landlord, and asked whether he was ill. "No," said he, "But I have had a long discourse with the angels and the heavenly friends, and am at this time in a great perspiration." As his things had been taken on board, he asked the landlord for a fresh shirt and a fresh sheet. Afterwards he went to bed again, and slept till morning.¹⁷³

But Swedenborg would also be talking to invisible people while out on walks.¹⁷⁴ According to what Burkhardt, a former clerk to the Swedish Chapel in London, told Dr. Peter Provo in 1783:

Swedenborg was a holy, good man, much given to abstraction of mind; that even when walking out he sometimes seemed as if in private prayer, and latterly took but little notice of things and people in the streets.¹⁷⁵

But Swedenborg's facial expressions were also known to have changed when he learned that Emperor Peter III of Russia had been executed, and also while at a dinner party in Gothenburg he learned of a fire in Sweden near his own house.

John Henry Jung-Stilling (1740–1817), an ophthalmologist and professor of agriculture at the University of Heidelberg and then Professor of political economy at the University of Marburg, was told by a friend, that on 17th July¹⁷⁶

“In the year 1762, on the very day when the Emperor Peter III of Russia died, Swedenborg was present with me at a party in Amsterdam. In the middle of the conversation, his physiognomy became changed, and it was evident that his soul was no longer present in him, and that something was taking place with him.” As soon as he recovered, after being urged repeatedly, he began to say how Peter III had been executed in his prison cell, which was confirmed in newspapers some days later.¹⁷⁷

According to the results of Immanuel Kant's investigations of Swedenborg's psychic experience of seeing a fire in Stockholm¹⁷⁸ while at a party at the home of William Castel in Gothenburg 300 miles away, Swedenborg left the company to walk in the garden¹⁷⁹ at 6 p.m., and returned “quite pale and alarmed.” “He was restless, and went out often.” “At eight o'clock, after he had been out again, he joyfully exclaimed, ‘Thank God! the fire is extinguished, the third door from my house.’”¹⁸⁰ Swedenborg stated to the assembled company “he had been told by the angels, that a fire was raging in Stockholm, in such and such a street.”¹⁸¹ The details were confirmed some days later by a messenger.

According to Shearsmith in 1792, Swedenborg

paid no attention to particular hours, but ate and slept only when he was hungry or weary.¹⁸²

He was never known to be in a passion, but was always kind and civil, living as a philosopher, and not minding what others thought or said of him.¹⁸³

This is confirmed by what Shearsmith told Henry Peckitt in 1778:

It seems he had not particular regard for times or seasons, or days or nights; only taking rest when nature required it.¹⁸⁴

This is confirmed by Robsahm, who wrote:

Swedenborg worked without much regard to the distinction of day and night, having no fixed time for labour or rest. "When I am sleepy," he said, "I go to bed"¹⁸⁵

Burkhardt told Dr. Peter Provo in 1790 that "He was never married; indeed, he was so taken up with his studies and writings, that he had no time for anything else."¹⁸⁶

John Christian Cuno reports that his landlady in Amsterdam, who owned a drapery shop, told him that he required little or no help. Her servant lit his fire in the morning, and he tended it during the day.

Swedenborg went to bed at 7 p.m. and got up at 8 a.m.¹⁸⁷ Shearsmith reports that Swedenborg when staying with him in London often got up about 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, worked until 8 a.m. and then had breakfast, and often went to bed at 6 or 7 p.m.¹⁸⁸ Cuno also informs us that sleeping 13 hours straight, was "not too much for him."¹⁸⁹ In 1743 and 1744, from reading his *Journal of Dreams*, we learn that he usually went to bed around 9 p.m. or 10 p.m.¹⁹⁰ and slept for 10 or 11 or even 12 hours.¹⁹¹

So we can begin to see that if Swedenborg did behave in such a way while staying with Brockmer, it could upset the running of the house, particularly if Brockmer had a meticulous maid, and wasn't used to lodgers keeping irregular hours. It is therefore quite feasible that she would have gone to fetch Brockmer from the coffeehouse, because she had no reply from Swedenborg in his room. If Swedenborg did not "conform himself to their manner of living"¹⁵⁰ with regard to mealtimes and bed-

times, and couldn't tolerate Brockmer meddling "with his papers,"¹⁵¹ his life-style was incompatible with that of the Brockmer household.

We know that in 1744 Swedenborg stayed with Brockmer between 18th May and 9th July,¹⁹² after being introduced to him by a shoemaker called Senniff.¹⁹³ We accept that Swedenborg could have been seen in a trance by the maid, or the Brockmer household could have been woken up by Swedenborg talking to invisible visitors in the night, but as Higham wrote in 1914, there is "no contemporary account of the special incident, or incidents, of May-June 1744, and of their physical and psychical effect upon Swedenborg."¹⁹⁴ In fact Higham also says:

That such mental perturbations, and so stupendous a Divine interposition, should *not* be accompanied by abnormal physical phenomena in their human subject is—to speak simply—unthinkable. But to ascertain the exact character of those phenomena, and to assess their temporary or permanent impress upon Swedenborg's mental constitution, are tasks far beyond the powers of the present compiler.¹⁹⁴

But even allowing for the possibility of Swedenborg being noticed having an abnormal experience, why does he say both before and after his stay with Brockmer that nobody knows about the profound ecstatic experiences he is having? Advocates of his alleged monomania may have an explanation, but there are so many things they haven't explained.

Around 1927 Acton put together references in Swedenborg's works from 1744, 1746 and 1748, which state that nobody knew about his unusual experiences until 1763.¹⁹⁵ We will now take a look at the references Acton lists for 1744 and 1746.

Six weeks before his stay at Brockmer's house Swedenborg writes:

During all this time I was in society as usual and no one could in the least [observe in me any change]; this was of God's grace.¹⁹⁶

Around April 1746 Swedenborg also writes that nobody has noticed yet that he can be having a conversation with another person and yet having a conversation with a deceased person simultaneously:

for about a year...in company with others I speak just like any other man, so that as yet no one has been able to distinguish me from myself as I was formerly, nor from any other man. Yet in the midst of company I have sometimes spoken with spirits and with those who were about me; and it may be that certain conclusions might have been drawn from this circumstance. Of this, however, I know nothing, that is to say, as to whether, for this reason anything has been noticed, in that then, the internal senses were sometimes withdrawn from the external, though not in such way that any one would make any judgment therefrom; for at such times they could think no other than that I was occupied with thoughts. The actual speech is not heard by any one save myself and those in the heavens who are present and to whom God Messiah grants permission to hear it. Yet sometimes the speech is as clear and distinct as the human voice—though not so high or with so rough a sound as when coming through one's lips. So much is this the case that sometimes even angels and spirits, etc., were afraid they would be heard by those who were present in the world.¹⁹⁷

Both before the time he stayed with Brockmer and afterwards, Swedenborg doubted that anybody was aware of his unusual experiences. It really does make me wonder, if Brockmer's story did actually take place, why Swedenborg doesn't mention it in his books of the time? Why does Swedenborg say nobody noticed anything unusual about his public behavior, and yet if we are to believe Mathesius' account of Brockmer's story in both its recensions, all these witnesses noticed Swedenborg naked and rolling in the mud, and so on. As Rev. James Spilling asked in 1890, where is the testimony of all these witnesses?⁴

Possible origins of the Brockmer story

We know that while Swedenborg was with Brockmer, he did attend the Moravian Chapel in Fetter Lane every Sunday.¹⁹⁸ Higham suggests that Swedenborg's mere attendance could have created some interest, if not gossip about the Swedish gentleman who was lodging with Brockmer and came to the chapel with him.¹⁹⁹ I have already mentioned that second-hand testimony from Shearsmith attested that Brockmer was so angry at Swedenborg leaving him that he "spread a report that he was mad."¹⁵²

In 1914 Rev. Hugo Odhner came up with an interesting theory based on the evidence that Brockmer and his maid were guilty of meddling with Swedenborg's papers.¹⁵¹ The two came across Swedenborg's *Journal of Dreams* and finding it written in Swedish, showed it to a Swedish speaking acquaintance, who translated Swedenborg's dreams of the night between 20th and 21st June, in which he sees himself naked, except for a shirt, in a church at nighttime. Swedenborg interprets it as referring to his lack of preparation for the task ahead.²⁰⁰ Odhner continues:

Brockmer disappointed at losing a lodger and at the same time a possible convert to the Moravian Church, (which Swedenborg had been attending while living with Brockmer), may have told others of this dream (and other dreams equally personal) as if it had described an actual occurrence—subsequently adding further embroideries—until it finally reached the ears of Wesley, and of Mathesius, the Swedish Clergyman in London, who was personally acquainted with Brockmer, and whose malevolent gossip coined the 'Insanity myth' into common currency.²⁰¹

I suppose it is possible, but how could anybody prove it to be true? As with a lot of evidence or opinions about the evidence concerning the whole Swedenborg "Insanity myth," there is no corroboration from other witnesses or facts.

Chastanier relates that in 1785 Springer confirmed to him "in the presence of a numerous and respectable company"¹³⁴ that there were two origins to Brockmer's story. One was mentioned above attributed to Brooksbank, that Brockmer as a Moravian was upset about what Swedenborg said about Moravians in his book *Continuation concerning the Last Judgement*,¹⁴⁶ although I find this hard to believe for reasons stated above. Maybe from hindsight it could have aggravated things, but it seems far more realistic to believe that Swedenborg left because Brockmer and his maid meddled with his papers, and were trying to dictate how he should live his life, which caused him to leave. Brockmer, worried that his reputation might have been damaged, which would result in him not obtaining further lodgers, began a malicious rumor to protect his reputation.

The second incident which may have caused Brockmer's story concerned two thieving Jews who took advantage of Swedenborg when he was in

a swoon, or a kind of ecstasis or trance into which Swedenborg fell in their presence in his own house; when they profited of this ecstasis, to steal from him his gold watch. As soon as Swedenborg recovered his consciousness after his trance, he noticed that his watch had been taken from his pillow, and he asked the two Jews who were with him to restore it. They said to him, "Do you not know that in your ecstasis you seized your watch yourself; that you went out into the street, and threw it into the gutter." Swedenborg contented himself with replying, "My friends, you know that this statement is false." Being afterwards advised to prosecute these two rogues in a court of justice, he said, "It is not worth while; these good Israelites by this action have injured themselves more than me. May the Lord have pity on them."²⁰²

Circumstantially this story may fit in with the fact that Brockmer was a gold watch engraver. We also know that during 1743 and 1744 Swedenborg had experienced trances,²⁰³ ecstasies²⁰⁴ and swoons.²⁰⁵ Maybe his defence would have been harmed if he had admitted to having an altered state of consciousness, or he would have drawn unwelcome publicity to himself if he had resorted to prosecuting the Jews?

In the *Word Explained* Swedenborg mentions that the kingdom of heaven "has several times been shown me, first in the quiet of sleep and afterwards in midday or time of wakefulness, so that I could perceive it with the utmost clearness by every sensation."²⁰⁶ Presumably a swoon is one subcategory of Swedenborg's second type of "apparition," "when the man is in wakefulness, and the internal senses are removed, as it were, from the external,"²⁰⁷ which happened to him "frequently."²⁰⁸ Presumably it is this type of spiritual experience, which was described by Shearsmith,¹⁶⁶ Tuxen,¹⁷⁰ and when he knew that Emperor Peter III of Russia had been executed.¹⁷⁷ So there are possible examples of Swedenborg beginning a vision by having a swoon.

Secondly, we know from what Shearsmith told Dr. Peter Provo in 1792 that Swedenborg

was also regardless of money, leaving a very large purse of guineas in an open closet in his room, and the room-door open when he went out,²⁰⁹ and He seemed to lead a life like an infant, putting little value on money, and giving what people asked for their goods when he bought them.²¹⁰

Charles Lindegren retrieved “a good gold watch” amongst his effects after his death.²¹¹ Whether this was a replacement watch for the one stolen, or whether Swedenborg was wealthy enough to have two or more, we will never know.

As with most of the explanations of the events alleged by Brockmer, there is no way of corroborating Rev. Hugo Odhner’s theory, nor of corroborating Springer’s two origins of the ‘insanity myth’. We do know about at least some of Swedenborg’s trances, ecstasies and swoons from 1744 onwards and later. Whether he had such an experience at Brockmer’s house in 1744 is doubtful, because Swedenborg himself maintains that nobody knew he was having altered states of consciousness. As Higham argued in 1914, nobody knows what experiences Swedenborg had at Brockmer’s,¹⁹⁴ apart from the dreams he had during his stay with him.

Swedenborg the alleged Messiah

In Mathesius’ accounts of Swedenborg’s alleged “epileptic fit,” for want of a better description, Swedenborg is supposed to have told Brockmer that “he was the Messiah: that he was come to be crucified for the Jews.”²¹² White claims that this detail as well the rest of Brockmer’s story fits “into the incoherences of the Diary with singular credibility.”²¹³ We will now examine whether this fits as snugly as White makes out.

The first problem is that Swedenborg doesn’t seem to use the word “Messiah” in his *Journal of Dreams*! The Greek translation of the Hebrew word MASHIACH is Christ in its anglicized form. Swedenborg uses “Christ” some 36 times, 6 of which in conjunction with “Jesus.” The *Journal of Dreams* was written in Swedish, so I am not able to confirm whether Swedenborg uses “Messiah” in these places, or the Swedish equivalent of “Christ.” I can only assume that he uses the latter.

[Editor's note: Rev. Erik Sandstrom writes: "Swedenborg nowhere uses the name Messiah, but frequently the Swedish form *Christus* of the Greek equivalent for "Messiah." He inflects the name Latin-style (as is still customary in Swedish religious language), so that the genitive becomes *Christi* and the dative (*in*) *Christo*. It is interesting that Swedenborg, still a Lutheran, frequently falls back on contemporary church phrases, such as 'Gudz nad igenom Christi fortienst' (the grace of God through the merit of Christ). 'Ware Herre' (our Lord) occurs a number of times, and sometimes the expression is joined to 'God' rather than 'Christ,' as in 'Den Hogste...helig, helig, Herre Gud Zebaoth...ware Herre' (The Most High...holy, holy, Lord Zebaoth...our Lord). As Swedenborg tells of the Lord Himself appearing to him, however, the names are Jesus and Christus, sometimes in combination, as: 'Det ar Jesu Christi werk och intet mitt' (the work is that of Jesus Christ, and is not mine).]

The second difficulty is that nowhere in the *Journal of Dreams* does Swedenborg call himself the Messiah. He nowhere calls himself "Christ," or "God," or "the Almighty," or "the Holy Spirit," which is not surprising to Swedenborgians. For Swedenborg, God, in whatever terms he uses for Him, is separate and distinct from him. Some examples of his usage of "Christ" will suffice without laboring the point. The first example occurs while he was staying with Brockmer:

Christ showed me the divine grace. (JD 209)

...the all in all is to allow Christ to draw his providing care about us in the spiritual and the worldly. (JD 233e)

But God through Christ is the only one that helped me herein. He is my Lord and Master, and I am his slave. Honor and thanks to him, without whom no one can come to God. (JD 248)

In his *Journal of Dreams* Swedenborg spoke like any other 18th century Lutheran about God. I will now restrict myself to those entries written while he was staying with Brockmer:¹⁹²

3. Love to God in Christ is that by which salvation is promoted. 4. And then the man allows himself to be guided by the Spirit of Jesus. 5. All that comes from ourselves is dead, and nothing else than sin; and worthy of everlasting condemnation. 6. For no good can come from any other source than the Lord. (JD 198)

The day before I was so set in order that I had inward rest and peace in the Lord's disposal; and also the whole time recognized the Holy Spirit's strong operation, the bliss, and the earthly kingdom of heaven that filled the whole body. (JD 199)

I was in thoughts about those that resisted the Holy Spirit and those that allowed themselves to be governed by it. (JD 203)

To God alone be praise and honor. (JD 210e)

In 1746 in his book *Adversaria* or *Word Explained*, there was only one Messiah, and it certainly wasn't Swedenborg! For Swedenborg the 18th century Lutheran Christian, the Messiah is Jesus Christ:

...the Messiah, the Savior of the world. (WE 95; 98)

...the Messiah himself, the Saviour of the world, Jesus the Nazarene. (WE 478)

...the Messiah alone, the King of that kingdom, the Savior of the world, Jesus the Nazarene, anointed as King, whence he is called Christ, born of the virgin Mary... (WE 483)

Now Christians often quote passages in the Bible, which talk about Jesus being in them.²¹⁴ Swedenborg in 1746 also talks about Christ or the Messiah being in people:

the Messiah, the only-begotten son of God, in those who are his, when he is in them as in himself,...And yet there is not the least thing in the thought, nor the least thing in the will, and consequently not the least

thing in all that flows from the will, such as the actions and the several motions of man's body, which is not actuated by the Messiah himself just as if it were himself. Thus man is led in all respects like a passive potency or a dead force (as, in himself, he indeed is, although he himself is of a different opinion) by its active and living force; that is, as an instrumental cause is led solely by its prime efficient cause.

That the life of those who are in the Messiah is of this nature, can never be believed by anyone who has not been informed by Him, and who could have no experience testified to in himself.²¹⁵

As usual, Swedenborg's theology was based on the Bible and personal experience of God. It would be extremely out of character for Swedenborg to call himself the Messiah. However, it would not be un-Christian of him to talk about himself as being "moved," "inspired" or "actuated by the Messiah."

If ever Swedenborg were to call himself the "Messiah" it would be in this derivative sense, just as Jesus "the light of the world" (John 8:12) called his followers "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). This was the way that Beatson argued, when he wrote to John Wesley sometime in the 1780s:

Even supposing it to be true, that Swedenborg once called himself the Messiah, (which, however, is a character that he has no where assumed in any of his writings) this may be accounted for in the same manner, as we would account for angels calling themselves Jehovah, as they frequently did, when they appeared to the prophets of old. On such occasions, their own proprium or selfhood was quiescent, or as it were laid aside; and they were so filled with the presence and spirit of Jehovah, that they knew no otherwise but they themselves were Jehovah; having for the moment no consciousness or perception of their own proper life as creatures, but being overwhelmed as it were with the Divinity, which, for the purpose of revelation, made use of their persons as organs of divine speech. In like manner we apprehend it to be *possible*, (though we do not say that it was a *real fact*,) that Swedenborg, by whose means the Second Advent of the

Lord is actually effected, might once have called himself the Messiah, when, being filled with the Holy Spirit, he as it were lost the consciousness of his own existence, and spake merely as the representative of the Lord. Be this however as it may, it is certain, that in the whole of his writings (by which alone we can form a true judgment of his character) he discovers the deepest humility, the soundest judgment, and the most pious and christian-like spirit, disclaiming every idea of self-importance, and perpetually ascribing to the Lord alone all glory, honour, praise, and power.²¹⁶

In the Bible the prophets spoke as though they were the LORD,²¹⁷ and human messengers spoke as though they were their master.²¹⁸ So if Swedenborg were to call himself the Messiah, it could only be in a derivative sense, because as said in his writings from that period and others, the Messiah is always Jesus Christ.

Another explanation given by Swedenborgians in the past is that Brockmer misheard Swedenborg. Rev. Woodville Woodman expressed this theory in 1867:

And if the description given in Mr. White's book of Swedenborg's broken English, when he exclaimed of his works, 'De voil be not vordy of dem,' is a correct one, the probability is rather that Mr. Brockmer mistook what Swedenborg said, than that the latter should have so directly contradicted the whole tenor of his writings.²¹⁹

The Shearsmiths told Peckitt in 1778 that Swedenborg "did not know the English language so as to hold a running conversation in it. He had an impediment in his speech."²²⁰ Four years later Shearsmith told Dr. Provo:

In English he conversed but indifferently, but more freely in Latin with those who visited him. Mr. Hartley and he, I think, always conversed in Latin, and also some of the Swedish clergy.²²¹

Swedenborg always had a speech impediment.²²² Swedenborg "usually spoke very distinctly, but stammered a little when he spoke too fast."²²³ According to Robsahm, "It was difficult for him to talk quickly; for

he then stuttered, especially when he was obliged to talk in a foreign tongue."²²⁴

Snippets of his broken English have been preserved for us, such as "Dat be he! Dat be he!," when, from his approaching coach he saw Shearsmith.²²⁵ When Swedenborg asked Shearsmith to shake his carpet on a Sunday, and Swedenborg hadn't realized what day it was, and Shearsmith suggested they do it the next day, Swedenborg immediately replied, "Dat be good! Dat be good!"²²⁶ Minutes before his death, which he had predicted a month before, Swedenborg asked the Shearsmiths what time it was, and when they said 5 p.m., he said "Dat be good! Me tank you, God bless you." He said goodbye to them and then calmly passed on.²²⁷

So for Swedenborg the stammerer speaking English as a foreign language, he might have been misheard by Brockmer. Even Mathesius agrees that Swedenborg did have a speech impediment, both in his 1781 account and his 1796 one.²²⁸ It is reasonable that he could have been misheard, because nowhere in his writings of the period and later, does he acknowledge himself to be the Messiah. For this 18th century Lutheran Christian, only the LORD Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ or Messiah. The only sensible conclusion is that were he to have called himself the Messiah, it was in a derivative sense, that is, the LORD Jesus Christ inspiring him, made him the Messiah.

The only passage in his theological writings which I know of which could remotely be envisaged as Swedenborg acknowledging himself to be the Messiah is in *True Christian Religion*, but even it is in a derivative sense, and he never uses the word "Messiah":

This, the Lord's second coming, is taking place by means of a man, to whom He has shown Himself in person, and whom He has filled with His spirit, so that he may teach the doctrines of the new church which come from the Lord through the Word.

Since the Lord cannot show Himself in person, as has just been demonstrated, and yet He predicted that He would come and found a new church, which is the New Jerusalem, it follows that He will do this by means of a man, who can not only receive intellectually the doctrines of this church, but also publish them in print. I bear true witness that the

Lord has shown Himself in the presence of me, His servant, and sent me to perform this function. After this He opened the sight of my spirit, thus admitting me to the spiritual world, and allowing me to see the heavens and the hells, and also to talk with angels and spirits; and this I have been doing for many years without a break. Equally I assert that from the first day of my calling I have not received any instruction concerning the doctrine of that church from any angel, but only from the Lord, while I was reading the Word.²²⁹

White also knows of no place in Swedenborg's theological Writings, that he claims to be the Messiah. Without any proof whatsoever, he suggests: "it may be that he left off the use of that title [Messiah] when he emerged from the phantastic state described in the Diary of 1744,"²³⁰ which is consistent with his view that Swedenborg was insane during the writing of it.²³¹ White also argues that *True Christian Religion* 779 quoted above "may fairly be held as its equivalent."²³⁰

Swedenborg's alleged "special mission' syndrome"⁷⁰

If some of the psychiatrists we have mentioned were asked to examine TR 779, I suspect they would diagnose Swedenborg as a schizophrenic with "special mission' syndrome."^{64,70} Other passages which White quotes in his book could also be regarded as further examples: eg AC 5; CL 1; NC 52.²³² White seems to anticipate the psychiatrists, when he writes:

Swedenborg's frequent assertion, that the Lord had manifested Himself before him in Person, is often adduced as the final touch of his fanaticism; but when we ascertain the terms of his meaning, much of its strangeness disappears.²³³

(We will look at God's appearances to Swedenborg later on in this article.)

White expresses annoyance at Swedenborg's "habit of parading his Divine Call as a passport to confidence; and yet no man ever more emphatically taught the impossibility of creating belief by external compulsion."²³⁴ One reason he (White) seems to give for this is because

The speciality which Swedenborg attributes to his Divine Call and Mission is a great annoyance to many...they feel they must either pronounce him a fanatic, or he will throw their intellectual system into chaos. There is something to be said for and against their perplexity.²³⁵

Consequently, White is at great pains to moderate the apparent exclusivism of Swedenborg's statement:

For myself I am very tolerant of such pretensions, with the proviso, that they are in no sense final or exclusive. If Christ be Truth, and we discover Truth in Swedenborg's books, Christ makes His advent to us in them. Nevertheless he lays an illicit emphasis on his service; for if, as he himself testifies, whoever wills what is good or thinks what is true, receives and reveals the Lord, why should he try to make off as unique what is happily so frequent and familiar? By these pretensions, totally inconsistent with his philosophy, he brings an air of *charlatanerie* about himself which is highly offensive to sincere minds.²³⁰

White's attempt to moderate such seemingly exclusive statements is based on the following arguments:

- (1) Hindu fakirs, like Swedenborg, have been able to control their respiration, and experience altered states of consciousness;²³⁶
- (2) Swedenborg's was like most Seers' experiences but the latter's were only momentary;
- (3) Everyone is unconscious in the next world right at this very moment (HH 438);²³⁷
- (4) Every Anglican clergyman and bishop claim to have been called by God, as does every "Dissenting Minister," and every Roman Catholic priest;²³⁸
- (5) The Divine in Swedenborg is the same as in all other people, no matter how wise or how simple. It all depends "on the quality of their acceptance of the divine" (LW 78);²³⁹
- (6) There is no reason why any of us cannot say that God has spoken to us;²⁴⁰

- (7) God is too transcendent to be seen by human beings,²⁴¹ so when Swedenborg saw the LORD, he saw Him as the Sun of heaven,²⁴² or, like the prophets and apostles of the Bible, he saw an angel filled with the LORD's presence.²⁴³ (I would also add that when angels see the LORD they see a 'higher' angel infilled with Him.²⁴⁴);
- (8) "We shall see the Lord, if at death we find ourselves among the angels; and so we should see Him even now were our inner eyes opened."²⁴⁵

White summarizes his view:

So likewise even here, we may at times have seen the Lord possess a good man, as Swedenborg tells us he has seen Him possess an Angel, in some sacred hour when "filled with the Holy Ghost," his face has become as Stephen's, as though "it had been the face of an Angel," we observe a light in his eyes hitherto unseen, a sound in his voice heretofore unheard, a passion and an unction in his eloquence heretofore unknown. When the afflatus has departed he feels that he has been other than himself, that a glory not his own has been round his brows and that words such as he never conceived have been gliding over his lips. After such an experience, reverently, may we not say?—We have seen and heard the Lord in His servant.²⁴⁶

How do I cope with Swedenborg's claims that his experiences were unique?

When reading that some of the things Swedenborg heard and saw, "have never come to any man's knowledge, nor even entered his imagination,"²⁴⁷ and "admission into the spiritual world...has not been granted to anyone since the creation, as it has been to me,"²⁴⁸ I, like White, temper such statements with such claims as:

- (1) Swedenborg's admission that he was unique, was "as far as" he knew,²⁴⁹ or from his knowledge of history.²⁵⁰
- (2) Every human being is capable of having visions and talking to angels in the next world, if they weren't so materialistic and worldly,²⁵¹ and if the LORD wanted it to happen.²⁵² Swedenborg believed that a few people in his day could have visions,²⁵³ and that as the new spiritual

age progressed the likelihood of people having visions would increase.²⁵⁴

- (3) Swedenborg knew that besides prophets, Christian saints had seen into heaven.²⁵⁵ Angels had told Swedenborg that several 'mortals' like himself had been with them in their heaven.²⁵⁶
- (4) In 1748 some spirits "supposed" that Swedenborg was 'exclusively' unique, but presumably angels told them otherwise. These spirits had assumed that Swedenborg only

was in such a state as to be capable, by a spiritual idea, of perceiving interior things, and of being as a spirit, from whence, as usual, they drew some kind of sinister inference; but it was said to them that all could be such if the Lord pleased, even the most stupid...with whomsoever the Lord pleases the mind may be opened, so that by a spiritual idea things may be intuitively perceived—in an orderly manner with those who are in faith, and in an extraordinary and miraculous manner with those who are not in faith.²⁵⁷

This exploration of how unique Swedenborg's experiences were, reminds me of the discussions that took place between Wilson van Dusen and Rev. Erik Sandstrom, and the former and Rev Erik E. Sandstrom in 1976 and 1977 respectively, regarding the validity of such things as meditation and Near Death Experiences, based on what was revealed to Swedenborg as opposed to what has been experienced personally by individuals.²⁵⁸ Possibly the doctrinal material presented in this section would go some way in helping them to bridge the gap between their respective positions?

In 1980 Larsen talked of looking at Swedenborg's "visions...as particularly unique and valuable instances of what is, in fact, a universal human capacity. It is the recorded annals of this capacity I refer to as 'the visionary tradition.'" Larsen believes that for Westerners, "Swedenborg is indeed an exemplary guide, helping us to establish both the scope of the quest [of exploring our 'inner space'], and its potential value as well as dangerous pitfalls."²⁵⁹

Possibly if psychiatrists knew that Swedenborg wasn't so absolute, in his emphasizing his uniqueness, then maybe they wouldn't regard him as

suffering from monomania or schizophrenia. Possibly if Swedenborgians were more aware of the material in this section, they wouldn't feel so threatened when Swedenborg's uniqueness is questioned. As with all writers, it is only when you study their books in depth do you get the full picture of what they're saying. It is not really fair to home in on one statement a person makes, and make this the only pronouncement on a particular subject—despite what the media does! I believe that Swedenborg's visionary experiences were extraordinary, special, and unique, but I don't believe that they preclude other people having similar visions. At the end of the day I have to admit that I haven't found time so far to read more visionaries from the East and the West to fully evaluate Swedenborg's experiences. Therefore I can't in all honesty deny the possibility that another 'unique' individual hasn't had visionary experiences on a par with or which surpass Swedenborg's. I still admire Swedenborg as a person, and I still believe his theological Writings are a revelation from God.

The Vision in the Inn²⁶⁰

We now move on to an incident which, it is claimed, happened to Swedenborg in April 1745, while he was in an inn in London. Some non-psychiatrists have used this to question Swedenborg's sanity.²⁶¹

According to Carl Robsahm, an accountant²⁶² at the Bank of Stockholm, in April 1745 while Swedenborg was in London, he had a vision which began his calling as a revelator. Swedenborgian commentators, would assume that this was a visionary experience, in which the LORD opened the sight of his spirit, so that he was able to witness this event unfolding in the next world. With regard to Swedenborg's call it is generally assumed in Swedenborgian circles to have been a gradual one beginning in the *Journal of Dreams* period of 1743–1744.²⁶³ In writing his "memoirs of Swedenborg" for Carl Frederic Nordensköld in 1782, Robsahm recalled the conversation with Swedenborg in which he asked him about "where and how it was granted him to see and to hear what takes place in the world of spirits, in heaven, and in hell." Robsahm continues:

...Whereupon Swedenborg answered as follows: I was in London and dined rather late at the inn where I was in the habit of dining, and where I had my own room. My thoughts were engaged on the subjects we have been discussing. I was hungry, and ate with a good appetite. Towards the close of the meal I noticed a sort of dimness before my eyes: this became denser, and I then saw the floor covered with the most horrid crawling reptiles, such as snakes, frogs, and similar creatures. I was amazed; for I was perfectly conscious, and my thoughts were clear. At last the darkness increased still more but it disappeared all at once, and I then saw a man sitting in a corner of the room; as I was then alone, I was very much frightened at his words, for he said: "*Eat not so much.*" All became black again before my eyes, but immediately it cleared away, and I found myself alone in the room.

Such an unexpected terror hastened my return home; I did not let the landlord notice anything; but I considered well what had happened, and could not look upon it as a mere matter of chance, or as if it had been produced by a physical cause.

I went home; and during the night the same man revealed himself to me again, but I was not frightened now. He then said that He was the Lord God, the Creator of the world, and the Redeemer, and that He had chosen me to explain to men the spiritual sense of the Scripture, and that He Himself would explain to me what I should write on this subject; that same night also were opened to me, so that I became thoroughly convinced of their reality, the worlds of spirits, heaven, and hell, and I recognized there many acquaintances of every condition in life. From that day I gave up the study of all worldly science, and laboured in spiritual things, according as the Lord had commanded me to write. Afterwards the Lord opened, daily very often, my bodily eyes, so that, in the middle of the day I could see into the other world, and in a state of perfect wakefulness converse with angels and spirits.²⁶⁴

It cannot be stressed too much that Robsahm's account is secondhand, despite Robsahm putting it in the first person, which gives the impression

that it is firsthand. Thus it is not as reliable as Swedenborg's firsthand accounts.^{265, 301} As Regamey says:

Is it not the first duty of a scrupulous biographer worthy of the name to verify the source of all the documents he plans to use and give primary importance to the actual testimony of the man himself?²⁶⁶

A third-hand account of this event, occurs in Pernety's preface to a French translation of *Heaven and Hell*, published in 1782 in Berlin.²⁶⁷ In "Pernety's account" the animals change from being "the most horrid crawling reptiles, such as snakes, frogs, and similar creatures" to being "snakes, toads, caterpillars, and other hideous reptiles."²⁶⁸ Pernety seems to incorporate Dr. Beyer's description of this calling, which he included in a letter to C.F. Nordenskold in 1776,²⁶⁹ by adding the details that the man or angel was surrounded by light, and that he "was clothed in imperial purple."²⁷⁰ The actual text of the letter Dr. Gabriel Beyer wrote to C.F. Nordenskold in 1776, is as follows:

The information respecting the Lord's personal appearance before the Assessor, who saw Him, in imperial purple and in majestic light, seated near his bed, while He gave Assessor Swedenborg his commission, I had from his own lips at a dinner-party in the house of Dr. Rosen, where I saw the old gentleman for the first time. I remember that I asked him how long this lasted; whereupon he answered, About a quarter of an hour; also, whether the strong light did not affect his eyes; when he said, No.²⁶⁹

There are other slight differences in Pernety's account, such as the angel appearing the following night, rather than later during that same night; slightly different words used by the angel although the substance is the same; and the angel would "dictate"²⁷¹ rather than explain what Swedenborg had to write.²⁶⁴ Pernety then assures us that "Swedenborg related the same circumstances to Doctors Beyer and Rosen, while dining at the house of the latter in Gottenburg."²⁷²

However, there are subtle differences between Robsahm's account and Swedenborg's own accounts, written 37 and 2 years after the event respectively. In 1747 Swedenborg wrote his own less complete account of

these events. He does concur that these occurrences happened in April 1745, but at midday not “rather late”! There is not “the most horrid crawling reptiles such as snakes, frogs, and similar creatures” but only worms! In Swedenborg’s account the man is identified as “an angel,” who tells him “not to indulge the belly too much at the table,” but he appears before the vision of creatures, not after it! Swedenborg in his version writes:

While he was with me there then clearly appeared to me, as it were, a vapour exuding from the pores of my body like something watery, in the highest degree visible, which slipped down to the ground where a carpet was seen upon which the collected vapour was turned into various little worms, which being gathered together under the table, were burnt up in a moment, with a loud noise or sound: the fiery light therein was seen by me and the sound heard. I suppose that in this way all the little worms which can be generated by an immoderate appetite were cast out of my body, and thus were consumed, and that I was then cleansed from them.²⁷³

Also between 1744 and 1748 in his unpublished work *Adversaria* or *Word Explained* in commenting on the plague of frogs mentioned in Exodus 8:2–15, Swedenborg talks about “unclean spirits of the lowest sort” who excite a person’s desires and “pleasures of the senses,” who are symbolically seen as frogs, or sometimes insects, in the next world,²⁷⁴ Thus, frogs are psycho-spiritually related, but not biologically related, to insects. Swedenborg then continues:

On a certain occasion these likewise appeared to me when they were going forth, and this quite plainly so that I saw them crawling before my eyes and soon afterwards gathered together into a unit. Then they were afire, as it were, and burst asunder with a noise which sounded to my ears like the crash when things are shattered. The place was afterwards purified. This was in London in the month of April 1745. Something like smoke was coming out through the pores, but on the ground it appeared like so many crawling worms in great abundance.²⁷⁴

From my understanding of the context, Swedenborg sees insects “crawling before his eyes” and not frogs, and not snakes! The frogs merely come into the equation because as Swedenborg is expounding the frogs of Exodus 8, he is reminded of a vision he had in April 1745. (This also seems to be Toksvig’s conclusion.²⁷⁵) It seems that Robsahm confuses the two, and adds extraneous material to his account of the vision. However, this is my reading of the passage. Pernety possibly mistranslates and elaborates it further.

A different explanation is suggested by Regamey, who believes Swedenborg in WE 3557 describes both frogs and larger insects appearing to him.²⁷⁶ However, the context describes the creatures as “crawling.” Frogs hop. I don’t know that they crawl! But maybe in a vision anything goes, such as locusts looking like war-horses with human faces, hair like that of women, and teeth like those of lions! (Revelation 9:2,7–10) Regamey suggests that Robsahm “may be confusing two separate and unrelated events,”²⁷⁷ by combining two visions Swedenborg had in the Aprils of successive years: one of April 1744²⁷⁸ and one from April 1745 in which he sees frogs and insects,²⁶⁵ but I’m not wholly convinced. Even if this were true, there is no Divine Call in the theophany of April 1744 as strong as that alleged by Robsahm in April 1745.

A Critical Look at the Vision in the Inn

Most if not all biographies of Swedenborg in English, whether supportive, hostile or neutrally critical, don’t mention the problems that exist with Robsahm’s account of the “Vision in the Inn.” It is imperative therefore for serious investigators of this incident to study articles by Rev. A. G. Regamey [1937, 1966]²⁶⁰ and Rev. Dr. Friedemann Horn [1987].²⁷⁹ No matter which part of Robsahm’s memoirs is used by researchers, they also need to be aware that there are various versions of them. Hallengren’s [1994]²⁶² excellent introduction to a critical edition of Robsahm’s memoirs has thankfully been translated into English by Rev Dr. George Dole. However, Hallengren’s synoptic examination of the various versions are only available in Swedish, as far as I know. Sadly I must confess to neither

understanding Swedish nor having access to this publication.* Having made these remarks, let us now proceed to a critical examination of the "Vision in the Inn" incident.

Swedenborg himself in his indices confirms that SD 397 and WE 3557 describe the same event.²⁸⁰ There are definite similarities between the first part of the vision in Robsahm's account, such as Swedenborg overeating as in SD 397, or frogs symbolizing bodily appetites in WE 3557. It is Robsahm who mentions "dimness" which the other two accounts don't mention.

It seems reasonable that Swedenborg had a vision about worms in April 1745. He was reminded of this incident in late December 1747, because at that time he was shown the symbolism of filthy and disgusting little animals, such as mice, as being that of illusions and fantasies derived from avarice.²⁸¹ In the next world people are shown their failings in a very visible way, by them being projected in front of their very eyes in a symbolic way. Even insects²⁸² are used to encourage people to confront their disproportionate love of physical things. When this attachment to food or money has been lessened, then the little creatures are turned into human beings, because the person has become more human.²⁸³ Although the angel spoke to Swedenborg before the vision in SD 397 but after the vision in Robsahm's account, I wonder whether this vision showed Swedenborg that he was tempering his gluttony, that is, "cleansed from" the worms?

In WE 3557 it is "The place was afterwards purified." In the next world whether the person or his surroundings are improved, it is one and the same thing, because our surroundings are a mirror of our character or mood at any given moment.²⁸⁴ As mentioned above from Acton's translation, only worms occur in the vision—even though Regamey's translation assumes that frogs were seen²⁷⁶—but Swedenborg links their symbolism with that of frogs, because he is expounding Exodus 8:1–2. Possibly there is an ambiguity in the Latin, which also confused Robsahm, or Swedenborg in linking worms symbolically with frogs, confused Robsahm.

* See Appendix.

Regamey asks why Swedenborg left out the vision of the LORD in SD 397 and WE 3557?²⁷⁶ A fellow European New Church Minister, Rev Dr. Friedemann Horn, also assumes that if the purification experience was followed by a Divine call, then Swedenborg would have mentioned it. "This is, however, precisely what one would expect if it was a matter of *continued* experience."²⁸⁵ Horn regards "the all too direct"²⁸⁶ "connection of the two experiences" as being "most certainly mistaken."²⁸⁷ I don't share Horn's degree of certainty, but I do take on board his mild castigation of English-speaking Swedenborgian researchers who do not acknowledge that the connection between the purification experience and the Divine call is not as clear cut as some writers make out.²⁸⁸

Horn makes good points about Robsahm's account being cited "as the only reliable source on his calling into the office of seer," which threatens to cause Beyer's account "to fall into oblivion." Horn believes that Robsahm's account is plausible because Robsahm was a friend of Swedenborg's; Swedenborg expresses himself in the first person; and Robsahm's account is the most detailed and the most dramatic.²⁸⁵ Horn also believes that Beyer's account is "less effective," ignoring "the truth-content of the two accounts."²⁸⁹ Horn also thinks that Robsahm's account is the "livelier and more immediate of the two."²⁸⁷

But assuming for a minute that Swedenborg deliberately left out the Divine call, it could have been that in the SD 397 passage he was setting it in the context of seeing little creatures in the next life, while in WE 3557 he was reminded of it because of the symbolism of the frogs. If an angel is really infilled with the Divine of the LORD,²⁴³ then the fact that in SD 397 an angel tells Swedenborg "not to indulge the belly too much at the table" before the vision, while in Robsahm's account the man saying "Eat not so much" occurs after the vision, means that the LORD had appeared to Swedenborg.

In 1987 Horn would not have agreed with me connecting "the man" with "the angel." He writes quite categorically:

In Swedenborg's terminology an angel is unequivocally a being of the other world to which Swedenborg had been given access by the Lord, but under no circumstance "the Lord God" himself, the "Creator of the world and the Savior."²⁸⁷

However, as has been stated already, the LORD infills angels so that they speak on His behalf to people.²⁴³ Since in Swedenborg's experience, angels are people, both males and females,²⁹⁰ there is no reason why "the man" could not have been "an angel" infilled by "the LORD."

Regamey questions whether this episode "stands in strange contrast to all that Swedenborg says elsewhere on the nature and character of a Divine Revelation." He also wonders whether such a context for the commission "lacks completely the element of dignity that one would expect in connection with such a noble cause and so important a mission."²⁶⁶ This probably lay behind Horn's comment that Robsahm's account "casts a peculiar light—to put it mildly—upon Swedenborg and his calling."²⁸⁷

But if we consider the appearances of the LORD to Swedenborg during 1744—something which neither Regamey nor Horn considered fully—we have to ask ourselves how dignified were they? For example on 6th–7th April Swedenborg experienced both belief in and doubts about God's miracles through Moses. After going to bed, he heard a noise under his head, began to shudder, and "found that something holy was upon me." This returned again and threw him out of bed. Words were put in his mouth identifying his sinfulness, and he then saw the LORD Jesus. He had a few doubts about the genuineness of the experience, but soon convinced himself.²⁹¹ Did Swedenborg see "Christ crucified" after he had a sexual dream and was in temptation on 13th–14th April?²⁹²

It seems to me that if we believe in a God who became a human being to rescue us from all sorts of human frailties, then He has to meet us where we are. To quote SD 2990: "the Lord appears to many, in the other life, *in a form suitable to them*" [my emphasis]. At one of Swedenborg's darkest moments the LORD appeared to him:

When I was in damnable thoughts, the worst that could be, in the same hour Jesus Christ was presented strongly before my inner eyes and the operation of the Holy Spirit came over me, so that I could know therefrom that the devil was away.²⁹³

Later still, Swedenborg sees the LORD borrow some money off someone else. Swedenborg picks up money the LORD drops and gives it back

to Him. Swedenborg notes: "It seemed it was Christ himself with whom I associated as with any other man, without ceremony."²⁹⁴

As with all types of scholarship, if you search long and hard enough you will find someone who agrees with you. So anybody can find people who believe the "vision in the inn" is authentic and others who don't. Even Horn knew that in 1948 Professor Ernst Benz believed that Robsahm's account was genuine:

Precisely the connection between the purification experience and the actual vision of being called appeared to him a sign of authenticity. Similar connections were well known among countless authentic, Christian calling visions, he asserted.²⁸⁶

However, Benz was more cautious in 1969. In 1969 Benz thought this vision "entirely contradict[s] the other visions of Swedenborg's," and is to "be rejected on the basis of being incorrect."²⁸⁸ The world-famous psychiatrist C.G. Jung (1875–1961) didn't believe in its authenticity on the basis that one of his patients saw a white-bearded God in checkered pants, which Jung described as "a similarly grotesque 'caricature.'"²⁹⁵ Horn [1987] is convinced that by believing the LORD was the angel or the man, people would "place Swedenborg's calling-vision into the realm of the absurd."²⁸⁶ But does this say more about the opinions and belief of the maker of such a comment, or the vision? If the LORD "appears to many, in the other life, in a form suitable to them,"²⁹⁶ and when we dream or have a vision, we are seeing into the next life,²⁹⁷ why can't the LORD appear to Swedenborg as a man, or as a white-bearded man with checked trousers?

In 1994 Hallengren²⁹⁸ cited a number of people who believed Robsahm's account was genuine. Walt Whitman believed that the "Vision in the Inn" was

"a historic event" that happened in "somewhat comical" fashion, the most unromantic and vulgar circumstances: toward the end of a meal in an inn in London. Whitman understood this in terms of himself. Like Ralph Waldo Emerson earlier, he had become aware of the divine presence precisely in the most everyday things.

Hallengren then paraphrases Joseph Von Goerres, the German politician and writer, in 1827, who also believed it to be authentic:

This very call vision speaks for Swedenborg's honesty and passion for truth: it gives the impression of authenticity. A charlatan would have come up with a more evocative and dazzling introduction to his visions.²⁹⁸

Hallengren admits to not being able to evaluate how much of Robsahm's information is accurate:

The truth eludes us and we peer through a haze of plausibilities. We tend to say that what Robsahm himself saw and heard during the latter years of Swedenborg's life happened credibly and reliably, while part of the earlier information has more a hearsay quality and does not come from Swedenborg himself.²⁹⁹

However, Robsahm is viewed as "unpretentious,"²⁹⁹ who took information "down in complete honesty and conscientiousness, to the limit of" his "ability and understanding."³⁰⁰

Robsahm as a witness is honest but limited. Like Beyer he is second-hand.^{265, 301} Is my contextual explanation, that Swedenborg didn't need to mention the Divine call in SD 397 and WE 3557, plausible? If not, we still have to speculate that Robsahm has, absentmindedly or unintentionally, linked two separate events. Again we have evidence that is incomplete in this study. We now need to look at Swedenborg's theophanies, that is, the appearances of the LORD to Swedenborg.

In 1990 the Rev. Brian W. Keith presented a paper entitled "Seeing the Lord" to the Council of the Clergy of the General Church of the New Jerusalem in the United States. It was subsequently printed in *New Church Life*. He lists passages in Swedenborg's theological Writings, in which the LORD appears to Swedenborg,³⁰² which we will now examine. Unfortunately, like Regamey and Horn, Keith doesn't look at the theophanies in the *Journal of Dreams*.

Swedenborg quite often mentions seeing our LORD Jesus as a human being,³⁰³ which, along with being conscious in the next world, “surpasses all miracles.”³⁰⁴ In 1764 Librarian C.C. Gjoerwell was told by Swedenborg in a conversation, that the LORD Jesus had appeared to him in person in London in 1744.³⁰⁵ Swedenborg in two letters mentions the LORD Jesus appearing to him in person: such as the one to C.F. Oetinger in 1766,³⁰⁶ and to Rev. Thomas Hartley in 1769.³⁰⁷

Presumably Swedenborg saw the LORD as a Person, when he sent out the 12 disciples throughout the spiritual world on 19th June 1770.³⁰⁸ When Swedenborg saw the LORD it guaranteed that what he had written was true and from Him.³⁰⁹ He also confirms that when people see the LORD they see an angel infilled with the LORD,³¹⁰ with the eyes of their spirit.³¹¹ Several times evil spirits tried to mimic the LORD, but were shown to be false.³¹² On one occasion Swedenborg is allowed to see into the third or highest heaven, and saw “the Lord Only in an appearance similar to that in which He was seen by John (Revelation 1)” “standing upon the foundation stone.” This vision had the effect of filling the “interiors of the minds of the angels” accompanying Swedenborg with “holiness” and impelling them to prostrate themselves.³¹³ This Divinity or holiness is mentioned by Swedenborg in a dream in “the night between the 18th and 19th November 1751”:

The Lord was seen by me, in a dream with the face and form in which He had been when He was in the world. He was such that interiorly He was full, and, so, could have ruled the whole heaven within...When, also, I awaked I saw Him obscurely; and it was stated that such had been His appearance. In a word, He was filled with heaven and with the Divine.³¹⁴

Swedenborg also witnessed the LORD appearing to spirits from Jupiter, first as the sun of heaven, which they did not acknowledge as the LORD, and then “encompassed with a solar circle.” Earthly contemporaries of Jesus confirmed his identity, as did spirits from Jupiter to whom the LORD had appeared before.³¹⁵ The LORD appears to angels from our planet “in the sun as a Man, encompassed therein with a fiery solar [sphere], from which the angels in the heavens derive all light.”³¹⁶ Swedenborg also saw the LORD as a Sun for several years.³¹⁷ At first

Swedenborg only saw the LORD as a moon,³¹⁸ but by the time of *Heaven and Hell*, it was “sometimes.”³¹⁹ Swedenborg also saw the LORD appearing to a cloud full of angels “speaking from the sun” to them.³²⁰

It seems to me that the LORD can appear to people in whatever guise is needed for them to acknowledge Him, as Swedenborg wrote in SD 2990 quoted above. Swedenborg would use the theological term “accommodation.”³²¹ But to explain why the LORD appeared to Swedenborg as a Divine Human Being and on other occasions as an almost everyday human being, it may be because of the state of the spirits or angels with Swedenborg at the time. Swedenborg writes that there is a vast range of angels from the simple to the wise, from the good to the best.³²² Also Swedenborg teaches us that the LORD has “oftentimes” been seen by him “surrounded” by “a column of spirits” or possibly angels.³²³ I would suggest the spiritual state or quality of the angel or spirit who is infilled by the LORD could explain why the LORD has to adapt Himself more or less.³²⁴ Thus, I believe that there is a variety of theophanies: some more Divine than other, some more everyday. This range of ways we can see God is because of the state of the angels or spirits through whom the LORD appears to people.

From my study of the “Vision in the Inn” I would conclude that there was a Divine Presence in the form of an angel, when Swedenborg noticed vapor exuding from his spiritual body, and becoming worms on the carpet on the floor.^{273, 243} In Swedenborg’s accounts he was not emperor-like nor was he commissioned, as he was in the vision he related to Beyer at a dinner party in 1765,²⁷² which Beyer passed on to Nordensköld in 1776.²⁶⁹ The only person to link the vision of worms with a Divine Commission is Robsahm, who doesn’t portray the LORD as an Emperor. Pernety follows Robsahm but includes Beyer’s account.

We cannot disprove that the vision of worms developed or didn’t develop into the vision of the Divine Emperor commissioning Swedenborg, despite Regamey²⁷⁷ rightly pointing out that Robsahm is wrong when he implies Swedenborg had a mistress when he was a young man,³²⁵ or Swedenborg inherited a lot of money from his father.³²⁶ Each part of Robsahm’s memoirs has to be taken on its own merits. I think it fairer to assume that Robsahm is correct and then try to prove him false. Even Hallengren [1994] accepts that Robsahm did the best job that he could

do,³⁰⁰ and that sometimes there is no way of ascertaining the veracity of some of his reminiscences.²⁹⁹

As mentioned above we assume that Swedenborg in SD 397 was talking about the symbolism of small animals in the next world and was reminded of the “worms” vision of April 1745; whereas in WE 3557 Swedenborg was expounding the frogs of Exodus 8:2–15, and so was focussed on the symbolism of frogs and insects. I believe that Swedenborg’s commission could have developed from a vision of “worms,” despite the apparent lack of dignity or what Swedenborg says about Revelation.²⁶⁶ It fits quite comfortably in with Divine Manifestations to Swedenborg in 1744,^{291–294} and with my theory that Swedenborg experienced a range of ways of seeing God, because of the different types of spirits and angels, through whom the LORD appeared to him.

However, apart from Robsahm writing 37 years after the event, there is no contemporary witness to link the “worms” vision with the “Divine Commission” vision. This conclusion by both Regamey²⁷⁶ and Horn,^{285–287} and by me, requires people who use Robsahm’s account to use it with the greatest deal of caution. It is secondhand testimony at best,²⁶⁵ as is Beyer’s.³⁰¹ The difference between Regamey’s, Horn’s and my position is that I argue that these two visions *could have* occurred or *might have* happened on the same or consecutive nights, but this is only my hypothesis, which is incapable of being verified.

Conclusion

In the February 1996 *Lifeline* Rev. David Lomax asked “How do WE react to criticism?”³²⁷ He had discovered a book written in 1824 by a non-Swedenborgian minister, Rev. G. Beaumont, which was in response to some public lectures in Norwich by Rev. Samuel Noble. I think that this is a valuable question to ask Swedenborgians at the outset of this conclusion. How do we Swedenborgians feel when Swedenborg’s sanity is questioned or vigorously disputed by eminent psychiatrists? Hurt? Threatened? Livid? Angry? Disappointed? Disgusted? Challenged? Excited? I must confess that my first reaction to Johnson’s article was to dismiss it as ill-informed foolishness, but since I had never heard the Brockmer story, doubts were

raised in the back of my mind. But I now feel that I have faced and worked through these doubts to my satisfaction at the moment.

When Swedenborg was being charged with heresy in the Gothenburg trial, he wrote to Dr. Beyer in 1769, assuring him that he believed that the LORD was defending him, and that he had

also been told by an angel from the Lord that "I may rest securely on my arms in the night," by which is meant the night in which the world is now immersed in respect to the things of the church.³²⁸

But the use of this passage could be misinterpreted as a tactical retreat to "behind the barricades,"³²⁷ or as a put-down to people who believe Swedenborg was insane, which would only inflame the situation. The same adverse effect could result from quoting Swedenborg's words to Ferelius at his last Holy Communion:

Mr. Pastor, as true as you see me here, and as true as I live, I have not written any thing from myself, but the truth from God; and if you will pay attention to the truth, we shall some time in eternity have important things to talk over together.³²⁹

Quoting passages such as the above could distance us from people with different opinions, and convince them that we are not serious about discussing the issues. Pious sentiment is great; zealous loyalty is admirable; but if we allow it to alienate or humiliate or even demonize our antagonists, then we just come across as being arrogant people with a 'ghetto mentality'. How would a non-Swedenborgian react to these words from Rev Thomas Hartley's introduction to his translation of *Heaven and Hell* [1778]?:

Reader, might it not seem a wonder, if a person of so extraordinary and so apostolical a character, should better escape the imputation of madness, than the prophets of old? And accordingly some have given out, that he [Swedenborg] was beside himself...Now, if to write many large volumes on the most important of all subjects with unvaried consistency, to reason

accurately, and to give proofs of an astonishing memory all the way; and if hereto be joined propriety and dignity of character in all the relative duties of the christian life; if all this can be reconciled with the definition of madness, why there is an end of all distinction between sane and insane, between wisdom and folly. Fie upon those uncharitable prejudices, which have led so many in all ages to credit and propagate slanderous reports of the best of men, even whilst they have been employed in the heavenly work of turning many from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God!³³⁰

Hartley goes on to talk about how an angel or a Divinely inspired person would be received by such error-prone and prejudicial men, and then alludes to the story of Democritus and the citizens of Abdera. The latter asked Hippocrates to cure him of his insanity, only for Hippocrates to diagnose them as the ones needing treatment.³³⁰

I strongly feel that we need to avoid “us” and “them” labels, or black-and-white stereotyping. I don’t think it helps us to be taken seriously. We can still remain loyal—not blindly loyal—to Swedenborg as a person and the LORD’s revelation through him, by arguing calmly and dispassionately.

According to Pernety, when Count Anders von Hopken, a one-time Prime Minister of Sweden, asked Swedenborg why he mixed up his reasonable theological ideas with his visions, which many regarded as fictions and proof of his insanity, Swedenborg replied:

I was commanded by the Lord to write and publish them,...do not suppose that, without such a positive order, I should have thought of publishing things which I well knew many would regard as falsehoods, and which would bring ridicule upon myself. If I assure them that I have received this command, and they are unwilling to believe me, the satisfaction will remain to me of having obeyed the orders of my God, and I shall answer them with Paul in the Corinthians: “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but yet are wise in Christ,” and, “If we are mad, we are mad from God.”³³¹

In a letter to General Tuxen, Count von Hopken answers slightly differently by quoting Swedenborg:

that this did not depend on him; that he was too old to sport with spiritual things, and too much concerned for his eternal happiness to yield to such foolish notions, assuring me, on his hopes of salvation, that imagination produced in him none of his revelations, which were true, and from what he had heard and seen.³³²

If these are pious sentiments of a deluded man, then someone is going to have to convince me with arguments that are stronger than Johnson's or Maudsley's or the other psychiatrists that I have examined. But that is my opinion based on my examination of as much of the evidence as I can get my hands on.

I remember an exchange of letters between Frank Podmore, MA and E.H. Bayley in the 1909 *Morning Light*, which got absolutely nowhere. Both gentleman bombarded each other with fact after fact and conceded little ground to each other.³³³ It reminded me of two of David Lomax's other comments:

...the reality tends to be such battles ride rough-shod over very real feelings which people have.

One of the ironies of life is that those who go on the attack are likely to feel most threatened, and it is, generally speaking, the groups who are most motivated by fear who are the strongest critics of others.³³⁴

Possibly New Church people in the past have not done our cause much good by the way they have argued their case. Maybe they could have been calmer, more understanding, more empathetic of where their antagonists were coming from? Maybe we Swedenborgians need to adopt more angelic responses to our apparent adversaries? What do you make of these two quotations?:

The angels are forbidden to act in any violent manner and thereby crush a person's evil desires and false assumptions: They must act gently. (AC 5992:1)

Angels...so far as the person allows them,...turn evils into good, or into something approaching good, or into something which leads in that direction. (AC 5980)

Our goal as "angels in training" is not to out-argue our opponents necessarily, but possibly to move them at least one step towards our position, if and only if they are willing and we believe that is the LORD's will for both of us. But our aim should also be to learn more about the state of our faith. If all our faith is, is a mere regurgitation of the "party line" or what Swedenborg calls "historical faith," then we don't have a faith which is leading us to heaven very effectively. In some ways we should be thankful to all the people in the past who have questioned Swedenborg's insanity, because the LORD can use such "attacks" to move us all from unquestioning loyalty in Swedenborg and his books, to a much more mature and balanced religious conviction. With our belief in the sanctity of another person's freedom to believe whatever they like for whatever reason, it is not our responsibility nor our privilege to become "control freaks":³³⁵ seeking by force or argument or passion to thrust our beliefs onto others, or make them conform their opinions to ours.

One of the great ironies about Dr. John Johnson's claim, following Dr. Henry Maudsley, that Swedenborg suffered a messianic psychosis in middle life, is that both Dr. Johnson and Swedenborgians are "in the same boat." We are both seeking the truth, but he is sitting at one end being loyal to Maudsley and we're at the other end being loyal to Swedenborg. Swedenborgians need not be afraid of the truth. We are objective enough to face the real picture of Swedenborg's mental health, and I am yet to be convinced that it is as clear cut as either Johnson or Maudsley or some other psychiatrists present.²⁹ Swedenborgians just ask for a fair discussion⁵¹ and for Swedenborg to be put to the test.⁵⁷ We would like some psychiatrist to explain why Swedenborg couldn't be sane and his visionary experiences genuine?

Possibly Swedenborgians and some psychiatrists will have to learn to agree to disagree about a belief in the supernatural,^{24, 50, 59} but any sceptic of either camp needs to be aware of the limitations of scepticism:

In its enthusiasm for truth, scepticism can leave the subject stripped of interest without replacing it with new questions and new enigmas. It reveals not only the follow of fantasy, but it tells us that there is no mystery. This is as nonsensical as the faith-based ideas that it rejects, as it implies that everything is known and that there are no further questions to be asked; all is misperception and illusion. Yet, such dismissal is not applied to the chemistry of the cell or the nature of mind; there is a depth and an enigma in both of them which is applicable to the ill-explored, close encounter experience.³³⁶

It is disappointing that Maudsley, Johnson and others didn't read, or didn't feel a need to read, more of Swedenborg's own work,⁵ or don't quote from books sympathetic to Swedenborg. It is a pity that Swedenborgian psychologists are dismissed as biased, and contemporary evidence about Swedenborg's lack of monomania or schizophrenia is neither admitted nor considered nor evaluated, because of prejudice or poor scholarship. It is unfortunate that the most elaborate version of Brockmer's story is usually quoted,⁶⁶ without having compared it to earlier versions, which aren't as injurious to the diagnosis of Swedenborg's mental health. It is disappointing when Swedenborg is judged in his own absence;¹⁹ when he is portrayed only as someone having dreams and visions, rather than also as a scholar, an active politician and a sociable person.^{3, 76} It is definitely frustrating and threatening, when Swedenborgians are adjudged to be insane as well!^{46, 337}

How reliant we are on another's opinions! It's interesting that most psychiatrists who diagnose Swedenborg as being a monomaniac or schizophrenic rely on White's biography of 1867, and yet White only believed Swedenborg to have a bout of temporary insanity during 1744 and 1745.^{12, 213} White puts it down to "pert scientific ignorance" that psychiatrists should consider him insane after 1745.¹³ Relying solely on the opinion of Maudsley to discredit Swedenborg's and any Swedenborgians' sanity did

not convince an appeals court in about 1892 in the United States of America. They ruled: "It was unfair and improper to urge upon the jury the opinion of one who was introduced to them as 'the highest authority in the world on mental alienation.'"³³⁸ Even Rev. Francis Okely, despite knowing Brockmer's story firsthand, didn't find Swedenborg insane.^{112, 339} Uncritical use of one source, such as Ferelius' comment, that Swedenborg "never washed or brushed his clothes, maintaining that no dirt would adhere to them," without comparing it to the more numerous testimonies of Swedenborg's contemporaries to the contrary,¹⁷ is, as I said earlier in this article, "uncritically mischievous and naively libellous." It is not very scholarly for Maudsley to say that Swedenborgians have "impugned the veracity of Brockmer's story," because White said it, and it just happens to fit in with Maudsley's position.³² The use of the emotive, amorphous term "hallucination," is likely to incite Swedenborgians as it did Rev. W. Mason in 1864.^{49, 54, 64} But also it betrays very loaded presuppositions about Altered States of Consciousness (ASC). As Charles Tart wrote in 1969:

We have available a great deal of scientific and clinical material on altered states of consciousness associated with psychopathological states, such as schizophrenia, by comparison, our scientific knowledge about ASCs which could be considered "desirable" is extremely limited and generally unknown to scientists.³⁴⁰

Are any of us sufficiently aware of ourselves to spot circular reasoning²⁹ or sheer mischievousness all the time?²⁴ It is fair to ask both psychiatrists and New Church people whether their respective "psycho-histories" of Swedenborg say more about their respective beliefs than about Swedenborg.⁴⁴ Even if a psychiatrist were to be "cocksure" that Swedenborg was "an irresponsible maniac,"⁵³ or that they are systematic,⁵⁵ or that his theories fit his experiences,⁵⁴ does monomania really explain this? I don't believe it impertinent to ask some psychiatrists to justify their diagnoses, by explaining the relationship of what is abnormal, on the basis of what is common or everyday human experience.⁵⁶ Psychiatrists who have maintained that "schizophrenics have hallucinations, so people who have visions, must be schizophrenics," need to expand on the logic behind their argument, at least for me,²³ because they don't explain why this

implies that characters in the Bible, as well as our LORD Jesus are not mad.^{24, 50} Larsen is of the opinion that "Many psychiatrists have 'taken on' Swedenborg without an adequate grasp of transpersonal psychology."³⁴¹

I find Larsen's article very gentle and very wise. He is quietly confident about Swedenborg's sanity. As a clinical psychologist who has worked with "paranoid schizophrenics," Larsen doesn't believe Swedenborg was one.^{75, 76} Yet Larsen, with his greater knowledge of Swedenborg's life, is willing to go beyond psychology, and look to "history, anthropology, and mythology, as well as psychology" to "amplify, call attention to, and compare" "the mysterious and provocative data surrounding this unusual man."⁴³² This is a lesson for all of us. Whatever our expertise, even our "specialist field," whether it be psychiatry, psychology or even Swedenborgian studies, we sometimes need to look beyond our "field" for help. After mentioning a multi-disciplinary approach, Larsen continues:

In the process we may lay to rest the myth of his "mental illness" which seems to me an error in epistemology and interpretation rather than any kind of valid diagnosis. The visionary tradition reveals a pattern of human psychological experience of a more than personal, or "transpersonal" nature. Swedenborg's visions arose, not from personal pathology (the psychoanalytic assumption), but from an experiential plunge into a transpersonal level of the human psyche. The phenomenology and stages of this level are by now rather well known, having appeared similarly in many human psyches, despite a bewildering variety of personal, cultural, and historical settings. This is not to say that Swedenborg did not bring personal-historical and cultural assumptions to his experiences. These are, in fact, abundantly evident as we follow his journey within to the luminous core of his transpersonal experience.³⁴³

If a psychiatrist or a psychologist is not trained in nor familiar with "transpersonal psychology," then this is yet another area of bias, which needs to be admitted and explored. I'm not convinced any "school" of psychology or psychiatry, whether Freudian, Jungian, Adlerian, or transpersonal, or whatever, has all the answers. Then again, neither do Swedenborgians!

There are different New Church positions in regard to the Brockmer story from Rev. Ormond Odhner's outright dismissal,¹²² through Rev. Dr. Rudolf Tafel's "the-first-bit-could-be-true, but-the-rest-is-pure-fiction" stance,⁸⁸ to Charles Higham's "something-might-have-happened-but-nobody-knows-what, nor-ever-will" position.¹⁹⁴ Knowing about different shades of opinion among champions of Swedenborg could possibly temper the zeal of Swedenborgians. Even White is a champion of Swedenborg; possibly more guarded than most, or even more realistic?

There are significant pieces of evidence missing in order to fully evaluate the Brockmer story. How can anybody weigh up the evidence supplied by Brockmer, Mathesius, Okely, Hindmarsh and Beatson? Is Brockmer's Dr. Smith the same as Shearsmith's Mr. Smith? Is Mathesius' Mr. Caer the husband of Shearsmith's Mrs. Carr? If Brockmer's story is true, where is the evidence of all the witnesses like coachmen, or embassy officials?⁴ How can Swedenborg's claims of nobody knowing about his visionary experiences at the time, be explained?¹⁹⁵⁻¹⁹⁷ We can understand why there would be tension between Brockmer and Swedenborg because their life-styles, particularly their nocturnal ones, were mutually exclusive.¹⁵⁰⁻¹⁵¹ If Brockmer was angry at Swedenborg leaving him, and was worried that this might affect potential lodgers, he could have "spread a report that he [Swedenborg] was mad."¹⁵² Why do psychiatrists not explore the possibility of this motive, and its possible consequences? If Swedenborg did call himself the Messiah, why doesn't he call himself that in his writings of the period and afterwards? Why is the Messiah always our LORD Jesus? It could have been his speech impediment^{222-224, 228} or his lack of English,^{221, 225-227} which caused him to be misheard.²¹⁹ Why have psychiatrists not considered that maybe Swedenborg was using "Messiah" in a derivative sense?²¹⁶⁻²¹⁸

How does anybody synthesize the "Vision in the Inn" material, when Swedenborg only affirms that he saw worms and an angel,^{273, 274} but it is Robsahm 37 years later who combines it with a Divine commission?²⁶⁴ Is the Latin of WE 3557 ambiguous? Does it refer to worms only as I and Toksvig argue,²⁷⁵ using Acton's translation, or worms as well as frogs, as Regamey argues?²⁷⁶ Scholars need to acknowledge that there is no clear-cut, firsthand link between the purification vision and the Divine call

vision,^{276, 286-288} although I have argued that it could have been possible, taking into account Swedenborg's other visions of 1744, and a belief in a variety of theophanic experiences.

For some, Swedenborg's mere claims to be unique or to have a "special mission"⁷⁰ are enough to condemn him as a monomaniac or a schizophrenic. Hopefully by listing White's and my own attempts to temper these somewhat, a fuller, more accurate picture of what Swedenborg was really saying, will emerge. Swedenborg is not as absolutely unique as some of his statements appear on the surface. Another aspect of this lies in the field of "transpersonal psychology." Swedenborg is part of what Larsen called "the visionary tradition,"²⁵⁹ and so is "more the shaman than the madman."³⁴⁴

But despite differences of opinion, missing pieces of evidence, circular reasoning, overreliance on authority figures, if we humbly and openly engage with people who hold different opinions, this may help fine-tune our objectivity, and encourage the development of our enlightenment. After this long, exhaustive study I remain to be convinced that Swedenborg was ever insane. For me, his character and reputation are intact, and even enhanced. I firmly believe that my faith has become less "historical" and more real through this study.

Finally, thank you Dr. Johnson for your challenging paper! I don't believe that Swedenborg suffered from a messianic psychosis, but I believe that I have grown as a person through exploring the issues.

APPENDIX ON ROBSAHM'S MEMOIR Erik Sandstrom, Sr.

1. Robsahm's own handwritten ms—if there ever was one! see 3 below—is lost. A number of handwritten copies exist.
2. In his Foreword to his annotated publication of Robsahm's memoirs Hallengren writes: "With regard to essential matters, however, there are only minor differences in the known versions, including the oldest translations. The contents can be established with great

certainty” (CARL ROBSAHM OM SWEDENBORG, ABA Cad/Copy & Tryck, Stockholm 1989, p. 14.).

3. Hallengren tracks down five Swedish copies (versions). He is making use of the *Uppsalamanuskriftet* (the Upsala ms), and notes that this is written in German style. Robsahm was an accountant at the Loan Bank (a department of the National Bank at Stockholm). Hallengren: “Did Robsahm cause a copyist at the bank to make a clean copy of his ms? Or has some one of his acquaintances made a copy? The text is doubtless a clean copy [of a draft] or a careful copy [of a ms], as it is virtually free of corrections or signs of hesitation...Perhaps, in fact, *there never was any Robsahm handwritten ms on Swedenborg*, except maybe as a draft? If so we may be as close to the original as we can get” (Ibid., p. 19; emphasis mine.).

Hallengren mentions the following five known copies: The Upsala ms (ms.U); the London ms (ms.L); the Dybeck copy (ms.R); the Deleen copy (ms.Dn); a lengthy copy fragment kept by the *Pro Fide et Caritate* (ms.P). The above are apparently all in Swedish, including the “ms.L,” kept in the Swedenborg Society’s archives at Bloomsbury in London (concerning which Hallengren speculates that it may have been left there after R.L. Tafel’s work on his *Documents*). In addition to the above five there is also a translation into German by Achatius Kahl, a theologian at the University of Lund (ms.Lund). Thus we have five versions in Swedish, and one in German.

A word about Kahl. According to Odhner’s *Annals of the New Church* Dr. Kahl was “an earnest receiver of the Doctrines,” and he is the author of *Nya Kyrkan och dess Inflytande på Theologiens Studium i Sverige* (The New Church and its Influence upon the Study of Theology in Sweden). A striking phrase occurs on p. 7 of Hallengren’s publication: “In a German translation [of the Robsahm Memoirs] done by the theologian of Lund Achatius Kahl (1794–1888), *who owned the manuscript*, the Robsahm Swedenborg memo-

ries had been published by Immanuel Tafel in 1842 in his German collection of documents” (My translation, my emphasis). That “*manuscript*,” however, according to Hallengren’s above observation (see 3), may have been no more than one of the five copies, and then probably the “ms.U.”

4. I mentioned that Hallengren makes use of the “ms.U.” In the section where Swedenborg is telling Robsahm about his vision in the London inn where he was taking his evening meal, we find: “I saw a man sitting in a corner of the room...” But at this point Hallengren puts in a footnote as follows: “*ms. P*: ‘I saw a man, majestically arrayed in purple and encompassed by a bright light, sitting in a corner...’” (ftn. p. 36).

“ms.P” means the *Pro Fide et Charitate* fragment. I doubt that this description of the “man” merits much attention, i.e. not in *this* context. It seems to be a case of two different events being confused (and Hallengren, too, seems confused). In his footnote Hallengren adds his speculation that the detailed description of the “man” who spoke to Swedenborg in the inn may stem from “the brief version of the event that G.A. Beyer gave C.F. Nordenskiöld in a letter dated March 23, 1776” (*Doc.*, vol. 2, p. 426). But I do not think Beyer was referring to the event in the inn!

In his letter Beyer speaks of the Lord *seated near his bed*, which indicates that the event Beyer is referring to is the one in *Holland* concerning which Swedenborg himself writes in the *Journal of Dreams*. The relevant words in Beyers letter, printed in *Documents*, Vol. 2, p. 426, are: “The information respecting the Lord’s personal appearance before the Assessor, who saw Him, *in imperial purple and in majestic light*, seated near his bed, while He gave Assessor Swedenborg his commission, I had from his own lips at a dinner party in the house of Dr. Rosen, where I saw the old gentleman for the first time” (Emphasis mine.).

The *Journal of Dreams* entry is dated 6–7 April, 1744. Swedenborg here says that he had *gone to bed*, and that then he “sat in His bosom, and saw Him face to face.” Swedenborg does not

here say that the Lord appeared “in imperial purple and in majestic light,” but this information he could well have added when he related that same event to Beyer and the others at the party.

5. In the excerpts from Talbot’s article that you sent me, I read at bottom of p. 31: “Horn makes good points about Robsahm’s account being cited ‘as the only reliable source on his calling into the office of seer’, which threatens to cause Beyer’s account ‘to fall into oblivion.’” But what about Swedenborg’s own account of the *earlier* call in his *J. of Dreams*? Robsahm’s account would report *another* and *later* call. I think both accounts are authentic—certainly Swedenborg’s own is. In fact, testimonies by Gjørwell (Librarian at the Royal Library), Beyer, Robsahm, and others, in addition to Swedenborg’s own, clearly suggest, or show, that his call to be Revelator was *progressive*, and was not a solitary occurrence. But this is a subject by itself and in its own right.

Endnotes

1 [In the text, endnote superscript numbers are not always in sequence. The number, however, refers the reader to the correct endnote. See list of abbreviations used at end of article.] R. L. Tafel, *Document Concerning Swedenborg...* (hereinafter *Doc.*): II: I: 598–599. Tafel follows Rev. Samuel Noble (in his preface to *Heaven and Hell*, xxviii) in assuming that Swedenborg stayed with Brockwer in 1744 and also in 1769. Cf. *New-Church Magazine...* (hereinafter *NCM*) (1885): 385–386.

2 *New Church Life...* (hereinafter *NCL*) (1906): 371.

3 *NCL* (1914): 428.

4 *Morning Light...* (hereinafter *ML*) (1890): 12a, which is from James Spilling’s review of Wm. W. Ireland, M.D. *Through the Ivory Gate: Studies in Psychology and History* (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1889).

5 *ML* (1913): 191b, which is from Rev. Arthur Wilde’s editorial comments on a reference to Swedenborg in the *Practitioner* of 12th December 1912, in an article entitled “The Relation of Epilepsy to Insanity and Its Treatment” by “Robert Jones, M.D., F.R.C.P., Resident Physician and Superintendent of the London County Council Asylum, Claybury; and Lecturer on Psychological Medicine, St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, London.”

6 *ML* (1901): 494b. The editor also mentions Francis H. Walmsley.

7 Cf. White’s comment that for cessationists, or people who believe “that immediate communion of God with Man ceased with Bible times,” to believe that Swedenborg “was a servant of God and a Seer of Angels, is to them like an invitation to become the dupes of a lunatic or impostor.” White (1867): I: 254, 255. White (1868): 144.

8 White (1867): I: vi, which is repeated in White (1868): vii. White describes his third biography as a “condensation” of his 1867 biography, and proudly states; “No detail of any importance has been omitted.” (1868): ix.

9 Johnson (1994): 690–691.

10 Tafel in *Doc.*: II: I: 592. *Ibid.*: II: II: 1307 mentions Maudsley's article in the *Journal of Mental Science* (July 1870), number 70, *Doc.* II: II: 1235 mentions 1869. (In Johnson's bibliography he mentions an article in the 1869 *Journal of Mental Science*, so maybe Tafel has got his dates wrong?) The book of his lectures *Body and Mind* (2nd edition) is reviewed by the editor of the *Intellectual Repository and New Jerusalem Magazine* (hereinafter IR) (1874): 417–424, 478–484. He is mentioned by name in ML (1901): 494b.

11 A point made by the Rev. Norman Ryder in a telephone conversation with me on the subject of Johnson's article.

12 Johnson (1994): 690a says: "White (1867)...did not express any opinions about Swedenborg's mental state, apart from the single statement 'There is no denying that in 1743, when Swedenborg was introduced into the Spirit World, he was for a while insane'." In dipping into White's biographies I haven't found this reference. Cf. White (1868): 140, 163.

13 White (1867): I: 245. Also (1868): 140. Compare what White says 11 years earlier: "No denial of the possibility of such spiritual vision as is claimed by Swedenborg, can be accepted from the Christian. Such denial is alone the privilege of the professed materialist. We all know how much of our loved and common faith rests on claims that are quite as startling as those of Swedenborg. From the visions of Abraham to those of John in Patmos, the whole Scriptural narrative is interwoven with supernatural incident." White (1856): 27.

14 Johnson (1994): 690a.

15 White (1867): I: 30 but corrected on p. 539 of the same volume. His 1868 biography leaves it out. Cf. White (1868): 24.

16 See e.g. what I wrote about Swedenborg's visions of Quakers in my article "The Toronto Blessing: A Swedenborgian Perspective on Christian Revivals and their Causes." (Part 2) in NCM (July 1995): 7–10.

17 Johnson (1994): 690b. It was Rev. Arvid Ferelius writing to Professor Tratgard (*Doc.* II: I: 561 (¶15); White (1867): II: 343. Also White (1868): 509. But is White correct in saying Swedenborg told Ferelius or are these Ferelius' observations on an isolated day, or, as Tafel suggests, hearsay conveyed to Ferelius, which is easily dismissed by testimonies from other of Swedenborg's contemporaries? (*Doc.* II: I: 561n–562n) It is more likely to be the experience of angels and spirits in the next world. (Cf. SD 5174; 5601:2; 5664) *Spiritual Diary* (hereinafter SD) 5172 may be a possible source of this misunderstanding.

18 Toksvig (1983): 159. Chapter XIII of Toksvig's book is entitled "Swedenborg's sanity" (1983: 156–167). Rev. Brian Kingslake, a Swedenborgian, in the introduction to the 1983 Swedenborg Foundation edition writes:

Miss Toksvig is completely detached and uncommitted, which gives her an advantage in some respects over most other biographers who have been unashamedly partisan...This book is by far the best I have ever come across for bringing the intelligent atheist or agnostic to a friendly confrontation with Swedenborg. It blazes the trail for the sceptic, beckoning him onwards with the assurance that Swedenborg, far from being insane as is so often supposed, was in many respects the sanest man who ever lived! (vii–viii).

For a critical review of Toksvig's book from a Swedenborgian perspective, see Rev. Dr. Bill Woofenden's article in *Studia Swedenborgia* No. 5 (January 1985): 3: 48–62.

On this point of reading Swedenborg as though he were only occupied with his dreams and visions as recorded in his *Journal of Dreams* (hereinafter JD), we note the comments of Acton (1927): 36–37. (As can be seen, Acton is using the word "visionary" and "mystic" in their derogatory meanings of enthusiast or person preoccupied with his own impractical ideas or views.)

It [JD] created a great stir and was the object of attack by those who sought to prove Swedenborg a visionary. Unfortunately, these critics and sometimes also, though to a much less extent, even Swedenborg's defenders have confined their attention to the contents of the *Journal*; and the result could hardly be other than the appearance

as of a life passed mainly in dreams and visions. The only just way to examine Swedenborg's Journal is to consider it in connection with the contemporary life and work of its author. Seen thus, the Journal assumes an entirely different aspect. It is no longer a record of vague dreams, but is the careful description, by a man of learning, accustomed to accuracy in his statements and logic in his reasonings, of experiences, the significance of which he sought to elicit, but of whose actuality he, as witness, could have no doubt.

In the daytime he wrote these dreams in his Journal and reflected on their meaning; but in the daytime he was also busily engaged in adding the finishing touches to his *Animal Kingdom*, consulting anatomical authorities, meeting learned men, and seeing his work through the press. During the period covered by his Journal, he wrote and published that masterpiece of reasoning, the Epilogue to the second volume of *The Animal Kingdom*, and also the whole of the third volume dealing with the relation to the mind. He also wrote *The Five Senses*, and the Introduction to his work *On the Brain*, in which he lays down the laws of analytical thought. It is unthinkable that the writer of works such as these could at the same time be a visionary or a mystic.

19 Toksvig (1983): 158–159.

20 IR (1874): 417–424, 478–479.

21 IR (1874): 417.

22 IR (1874): 482, cf. 483.

23 Ibid.: 483.

24 Ibid.: 482, cf. 484. This point is also made in ML (1890), p. 11a & *Monthly Observer...* (hereinafter MO) (1864), p. 297. Cf. endnote 13.

25 Ibid.: 472. The non-Swedenborgian science writer Gary Lachmann recently commented: "Swedenborg's heaven is on a par with the visions of Dante" in his article "Heavens and Hells: the Inner Worlds of Emanuel Swedenborg" in *Studia Swedenborgiana* 9: 3 (October 1995): 19.

26 Ibid.: 421.

27 Compare the piecing together of incidents in Swedenborg's life from 1736, 1740 (cf. *The Word Explained...* (hereinafter WE) 6905), 1744 and so on, in Acton (1927): 26–53. Cf. also e.g. WE 1003; SD 2951; 3464. Cf. Beyer's letter to C.F. Nordenskold (*Doc. II*: I: 263, 426 (¶4). Cf. endnote 263.

28 Dr. Gilbert Ballet, the French neurologist, who was Professor of Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, in his book *Swedenborg: Story of an Eighteenth Century Visionary* (Paris, Masson et Cie, 1903), argues for the gradual development of Swedenborg's condition contrasted with the sudden vivid hallucination of St. Paul! NCM (1903): 111.

29 IR (1874): 420.

30 Ibid.: 424; cf. also 417.

31 White (1867): I: 245. Also White (1868): 140. Cf. also endnote 12.

32 IR (1874): 419.

33 White (1867): I: 225. Also White (1868): 132–133.

34 IR (1867): 267. One of White's "tactics" seems to be that he thrusts Swedenborg's "extremely exceptional" comments or "very rare statements" "into glaring distinctness." IR (1874): 478.

35 For a full account of the long and drawn out affair including the court cases during 1860 and 1861, read Tafel's account in *Doc. II*: II: 1318–1329.

36 Woofenden (1968): 163. For a detailed and exhaustive comparison of White's first two biographies of Swedenborg, see Tafel in *Doc. II*: II: 1284–1329.

37 *New Jerusalem Magazine...* (hereinafter NJM) (1868): 472.

38 Tafel in *Doc. II*: II: 1286.

39 Cf. Tafel in *Doc. II*: II: 136 and 1312–1315.

40 White (1856): 123, 150–151, etc.

- 41 There is no endnote no. 41.
- 42 Rev. J. R. Rendell in *Transactions of the International Swedenborg Congress* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1910): 45–46. Cited in Higham (1914): 113n.
- 43 Larsen (1980): 14–23, also Larsen (1988): 188–191, explores the issues of Swedenborg's alleged "mental illness."
- 44 *Ibid.*, (1980): 16. (1988): 188b.
- 45 *Ibid.*, (1980): 17. (1988): 188b–189a.
- 46 IR (1832–1833): 419, which is a review of Dr. Elliotson's transcribed lecture in the *London Medical Gazette* of 23rd March 1833, p. 819. Cf. endnote 337.
- 47 MO (1864), pp. 299–300.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 301. Mason speaks from experience, that is, from discussions he has had with psychiatrists of his day (*ibid.*, p. 300).
- 49 *Ibid.*, 300.
- 50 IR (1832–1833): 420. See endnote 24.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 421.
- 52 MO (1864): 302. Could it have been Hippocrates Junior?
- 53 ML (1901): 494b. Rev. Arthur Wilde in his review of Dr. Robert Jones's article in the *Practitioner* on December 12th 1912, entitled "The Relation of Epilepsy to Insanity and Its Treatment," asks: "If Dr. Jones' information has been drawn from this book [Dr. Ballet's], or from an out of date and erroneous biography of Swedenborg [e.g. White?] it would be well for someone to supply him with more accurate information." See endnote 5.
- 54 ML (1890): 11a. Cf. endnote 4.
- 55 ML (1890): 12b. Ireland particularly appreciated Swedenborg's book on marriage *Conjugal Love*.
- 56 NCM (1903): 110.
- 57 ML (1890): 12a.
- 58 White (1867): I: 271–272. White (1868): 153–154 (with slight variations, such as "vilifiers" instead of "controversialists").
- 59 ML(1890): 11a & b.
- 60 Hood (1854): 161.
- 61 NCL (1914): 428.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 429.
- 63 ML (1890): 11b.
- 64 NCM (1903): 113.
- 65 JD or SD or both?
- 66 ML (1913): 191b.
- 67 NCL (1915): 159. I assume his talk was in 1914 because of the short review in NCL (1914): 428–429.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 158
- 69 NCL (1914): 428 quoting *Svenskt Biogr. Lexikon*.
- 70 Larsen (1980): 17. Larsen (1988): 188b–189a.
- 71 Larsen cites Karl Jaspers, *Strindberg and Van Gogh*, Berlin: Springer, (1926) in Larsen (1988): 191b.
- 72 For Lagerborg, Larsen cites Toksvig (1983): 162, 362 n. 13, who cites *Finsk Tidsskrift* (1923): 281. Lagerborg apparently based his views on the German psychiatrist E. Hitschmann.
- 73 For von Winterstein, Larsen cites Toksvig (1983): 163, 372 n. 14, who cites H.D. Spoerl, in *New Christianity*, (Winter 1937): 14. According to Toksvig: "Von Winterstein, another psychoanalyst, confirms and elaborates Hitschmann's diagnosis." (Toksvig 1983, p. 163).
- 74 Larsen cites Emil A. G. Kleen, *Swedenborg*, Stockholm (1917, 1920).
- 75 Larsen (1980): 17–18. Larsen (1988): 189a.

76 Larsen (1980): 19–20. Larsen (1988): 189a–189b. Confirmed, for example, by Shearsmith's testimony to Dr. Peter Provo in 1792 NCM (1885): 385, 386. According to Ferelius Swedenborg "never sought to make proselytes." In R.L. Tafel, *Doc. II*: I: 559: ¶8, which is confirmed by Robsahm (*Doc. I*: 34: ¶14) and Pernety (*ibid.*): 58: ¶11.

77 Van Dusen (1972, 1981): 190.

78 Van Dusen (1974): 17.

79 NCM (1914): 36 n. Higham collected his information from Daniel Benham's *Memoirs of James Hutton: comprising the annals of his life, and connection with the United Brethren*, London (1856). Moravians "give themselves out as the true Lutherans and recognize the work of the Holy Ghost" (JD 202).

80 *Ibid.*, 37.

81 NCM (1914): 115, 116 n. In his hymn book Brockmer calls himself Paul John Brockmer. White paints Brockmer as "a timid, prudent and credulous London lodging-house keeper." White (1867): I: 133. White (1868): 225.

82 *The Arminian Magazine* became the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* in 1798. NCM (1914): 84.

83 Higham supplies the page numbers: IV:46–49. NCM (1914): 84.

84 NCM (1914): 82–83. White (1867): I: 232 dates it to "around 1770." Tafel rightly points out that "Instead of taking the evidence of a man given soon after a supposed occurrence, he prefers to accept his testimony on the same subject as written down *sixteen years later*, and after he had an attack of insanity." *Doc. II*: I: 587n.

85 See *Doc. II*: I: 586–590 for the full account.

86 Cf. JD pp. 191–193. (*Doc. II*: I: 193: ¶133) taking into account the 12 day difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendars. (Cf. Tafel in *Doc. II*: I: 193 footnote.) "But when Mr. White discovers that Swedenborg was not in London during that year, but was at Stockholm, and that he did not come to London till May, 1744, he deliberately changes the figures to 1744!" *New Jerusalem Magazine* (hereinafter NJM) (1868): 476.

87 Cf. JD 202. *Doc. II*: I: 196: ¶142.

88 *Doc. II*: I: 590.

89 *Ibid.*, 590–592.

90 *Ibid.*, 592.

91 White (1867): I: 220. White conveniently left this detail out in his 1868 biography. Cf. White (1868), p. 124. Maybe he realised its falsehood, but "arguments from silence" are notoriously weak!

92 *Doc. II*: I: 587n. Compare *Doc. II*: I: 593–600 for a comparison between the two versions. Tafel's conclusion was that "Mathesius' testimony when examined exclusively in its own light, breaks down completely; for it is shown to be full of inconsistencies, and downright contradictions." (*Doc. II*: I: 600) In Mathesius' 1796 version Swedenborg is "a somewhat aged man, and, as you tell me, have never taken medicine." White (1867): I: 222. Also White (1868): 130; *Doc. II*: I: 593b, which makes Swedenborg outchasing his attendant laughable, unless the latter was a geriatric, because Swedenborg was 55 in 1743, assuming the incident did actually happen then, which is impossible. Cf. NJM (1868): 472. For Swedenborg being a spritely 81 year old, compare John Christian Cuno's statement of 1769: "although he is more than twenty years older than I am, I should be afraid to run a race with him; for he is as quick on his legs as the youngest man." (*Doc. II*: I: 450). But how literally do we take Cuno's remark? According to Pernety, when Swedenborg was 80, he had "the bodily vigour of a man of thirty." *Doc. I*: 72.

93 NCM (1914): 87.

94 *Doc. II*: I: 594b.

95 *Ibid.*, 592b.

96 *Ibid.*, 593b.

97 White (1867): I: 221–225. Also White (1868): 129–132.

98 *Doc. II*: I: 593.

99 *Ibid.*, 593, 594.

- 100 Ibid., 589.
 101 Ibid., 595.
 102 Ibid., 596.
 103 NCM (1914): 87.
 104 Cf e.g. NJM (1868): 472.
 105 Higham supplies the page numbers: VI:437–441, 495–498, 550–552, 607–614, 669–680 (NCM (1914): 85).
 106 *Doc. I*: 7–8. Also, *The Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg* translated and edited by Alfred Acton, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Scientific Association (1955): 676–679.
 107 *Doc. II*: I: 584. White published it in (1867): I: 228–229. Also White (1868): 133–134.
 108 White (1867): I: 229. On p. 228, White writes about Wesley's 1783 account of Swedenborg:
 We now come to a painful passage connected with this affair, in which Wesley must be severely censured for some careless tattle, by which he brought down odium alike on Swedenborg and Mathesius, and threw the clear and honest story of Brockmer into confusion and discredit.
 109 White (1868): 133.
 110 *Reflections on Baron Swedenborg's Works in New Jerusalem Messenger*, (28th December 1861), New York (unsighted). See MO (1862): 95–101.
 111 White (1868): 133; NCM (1914): 109, cf. also 115, quoting Okely. Cf. endnote 110. MO (1862): 97.
 112 Ibid., 111. MO (1862): 97.
 112a MO (1862): 96.
 113 *Doc. II*: II: 696 and quoted in NCM (1914): 111.
 114 NCM (1914): 110 quoting Okely's "Reflections," (cf. endnote 103). Okely expresses some difficulty with *True Christian Religion*, but he also seems undecided in some aspects of Swedenborg's theology, or to at least give Swedenborg the benefit of the doubt concerning his unique claims. Cf. *Doc. II*: II: 1244–1245.
 115 White (1868): 133.
 116 Beatson (1791): 93. Cf. also Hindmarsh (1821): 19–21. Higham supplied the information that Beatson was secretary to Conference at its first session in 1789. NCM (1914): 109.
 117 Ibid., 93–94.
 118 IR (1867): 264.
 119 White (1867): I: 226.
 120 Ibid., I: 227. White describes Hindmarsh as "a zealous Swedenborgian" (I: 225), "an out-and-out Swedenborgian devotee" and therefore prejudiced. (I: 227) Hindmarsh's account was just "a rhetorical flourish" (I: 227) and mentioned in IR (1867): 266.
 121 Ibid., I: 226n.
 122 NCL (1958): 63.
 123 Hindmarsh (1821): 20, saying Brockmer "positively" declared "'that he had never opened his mouth on this subject to Mr. Wesley, nor had he ever given such an account to any other person:' and he seemed much displeased, that Mr. Wesley should have taken the liberty to make use of his name in public print, without his knowledge or consent." Cf. NCM (1914): 109.
 124 White (1868): 133; cf. White (1867): I: 225.
 125 White (1867): I: 230. I, like White, felt uncomfortable at Noble suggesting it was Divine judgment on Mathesius, namely, that he had slandered Swedenborg as insane, and therefore became insane himself. White (1867): I: 231.
 126 White (1867): I: 128n: "That Mathesius was 'Swedenborg's personal and violent enemy' is merely an inference or colouring of Noble's, and one quite unwarranted. There is no evidence, that the two men ever came in contact. Mathesius apparently had no belief in Swedenborg's claims and doctrines, and this incredulity was in all likelihood the extent of his

aversion." And yet according to Springer, "Swedenborg had presented a copy of his *Arcana Caelestia* to Mathesius," so must have met him at some stage! Cf. endnote 134.

127 Noble's *Appeal* (3rd ed.): 241.

128 *Doc. II: I: 538: ¶ 9*. White (1867): I: 232 calls this "the gossip of a publican to whom Swedenborg had been handsome."

129 *Doc. II: II: 1182*.

130 *Doc. II: I: 536*.

131 *Doc. I: 709*. Pernety says Mathesius was an enemy of Springer, because Springer was a friend of Swedenborg's. *Doc. I: 61: ¶ 14*.

132 *Doc. II: I: 576, 606*. Cf. Hindmarsh (1821): 22.

133 *Doc. II: I: 581*.

134 *Doc. II: I: 609*.

135 *Doc. II: I: 610: ¶4*.

136 *Doc. II: I: 611*; cf. also *Doc. I: 702–703*.

137 White (1867): I: 232.

138 *Ibid.*, I: 231.

139 *Doc. II: II: 1187*.

140 *Doc. II: I: 548–549, 577*; NCM (1885): 385.

141 NCM (1885): 380; cf. also what the Shearsmiths told Henry Peckitt in 1778 in *Doc. II: I: 544: ¶2*

142 *Doc. II: I: 597–600*.

143 E.g. *Doc. II: I: 595b*; White (1867): I: 224. Also White (1868): 131.

144 NCM (1885): 382.

145 NCM (1885): 383–384. Did he move to Shearsmith's because Mrs. Carr had moved? (Cf. *Doc. II: I: 544*). Shearsmith's maid, later his second wife, told Henry Peckitt, that before he came to the Shearsmith house the first time, "he was offered another lodging in the neighbourhood, but he told the mistress there was no harmony in the house; which she acknowledged, and recommended him to Mr. Shearsmith's." *Doc., II: I: 546: ¶10*. Could it have been Mrs. Cartwright who had the disharmonious house? (*Doc. II: I: 554: ¶ 2; II: I: 556: ¶12*.

146 *Doc. II: I: 610*; cf also *Doc., I: 61: ¶14*.

147 LJ (C) translator's preface in any edition.

148 NCM (1885): 382, 383.

149 *Doc. II: I: 547–548*.

150 NCM (1885): 381–382

151 *Doc. II: I: 554: ¶1*.

152 *Doc. II: I: 555: ¶2*.

153 *Doc. II: I: 610: ¶4*.

154 *Doc. II: II: 1191–1192*.

155 That is, "the door-way between the two rooms, where he had often observed Swedenborg to stand, while he was conversing with his invisible friends." A gentleman from St. Croix, who greatly admired Swedenborg, gave Shearsmith half-a-guinea to stand on this spot. (Shearsmith to Hindmarsh, *Doc. II: I: 550: ¶8*. Shearsmith told Dr. Peter Provo in 1792 that Swedenborg "generally stood between the bed and front room when conversing in the day with spirits or those who were invisible to others" NCM (1885): 385–386.

156 *Doc. II: I: 544: ¶ 4*.

157 NCM (1885): 380–381.

158 *Ibid.*, 384–385.

159 *Ibid.*, 385–386.

160 *Doc. I: 39–40: ¶24*; cf. 1 Corinthians 10: 13.

161 *Doc. I: 40: ¶ 25*.

162 *Doc. I: 40: ¶26*; cf. the Apostle's vision in Revelation vol. I, p. 14 and Swedenborg's comments in *Apocalypse Revealed...* (hereinafter AR): 48, *Apocalypse Explained...* (hereinafter AE): 68.

- 163 *Doc. I*: 70: ¶ 34.
 164 *Doc. II*: I: 558: ¶ 5; cf. *Doc. II*: I: 562–563: ¶1.
 165 *Doc. II*: I: 537: ¶ 3.
 166 *Doc. II*: I: 555: ¶ 4.
 167 *Doc. I*: 53: ¶ 2. Cf. Elijah's 40 days and nights (I Kings 19: 8).
 168 *Doc. II*: I: 545: ¶ 7).
 169 *Doc. II*: II: 1147–1151.
 170 *Doc. II*: I: 434: ¶ 10.
 171 *Doc. I*: 41: ¶ 29 (Harrison to Robsahm).
 172 *Doc. I*: 41: ¶ 30.
 173 *Doc. II*: I: 531–532: ¶ 12.
 174 NCM (1885): 385–386, cf. WE 943, 1149; *Arcana Coelestia* (hereinafter AC) 1884 (as in *Heaven and Hell* 441), AC 5605:2e, *True Christian Religion* (hereinafter TR) 157:1, AR 896:1; *Conjugal Love* (hereinafter CL) 316:1.
 175 *Doc. II*: I: 541E.
 176 *Doc. II*: I: 619.
 177 *Doc. II*: I: 490.
 178 The Stockholm fire took place on July 19, 1759 (*Doc. II*: I: 619) or July 29, 1759 (*Doc. II*: I: 629n).
 179 Swedenborg to Bergstrom (*Doc. II*: I: 631D).
 180 *Doc. II*: I: 629.
 181 Jung-Stilling in *Doc. II*: I: 630B.
 182 Shearsmith to Provo in 1792 (NCM (1885): 380).
 183 *Ibid.*, 380–381.
 184 *Doc. II*: I: 545: ¶ 9.
 185 *Doc. I*: 32: ¶ 3. Cf. *Doc. I*: 33: ¶ 7: “he had never any definite time for sleeping.”
 186 NCM (1885): 379.
 187 *Doc. II*: I: 446: ¶ 7; cf. *Doc. I*: 33: ¶ 7.
 188 NCM (1885): 385, 386.
 189 *Doc. II*: I: 482F.
 190 JD: 40, 45, 51.
 191 More than 10 hours (JD 140), 11 hours (JD 100, 105, 174, 177); 12 hours (JD 127).
 192 JD 197e, 215e. *Doc. II*: I: 194: ¶ 137e, 200: ¶ 151e.
 193 Cf. *Doc. II*: I: 587: ¶ 1; JD 197e; *Doc. II*: I: 194: ¶ 137e. It is Mathesius who supplied the name to Wesley. From James Hutton's memoirs, cf. endnote 79, we learn, “John Senniff, Shoe Maker, [born at Worms in Germany, January, 1688. He was Warden of the German congregation at London in 1744, died May 2, 1752, and was buried in the burial ground near Bloomsbury.]” NCM (1914): 36–37.
 194 NCM (1914): 81.
 195 Acton (1927): 68. For 1748 see SD 722, 1166, 3963. Cf. also SD 142. For the fact it wasn't until 1763 that people had an inkling that Swedenborg was undergoing extraordinary experiences, Acton appeals to Swedenborg being named as the author of AC; *Earths in the Universe* (hereinafter EU); HH; *Last Judgment* (hereinafter LJ); *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* (hereinafter HD); *White Horse* (hereinafter WH); in a Swedish book by S. J. Alnander. (*Doc. II*: II: 977). However, how many people knew that it was the angels who told Swedenborg that there was a fire raging in Stockholm in July 1759? See endnote 173 How soon had Queen Louisa Ulrica of Sweden's commissioning of Swedenborg to find out information from her deceased brother, Prince Augustus William of Prussia, in November 1761, become public knowledge? (*Doc. II*: I: 618–620, 647–666) Baron Daniel Tilas knew some time before 16th March 1760 (*Doc. II*: I: 396–396), possibly “the winter of 1759” (*Doc. I*: 59n).
 196 JD 80. *Doc. II*: I: 166: ¶ 46.
 197 WE 3347; cf. also WE 475, 943.

- 198 *Doc. II*: I: 587 (Wesley in 1781); JD 202e. *Doc. II*: I: 196:¶ 142. Initially as a Lutheran he may have been quite comfortable with the Moravians, but towards the middle of October 1744, Swedenborg realises that the Moravians aren't really for him. JD 264. *Doc. II*: I: 214: ¶¶ 192. On *Doc. II*: 1087–1088 Tafel refers us to AC 3904, JD 264, 266, 267; *Doc. II*: I: 214 : ¶¶ 192, 194, 195. 199 NCM (1914): 86.
200 JD 206. *Doc. II*: I: 197: ¶ 145.
201 NCL (1914): 235.
202 *Doc. II*: I: 609–610: ¶ 2; White (1867): I: 233.
203 JD 12:9; 14; 112; 174; cf. 199.
204 JD 44e; 112; 127; 156; cf. 48; 199.
205 JD 282.
206 WE 541.
207 WE 1351. Compare WE 1144: “visions are such as are seen in time of wakefulness when the mind is removed from the senses and from the animus,” or everyday temperament or disposition, “take place in midday and in full wakefulness.” For some physical causes of swoons, see *Divine Wisdom* (hereinafter WI): xi: 6a; *Divine Love and Wisdom* (hereinafter DLW): 390:2 ; WI iii: 5, vii: 4:2, x: 7; 407:2; also WI vi: e. For spiritual causes see e.g. SD(M) 4686. Also AC 6195, 6321, HH 932, 490e, TR 119, 607.
208 WE 1353.
209 NCM (1885): 382. In fact Swedenborg used to send Shearsmith to help himself. *Doc. II*: I: 556: ¶ 10.
210 NCM (1885): 385.
211 *Ibid.*, 381. Cf. *Doc. II*: I: 549: ¶ 7.
212 *Doc. II*: I: 588: ¶ 6; White (1867): I: 222. Also White (1868): 130.
213 White (1867): I: 225. Also White (1868): 132–133.
214 E.g. John 6:56; 15:4–7; 17:23, 26; 1 John 2:24; 3:24; 4:15.
215 WE 510. Swedenborg supports this statement by appealing to Acts 17:28 and “the saying that God is the All in all.”
216 Beatson (1791): 93n–94n.
217 E.g. Exodus 5:1; 7:17; 8:1, 16; 1 Samuel 15:10; 2 Samuel 7:4; 1 Kings 6:11; and particularly throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament.
218 E.g. Genesis 32:4; Exodus 5:10; Numbers 20:14, 22:16.
219 IR (1867): 264. White quotes these words of Swedenborg's on the authority of Goyder's *Life of Swedenborg*, p. xxxviii. White (1867): II: 301. Also White (1868): 481.
220 *Doc. II*: I: 545: ¶ 6.
221 NCM (1885): 383.
222 *Doc. I*: I: 547: ¶ 14. Cf. Robsahm, *Doc. I*: 34: ¶ 12; Pernety, *Doc. I*: 57: ¶6; Cuno, *Doc. II*: I: 445: ¶5; Hindmarsh from Pernety, *Doc. II*: I: 550–551.
223 *Doc. II*: I: 550: ¶ 9.
224 *Doc. I*: 34: ¶ 12.
225 *Doc. II*: I: 548: ¶ 3. Also White (1867): II: 575. Also White (1868): 664.
226 *Doc. II*: I: 549: ¶ 4.
227 *Doc. II*: I: 549: ¶ 6, II: I: 578.
228 *Doc. II*: I: 588: ¶ 6, 593: ¶6; White (1867): I: 222. Also White (1868): 129–130. Swedenborg needs Brockmer to be his spokesman to the Jews because of his speech impediment.
229 TR 779, cf. SD 1647, 4034, *Divine Providence* (hereinafter DP) 135, *Invitation to the New Church* (hereinafter NC) 38, AR (Pref.)4, SS(P) (*De Verbo*) 29, NC (Pref.) VII, *Coronis* (hereinafter CO) 18, 20. These references are taken from a list drawn up by Rt. Rev. Peter Buss in “The Word of God” part 2 in NCL (March 1996):112–113.

230 White (1868):163. White takes great pains to argue that Swedenborg like other "Divine instruments" was not "impeccable and infallible" (*ibid.*, x). After all the LORD comes to every humble, sincere listener to His voice or reader of His revelations (e.g. AC 3900:9, 4060:5, 8427:4, AR 944:1, AE 482:2), a state of mind sometimes symbolized by "morning" (e.g. AE 179:10). Cuno thought "that Swedenborg as a philosopher is quite modest and unassuming, but as a theologian more than arrogant." *Doc. II: I: 478–479: ¶ 4*. Oetinger regards Swedenborg as "presumptuous" because he diminishes "the force of the sense of the letter" of the Bible (*Doc. II: II: 1060*).

231 White (1868):140, 163. Cf. endnotes 12 & 13.

232 White (1868): 143–144, 151.

233 *Ibid.*, 160.

234 *Ibid.*, 154 citing *Doctrine of Faith* 4. Cf. also TR 110: 2.

235 *Ibid.*, 155.

236 Cf. SD 3034^{1/2}; 3317; 3320; 3464:2. Cf. Larsen (1980): 26–33; also Larsen (1988): 192a–194b. Toksvig (1983): 126, 129, 130, 218–219 lists also *Economy of the Animal Kingdom II: 10:42; The Fibre* (edited by Alfred Acton): 525ff; SD 402, 1612–1615. SD 402 is fascinating because some spirits from "the Indies" "induced a like respiration upon me that I might know this from experience." Both Toksvig and Larsen draw parallels with yogic techniques.

237 White (1868): 150–151.

238 *Ibid.*, 152.

239 *Ibid.*, 158–159.

240 *Ibid.*, 159. White quotes AC 1410 in support of this, but AC 904 might have been a better proof text, which he quotes on page 162.

241 *Ibid.*, 160–161 quoting AE 114:1, 1341; TR 28.

242 *Ibid.*, 160–161 quoting AC 8760:2; LW 130; DP 31e. For Swedenborg himself cf. DP 135e; DLW 131.

243 *Ibid.*, 161–162 quoting AC 49:1, 1245, 1341(?), 1573:7, 1745:3, 1894:2, 1925:1–4; DP 96:6. For Swedenborg himself, cf. AC 1925:2; AE 78:3.

244 HH 52, 55e; AR 465, 938:1; cf. AC 8865, 8949 (also EU 98), 9359 (also EU 121), 9694 (also EU 130). TR 691: 2; AE 412: 16.

245 White (1868) quoting DLW 137; AC 904, 2253, etc.

246 *Ibid.*, 162. White alludes to Acts 6:15, 7:55.

247 AC 5; cf. AC 67.

248 *Invitation to the New Church* (NC) 59.

249 NC 39; cf. SD 1677, 3623.

250 NC 43.

251 AC 5, 69, 1880 4; cf. SD 564(1), 740, 1166; WE 475.

252 AC 1970; HH 76, 171; WE 475, 1694e.

253 AC 5121:2 "Scarcely anyone receives such [internal "Revelation from perception"] at the present day."

AC 9396:2 "...heaven nowadays is closed, for scarcely any one at the present time speaks with angels and spirits." Cf. AC 9438:3 (also EU 193:3), 9503: 1, 10751 (also EU 160); HH 249; DP 135; EU 1; AE 53: 2e; *Doc. II: I: 537: ¶ 2; Doc. II: I: 559: ¶ 8; WE 1351:1*.

254 AC 1696e.

255 TR 851:3e. (Also CL 26e).

256 JD 243.

257 SD 2021, 2541–2542.

258 *The New Philosophy* (1976):499–432 and NCL (1977): 41–42, 202–204.

259 Larsen (1980): 8. Also Larsen (1988): 186a.

260 The title of this section was taken from the title of Regamey (1966).

261 Rose (1966): 36, lists Toksvig, Dr. Enoch Pond, and W. C. Irvine. Pond's original book *Swedenborgianism Reviewed* was critically assessed by T. Parsons in the *New Jerusalem Magazine* (Boston: October 1846): 57–78, and it was A. E. Penn who wrote a reply to W. C. Irvine called *Heresies Exposed Exposed* (Bombay: British India Press, 1935).

262 Hallengren (1994): 29, 30–31 & nn. 9–10, 42 explains his actual position. An accountant doesn't strike me as being as impressive as Tafel's depiction him as "the treasurer." (*Doc. I*: 620, n. 19)

263 As well as endnote 27, see Tafel (1877) *Doc. II*: II: 1118–1127 and Woofenden (1974): 3, who believes "the transition began about October, 1743, and was completed by June, 1747."

264 *Doc. I*: 35–36: ¶ 15. Tafel (*Doc. I*: 622, n. 21) refers the reader to *Adversaria* (hereinafter AD): II: 1956, 1957 (WE 3557) and AD I: 1003 (WE 1003).

265 Regamey (1966): 39. Horn (1987): 24 believes that Robsham putting the account in the first person is a sign of plausibility. Cf. endnote 301.

266 Regamey (1966): 37. It's a shame that Regamey doesn't elucidate what Swedenborg says about "the nature and character of a Divine Revelation."

267 *Doc. I*: 52.

268 *Doc. I*: 68: ¶ 32.

269 *Doc. II*: I: 426: ¶ 3.

270 *Doc. I*: 69: ¶ 32.

271 For a Swedenborgian discussion of what Swedenborg meant when he said that angels or spirits dictated information to him, see Woofenden (1985): 57–60. Cf. endnote 18 and *Doc. I*: 62: ¶15, and Tafel's footnote.

272 *Doc. I*: 70: ¶ 33. Cf. *Doc. II*: I: 426: ¶ 3. This dinner party took place in July 1765. Acton (1955) in L & M 604, cf. endnote 106, who recalls Councillor Wenngren's summary of Beyer's attitude to Swedenborg at the time:

During his [Swedenborg's] stay at Gottenburg, Dr. Beyer accidentally met him in company, and entertaining, from report, the same sentiments with many others in that country, with respect to his being a madman, on account of his assertion, that he had communication with the spiritual world, he was surprised when he observed that Swedenborg spoke very sensibly, without discovering any marks of that infirmity of which he was suspected, he therefore invited Swedenborg to dine with him the day following in company with Dr. Rosen (*Doc. II*: II: 699).

273 SD 397. Cf. JD p. 187 "drank a little more than I ought; which is not of the spirit, but of the flesh, and thus sinful."

274 WE 3557, cf. Revelation 16:13. In WE 1003 Swedenborg could indicate that it happened in "the middle of April 1745."

275 Toksvig (1948, 1983): 152.

276 Regamey (1966): 38, 39. Cf. endnote 278.

277 Regamey (1966): 38.

278 JD 53–65; also *Doc. II*: I: 158–162: ¶ 27–34.

279 Horn (1987): 24–27.

280 SD 397 n. 1, and WE 3557 n. 4.

281 SD 377; cf. SD 384–385 also for "mice."

282 SD 387.

283 SD 378.

284 Cf. what Swedenborg says about angels' clothes (e.g. HH 178–179, 181–182), homes and surroundings (e.g. HH 183, 186, 188–190).

285 Horn (1987): 24.

286 Horn (1987): 26b.

287 Horn (1987): 26a.

288 Horn (1987): 27a.

289 Horn (1987): 25a.

290 E.g. HH 74–77, CL 28–33; cf. Zechariah 5:9, Mark 16:5, Luke 24:4, etc.

- 291 JD 50–55. Also *Doc. II*: I: 157–160: ¶ 26–27. In a similar experience nearly 3 months later, he feels the back of “a holy angel,” but is not thrown on his face. JD 209–210. Also *Doc. II*: I: 198: ¶ 147.
- 292 JD 120–122. Also *Doc. II*: I: 177–178: ¶72e [untranslated]–73).
- 293 JD 168. Also *Doc. II*: I: 188: ¶112.
- 294 JD 276. *Doc. II*: I: 217: ¶202.
- 295 Horn (1987): 27b.
- 296 SD 2990. Cf. HH 55.
- 297 Talbot (1990): 12, 14–15, in which I quote AC 2588:7, 5115:3, AE 706:3 (for dreams) and AC 1970; HH 76; AE 53:1, 1037: 1; DL 52; AR 36; CL 26; TCR 851:2 (for visions).
- 298 Hallengren (1994): 28. Hallengren (1994): 42 talks about “the powerful von Goerres came up against the simple authenticity of the call vision.”
- 299 Hallengren (1994): 42
- 300 *Ibid.*, 43
- 301 Woofenden (1974): 7; cf. endnote 265.
- 302 Keith (1990): 950–951 who has a useful bibliography on p. 368.
- 303 CL 1. (as in TCR 851:1); see also TCR 777:2, 779; NC 43, 52. Some of these passages have already been mentioned by White. Cf. endnote 232.
- 304 NC 43, 52.
- 305 *Doc. II*: I: 404: ¶5.
- 306 *Doc. II*: I: 249, 253.
- 307 L & M 679; cf. endnote 106. Also *Small Theological Works and Letters* (hereinafter STWL)
- 313.
- 308 TCR 4:1, 108e, 791.
- 309 SD 2472.
- 310 SD 2990; cf. endnotes 243, 244.
- 311 TCR 777:2; cf. endnote 297.
- 312 SD 3010, 3249.
- 313 AR 926:4, *Brief Exposition* 118:4; TR 187:4.
- 314 SD(M) 4791.
- 315 EU 40:2, AC 7173, SD 3292, 1446.
- 316 EU 170:2. Also AC 10809, and SD 5513a: b.
- 317 DW 131, HH 85, DP 135, *Interaction of Soul and Body* 4; cf. HH 143.
- 318 AC 1531.
- 319 HH 118.
- 320 Five Memorabilia 18.
- 321 E.g. AC 8443, 8644, 8783, DP 202:3, TR 150.
- 322 E.g. HH 20–50, 265–283.
- 323 AE 78:2, 3.
- 324 Talbot (1990): 13; cf. endnote 297, in which I quote AR 945e, SD 284, AC 1625.
- 325 *Doc. I*: 43: ¶ 36. Cf. Tafel’s evaluation in *Doc. I*: 628–630 n 27, and *Doc. II*: I: 437: ¶18.
- 326 *Doc. I*: 42: ¶ 34. Cf. Tafel’s evaluation in *Doc. I*: 620 n. 19.
- 327 Lomax (1996): 17a.
- 328 *Doc. II*: I: 316–317. Cf. Robsahm’s story about Swedenborg being informed of the plot by a friendly Senator. Swedenborg “became very sorrowful, and going straightway into is garden, fell upon his knees and in tears prayed to the Lord, and asked Him what he should do, when he received the comforting assurance, that nothing evil should befall him—as was the case.” *Doc. I*: 47: ¶ 48. Swedenborg was saved from assassination by “a nail of a lock.” (*Doc. I*: 59: ¶ 12); cf. footnote pp. 59–60. Cf. *Doc. II*: II: 1053 (Beyer to Oetinger).
- 329 *Doc. II*: I: 563: ¶ 1.
- 330 *Doc. II*: I: 507–509: ¶ 17.
- 331 *Doc. I*: 66: ¶27.
- 332 *Doc. II*: I: 409 (11/5/1772).

333 ML (1909): 209a–210a

334 Lomax (1996): 16b, cf. endnote 327.

335 Cf. Rev. Dr. George Dole's paraphrase of the Swedenborg expression "love of dominion from the love of self" as "the need to be in control" in "The Nature of Evil Reexamined" in *The Messenger* (September 1996): 104ab.

336 Budden (1995): 9–10.

337 Cf. the case of Rev. Sven Schmidt, a Swede, who "was deprived of his office, declared insane and imprisoned because he insisted on teaching the Swedenborgian tenets." Sigstedt (1951, 1981): 408. Butterfield (1993) writes:

New Church members will no doubt be greatly relieved to learn that the highest American courts of not one but two states have held that being a Swedenborgian is not a definitive symptom of lunacy. While that means of course, that there are still forty-eight states that have yet to take a position on the issue, it seems likely that we can all rest comfortably in the presumption of sanity. Further, New Church men and women have been presumptively sane, at least in Illinois and Washington, for some time now. (pp. 114–115)

Cf. endnote 46.

338 Rose (1993): 269, which was drawn to my attention by Rev. Norman Ryder.

339 Rev. W.H. Benade's article mentioned in endnotes 110–112 was also printed in *MO* (1862): 95–101, which I only discovered after writing parts 1 & 2 of this treatise as it appeared in *New-Church Magazine*.

340 Charles T. Tart, ed., *Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings* (New York: Wiley, 1969): 2 (unsighted); quoted in Blackmer (1991): 15; cf. 59 n. 13.

341 Stephen Larsen in his introduction to Blackmer (1991): 57 n. 16. For other articles on "Transpersonal psychology" from a Swedenborgian perspective, cf. Larsen (1980) and (1988); and Martin (1983) and (1988).

342 Larsen (1980): 10. Also Larsen (1988): 187a.

343 Larsen (1980): 10–11. Also Larsen (1988): 187a.

344 Larsen (1980): 14. Also Larsen (1988): 188a.

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Abbreviations for the Titles of Swedenborg's Writings

AC	Arcana Coelestia	LD	The Lord (De Domino)
AD	Adversaria	LI	Doctrine of Life
AE	Apocalypse Explained	LJ	Last Judgement
AR	Apocalypse Revealed	LJ(C)	Continuation of Last Judgement
AT	Athanasian Creed		
BE	Brief Exposition	LJ(P)	Last Judgement (published posthumously)
CA	Consummation of the Age	LO	Divine Love
CH	Charity	LW	Divine Love and Wisdom
CL	Conjugal Love	MA	Marriage (De Conjugio II)
CN	Canons of the New Church	3MA	De Conjugio III
CO	Coronis	MI	Miracles
CV	Conversations with Angels	MI(F)	Fragment on Miracles
DC	Documents concerning Swedenborg edited by R.L. Tafel	NC	Invitation to the New Church
DL	Doctrine of the Lord	NQ	Nine Questions
DP	Divine Providence	PD	Precepts of the Decalogue
EC	Ecclesiastical History of the New Church	PP	Prophets and Psalms
EU	Earths in the Universe	RE	Reply to Ernesti
FA	Doctrine of Faith	SB	Interaction of Soul and Body
FC	Index to "Formula Concordia"	SC	Scripture Confirmations
FM	Five Memorabilia	SD	Spiritual Diary (also called Spiritual Experiences)
HD	New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine	SD(M)	Minor Diary
HH	Heaven and Hell	SS	Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture
IB	Index Biblicus	SS(P)	Sacred Scripture (De Verbo)
IM	Index to Memorabilia in True Christian Religion	TR	True Christian Religion
JD	Journal of Dreams	WE	The Word Explained = Adversaria
JU	Justification	WH	White Horse
		WI	Divine Wisdom

“HENRY MAUDSLEY ON SWEDENBORG’S MESSIANIC PSYCHOSIS”: SOME COMMENTS

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A number of aspects of Dr. Johnson’s article on Henry Maudsley’s views of Swedenborg (Johnson 1994) seem worthy of comment:

1. Dr. Johnson states that the first edition of Maudsley’s *Pathology of Mind* “provoked violent criticism of himself and an angry response from Swedenborg’s disciples” and that, as a consequence, “all reference to Swedenborg’s psychosis” was omitted from the 1895 edition because “Maudsley had presumably submitted to the pressures of Swedenborg’s followers” (Johnson 1994). Dr. Johnson cites no basis for this assertion, however, and no mention is made of the matter in Lewis’s (1951), Collie’s (1988) or Turner’s (1988) biographies of Maudsley, nor in Maudsley’s (1988) autobiography.
2. Dr. Johnson (1994) states that Maudsley based his views on White’s (1867) biography of Swedenborg. Since only the White biography is cited by Dr. Johnson, it appears that that was the basis for Dr. Johnson’s biographical summary of Swedenborg as well, although nowhere cited as such. Current contemporary major biographies and reference material concerning Swedenborg (e.g. Sigstedt 1952, Toksvig 1948, Woofenden 1988) are not mentioned. The omission may be significant, since these more recent sources would have made clear a pattern of possible bias. To begin with, White’s case is largely based on a single source, the statement of the innkeeper Brockmer, made decades after the purported incidents took place, and a partial and perhaps nearly complete fabrication (Sigstedt 1952, Toksvig 1948, Talbot, this issue). (It appears likely that Brockmer had grievances based on critical remarks in Swedenborg’s work of his [Brockmer’s] religious sect, and due to Swedenborg having left his lodging amidst charges that Brockmer tampered with Swedenborg’s papers [ibid.].) Then the Swed-

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ish clergyman Mathesius, the promulgator of Brockmer's statement—and cited by Maudsley—also appears to have been hostile to Swedenborg's teachings, if not Swedenborg personally (*ibid.*). (Perhaps significantly, Mathesius himself later became insane [Sigstedt 1952, Talbot, this issue].) And, finally, White himself appears to have been biased in this version of his Swedenborg biography, an apparent reprisal for White's being dismissed from his position at the Swedenborg Society publishing house (Sigstedt 1952, Woofenden 1988). Indeed, as Collie (1988) points out, Maudsley's acceptance of White's account was surprisingly—for Maudsley—credulous.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Johnson did not at least consult the account of a contemporary of White's, that of Ireland (1889), which was expanded from a *Journal of Mental Science* article. Ireland was already aware of the possible biases of both the Brockmer report and White biography.

3. Dr. Johnson states that Swedenborg had a conviction "that he was the Messiah and the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ." Maudsley was more cautious in his characterization of Swedenborg in this respect (Maudsley 1869b). Swedenborg himself was in fact at some pains to emphasize that the second advent lay in the ideas he claimed were revealed to him, but that he personally was but an authoring instrument, in a role analogous to that of the biblical Gospel writers (e.g. *True Christian Religion*, n. 779). See further comments on this matter in Talbot (this issue).
4. For an individual whose life was as widely known and documented in his own time as Swedenborg's, and who had such a voluminous published output, placing such evaluative emphasis on a single questionable piece of data such as Brockmer's report seems methodologically questionable. Maudsley (1869a,b), as well as Ireland (1889), at least attempted to come to grips with the full extent of Swedenborg's life and publications. Dr. Johnson's coverage, on the other hand, is so restricted that it fails to cite not only current biographical literature but even the second half of Maudsley's article (Maudsley 1869b). This latter omission is perhaps noteworthy in that it is in the second half that Maudsley acknowledges merit in some of Swedenborg's ideas and changes to a more evenhanded treatment of Swedenborg's char-

acter than in the first half. For instance, Maudsley at one points says Swedenborg

...has throughout his writings produced such a mass of sound criticism and instructive commentary as constitutes an important contribution to a practical system of Christian ethics. He is inconsistent, he contradicts himself, he puts forward strange and quite unacceptable doctrines; still his clear sincerity, and the marvellous powers which he frequently displays in his exposition of the Scriptures call forth irresistibly a feeling of admiration, and almost constraint, not a belief in his spiritual pretensions, but an acquiescence in Emerson’s description of him as a colossal soul, “one of the mastodons of literature.” (Maudsley 1869b, 427)

5. What may be most unfortunate, however, about Dr. Johnson’s uncritical citation of Maudsley is that it bypasses an opportunity to reflect on the enigma of Maudsley himself, a nominal atheist who “denounced introspection and metaphysics, yet he constantly returned to the metaphysical problem of the mind-body problem, which fascinated him.” (Lewis 1951) Indeed, in some places in his writing, such as the chapter on “Natural and Supernatural Religion” in *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings* (1887) or the conclusion of the second half of Maudsley’s Swedenborg paper (Maudsley 1869b), Maudsley sounds at times like a supportive critic or even apologist for orthodox Christianity. If he had such an orientation, it would explain in part his aversion to Swedenborg, whose writings are critical of some of Christianity’s basic tenets.

In conclusion, it seems worth reemphasizing that Swedenborg’s reports have always presented practitioners of what Maudsley’s generation referred to as “mental science” with a basic dilemma. In Ireland’s words,

A slight study of the subject ought to convince one, that either Swedenborg was subject to delusions and hallucinations, or that his pretensions to commune with the dead and his claim to announce a new revelation were really founded on the truth. To admit the latter view would entail the admission of the truth of a new religion...If any one, dissatisfied with

these explanations, wishes for a third one, I, for my part, have no idea what it may be. (Ireland 1889, 2)

Indeed, Swedenborg himself was well aware of this dilemma of interpretation, as Maudsley (1869b) acknowledges, and as is illustrated in the report of Gjörwell (the assistant librarian at the Royal Library in Stockholm) of an interview with Swedenborg, in which Swedenborg “spoke with perfect conviction, laying particular stress upon these words: ‘All this, I see and know without becoming the subject of any hallucinations and without being a fanatic...’” (quoted in Sigstedt 1952, 314).

Since Swedenborg’s claims, like those of other avowed revelators, lie beyond the bounds of testability of the scientific paradigm, no final answer to this dilemma of interpretation can be determined from that paradigm. Careful and dispassionate characterization of the dilemma, however, such as in Ireland’s (1889) essay, the chapter on the subject in Toksvig’s (1948) biography, and, we hope, the present issue of this journal, may help illuminate the matter for individual reflection. In Maudsley’s words,

Neither science nor philosophy has yet apprehended all things that are in heaven and earth, and it is always well, therefore, to examine without prejudice, rather than to suppress with hasty violence, any novel opinions, however strange and incredible they may seem. The history of the progress of knowledge is a history of the incredible becoming credible, of the strange being found true. (Maudsley 1889b, 430)

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SWEDENBORG'S CONTEMPORARY INSANITY ACCUSERS: ALSO REFLECTIONS ON THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF INSANITY CHARGES

Erik Sandstrom, Sr[†]

The authorship of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) falls into two distinct periods of his life: The first devoted to science and philosophy (about 1710–1745), and the second to theology (about 1745 to his death in 1772). The New Jerusalem Church (The New Church, for short) would call the latter period one of revelation, namely, the revelation of the Doctrines for the New Church.

I here note that those who would prove some form of mental derangement on the part of Swedenborg face some dilemmas. First, no diagnosis is based on any observed behavior of Swedenborg's, but only on his own notations concerning his spiritual experiences (I shall later report on a *rumored* behavior); second, he carried on in a highly respected manner his duties as a member of the House of Nobles in the Swedish Diet, and this throughout the years of the theological period; third, he enjoyed a normal social life—i.e. normal in every way, except for the fact that conversations at table tended to turn to his experiences in the spiritual world.

Indeed, his social life could deserve a chapter of its own, for it included people of all walks of life, from the King and Queen, other royals, men of learning, and members of the government and the clergy, down to commoners who sought his company because of his writings and his character—in fact, his social sphere appears to have widened after it became known that he had open communication with the spiritual world. And men like Carl Robsahm, a banker of Stockholm, Sweden, and the prosperous merchant Johan Christian Cuno of Amsterdam, Holland, testify to his relaxed and also elegant behavior in formal company. The testimony concerning a learned but modest gentleman with becoming manners is well-nigh unanimous.

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Says Robsahm: "He was cheerful and pleasant in company and, as a recreation from his severe labors, he enjoyed conversation with intelligent persons by whom he was always well received and much respected."¹ And Cuno adds to the social portrait: "It soon became known in town that I cultivated the society of this remarkable man and everyone tormented me to give them an opportunity of making his acquaintance." Yet Cuno, knowing for one thing that his honored friend "never stays up longer than seven o'clock," wanted to protect him from people driven by curiosity. Still, he adds,

Once at the urgent request of the wife of my friend Herr (K), I agreed to bring him to dinner. The old gentleman was at once willing and ready...Herr Swedenborg's deportment was uncommonly polite and gallant. As we were called to the table I offered Madame (K) my hand to lead her to the dining room. Instantly my young man of eighty-one years had his new gloves on and presented his hand to Mlle. (H), which became him very well.²

These tidbits from Swedenborg's social life will indicate that he was met with respect and that there was no appearance of a deranged mind. Apparently, however, there were indications of admiration turning into veneration, so that Swedenborg felt constrained to guard against such. In his *Journal of Dreams* he makes the following entry:

While the thought occurred to me, as it often does, if it should happen that anyone took me for a holy man, and therefore made much of me; nay, as is done by some simpleminded folks, if they were not only to venerate me but even adore me as a supposed saint; I then perceived that in the zeal in which I then was, I would be willing to inflict upon him every evil, even unto the extreme, rather than [to permit] anything of such a sin to cleave to him. And [I recognized] that I must entreat our Lord with

¹ C. O. Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic: the Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), 350.

² Sigstedt, 364.

earnest prayers, that I may not have any share in so damnable a sin, or that it should cleave to me.³

Indeed, it is only to be expected that conversations at table should turn to Swedenborg's experiences in the other world, for it appears that even people who deny the existence of a real and populated spirit-world are strangely eager for any peep into it that opportunity might offer. So Swedenborg told high and low about that world and, when asked, about people he had talked with there. But numerous contemporary testimonies—and R.L. Tafel collected about twenty extensive such from Sweden, Holland, and England⁴ (see *Documents* II, 395–571)—show that there was nothing fanatical, pretentious, or grandiose about Swedenborg's deportment; he would speak of his conversations with named deceased persons in the way others might talk about their acquaintances in their home town. To him life in the other world was everyday life. He was there just as he was here. And Cuno mentions his innocent and smiling blue eyes.

Swedenborg's spiritual experiences were in fact not important to him per se. They were simply part of his mission; and the *mission* was important. In a letter to the King, May 10, 1770, referring to his dining at the royal table, and how he had then spoken openly about his mission, he writes:

That our Saviour visibly revealed Himself before me, and commanded me to do what I have done, and what I have still to do; and that thereupon He permitted me to have communication with angels and spirits, I have declared before the whole of Christendom, as well in England, Holland, Germany, and Denmark, as in France and Spain, and also on various occasions in this country before their Royal Majesties, and especially when I enjoyed the grace to eat at their table, in the presence of the whole royal family, and also of five senators and others; at which time my mission constituted the sole topic of conversation...That our Saviour

³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Journal of Dreams* (Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy Book Room, 1918), n. 72.

⁴ Rudolph L. Tafel (compiler, translator, annotator), *Documents concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg* 3 vols. 2000 pp. (London: Swedenborg Society, 1875).

permits me to experience this, is not on my own account, but for the sake of a sublime interest which concerns the eternal welfare of all Christians.⁵

Not important *per se* —yet an integral part of the mission itself, which “concerned the eternal welfare of all Christians.” In the first published work of his period of theology (in the year 1749), in the early pages, Swedenborg is more explicit:

As of the Lord’s Divine mercy it has been given me to know the internal meaning of the Word, in which are contained deepest arcana that have not before come to any one’s knowledge, nor can come unless the nature of the other life is known (for very many things of the Word’s internal sense have regard to, describe, and involve those of that life), I am permitted to disclose what I have heard and seen during some years in which it has been granted me to be in the company of spirits and angels.⁶

We note here, “*nor can come unless...*” The essential mission was the opening of the internal sense of the Word—“the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of the heavens with power and great glory.”⁷ But the opening of that sense presupposed the opening of the spiritual world, for “things of the Word’s internal sense have regard to...those of [the other] life.” The internal, or spiritual, sense of the Word is the sense by which angels live. It is their lawbook. It is also the sense/lawbook for the spirit of man, which is his mind. Hence: spiritual world/spiritual Word—that is the connection.

Finally, one observation before I tell of Swedenborg’s accusers. It is striking that all the charges relating to Swedenborg’s mental state are based on the narratives from the other world. The voluminous exposition of the spiritual sense of Scripture—twelve volumes of the *Arcana Coelestia*, two volumes of the *Apocalypse Revealed*, and another six volumes of the *Apocalypse Explained* —plus the closely argued doctrinal works like *Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Love and Wisdom*, *Angelic Wisdom Concerning*

⁵ Tafel, *Documents* II: 375, 376.

⁶ *Arcana Coelestia* (hereinafter AC), n. 67.

⁷ Matt. 24: 30; AC 4060: 7.

the Divine Providence, and *The True Christian Religion*, not to mention several others, are virtually ignored. It is hard to hold back the thought that this ignoring is consciously, or more likely subconsciously, deliberate. For all those ignored works are eminently rational in approach, and all are addressed to the thoughtful human understanding: they all follow the maxim, that "now it is lawful to enter intellectually into the arcana of faith."⁸ I am not saying that the spiritual narratives bypass the understanding, only that the narratives are not argued; they are just set forth.

CONTEMPORARY ACCUSERS

Most of the more fierce attacks on Swedenborg in his own time came from fellow Swedes. There was even an attempt to have him confined in an insane asylum. One Swedish accuser lived in London, where he was the pastor of the Swedish church. John Wesley picked up the rumor spread by this pastor, obviously believed it, and actively promulgated it, but had no part in instigating it. One famous critic who was a non-Swede was, of course, Immanuel Kant. His book, *Träume eines Geistersehers* (Dreams of a Spirit-Seer) was called to Swedenborg's attention, and Swedenborg said he would reply to it (see comments below). But now let us take note of some of the charges that came to public view.

1. Conspiracy by members of the House of the Clergy.

The following is quoted from notes by Carl Robsahm, as translated by Tafel in his *Documents Concerning Swedenborg*. The incident in question occurred in the year 1769. We bear in mind that Lutheranism was the established State Religion of the country, and that faith in a tripersonal God and faith in the atonement of the Son as the sure means of salvation were commonly preached in all churches.

Swedenborg had ordered from England for the Diet in Norrköping (1769) a small box of his works, which in accordance with the regulations

⁸ Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion*, n. 508.

of customs was detained in the customhouse, on account of their containing foreign or heterodox thoughts on religion. Swedenborg, therefore, asked a clergyman [Bishop Filenius], one of his influential relatives, to get this box released for him, because he desired to distribute the books among the members of the various Houses of the Diet. This man assured Swedenborg he would, and embraced and kissed him; but when he went up to the House, it was he who insisted most strongly that the books should not be released. For this man Swedenborg entertained afterwards great contempt, and always called him Judas Iscariot, who betrayed his friend with a kiss. Swedenborg said that he would have been much better pleased with a downright refusal, than with a false promise inspiring confidence...

During the Diet of 1769 a cunning stratagem was planned by some members of the House of the Clergy, by which Swedenborg was to be summoned before a court of justice, and after the first examination to be declared a man who had lost his senses by his speculations in religion, whom it was most dangerous to leave in freedom, and who therefore ought to be confined in a lunatic asylum. As soon as a certain senator, a friend of Swedenborg's, heard about this, he wrote him a letter, in which he disclosed the scheme, and advised him to leave the country.

Swedenborg upon this became very sorrowful, and going straightway into his garden, fell upon his knees, and in tears prayed to the Lord, and asked Him what he should do; when he received the comforting assurance, that nothing evil should befall him—as was the case; for his enemies did not dare to carry out their persecution, when they considered that he was the head of a family, and related to other influential families, both in the House of Nobles and in the House of the Clergy.⁹

Swedenborg did in fact leave the country, though not for good, because he had business in Amsterdam, Holland. On account of ordinances relating to the State Church, Swedenborg was unable to have his theological works printed in Sweden; so he had them done in Amsterdam or London.

⁹ Tafel, *Documents I*: 46, 49.

Before he left, however, he sent a memorial protest to the House of Clergy, addressing, not the above scheme, but the non-release of his books from the customhouse. This document reads:

Respectful Memorial:

On my return home to Stockholm, I was informed that the book given out by me in Holland, called *Delitiae Sapientiae de Amore Conjugiali et Voluptates Insaniae de Amore Scortatorio* [the work *Conjugal Love*] was confiscated in Norrköping by the venerable House of the Clergy. Now, as I intended to present copies thereof to the libraries and also to the Bishops and to some other persons who have mature understanding, and to send the rest to Petersburg, Danzig, Königsburg, Lübeck, and the carrying out of this intention is now denied me, therefore it is my respectful request that the copies confiscated in Norrköping be released to me. I will mention here, that the above-mentioned book has been permitted entrance into Holland, England, Germany, Denmark, and also into France and Spain, and has been well received.

Stockholm, October 6, 1769Em. Swedenborg¹⁰

Acton comments editorially that the Memorial was never presented to the House of the Clergy, and that Bishop Filenius was the presiding officer. It was, however, read to the Ecclesiastical Committee on December 3.

2. Rumor spread by Rev. Aaron Mathesius

Mathesius was the pastor of the Swedish Church in London. Swedenborg while residing in that city presented him with a copy of *Arcana Coelestia*, but it is said that Mr. Mathesius never read it. Knowing his hostility towards his writings, Swedenborg declined when in bed

¹⁰ Alfred Action (translator, editor), *Letters and Memorials of Emanuel Swedenborg* (Bryn Athyn, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955), II: 689.

shortly before his death to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist from the hands of this pastor but did receive it from another Swedish clergyman. The rumor we are now concerned with was disseminated some years after Swedenborg's death, and it was done through John Wesley who named Mathesius as his authority. We quote from the *Arminian Magazine* for 1783 (Vol. VI, 437 ff), in which John Wesley has a lengthy article entitled, "Thoughts on the Writings of Baron Swedenborg."¹¹ Wesley writing:

Many years ago the Baron came over to England, and lodged at one Mr. Brockmer's: who informed me (and the same information was given me by Mr. Mathesius, a very serious Swedish clergyman, both of whom were alive when I left London, and, I suppose, are so still), that while he was in his house he had a violent fever; in the height of which, being totally delirious, he broke from Mr. Brockmer, ran into the street stark naked, proclaimed himself the Messiah, and rolled himself in the mire. I suppose he dates from this time his admission into the Society of Angels. From this time we are undoubtedly to date that peculiar species of insanity which attended him, with scarce any intermission, to the day of his death.

In an earlier edition of his *Arminian Magazine* (January, 1781) Mr. Wesley had published a considerably longer account, relating to Swedenborg, which he said "was given [him] by one of [Swedenborg's] own countrymen." This countryman, Mathesius, in turn attributes all particulars of his account to Mr. Brockmer, whom he names again and again throughout his account, as though quoting him by heart and thus giving the appearance of authenticity to every detail. Prominent is the point that Swedenborg claimed to be the Messiah—as e.g. per paragraph 9: "...Mr. Brockmer continued to visit him: he [Swedenborg] had often expressed his thanks to him for his great care, but would never give up the point that he was the Messiah; on which Mr. Brockmer always declined to dispute." (This 1781 account follows immediately after the above 1783 piece by Wesley in Tafel's *Documents*.)

¹¹ Tafel, *Documents* II: 584ff.

People are fond of sensational rumors, and such tend to be perpetuated. It is therefore important that steps were immediately taken to examine and refute the above. Before reporting on these, however, I would remind the reader of Swedenborg's comments in his *Journal of Dreams* quoted above (see pp. 120–121), to the effect that he would do anything to suppress or nullify any attempt to make him "a holy man."

The examination and consequent refutation took the form of an interview with Mr. Brockmer. Four gentlemen figure in this interview, two of them named: Mr. Robert Beatson and Mr. Robert Hindmarsh. The latter of these two has a special place in the history of the New Church. A book publisher and printer by profession, he promoted the translation and printing of Swedenborg's theological works into English; led a group to the formation of the first public organization of the New Church in the world; was the first person to receive baptism into the faith of the New Church; took steps to institute a New Church Priesthood, and was some years later recognized by the church in England as the first ordaining minister of the New Church. For some years in the 1800s he served as President of the General Conference of the New Church (first organized in 1789). Mr. Robert Beatson, an early receiver of the teachings of the New Church, was elected Secretary of the first General Conference, and in 1791 he presented "a thorough refutation of John Wesley's calumnies against Swedenborg" in *The Magazine of Knowledge*, London.

We quote from Tafel's *Documents*:

Soon after the publication of John Wesley's attack on Swedenborg in the 'Arminian Magazine' for 1783, Mr. Robert Beatson of Rotherham in Yorkshire, undertook a vindication of Swedenborg's writings which had been 'so grossly misrepresented, misquoted, and falsified by Mr. Wesley.' After finishing his vindication...he came to London, and in company with Mr. Robert Hindmarsh and two other friends called on Mr. Brockmer in order to interrogate him with respect to the truth of the statement which Mr. Wesley attributed to him. The result of their interview with Mr. Brockmer was published in the 'Magazine of Knowledge' for 1791 (Vol. II, pp. 92–96), and is as follows:

1. After communicating to Mr. Brockmer the purport of their visit, Mr. Beatson and his friends requested to know whether he had ever given any account of Baron Swedenborg to Mr. Wesley; for that he (Mr. Wesley) had publicly asserted this in his 'Arminian Magazine.' Mr. Brockmer immediately denied the fact, positively declaring 'that he had never opened his mouth on the subject to Mr. Wesley;' and seemed much displeased that Mr. Wesley should have taken the liberty to make use of his name in public print, without his knowledge or consent.

2. The following paragraph was then read to Mr. Brockmer, from the 'Arminian Magazine' for August, 1783...¹²

As soon as the above paragraph was read, Mr. Brockmer said, 'That it was entirely false; that he never gave any information of the kind to Mr. Wesley, but supposed that some other person might have made such a report to Mr. Wesley, who he said was very credulous, and easy to be imposed upon by idle tale, from whatever quarter it came.' Mr. Brockmer further added, 'That Baron Swedenborg was never afflicted with any illness, much less with a violent fever, while at his house; nor did he ever break from him in a delirious state, and run into the street stark naked, and there proclaimed himself the Messiah.' Mr. Brockmer acknowledged, 'that he had *heard a report*, that Baron Swedenborg had rolled himself in the mire; but he could not be certain of the fact, because he did not see it himself, *but was only told so...*

4. ...Mr. Brockmer, therefore, denied the truth of the following points which had been raised against Swedenborg by J. Wesley or Mathesius:

1. That he ever gave information respecting Swedenborg to Mr. Wesley.
2. That Swedenborg ever was afflicted with a fever at his house.
3. That he ever broke from him in a delirious state, and ran into the street, proclaiming himself the Messiah.
4. That Swedenborg ever looked frightful and wild.

¹² See above p. 126.

5. That he ever foamed at his mouth.
6. He acknowledged, that *he had heard a report*, that Baron Swedenborg had rolled himself in the mire; but he did not see it himself, and was only told so.¹³

Now as the above points to fabrication on the part of Mr. Mathesius, it would seem in order to draw up some perspective on Mr. Mathesius' actions. We have already seen his disdain for the book Swedenborg gave him. But his own society offers more of an insight into his person. In the *Anteckningar rörande Svenska Kyrkan i London* (Records of the Swedish Church in London), p. 82, there is the following entry:

On April 29, 1777, the Swedish congregation sent a letter to His Royal Majesty, containing the following nine points of accusation against their pastor, Mathesius: Arbitrary administration of the money belonging to the church; personal attacks from the pulpit; keeping the minutes of the congregation in a slovenly manner; refusing the members of the congregation access to the church books; holding church meetings without calling them in a legal way; signing the minutes of the proceedings with the names of members without their knowledge; going to the country without leave of absence; causing dissension in the congregation by exciting the lower classes against the higher, and persuading them that they possess rights which do not belong to them; and, finally, purchasing a parsonage in an unlawful way.¹⁴

Mathesius was ordered to defend himself; was in the meantime suspended from his functions; did produce a long reply; helped to procure the adoption of a constitution of the church which he had previously opposed; and was on March 21, 1779, reinstated in his office.¹⁵

¹³ Tafel, *Documents* II: 600–603.

¹⁴ Tafel, *Documents* I: 702.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

We learn further from the same Records of the Swedish Church in London, p. 89, that

in the summer of 1783 Pastor Mathesius was overtaken by a severe illness, whereby he was disabled from continuing his office. In the quarterly meeting which was held on August 18 of the same year it was announced that Ambassador Baron von Nolcken had made arrangements with the Danish minister to hold services in the Swedish Church every alternate Sunday...[By May, 1784] Mathesius had been so far restored that, after being relieved from his pastoral office, he was able to return to his native country, where he remained until his death.¹⁶

The above are the chief contemporary accusers. But we will also briefly review the query of the philosopher Kant and the worries of the merchant Cuno.

3. Immanuel Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*

This book is a well known attack on Swedenborg's sanity. Yet while satirizing Swedenborg—in this vein renaming him Schwedenberg—Kant apparently was quite fascinated by him and appeared torn between admiration and doubt. "Madness and Intelligence have not clearly defined bounds," he wrote. He had known of Swedenborg through the *Acta Eruditorum*, published at Leipzig, where from time to time Swedenborg's scientific-philosophical works had been noticed. And now Kant also heard stories from Stockholm—stories known as "the Queen's secret," "the lost receipt," and others—that seemed to give credence to Swedenborg's claim of open communication with the spiritual world.

Prompted by Charlotte von Knobloch, "a lady full of an enthusiastic love for knowledge, who was highly esteemed by Kant," the latter therefore decided to make special inquiries. He wrote to Miss von Knobloch: "I commissioned [an English gentleman who spent the last summer at this place], as he was going to Stockholm, to make particular inquiries respect-

¹⁶ Ibid.

ing the miraculous gift which M. de Swedenborg is said to possess." Kant later added that Swedenborg had told this Englishman that "he would proceed to London in the month of May, this year, where he would publish a book in which an answer to his letter in every point might be met with."¹⁷

It is not certain which book Swedenborg had in mind, but it is likely that it was *Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body*, published at London in 1769. This book deals with the question of physical influx, spiritual influx, or preestablished harmony (as represented by the philosophers Aristotle, Descartes, and Leibnitz respectively). It contains the statement, "There are two worlds, the spiritual world where spirits and angels are, and the natural world where men are" (ibid., n. 3). But perhaps the following is a more direct answer:

I was once asked how from a philosopher I became a theologian; and I answered, In the same manner that fishermen were made disciples and apostles by the Lord; and that I also from early youth had been a spiritual fisherman. On hearing this the inquirer asked, What is a spiritual fisherman? I replied that a fisherman in the spiritual sense of the Word signifies a man who investigates and teaches natural truths, and afterwards spiritual truths rationally. (Ibid., n. 20)

4. Cuno's worries

Johan Christian Cuno is one of Swedenborg's contemporaries who has given us the extensive testimonies to which I earlier referred. He was a man alert in matters of both philosophy and religion and apparently able to read books in the Latin language. He sought out Swedenborg's company when the latter stayed in Amsterdam. While a friend and admirer, he was not a follower; and he had doubts because Swedenborg denied the resurrection of the body and a last judgment in this world, and because he could not in other matters reconcile Swedenborg's teachings with what he read in the Word of God. But on many occasions he says that he defended Swedenborg, and in the matter of sanity or insanity he tended to give

¹⁷ Tafel, *Documents* II: 620–622.

Swedenborg the benefit of the doubt. Cuno also took note of the remarkable circumstance that although the writings of Swedenborg challenged orthodoxy and his books had been long before the public, they remained “without a single theologian taking any notice of them.”

The following brief extracts will give us the flavor both of his general feeling towards his old honored friend and his judgment with regard to the insanity question.

A. 1. I must remain faithful to the promise made last year, and begin by giving an account of the most singular saint who has ever lived, Mr. Emanuel Swedenborg. As nothing concerns me more in this world than the worship of God, and as I found interspersed in the last work of that man such strange and singular things, I was naturally impelled by an irresistible curiosity to make the acquaintance of the author. On reading the beginning of this book, which like all his other works is written in Latin, and which bears the title, ‘The Delights of Wisdom concerning Conjugal Love,’¹⁸ after which follow ‘The Pleasures of Insanity concerning Scortatory Love,’ I could not think otherwise than that its author was insane. Curiosity, however, induced me to read on, and occasionally I found him uttering such thoughtful things, as I had never before heard from academic desks and pulpits, and which never before had entered my thoughts...

B. 5. Me thinks it is by no means sufficient to look upon the good and honest Swedenborg simply in the light of a madman, and meanwhile give him permission to write and print as much as he chooses...No scholar, at least not one versed in natural science, will doubt Mr. Swedenborg’s science. It does not seem to me sufficient, that a theologian who, from pride or indolence, is not willing to examine his works, should shout with a loud voice with Festus (Acts xxvi, 24), Swedenborg is beside himself, much learning has made him mad; what wisdom can be expected from a madman; or that others, who like to be considered faithful watchmen on the walls of Zion, should say superciliously, ‘The good that

¹⁸ The actual last work published by Swedenborg was *True Christian Religion*.

Swedenborg has said is old, and all the new which he says is good for nothing...'

D. 1. Dear reader, in all that precedes methinks I have given you some information deserving to be known. Judge of it yourself: for to tell you the truth, I do not know at the present moment what I ought to think of him. I am quite willing to grant that the honest man is in his second childhood; but I still believe that whoever desires to make out that he is insane, commits a sin against him.¹⁹

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

I have already noted that those who would attribute some form or other of insanity to Swedenborg, base their analyses on what he narrates from the spiritual world. Let me now attempt a summary view of what I would call the spiritual philosophy contained in Swedenborg's theological works. I will try to show that the presentation of the spiritual world in those works is not just a panoramic description, nor an inquisitive tourist's annotations of the personal contacts he made during his visits. Nor is it the random or disjointed report of a self-deluded visionary. Rather it is part of a broad, thorough and highly integrated theological system that stretched across the entire sweep of Swedenborg's theology. And the doctrine—if you please, the philosophy—of the spiritual world includes also the nature of the substance out of which it is formed. And that substance finds its proper part in the totality of creation, spiritual and natural, which derives its existence from the infinite Creator. The following is, in outline form, the reasoning:

1. The Infinite is the origin of everything finite.
2. The universe, though vast beyond measure, is finite, because however much you multiply parts that are finite, the result is always finite.
3. It is not possible to account for the existence of anything finite except by postulating the infinite, for the cause must ever be prior to the effect, or product.

¹⁹ Tafel, *Documents II*, 443, 461, 462, 477.

4. Two essential qualities can be discerned in the infinite: love and wisdom; for only love accounts for the will to create, and only wisdom accounts for the stupendous order by which the universe is held together and by which day and night are produced on the planets and by which, where there is life, the three kingdoms—the mineral, vegetable, and animal—are coordinated.
5. If the Infinite is infinite love and infinite wisdom, then it is infinitely Human, i.e. God is Man.
6. From the Infinite God power, “in the beginning,” went forth to produce the first, or inmost, finite—in fact, there was even prior to this a nexus between the Infinite and the finite, which was the first proceeding or outgoing, creative Love and Wisdom. This proceeding appears to angels and spirits as a sun: the Spiritual Sun, which is the immediate origin of all creation.
7. The Divine power thus proceeding covers itself with one finite form after the other, the first form by composition producing the next, and so on down to ultimate matter.
8. There is action and reaction down the descending ladder in the creative process, and a balance, or equilibrium, is maintained between the active forces in each new entity and the forces of a surrounding atmosphere.
9. The interior human organic, which is the seat of affections and thoughts, consists of finite forms that are interior to matter but are housed by the material forms of the cortex of the brain. These interior organic forms, holding a wonderful velocity within, are held together by their own atmosphere which allows for a subtle communication between human beings which is wordless and superior to speech.
10. Grosser forms surround these interior forms, and these grosser forms are receptacles of the five forms of physical sensation.
11. When the body dies, these interior forms survive and are retained (it is reasonable to assume and hope that in due course molecular physics will help us understand more fully the nature of these forms). For their survival, however, these forms depend on corresponding interior forms with mankind still on earth.

12. These interior organic forms are to be called spiritual, because they are the seat of spiritual life: will, understanding, affection, thought.
13. That the spiritual world nevertheless stretches forth in panoramic form, and that angels and spirits, having arrived from the earth, are seen in human bodies as in the world, is because of the universal laws of correspondence which are present throughout creation.
14. The spiritual world is not a dream but can be somewhat understood by means of the phenomenon of dreams. Dreams have apparent dimensions; dreams show movements from place to place; dreams experience all the five senses: yet they all take place in the seat of human consciousness which is in the brain. Dreams have no dimensions; there is no space attached to them; all physical sensations of the body are asleep.

The above, of course, is a very inadequate view of the philosophy of creation; it is only a skeletal outline. But the point, in the context of the speculations with regard to Swedenborg's state of mind, is that if no spiritual world exists, then all ideas concerning a deranged mind take on interest and validity. But if that world does exist—in fact, is the very purpose of creation, for the Divine love and wisdom aim to give eternally—then all the weapons in the hands of Swedenborg's accusers and questioners fall out of their hands.

And, of course, if such a world does not exist, then millions—perhaps billions—of people other than Swedenborg are at least deluded and deceived, even if, for lack of a reasoned conviction, they may be spared the charge of mental disorder.

Is there, or is there not, a real, spiritual world into which all human beings come after their bodily death? This is the crucial question. On the answer to it hinges not only the faith of many people in the world, but also the credibility of those who speculate concerning the state of the mind of a learned and humble philosopher, who in the theological period of his life called himself *Domini Jesu Christi Servus*. □

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Summary: How is it that the name of a brilliant 18th century scientist and philosopher, many of whose exceptional achievements were often advanced for his time, is almost never mentioned in the annals of science? And how did it happen that a man very deeply dedicated to the advancement of science experienced a vision that completely altered the course of his life? We suggest, based on his extensive self-analytical writings, that the source of his spiritual experiences was temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) and that he is among the group of creative religious thinkers also suspected or known to have had epilepsy, from St. Paul and Mohammed to Dostoevsky, who have changed Western civilization. Key words: History of Medicine—Epilepsy—Temporal Lobe—Emanuel Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg was born in 1688 in Stockholm, Sweden, the third child of then Regimental Chaplain Jesper Swedberg (later to become Archbishop of Skara), and Sara Behm. Four years later, the boy's father was promoted to the professorship of theology at Upsala University, so that Emanuel grew up in a highly scholastic and religious atmosphere. In a 1769 letter to a lifelong friend, he wrote:

From my youth to my tenth year, my thoughts were constantly engrossed by reflecting upon God, on salvation and on the spiritual passions of man....From my sixth to my twelfth year, it was my greatest delight to converse with the clergy concerning faith....(1)

Recognized as a talented student, Swedenborg received a classical education at Upsala University. Subsequently he became an ardent student of

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science and traveled throughout Europe, meeting most of the leading men of learning of that time. Ultimately he was to make original and advanced contributions in the fields of algebra, geology, philosophy, astronomy, cosmology, physiology, physics, anatomy, paleontology, crystallography, mineralogy, and theology. He became a member of the Royal Academy of Science. In 1719, the Swedberg family was ennobled by the Queen, and their name was changed to Swedenborg (2). Later, Emanuel sat in the House of Nobles as Baron Swedenborg and played a constructive part in the political affairs of Sweden.

During the 19th century, many distinguished persons including Blake, Emerson, Coleridge, Carlyle, Henry James Sr., Tennyson, the Brownings, Ruskin, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Thoreau, Goethe, Heine, and Balzac held Swedenborg and his ideas in high esteem (3). Ralph Waldo Emerson (4) described Swedenborg as:

a colossal soul (who) lies vast abroad of his times uncomprehended by them, and requires a long focal distance to be seen...One of the mast-odons of literature, he is not to be measured by whole colleges of ordinary scholars.

In *The New Philosophy*, Woofenden (5) asked:

[W]hy is a man of such obviously astonishing achievements...almost completely ignored in the annals of science? Why is he not ranked, as he apparently deserves to be, with such scientific explorers as Bacon, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Darwin?...The answer probably lies in the fact that he wrote and published the *Arcana Coelestia* (6), described by Swedenborg in its title:

Arcana Coelestia, or the Heavenly Secrets which are in the Sacred Scripture or the Word of the Lord, disclosed here; here those which are in Genesis: together with the wonderful things which have been seen in the World of Spirits and in the Heaven of Angels.

This monumental work, published in Latin in eight quarto volumes between 1749 and 1756, marked Swedenborg's transition from scientist to theologian.

Swedenborg's spiritual eyes were opened in 1743. In an autobiographical letter (7), he stated it thus:

I have been called to a holy office by the Lord himself, who most mercifully manifested himself in person to me his servant in the year 1743, when he opened my sight to the view of the spiritual world and granted me the privilege of conversing with spirits and angels, which I enjoy to this day...From that time I began to print and publish the various arcana that have been seen by me or revealed to me, concerning heaven and hell, the state of man after death, the true worship of God, the spiritual sense of the Word....

More specifically, in *The Word Explained*, Swedenborg wrote:

The speech is exactly like the speech with one's associates on earth, but it comes from heaven...internally and it is so plain that it is heard in the same way as speech of the lips but in such manner that none of the bystanders hears or perceives anything at all...I can testify in sacred earnestness that I have been admitted into the spiritual world by the Messiah Himself, and this continually while I was writing these things which now come out in public.

When St. Paul, also suspected of having epilepsy with ictal visual and auditory hallucinations, fell to the ground and saw Jesus (Acts 22:9) those who were with him "...heard not the voice of him that spoke to me." Because of the impact of the *Arcana Coelestia* and his subsequent writings, Swedenborg was ridiculed by Emanuel Kant (8) who called him "the arch-fanatic of all fanatics," and dubbed his *Arcana* "eight quarto volumes full of nonsense." He was also accused of insanity by Lutheran clergymen. Of this charge, Coleridge (9) wrote: "O thrice happy should we be, if the learned teachers of the present day were gifted with a similar madness...."

A few years before Swedenborg died, some of his books were seized and their importation was prohibited, and he was charged with heresy. Very distressed, he wrote a letter of protest to the King (10) and although a trial had begun, ultimately nothing came of it.

Fortunately, Swedenborg kept a record of his dreams (which was not intended for publication) during the critical years from 1743 to 1744, and for 20 years he kept his *Spiritual Diary*, consisting of five volumes. Therefore, we have two valuable primary sources of information.

TEMPORAL LOBE EPILEPSY (TLE): IDIOPATHIC OR CRYPTOGENIC

Hauser et al. (11) showed that patients with epilepsy with “repeated occurrence of seizures in the absence of an acute precipitating history of prior neurologic insult” are usually categorized as “idiopathic” or “cryptogenic.” This is the case with Swedenborg. Based on his own testimony, Swedenborg had multiple symptoms of TLE, including a characteristic aura, falling, loss of consciousness, convulsions, visual and auditory hallucinations, and trance states. Postictal and interictal symptoms included double thoughts, mental confusion, memory loss, and behavioral changes. These symptoms are described chronologically herein.

The ecstatic aura

The ecstatic aura, a classic epileptic warning symptom with a history that dates at least back to Galen (12) occurs minutes or seconds before a seizure. EEG correlates were demonstrated by Cirignatta et al. (13) in 1980. The aura consists of “20-30 s [sic] of intense elation and ineffable all-pervading bliss, a feeling that the secrets of the universe [are] about to be revealed” (14). On April 5 and 6, 1743 (shortly before his generalized tonic-clonic seizure, GTCS), Swedenborg described such an aura in his *Journal of Dreams* (hereinafter designated JD). (Paragraphs in all his works have been numbered, in accord with Swedenborg’s lifelong practice.)

Had also in my mind and my body a kind of consciousness of an indescribable bliss, so that if it had been in a higher degree, the body would have been as it were dissolved in mere bliss. This was the night between Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, also the whole of Easter Monday.
[JD48]

Dostoevsky (15), who had hundreds of complex partial seizures (CPS), also experienced ecstatic auras, one of which coincidentally occurred, as with Swedenborg, on the night before Easter Sunday, more than 100 years later:

I felt...that heaven had come down to earth and absorbed me. I really perceived God and was imbued with Him. Yes, God exists...I cried. And I can recall no more....

I do not know whether that blessedness lasts seconds, hours or minutes, yet, take my word, I would not exchange it for all the joys which life can give....

The ictus

Before the GTCS next described, Swedenborg had made only a few references to his "sickness." On one occasion in March 1744, he said he had entreated (from God) a cure for his sickness. Then in April he described, for the first time, an experience involving symptoms of a major seizure, including falling, convulsions, loss of consciousness, and visual and auditory hallucinations. This event completely changed the course of his life.

There came over me a shuddering, so strong from the head downwards and over the whole body with a noise of thunder, and this happened several times...I then fell into a sleep and at about 12:00, 1:00 or 2:00...there came over me a strong shuddering from head to foot, with a thundering noise as if many winds beat together: which shook me: it was indescribable and prostrated me on my face...at that very moment I was wide awake and saw that I was cast down...and I spoke as if I were awake: but found nonetheless that the words were put into my mouth. "And oh! Almighty Jesus Christ, that thou...deigned to come to so great a sinner. Make me worthy of thy grace." I held together my hands, and prayed, and then came forth a hand, which squeezed my hands hard. Straightway...I continued my prayer and said, "Thou hast promised to take to grace all sinners; thou canst nothing else but keep thy word." At

that moment, I sat in his bosom, and saw him face to face; it was a face of holy mien...and he smiled so that I believe that his face had indeed been like this when he lived on earth...he asked if I had a clear bill of health.* I answered, "Lord, thou knowest better than I." "Well, do so," said he....Wakened, with shudderings. [JD51]

Thereafter, Swedenborg fell into a trance during which he concluded: "It was God's own son who came down with this thunder, and prostrated me to the ground...and so, said I, it was Jesus himself" [JD55].

More than 30 years later, when Swedenborg's theology was under attack by various Lutheran Bishops, Swedenborg wrote a letter of protest to the King (16) in which he repeated his claim to a personal mission from God:

That our Saviour visibly revealed Himself before me and commanded me to do what I have done, and what I have still to do and that thereupon He permitted me to have intercourse with angels and spirits, I have declared before the whole of christendom and...before your royal Majesties.

Even more specifically, he had explained earlier,

[I]t has been granted me...to be constantly...in company with spirits and angels, hearing them converse with each other, and conversing with them. Hence it has been permitted me to hear and see things in another life which are astonishing, and which have never before come to the knowledge of any man...I have there been instructed concerning different kinds of spirits, and the state of souls after death—concerning hell, or heaven, or the most happy state of the faithful—and particularly concerning the doctrine of faith which is acknowledged throughout all heaven...(17).

*Bill of Health...a certificate from the proper authorities as to the state of health of a ship's company, at the time of her leaving port (*Webster*, 3rd ed.).

Many years later, in the *Apocalypse Revealed* [531] and also in the *Spiritual Diary* [6108], Swedenborg (18), now in his seventies, again referred to being “suddenly seized with a disease nearly deadly...I was half dead with severe pain. I expected the end. Thus I lay in my bed for three days and a half.” He was living alone in London, but his housekeeper reported that on this occasion as on others he wept bitterly and cried out to the Lord not to forsake him. Asked later about the cause of his lamentation, he said, “Praise God, it is over now!...for whatever happens to me is permitted by the Lord.”

According to biographer Strakhov (19), Dostoevsky suffered “a terrible attack of epilepsy, from which he lay for three or four days almost unconscious.” The similarity between Swedenborg’s 3½-day ordeal and Dostoevsky’s 3- or 4-day ordeal suggests that Swedenborg’s “deadly disease” was also epilepsy, possibly involving multiple seizures or even partial status epilepticus, during those 3½ days. Multiple seizures are not uncommon. Geschwind (20) refers to a patient who “for several days [had] on-going temporal lobe seizures.” In another case, Blumer (21) refers to a patient with CPS who is reported to have had clusters of seizures: “7–8 seizures daily for 2–3 days.” There are other examples of Swedenborg’s probable CPS. In 1744, he wrote in *Journal of Dreams*:

I came into strong shudderings...one [shudder] followed the other, ten or fifteen in number. I waited in expectation of being thrown upon my face...but this did not occur....The shudders all started from below in the body and went up to the head. [JD209]

Later that year, he wrote: “Was long in holy shudders; yet at the same time in a deep sleep...seemed to me as if I was cast upon my face....” [JD228].

And again:

[T]here came upon me again the same kind of giddiness or swoon...so that I appeared to be near death. It came when I saw the light; threw me upon my face; but passed off by degrees; because little periods of sleep came over me. [JD282]

Trance states

In his seizure records (1861-1881), Dostoevsky (22) refers to a “contemplative mood” suggestive of a trance state:

Thoughts fragmentary...dreaminess, pensiveness...In general the aftermath of attacks, i.e. nervousness, shortness of memory, an intensified and foggy so-to-speak contemplative state now continues longer.

Swedenborg's trance states followed dreams, which sometimes followed seizures. Often, he began describing such trance states with the word “Afterwards,” e.g.:

Afterwards, when I was awake...and Afterwards (after a dream) my knees were moved of themselves...

(Dreamed of) how I was in waking trances nearly the whole time... [JD12]

Fell again into such a state that I was in thoughts neither sleeping, nor waking. Thought, what can this be...? [JD55]

[B]etween 3:00 and 4:00 in the morning, I wakened and lay awake but as in a vision... [JD87]

[D]uring the whole night, for about 11 hours, I was neither asleep nor awake, in a strange trance: knew all that I dreamed...the state of this sleep I cannot at all describe... [JD174]

This was in a vision when I was neither waking nor sleeping, but I had all my thoughts together... [JD207]

In 1769, 25 years after his vision of Christ, Swedenborg (23) described a vision that followed the public appearance of his *Brief Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church*:

When this preliminary treatise was finished, the whole Heaven, from east to west and from south to north, appeared to be covered with beautiful roses of a deep scarlet hue, so that all who were present with me in the world of spirits were astonished at it; this was a sign of the assent and joy of the New Heaven....

Double thoughts

Van Dusen (24) described doubling of thought as “relatively rare: each thought arises with its own opposite and there is opposition.” George Orwell (25) called it “doublethink.” His definition: “...doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them....Even in using the word doublethink it is necessary to exercise doublethink.” The distinguished 19th century French epileptologist Dr. Theodore Herpin (26) described the double thoughts of some of his epileptic patients which closely resemble those of Swedenborg:

There are two persons in me, one of which is in possession of reason, and the other—of madness.

It seems that one part of my intelligence witnesses the other’s aberrations.

I hear a conversation. I am agitated by two ideas combatting each other.

Comparable examples of double thought were reported by Swedenborg.

It was wonderful that I could have two thoughts, quite separate, at one and the same time.... [JD69]

Was continually in a fight with double thoughts that battled against each other. [JD 118]

The whole day I was in double thought.... [JD121]

In vision it seemed to me as if something were torn asunder in the air. It may perhaps betoken that my double thought should be torn asunder. [JD163]

The following dream combines trance and double thoughts:

During the whole night, for about 11 hours, I was neither asleep nor awake, in a strange trance: knew all that I dreamed....The state of this

sleep I cannot at all describe; but through it my double thoughts were in a manner severed or split asunder. [JD174]

Mental confusion and memory deficits

Memory loss is a frequent aftereffect of epileptic seizures. Rowan and Rosenbaum (27) defined ictal amnesia as “a transient disturbance of memory function which is caused by a seizure (or by its aftereffect), and which has no other clinical manifestation.” They suggested that repeated (but discrete) periods of memory loss are often associated with recurrent seizures. According to Kapur (28), Swedenborg’s mental confusion and memory deficits, so closely associated with epilepsy and its symptoms, can be characterized as transient epileptic amnesia (TEA). The duration of Swedenborg’s memory deficits appears to have been short-range, apparently aftereffects of seizures, and associated with a particular dream or dream state:

Afterwards I wakened and slept again many times...it was all heavenly; clear for me at the time: but afterwards I can explain nothing of it. [JD44]

[D]reamt much, after which I had shiverings, but could not bring any of it to mind, for every time the dreams vanished from me. [JD154–5]

I was dreaming the whole night, though only the smallest fraction of it comes to mind. It was as if I was being taught all night in many things of which I have no recollection. [JD105]

Behavioral correlates

In 1977, Bear and Fedio (29), proposed an association between interictal personality and behavioral traits and TLE. Although the association remains quite controversial, many neurologists accept Geschwind’s argument (30) that “in a very large proportion of patients with temporal lobe epilepsy there is a characteristic constellation of behavioral clinical findings.” Of the 18 possible behavioral correlates cited by Bear and Fedio (29), a cluster of eight appears to be clearly manifest in Swedenborg’s case.

Emotionality— a deepening of all emotions, sustaining intense affect

Describing his experience on that fateful night in 1744, the usually temperate and composed Swedenborg accentuated its emotional significance in *Journal of Dreams* with the heading “April 6–7. N.B. B. N.B” (JD51–56). Before this vision, he had feared that his faith was not strong enough. “I believed and I did not believe....” [JD49]. After the vision, he fell into an exultant trance: “[A]ll was holy...it was Jesus himself....” [JD55]

Elation, euphoria— grandiosity, exhilarated mood

After convincing himself that he had really seen Jesus, Swedenborg (31), highly euphoric, strove to moderate his exhilaration with humility. He was never pretentiously grandiose; he considered himself merely an instrument and “The Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ” (32).

Sense of personal destiny—Events given highly charged, personalized significance: divine guidance ascribed to many features of patient’s life

Swedenborg’s great sense of personal destiny resolved from euphoria to a mood of contentment with his role as servant acting under divine guidance. Two days before he died, in preparation for administration of the rite of communion, Swedenborg (33) declared earnestly to the Pastor: “As truly as you see me before your eyes, so true is everything that I have written.”

Humorlessness, sobriety

According to Benson (34): “The intellectual interests of epileptic patients with postictal behavioral problems tend to be serious, producing a sober, somber, humorless attitude.” There appears to have been little humor and a superabundance of complacent sobriety in Swedenborg’s life. According to Count van Hopken (35), who had known him for more than 40 years, Swedenborg’s predominant and enduring “temper of mind” was one of serenity; he was “always contented, never fretful or morose,” and was generally considered pious, sober, dignified, tranquil, and measured.

Hypermoralism—attention to rules with inability to distinguish significant from minor infractions; desire to punish offenders

As a theologian, Swedenborg was pragmatically moralistic, but we can rule out hypermoralism together with any personal desire to punish offenders; the latter, he believed, was God's province.

Altered sexual interest—loss of libido, hyposexualism, fetishism, transvestism, hypersexual episodes

Although Swedenborg never married, he was far from being hyposexual; rather, entries in Journal of Dreams after his first recorded GTCS indicate hypersexuality.

Lay with one that was by no means pretty, but still I liked her. [JD120]

She with her hand touched my member, and it grew large, larger than it ever had been. I turned round and applied myself; it bent, yet it went in. She said it was long. I thought during the act that a child must come of it; and it succeeded *en merveille*. [JD171]

Still I could not at all...hinder myself from seeking after the sex. [JD200]

Swedenborg interpreted these sexual dreams in symbolic terms [JD286].

Aggression—overt hostility, rage attacks, violent crimes, murder

If, in any sense, Swedenborg could be considered aggressive, it was definitely in his theological writings, as in his *Summary Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church* (36), in which he bluntly attacked both Catholics and Protestants for their theological errors such as clinging to the polytheistic idea of three gods and the belief in salvation through faith alone.

Sadness—discouragement, tearfulness, self-deprecation; diagnosis of depression, and suicide attempts

On the day before Easter, 1743, Swedenborg awakened and recorded a dream.

Began weeping because I had not loved [God] at all but instead had continually angered him that led me and had shown me the way...to the kingdom of grace; and because I had grown unworthy to be taken to grace. [JD36]

Dostoevsky also experienced periods of depression. His doctor, Yanovsky (37), made frequent references in his *Memoirs* to Dostoevsky's depressions. And in his notebook, Dostoevsky sometimes referred to his postictal "depression" and "objectless...melancholy."

Studies by Blumer (38) indicate that among patients with complex feelings during an epileptic attack "fear was the leading emotion...with depressive mood being the next common." Swedenborg's depression was based on fear of unworthiness. The following self-deprecatory comments appear in the *Journal of Dreams*:

I found myself more unworthy than others and the greatest of sinners. [JD74]

Afterwards I recognized myself as unclean, unclean with filth, from head to foot. [JD85]

Informed by his friend Carl Robsahm (39) of an appalling plot to have Swedenborg declared mentally deranged and confined to a lunatic asylum, Robsahm wrote:

Swedenborg...fell upon his knees in tears and prayed to the Lord asking Him what he should do. He received the comforting assurance that no evil would befall him—as was the case.

Religiosity—holding deep religious beliefs, often idiosyncratic, multiple conversions, mystical states

After he received what he perceived as a mission from God, Swedenborg abandoned science and devoted the rest of his life to his abundant theological writings. These were characteristically idiosyncratic;

indeed, he prophesied the establishment of a new church he had envisioned. Six years after he died, a church based on his teachings was established in London; the New Jerusalem Church (or "New Church") exists today, with branches throughout the world (40).

Hypergraphia—the tendency to write extensively, with a content that is typically religious, philosophical, or cosmic

Swedenborg was a prolific and seemingly inexhaustible writer; e.g., his *Arcana Coelestia* alone consists of more than two million words. He claimed (41) that much of what he wrote was dictated to him by spirits, sometimes viva voce, but often the words came through automatic writing: "Nay I have written entire pages, and the spirits did not dictate the words, but absolutely guided my hand, so that it was they who were doing the writing." He maintained that what the spirits were dictating came from God.

Etiology

The etiology of Swedenborg's TLE is problematic. As with those of St. Paul, Joan of Arc, and other famous historical figures of the past who had epilepsy, a definitive pathologic analysis of the origin of the seizures of Swedenborg remains beyond our reach. Hauser et al. (42) showed that cases with epilepsy in the absence of any history of previous neurologic insult are usually categorized as idiopathic or cryptogenic. No evidence suggests that Swedenborg had access to or would have used behavior-altering drugs. Details of his attacks and the absence of headaches argue against migraine. Swedenborg's seizures, like those of Dostoevsky, occurred almost always at night or in the early morning, so that despite contrary rumors of sickness from a housekeeper and others acquainted with his private life, his health was said to be excellent: his close friend Cuno (43) described him as "a perfect wonder of health," even at age 81 years.

Like Dostoevsky (whom Freud mistakenly diagnosed as an hysteric), Swedenborg was not a hysterical person. Instead, he was a singularly composed, sedate thinker. Woofenden (44) concluded that a mind to all

appearance calm, logical, systematic, and consistently convincing for a period of 28 years, could not have been a victim of “fancy or delusions.”

Fenwick (45) states that “seizures do not occur in a behavioral vacuum.” He emphasizes the abundant evidence that “feelings, thinking, and behavior” are important in the seizure process and that “a true understanding of a patient and his seizures requires both the neurological and the psychiatric points of view.” However, Stevens (46), reviewing the relationships between temporal lobe pathology and psychosis, concludes: “Most patients with epilepsy (including TLE) do not have, or will never develop, schizophrenia-like psychoses.” There is no suggestion that Swedenborg had such a disorder: his lifelong involvement in public affairs as a nobleman, his political contributions as a member of the Diet (e.g., long after he had turned from science to theology, he presented proposals in the House of Nobles concerning Sweden’s trade imbalance and the shocking prevalence of alcoholism in Sweden), his scientific achievements and membership and participation in the Royal Academy of Sciences, and the reasonableness and equanimity with which he conducted his daily life all testify to his judgment and mental balance. Although he died of a stroke at age 84, there is no suggestion of previous ischemic events.

We propose, however, that tremendous emotional stress may have been an exacerbating factor. Fenwick (47) suggested that epileptic seizures may be psychogenic, and Mattson (48) concluded: “Emotional factors can alter the likelihood of seizure occurrence, and they usually increase the frequency of attacks.” Before writing *Journal of Dreams*, Swedenborg had long been at work on an anatomic study of the human brain, with the ultimate purpose (and very high hopes) of finding the substances and seat of the human soul in the cortex, thereby revealing God’s link to man. The fervor with which he approached this critical work is evident in the prologue to *Regnum Animale* (49):

I...am determined to allow myself no respite until I have run through the whole field to the very goal—until I have traversed the universal animal kingdom, to the soul. Thus I hope, that by bending my course inwards continually, I shall open all the doors that lead to her, and at length contemplate the soul herself: by the divine permission.

Although he made important original physiological discoveries concerning the structure and function of the brain (50), perhaps Swedenborg's failure as a scientist to identify the seat of the soul in the brain resulted in a disappointment so shattering to him that it precipitated a psychoemotional crisis. Thereafter, he turned away from his brilliant and highly successful lifelong scientific career and began to experience and record his extraordinary dreams and seizures, during one of which he established his own personal link with God when he saw and spoke with Jesus and received what he absolutely believed to be his mission. This was the turning point in his life. Swedenborg (51) denied that his visions were "phantasms," his word for hallucinations. His "revelations," he believed, came to him as a result of "a suspension of bodily sensations" during which he received "angelic wisdom...by influx from above into the spiritual parts of his mind."

An evaluation of Swedenborg as a person with epilepsy does not devalue his achievements. Instead it places him in the remarkable group of eminent, creative humans who had the same neurological illness. Serene in his role as servant of the Lord, Swedenborg was immune to the many "poisoned arrows" his contemporaries aimed at his character and his writings. Perhaps he (52) meant to speak to future generations when he responded to one slanderer of his last work, *Vera Christiana Religio*:

Read, if you please, what has been written...and afterward draw your own conclusion—but from reason—concerning my revelation.

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DIAGNOSING EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

James L. Pendleton, M.D.[†]

TWO PERIODS OF SWEDENBORG'S LIFE

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), during the first part of his life, wrote prodigiously in science and philosophy as well as serving as a member of the Swedish House of Nobles and as Assessor of Mines. During that time he drew many amazingly accurate scientific conclusions, not proven until years later.^{1, 2} In 1743–1744, beginning at age fifty-five, Swedenborg kept a journal of his dreams, reporting the symbolism of some.³ At one point he reported he saw Jesus Christ face to face and concluded he was called to religious work.⁴ Swedenborg left his study of science and subsequently claimed that God had introduced him into the spiritual world where he communicated with angels and spirits for the rest of his life and learned doctrine directly from God.⁵ He wrote thirty volumes on religious doctrine and describing those experiences.

Different groups of people, each with its own prior perspective, have drawn different conclusions about Swedenborg's mental status during the events of 1743 and 1744 and beyond. Those who accept his religious writings as a source of appealing, coherent, spiritual principles find it surprising that they have thus far received so little recognition from

[†]Dr. Pendleton is a retired psychiatrist.

¹ Cyril O. Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic* (New York: Bookman Associations, 1962; reprinted London: The Swedenborg Society, 1981).

² Charles G. Gross, "Emanuel Swedenborg: A Neuroscientist Before His Time." *The Neuroscientist* 3: 2 (1997): 142–147. Gross named as Swedenborg's contributions to neuroscience: sensation, movement and cognition as functions of the cerebral cortex, function of the corpus callosum, somatotropic organization of the motor cortex, description of the neural pathway of each sense organ to the cortex, functions of the frontal lobe and the corpus striatum, circulation of the cerebrospinal fluid, and interaction of the pituitary gland between the brain and the blood.

³ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Journal of Dreams*. Commentary by Wilson Van Dusen; edited by William R. Woofenden (London: Swedenborg Society, 1989).

⁴ Swedenborg, *Journal of Dreams* ns. 54–55.

⁵ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion* (New York: The Swedenborg Foundation, 1949), n. 779, p. 339.

students of religion. In their minds, his religious writings are a Divine revelation that unfolds the previously hidden spiritual sense of the Old and New Testaments, constitute the Second Coming, and validate his claim to have been called by God. Some spiritists who have first heard Swedenborg described as a mystic or spiritist have also accepted his work, but from that perspective. On the other hand, some Christian believers, who accept that spiritual events occurred with the Old Testament prophets, Jesus Christ and John, when he wrote the biblical Book of Revelation, consider Swedenborg's doctrines heresy, propounded by one of the false prophets that Christ warned about.

Of particular interest here, however, is the interpretation of yet others, notably mental professionals, who view the experiences that Swedenborg described as spiritual as due to psychosis⁶ or, possibly, epileptic seizures.⁷ In this point of view, any theistic framework is seen as narrow, with only non-theistic ones assumed to be objective, as demonstrated by the letter from Johnson cited by Talbot.⁸ (Both Johnson's⁹ and Talbot's articles are reprinted in this issue.)

The question we propose to address here, then, is that of how valid and objective the diagnostic process used to arrive at this conclusion in fact is. To what extent can psychiatrists, psychologists, neurologists or other physicians gauge Swedenborg's mental status? Their perspective certainly adds another dimension to the possible viewpoints on Swedenborg's claims. However, I think their contribution is less authoritative regarding the specific, final answer on this matter than nonprofession-

⁶ Psychosis is a clinical term for "A mental disorder characterized by gross impairment in reality testing as evidenced by delusions, hallucinations, markedly incoherent speech, or disorganized and agitated behavior..."

Insanity is more recently "...a legal rather than medical term denoting a condition due to which a person lacks criminal responsibility for a crime and therefore cannot be convicted of it." *Dorland's Medical Dictionary*; 27th. edition. Elizabeth J. Taylor, editor (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1988).

⁷ Elizabeth Foote-Smith and Timothy J. Smith, "Emanuel Swedenborg." *Epilepsia* 37: 2 (1996): 211-218.

⁸ Brian M. Talbot, "Swedenborg's Alleged Insanity." *New Church Magazine* (March 1996): 22: 2-28; (May 1996): 23: 2-28; (December 1996): 24: 4-60.

⁹ John Johnson, "Henry Maudsley on Swedenborg's Messianic Psychosis." *British Journal of Psychiatry* 165 (November 1994): 690-691.

als may think. As with those other groups, subjective bias enters in, and in fact is a constant concern to professionals in all medical diagnosis and treatment studies. They are well aware that no one is objective and that the best we can do is only to broaden our subjectivity enough that it becomes serviceably close to reality. We will thus review here some of the subjective factors in diagnosis.

THE DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS

Finite limitations and subjective perspective

A diagnosis is more accurately a diagnostic impression. Diagnosis is open to subjective judgment even in laboratory and pathologic, as well as clinical, examination. We must make judgments, but should recognize that we rarely can say we know all the pertinent facts, particularly about people. We are doomed to prejudgment or prejudice, although, we hope, not viciously or stubbornly. During assessment of a situation an important, additional fact can, and should, change our conclusions, including during medical diagnosis.

Expectation and perspective markedly influence diagnosis. After a previously unknown disease entity is recognized, signs and symptoms that had previously been ignored or attributed to another condition are recognized and seen as representing the new condition. As an example of change in diagnosis, in the United States, at least, manic depressive (bipolar) illness is now diagnosed considerably more for cases that were previously diagnosed as schizophrenia. Before lithium, when the same antipsychotic medications were used to treat both conditions, there was little motivation to distinguish carefully between the two. The discovery of lithium and other medications that treated manic-depressive illness effectively, but not schizophrenia, gave observers motivation to notice the subtleties of mood disturbance, instead of jumping to a diagnosis of schizophrenia every time the more easily noticed paranoid thoughts were seen.

Not being able to examine a patient creates more room for error. Not infrequently a clinician may have one impression after getting a limited or incorrect history from friends or relatives, only to change his or her mind

after examining the patient. Parents can have one assessment after hearing a report from one of their children, until they hear the report from another. Knowing one more fact can have an important effect on a conclusion, perhaps leaving no clear answer. More of that later.

Finite limitations are a universal cause of bias and prejudice. Prejudging is the making of a judgment before all the pertinent facts are known. People must make decisions, but should do so with the recognition we can rarely say that we have all the pertinent facts at the time we make a decision, particularly about human beings. It is our perspective from which we organize what we observe, ignore, and rank as to importance. Subjective perspective and judgment cannot be eradicated from that process.

The effect of language

The English language has many words with implications and connotations of good or bad, whereas another word referring to the same phenomena often has the opposite connotation, such as the words "firm" and "rigid" or "flexible" and "spineless." Using a word such as "hallucination" creates a diagnosis of mental abnormality without going through any diagnostic discipline. The words "experience," "report," or "phenomenon" refer to an event without the secondary implication that mental illness is the cause. The person using judgmental words not only conveys a secondary meaning or judgment, but, worse, may fail to realize the effect such words have on his or her own thinking.

In lectures on psychiatry, psychology or neurology, the speaker will sometimes make the passing comment that mind-body unity has replaced the old idea of mind-body duality. That eliminates the possibility of a spiritual reality as described by Swedenborg. Anyone, psychiatrist, psychologist or not, who accepts that comment, perhaps unthinkingly, can only conclude that Swedenborg's claims were the result of mental illness of some sort. That scientist limits his or her conclusions more narrowly than most religious observers. There are few religious persons who would deny the existence of mental illness in the way that some scientists deny the possibility of spiritual phenomena.

Van Dusen¹⁰ demonstrates an ingenious example of adding a new dimension to the study of mental illness. He carried on conversations with patients' voices as though they were separate individuals as the patient said. The response of the voices came as though they were from separate persons, including conversation that Van Dusen could understand, but the patient could not. He found that about 20% of the patients' voices spoke "in universal ideas and in ways that were richer and more complex than the patient's own mode of thought." It's extremely unlikely that a scientist who dismissed the possibility of spiritual beings would ever think of carrying out such an experiment.

Just as there is no way to prove that a person doesn't have any cancer or other disease, none of the above discussion proves that Swedenborg wasn't mentally or neurologically ill. But professional knowledge adds little to making that decision. The professional only adds to the physical/mental categories possible. The nonprofessional can make the decision essentially as well as the professional. The implication of the claim to have communication with God or spirits does not require professional education. But if Swedenborg was necessarily deluded and hallucinated, so must have been every other religious figure claiming such contact, including the Old Testament prophets, John, the author of the Book of Revelation, and Jesus Christ. Even those who accept the possibility of religious experience must decide which religious figures they will believe. Those decisions are made based on acceptance of the message and what appears logical.

Well designed studies

Double blind studies of treatments, in which neither the observer nor the patient knows who is getting the real treatment being studied or who the placebo (nonactive pill or treatment), indicate science's recognition that observer bias can distort evidence gathered and the results in a study. Observer convictions of benefit or uselessness will influence how the

¹⁰ Wilson Van Dusen, *The Presence of Other Worlds* (New York: Perennial Library, Harper Row, 1974), 117–138.

questions are asked and what the patients report. The number of people studied is as large as possible and compared to a group matched for everything possible, such as age, sex and severity of illness. The intent is to have the treatment be the only difference between the two groups. Following the most well designed of studies, the results are then evaluated for probability, not proof. Only if probability is better than one in twenty that the results could have come about by chance, are they felt to indicate significance. Before publication, studies are screened by reviewers for validity of design. And only after other investigators reproduce significant results, are findings felt to be probably valid. After all this, later evidence may prove the conclusions wrong.

Importance of probability

Everything we do is based on our anticipation of the importance and probability of results from our action. Medical and psychiatric diagnoses are also based on probability. How clearly do certain findings indicate a diagnosis or method of treatment? This idea will be discussed in relation to diagnosing Swedenborg.

SWEDENBORG'S DIAGNOSIS

What caused Swedenborg's experiences in 1743 and for the rest of his life? What are the diagnostic possibilities?

In considering Swedenborg's whole life, he does not demonstrate the blunting and inappropriateness of emotional tone and responsiveness to people, the gross disorganization of thought, and the impairment of function associated with schizophrenia. Neither do descriptions of Swedenborg demonstrate the abnormal, exaggerated mood swings and marked disruption of thought and behavior present in bipolar (manic-depressive) illness.

The closest modern diagnosis in DSM-IV, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association,¹¹ that could fit

¹¹ American Psychiatric Association: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition. (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Swedenborg is Delusional Disorder, Grandiose Type, which includes delusions of inflated worth, power, knowledge, identity, or that one has a special relationship to a deity or famous person. (A delusion is a false belief that cannot be corrected by reasonable evidence or logic.) Functioning, other than that pertaining to the delusion, must not be obviously impaired or odd, mood disturbance must have been brief. Swedenborg did not demonstrate the usual findings that one discovers when an individual's single psychotic area is opened up, which include agitation, grandiosity, hyperexcitability, hyperactivity and decompensation into floridly incoherent and suspicious thought. He was composed and coherent in his description of his spiritual experiences in his writings. It should be noted that a diagnosis of delusional disorder in Swedenborg's case would be made on the single decision that his claims were delusional. A psychiatrist or psychologist has no more insight into the truth of that than a layman.

Temporal lobe epilepsy

Johnson,¹² reports that Henry Maudsley, renowned 19th century English psychiatrist, thought that, in addition to what he called acute and chronic mania, Swedenborg may have had several epileptic "fits." An article by Foote-Smith and Smith¹³ (reprinted in this issue) proposes the diagnosis of temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) as the cause of the episodes in 1743 that Swedenborg attributed to Jesus Christ's appearing to him, and to an interictal (between seizures) psychosis that caused his belief that the world of the afterlife was opened to him in order to write a religious revelation. Their thorough and evenhanded article will be examined in some detail to indicate that observers, in this case they and I, can come to different diagnostic conclusions from the same evidence.

The interictal psychosis described by some to occur in TLE is reportedly characterized by lack of mental deterioration over time and the preservation of good affect (emotional tone). It has also been differentiated

¹² Johnson, "Maudsley." *Brit. Jour. Psych.*

¹³ Foote-Smith, "Swedenborg." *Epilepsia.*

from chronic schizophrenia by an absence of schizoid features in the prepsychotic personality and the maintaining of social efficiency.¹⁴ Such people also show organic mental findings, of which there was no known indication in Swedenborg.

Despite Foote-Smith's and Smith's thorough study and apparent respect for Swedenborg, one can draw different conclusions than their assessment and diagnosis. After quoting Hauser et al that the cause of repeated occurrence of seizures is usually "idiopathic" (unknown pathology) or "cryptogenic" (hidden cause), they state, without establishing that Swedenborg had epilepsy, that "This is the case with Swedenborg," which conveys the impression the diagnosis had been demonstrated.

A key part of their diagnosis of TLE is based on Swedenborg's self-reports of his dreams as recorded by him in a private, unpublished journal, the *Journal of Dreams*. The authors state as follows:

Based on his own testimony, Swedenborg had multiple symptoms of TLE, including a characteristic aura, falling, loss of consciousness, convulsions, visual and auditory hallucinations, and trance.¹⁵

To begin with, the word "aura" is defined as "...phenomenon that precedes and marks the onset of a paroxysmal attack, such as an epileptic attack."¹⁶ Their use of this word thus already conveys a diagnosis of epilepsy. The authors then cite a description by Swedenborg in the *Journal* that they conclude indicates Swedenborg experienced a generalized tonic-clonic seizure (GTCS).¹⁷ A summary of the subjective sequence of events was as follows: strong shuddering accompanied by noise of thunder repeated several times, sleep, shuddering and thunder, being prostrated on his face while wide awake, words put in his mouth, a hand squeezing

¹⁴ M. Rayport, S. M. Ferguson, "Psychiatric Evaluation for Epilepsy Surgery." Chapter in *The Diagnosis of Epilepsy*, edited by Simon Shorvon, Fritz Dreifuss, David Fish, and David Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell Science, Ltd., 1996), 633.

¹⁵ Foote-Smith, "Swedenborg." *Epilepsia*, 212.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Dorland's Dictionary*.

¹⁷ Foote-Smith, "Swedenborg." *Epilepsia*, 212-213.

his praying hands, sitting in Christ's bosom, seeing Him face to face, brief conversation about his having a clear bill of health, and wakening with shuddering. That does not appear to me to be the description of a grand mal seizure or GTCS, which may start with a warning aura, followed by a cry, total body spasm for 30 seconds or more accompanied by loss of consciousness and a fall, generalized gross shaking, usually loss of bladder and bowel control, sleep and a gradual return of consciousness. Other than possibly remembering the strange, characteristic feeling of an aura that sometimes occurs just prior to a seizure, the patient afterward reports only such things as having sore muscles (from the spasms of the convulsions), an injury (from a fall not remembered by the patient), a sore tongue or blood on a pillow (from biting his/her tongue). To the best of my knowledge, remembering the fall or convulsion of a seizure eliminates the diagnosis of a GTCS.

Both simple and complex partial seizures of temporal lobe epilepsy and also generalized tonic-clonic seizures can occur in the same patient. However, while a patient experiencing a TLE seizure typically remembers an aura, if it occurs, and the sensory portion of the actual seizure, such as déjà vu, a pervasive color, micropsia or an odor, he or she usually does not remember the generalized doing of some motor activity, called automatism,¹⁸ such as going into a different room or pointlessly moving something. The patient reports being in one place and next finding himself somewhere else. Manford¹⁹ did describe a series of patients with a diagnosis of TLE which included four patients with simultaneous, bilateral clonic movements, with preservation of awareness, during which they could talk.

The hallucinations associated with TLE are described as fragmentary and not coherently progressive,²⁰ unlike what Swedenborg reports.

The memory deficits that Foote-Smith and Smith describe related to Swedenborg's dreams appear quite compatible with the normal forgetting

¹⁸ Fritz E. Dreifuss, "Classification of Epileptic Seizures and the Epilepsies." Chapter in Shovron, *Treatment of Epilepsy*, 62-3.

¹⁹ M. Manford, "Clinical localization: Conceptual Problems and Pitfalls." Chapter in *The Treatment of Epilepsy*, 535.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 536.

of dreams that occur with most people most of the time. People commonly forget dreams if they don't make a strong effort to remember them immediately on waking.

Regarding the diagnostic importance of the term "double thoughts," more definition is needed. Van Dusen²¹ described his own double thoughts, which indicated only to him a struggle to think only of acceptable thoughts. Not uncommonly, people struggling against unwanted thoughts find those thoughts seeming to intrude into thoughts of the opposite. To focus on not thinking of something is to think of it. In support of this possibility, Swedenborg states in his *Journal of Dreams* when struggling against the worst possible thoughts, "The next day I was from time to time in combat and in double thoughts and strife."²² At another place, paragraph 158, in the *Journal*, Swedenborg states, "When I thought on Jesus Christ, there came in at once godless thoughts."

Foote-Smith and Smith acknowledge that the association of characteristic interictal (between seizures) or post-ictal behavioral clinical findings in patients with TLE, is controversial. However, as noted by Rayport and Ferguson,²³ and Trimble,²⁴ many investigators of TLE have reported apparent association of various psychiatric conditions, including psychosis. It seems highly unlikely that the few episodes considered by Foote-Smith and Smith to be seizures would cause delusions and hallucinations for the remaining twenty-seven years of Swedenborg's life.

"Behavioral correlates" of TLE

The authors report Bear and Fedio's description of eighteen behavioral correlates found in some patients with TLE and conclude that Swedenborg clearly manifested eight: emotionality, elation, humorlessness, hypersexuality, aggression, sadness, religiosity and hypergraphia.

²¹ Wilson Dusen, Commentary in Swedenborg, *Dreams*.

²² Swedenborg, *Dreams*, n.168.

²³ Rayport, "Psychiatric Evaluation." *Epilepsy*, 632.

²⁴ M. R. Trimble, "Psychiatric Disorders in Epilepsy." Chapter in *The Treatment of Epilepsy*, 337-344.

If one assumes that Swedenborg's conclusion that he was communicating with God is correct, the emotionality, elation, and even sadness over his unworthiness would be appropriate. Neither emotionality nor humorlessness seem equivalent to a description of Swedenborg cited by the authors as "always contented, never fretful or morose" and generally considered pious, sober, dignified, tranquil and measured. Those emotions were associated only with his episodes, and not ongoing, interictal characteristics.

Evidence of hypersexuality appears weak. A review of Swedenborg's *Journal of Dreams* reveals that all of his reports of sexual events in those dreams were brief, matter-of-fact and without any indication of hypersexual preoccupation. When he did elaborate, he commented only that the particular occurrence probably represented changes in his spiritual state and growth or symbolized his relationship to his studies and writing.

Swedenborg's occasionally blunt criticisms of other religious ideas, were directed at what he described as false doctrines and beliefs. They appear to fall quite short of the characteristics described by Bear and Fedio as aggression—overt hostility, rage attacks, violent crimes and murder.

The authors state that Swedenborg showed hyper-religiosity and hypergraphia as behavior characteristic of TLE. Swedenborg stated he had strong preoccupation with God and religion from childhood. His unusual amount of writing began years before 1743, the year of his first suspected seizure. Therefore neither hyper-religiosity nor hypergraphia began interictally. One would have to postulate the unlikely possibility that Swedenborg had TLE from childhood sufficient to affect his psyche without interfering with his education and life, or of being observed. As stated above, it is also unlikely that a few supposed seizures between 1743 and 1744 would permanently produce a psychosis in Swedenborg for the remainder of his life.

All this is not to attack Foote-Smith and Smith in their endeavor to elaborate what, to them, seems to be an appropriate diagnosis. However, in diagnoses subjective judgment often differs among observers. To this observer, the diagnosis of TLE or other neurologically-induced seizures does not seem substantiated.

Johnson on Maudsley's diagnosis

Johnson in his article,²⁵ states that Henry Maudsley, a renowned British psychiatrist (1835-1918), based his pathography and diagnosis of Emanuel Swedenborg on the biography of White.²⁶ Talbot (this issue) raises significant questions from other reports about some of the supposed incidents reported by White.

Talbot's work

Talbot's article demonstrates the most useful method of study for anyone interested in assessing Swedenborg's life and mental status. His exhaustive search gathers reports on Swedenborg's behavior, some of which appear to refute other damaging vignettes, such as that reported by Johnson. He shows evenhanded consideration and skepticism of all material available to him. He acknowledges his Swedenborgian perspective and that he has not been able to find all the pieces of the puzzle. Such an approach in evaluating all his facts and their implications is more important in coming to correct conclusions about Swedenborg's condition than the conclusion of the most accomplished psychiatrist, psychologist or physician that is based on limited or incorrect knowledge or prejudice. Johnson in his letter to Talbot, as reported by Talbot, dismisses the view of someone as biased because he is a Swedenborgian. There are few believers in religion who would deny that mental illness exists. Who is more biased in an inquiry such as this, the person with a religious perspective who acknowledges the possibility of mental illness, or a scientist who has previously concluded that there is no spiritual realm or God?

CONCLUSION

If a diagnosis were to be assigned to what we know of Emanuel Swedenborg, it would appear closest to delusional disorder. (Monoma-

²⁵ Johnson, "Maudsley." *Brit. Jour. Psych.*

²⁶ *Ibid.* referring to W. White, *Emanuel Swedenborg, His Life and Writings*. (London: Simpkin, 1867).

nia²⁷ is no longer used, but similar.) Making that diagnosis does not require professional training. It merely means someone has decided that Swedenborg's ideas were crazy and that he experienced visual and auditory hallucinations. It should be noted that his continued functioning and reported equanimity even while discussing his supposed florid delusions and hallucinations, is unusual even for delusional disorder. The perspective of a psychiatrist is to look for signs of mental illness and organize them according to the current system of classification. DSM-IV has no diagnosis for "rare, but normal" or "religious revelator."

Looked at only from the scientific perspective, which eliminates what is not physically observable from its scope of inquiry, one can only conclude that Swedenborg had a mental illness. This materialist point of view is presently pervasive. Reportedly even most academic departments of philosophy, which supposedly study "the processes governing thought and conduct" and the "theory or investigation of the principles or laws that regulate the universe and underlie all knowledge and reality"²⁸ eliminate God and religion as one foundation from which to consider reality.²⁹ As science has postponed death, we have decreasing emotional need to believe in God and a spiritual realm. From an intellectual standpoint, the fantastically dynamic complexities and order of nature, found increasingly with each new discovery, would appear to suggest a probability that an intelligent God created it. If God created nature and man, it is quite reasonable that He would establish religious revelation. Yet the above scientific and philosophic assumptions require a diagnosis of mental illness in revelators such as the Biblical prophets or Swedenborg.

Talbot's implied need for a psychiatrist familiar and/or trained in transpersonal psychology and altered states of consciousness occurring outside the boundaries of mental illness to give input about Swedenborg is valid. My lack of such knowledge is a deficit in this inquiry.

²⁷ Defined as "a mental disorder characterized by irrationality on one subject." *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Unabridged. Second edition; editor Jean L. McKechnie (USA: William Collins + World Publishing Company, 1977).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Barry Stroud, "The Charm of Naturalism." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 70: 2 (November 1996): 43–55.

Even if the cause of the events in 1743, 1744 and afterward in Swedenborg's life was spiritual, one would expect that a physical mechanism would have to have been present in the brain to carry out the spiritual process. In the future, science will likely find physical changes in the brain accompanying the type of experience Swedenborg had. However, the key question is likely to remain unprovable: does a spiritual cause create the effect in the brain, or a physical cause create the mental effect?

At this time, the best answer regarding Emanuel Swedenborg's mental state must come from a careful assessment of his writing, further gathering of as many valid facts as possible about his life, recognizing perspectives and assumptions, and using logic and judgment. For the New Churchman, evaluating the message takes precedence and sets the perspective for considering the messenger. □

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG, PROPHET OR PARANOID?

Thomas W. Keiser, Ph.D., J.D.[†]

INTRODUCTION

It was nearly a century ago that William James delivered the famous Gifford lectures at Edinburgh. These lectures gave birth to one of the world's most penetrating studies of psychology and religion. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* became an instant classic. Early in the lectures, James identifies a common reductionistic fallacy. This fallacy frequently creeps into discussions of outstanding individuals who have contributed to their culture by virtue of superior abilities. James was well aware that individuals who experience unusual mental states, even when productive of socially desirable results are often tagged with a "diagnosis." A physician himself as well as a psychologist, James was well aware of the propensity of the medical profession to pathologize superior endowments as well as those that are the proper subject matter of psychiatry. He quotes a sample of authorities.

"Genius," said Dr. Moreau, "is but one of the many branches of the neuropathic tree." "Genius," says Dr. Lombroso, "is a symptom of hereditary degeneration of the epileptoid variety, and is allied to moral insanity." "Whenever a man's life," writes Mr. Nisbet, "is at once sufficiently illustrious and recorded with sufficient fullness to be a subject of profitable study, he inevitably falls into the morbid category...And it is worthy of remark that, as a rule, the greater the genius, the greater the unsoundness."¹

Within this decade two studies illustrate similar medical approaches to religious experience, this time with reference to Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), eighteenth century scientist, philosopher and theologian. In

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¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 18.

an article in *Epilepsia*, Elizabeth Foote-Smith and Timothy J. Smith “diagnose” Swedenborg as suffering from temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE).² These authors locate the origin of Swedenborg’s theology in his alleged TLE. Another analysis in a paper entitled “Henry Maudsley on Swedenborg’s Messianic Psychosis” by Manchester-based psychiatrist, John Johnson, concludes:

Whether Swedenborg’s messianic psychosis was due to acute schizophrenia or an epileptic psychosis will remain a diagnostic enigma.³

Here we find the terms “epileptic psychosis” and “acute schizophrenia” as well as “messianic psychosis.” We will see later in this paper that none of these terms are currently in use. Others drawn from research and clinical consensus have replaced them. Even so, in all of these inquiries the threshold question is whether Swedenborg suffered from a mental disorder at all and, if he did, what was it? Before I examine these issues, I need to digress.

We have heard much about paradigms in science and the concept is a useful one. A paradigm, as the term is used in the philosophy of science, is a set of assumptions shared by all or almost all individuals within a given domain of inquiry.⁴ I would like to propose another term—quasi-paradigm—for use in this discussion. A quasi-paradigm is more limited than a true paradigm. It is shared by only a subset of individuals within a domain of inquiry. The set of assumptions of a quasi-paradigm would constitute a true paradigm if they were more universally accepted. Assumptions in a quasi-paradigm are highly authoritative and persuasive. The quasi-paradigm in this instance is the assumption that there is a natural explanation for all events and processes. I call it the “natural-only” paradigm. This assumption is maintained even if the cause of the phenomenon in question cannot be identified in our present state of knowledge. The natural-only

² Elizabeth Foote-Smith and Timothy J. Smith, “Emanuel Swedenborg.” *Epilepsia* 37: 2 (1996).

³ John Johnson, “Henry Maudsley on Swedenborg’s Messianic Psychosis.” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 165 (November 1994): 691.

⁴ Thomas A. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

quasi-paradigm entails the belief that sooner or later everything currently mysterious will be seen to have a natural explanation. This assumption is a working hypothesis for many scientists (and well it should be) but is a philosophy or *Weltanschauung* for others. The latter endorsement is not intrinsic to doing science but *is a personal construction of reality not shared by all scientists*. Many scientists and mental health professionals are religious, that is, they have not rejected the idea that there are supernatural objects and events in our universe. Some scientists, including psychologists, accept the proposition that objects and events may exist outside the reach of empirical observation and measurement. This is important because the quasi-paradigm under discussion rejects any possibility of a supernatural dimension of reality and allows those who harbor the quasi-paradigm to automatically make assumptions without examining the data. In the present case it allows a person to make definitive statements about Swedenborg's mental states without the necessity of reading even a single sentence of his works! It goes like this: If Swedenborg was not a charlatan or a liar, then his experiences were the products of a mental disorder characterized by hallucinations and delusions. A delusion is a false belief that is consistently resistant to any evidence to the contrary. A hallucination, on the other hand, is a perceptual distortion of any of the five senses singly or in combination. In Swedenborg's case, speaking with spirits would be considered an auditory hallucination while seeing things in the heavens would be considered a visual hallucination. Swedenborg's belief that he had a unique mission that mandated his direct contact with the spiritual world, if false, would be considered a delusion. It then follows logically that some mental disorder characterized by delusions and hallucinations was responsible for the theology he constructed. I want to stress that this is a logically correct analysis given the quasi-paradigm that no spiritual dimension exists.

If one knows that something does not exist, it is relatively easy to negate everything written about it. I do not have to study books on unicorns to decide whether or not they can fly. So it seems clear within this quasi-paradigm that Swedenborg's claims are *prima facie* evidence of a mental disturbance. To anyone who endorses the quasi-paradigm defined above, Swedenborg was either a charlatan or he was deluded. There is no discourse with those within the ambit of this quasi-paradigm. No amount

of evidence suggesting that Swedenborg was sane and had genuine revelations will be persuasive. If a valid argument shows that this or that mental disorder is not applicable to Swedenborg, a person endorsing the quasi-paradigm of natural causation will simply search harder for a disorder that does fit the facts of Swedenborg's life. In the following pages I will attempt to analyze some of the efforts made to pass judgment on Swedenborg's sanity.

SWEDENBORG'S SANITY—DIAGNOSTIC CLARIFICATIONS

A number of studies of Swedenborg's "sanity" fail to define certain basic terms. The first step in the present analysis is to place the term "insanity" in its proper perspective. Insanity is an anachronistic term when used in mental health contexts. It remains, however, an important legal term. Psychiatrists, psychologists and others do not use the term insanity. In legal contexts, insanity is defined in a number of ways that correspond roughly to the concept of psychosis. The most common legal definition of insanity is the M'Naghten Rule. To use the M'Naghten Rule to define insanity in a criminal case, a two-pronged test must be applied.

- (1) Did the defendant, at the time of the crime know what he or she was doing?
- (2) If the defendant did know, did he or she know that the act was wrong or realize that it violated the rights of another?

If the answer to both of the above is "no" an individual may be found not guilty by reason of insanity. This is primarily a cognitive test, that is, it depends on a person's awareness of the nature of his or her actions and their consequences. Another insanity defense is the so-called "irresistible impulse" doctrine. This doctrine supports an insanity defense when a defendant is aware of the nature and consequences of a criminal act but is unable to resist committing it because of a mental disorder that impairs his or her free-will or self-control. A person may, therefore, be considered insane if he or she knew the nature of the act, knew that it was wrong but was unable to resist committing it. The definition of insanity used in any given trial depends on the jurisdiction. Some state and Federal Appeals

courts have adopted the American Law Institute's definition of insanity. This definition is more comprehensive than the M'nghten Rule and addresses both cognitive and irresistible impulse elements.

A person is not responsible for criminal conduct if at the time of such conduct as a result of mental disease or defect he lacks substantial capacity either to appreciate the criminality (wrongfulness) of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of law.⁵

It should be clear, then, that the term insanity is at present used only in the legal profession and no longer has any diagnostic or theoretical significance in the mental health field (except in forensic contexts).

The concept of psychosis, on the other hand, is an extremely important concept in contemporary psychology and psychiatry. Feuchtersleben introduced the term "psychosis" in 1845.⁶ He used it to describe mental diseases not caused by neurological or other organic disorders. Psychosis, according to Feuchtersleben, is a disorder of the mind or soul. This dualistic, mind-body, approach to mental disorders later evolved into the distinction between organic and "functional" disorders. Functional disorders are generally thought to stem from intrapsychic conflicts of one kind or another and are, therefore, purely "psychological." Today the term psychosis refers to a group of severe mental disorders characterized by personality deterioration resulting in significant social and occupational dysfunction. Psychosis is a severe breakdown of reality testing. Reality testing is the capacity to distinguish subjective experience from objective, consensual reality. Thus, a patient suffering from severe phobias or obsessive-compulsive symptoms is troubled by bizarre fears or compulsions but is painfully aware that these experiences are irrational. Such a person is not psychotic. The following is an example of how someone with an obsessive-compulsive disorder experiences life.

I find that I have to go back and check to see if I have locked the house. I clearly remember that I did but the feeling is that I may not remember

⁵Section 401: Model Penal Code.

⁶E. Feuchtersleben (1845) *Medical Psychology*. Trans. by H.E. Lloyd & B.G. Babington (London, 1847).

correctly. Sometimes I'm away from home when the feeling comes on and have to drive all the way back and check again. If I'm at work, I have to leave and go back and check. This is very upsetting—it sets me back and the work piles up. If I try to resist, the anxiety builds up and I can't think of anything else until I check. I then feel relieved but later wonder if I forgot to lock the door while I was checking it. I know this is crazy, but I can't control the anxiety or thoughts that I may have forgotten. I know it's wrong, but I can't change the pattern.⁷

This unfortunate man has lost control of his life. He recognizes the irrationality of his thoughts and actions but cannot control the anxiety that erupts when he resists a ritualistic act. His reality testing remains intact however. Quite different is the mental state of a psychotic patient who suffers from impaired reality testing.

I know that they talk about me because I see them whispering and looking in my direction. I sometimes hear them at night but I don't know how I can hear them. I think that they may have a machine tuned into my room or maybe they pick up what I'm doing through the television set or—I've heard that you can eavesdrop on a person through the telephone. Sometimes I unplug the phone but I'm not sure if that helps. You never know with the sophisticated things they have now whether they even need electricity to bug the place. I would go to the police but I think they are in on it too. I don't trust anyone, even you could be involved doctor; I probably shouldn't be talking to you about this.⁸

This patient accepts the reality of his beliefs and makes no distinction between processes going on inside of him and the reality most of us take for granted. To him the world is predatory and others are out to harm and humiliate him. His reality testing is devastated; he is suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

Dr. John Johnson's study suggests acute schizophrenia as one diagnostic possibility for Swedenborg. Given that Johnson interprets

⁷Personal communication from patient.

⁸Personal communication from patient.

Swedenborg's claims as evidence of grandiosity, he appears to be suggesting that Swedenborg suffered from the paranoid variety of schizophrenia. We can, however, dismiss his use of the term "acute schizophrenia" as this concept is no longer supported by modern psychiatry. In the current nomenclature, any symptom pattern (syndrome) that looks like schizophrenia cannot even be diagnosed before six months have elapsed, in which case the condition is no longer acute. If the patient presents with the symptoms of schizophrenia before six months the diagnosis must be "schizophreniform disorder." So there is no longer a diagnosis of "acute schizophrenia."

Allegations that Swedenborg suffered from some sort of paranoid process are popular among medical professionals. This is due largely to Swedenborg's claim that he had a special mission to reveal hidden truths through intercourse with spirits and angels. Swedenborg does, in fact, make some pretty extraordinary claims. His insistence that spirits are in conjunction with persons in the natural world seems to cry out for a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia.

With every individual there are good spirits and evil spirits. Through good spirits man has conjunction with heaven, and through evil spirits with hell. These spirits are in the world of spirits, which lies midway between heaven and hell. This world will be described particularly hereafter. When these spirits come to a man they enter into his entire memory, and thus into his entire thought, evil spirits into the evil things of his memory and thought, and good spirits into the good things of his memory and thought. These spirits have no knowledge whatever that they are with man; but when they are with him they believe that all things of his memory and thought are their own; neither do they see the man, because nothing that is in our solar world falls into their sight. The Lord exercises the greatest care that spirits may not know that they are with man; *for if they knew it they would talk with him, and in that case evil spirits would destroy him; for evil spirits, being joined with hell, desire nothing so much as to destroy man, not alone his soul, that is, his faith and love, but also his body.*⁹ (Italics added)

⁹E. Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (London, 1758). English trans. (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1988), n. 292.

It is common for paranoid persons to harbor increasingly persistent feelings that they are being controlled by supernatural beings. Barbara O'Brian, afflicted with schizophrenia, awoke one morning to find "Operators" at the foot of her bed. The operators told her things consistent with those described by Swedenborg in the above quote. According to O'Brian all people are under the control of Operators. These Operators sound very much like Swedenborg's spirits. In her autobiography, *Operators and Things*, O'Brian describes how she was told by an Operator named Burt that she was unusual among humans since she was aware that Operators exist and exert a great deal of control over humans.

Burt explained. I could see why he had been chosen spokesman. What he had to say, he said clearly and in a few words. I had been selected for participation in an experiment. He hoped I would be cooperative; lack of cooperation on my part would make matters difficult for them and for myself. They were Operators, the three of them. There were Operators everywhere in the world although they rarely were seen or heard. My seeing and hearing them was, unfortunately, a necessary part of the experiment. I thought: I have come upon knowledge which other people do not have and the knowledge is obviously dangerous to have; others would be in equal danger if I revealed it to them.¹⁰

Swedenborg maintains that spirits are intimately linked to our spiritual lives and that, unlike the ancients who knew this, we are at present ignorant of their influence. Hinton, another Operator, tells O'Brian that most people (Things) do not know that Operators are influencing them, yet Operators constitute an ever-present part of our spiritual environment. When O'Brian protests, Hinton attempts to soften the blow.

Hinton sighed. "Things, Yes, of course. Think of the word with a capital initial, if you like. It may help your ego a bit. All people like you are Things to us—Things whose minds can be read and whose thoughts can

¹⁰ Barbara O'Brian, *Operators and Things: The Inner Life of a Schizophrenic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Arlington, 1958), 31–2.

be initiated and whose actions can be motivated. Does that surprise you? It goes on all the time. There is some, but far less, free will than you imagine. A Thing does what some Operator wants it to do, only it remains under the impression that its thoughts originate in its own mind. Actually, you have more free will at this moment than most of your kind ever have. For you at least know that what we are saying is coming from us, not from you.”¹¹

In her book, *The Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl*, author “Renee” becomes aware that she is being controlled by a vast world-order called “the System.” She discovers that unknown persecutors within the System are responsible for her overwhelming feelings of guilt.

Some time after, I discovered that the Persecutor was none other than the electric machine, that is, it was the “System” that was punishing me. I thought of it as some vast world-like entity encompassing all men. At the top were those who gave orders, who imposed punishment, who pronounced others guilty. But they were themselves guilty. Since every man was responsible for all other men, each of his acts had a repercussion on other beings. A formidable interdependence bound all men under the scourge of culpability. Everyone was part of the System. *But only some were aware of being part.* They were the ones who were “Enlightened” as I was. And it was at the same time both an honor and a misfortune to have this awareness. Those who were not part of it—though actually, of course, they were—were unaware of the System. As a result, they felt not at all guilty, and I envied them intensely.¹² (Italics added)

I could quote other accounts of psychotic people who describe a similar phenomenon but O’Brian and Renee are sufficiently representative. If we reject Johnson’s diagnostic options, acute schizophrenia or epileptic psychosis, we still need to explore the possibility that Swedenborg, like the patients quoted above, suffered from paranoid schizophrenia.

¹¹ Ibid, 32–3.

¹² Marguerite Sechehay, *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* (New York: Grune & Stratton, Inc., 1951), 35–6.

PARANOID SCHIZOPHRENIA

In a meeting in Heidelberg in 1898, Kraepelin formally suggested the term *Dementia Praecox* as a label for a syndrome more debilitating than paranoia, a diagnosis of a more benign nature. Kraepelin did not invent the term *Dementia Praecox* but is credited with applying it to the syndrome that Eugene Bleuler later named "schizophrenia." The concept of schizophrenia itself has undergone many revisions. Today, a diagnosis of schizophrenia indicates a psychosis characterized by hallucinations and delusions and by markedly impaired social and occupational functioning. Both positive and negative symptoms may be in evidence. Positive symptoms are exaggerated normal functions; for example, hallucinations are exaggerated expressions of normal perceptual processes. Negative symptoms involve the loss of or reduced normal functions. An abnormally low level of emotion (flat affect) is an example of a negative symptom in schizophrenia. Schizophrenic patients invariably demonstrate major dysfunction in social or vocational activities. Their behavior is often bizarre, their thoughts disordered and illogical. At times their emotions are inappropriate; a schizophrenic patient may break into laughter when told that a loved parent has just died. Of the various subtypes of schizophrenia, the paranoid variety is the only one relevant to our discussion. Paranoid schizophrenia shows the least impairment of all the subtypes. It is also the most dangerous of the psychoses. Delusions of grandeur or persecution may be accompanied by auditory or, sometimes, visual hallucinations. Delusions are bizarre. A person may insist that someone has stolen his internal organs or that the CIA is causing him to contract throat cancer by means of radioactive rays broadcast through his television set. In order to make the diagnosis of schizophrenia, all biological or neurological causes for the symptoms must be eliminated. Thus one cannot diagnose schizophrenia in a person who has abused amphetamines, even though such a person's symptoms appear indistinguishable from paranoid schizophrenia.

There is a voluminous literature about Swedenborg's life and none of it is consistent with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Swedenborg's social and vocational relationships were exemplary; there is not a shred of reliable evidence to suggest that he ever suffered from debilitating mental confu-

sion or disorientation. His thoughts were logical and clear to the end of his life. The constellation of symptoms necessary to sustain a diagnosis of schizophrenia is absent in this remarkable scholar's history. I will not explore the possibility that Swedenborg suffered from a mood disorder with psychotic features because the symptoms of such a disorder would be very conspicuous in all accounts of his life. Bipolar disorder with psychotic features, for example, requires that the mood component of the disorder be prominent along with any psychotic symptoms. Deep and debilitating depressions and reckless manic episodes are required for this diagnosis, for which there is no evidence in Swedenborg's history. A prominent disorder of mood could not escape notice by persons in Swedenborg's social and occupational environments. Instead his even-tempered demeanor and lack of emotional lability were evident in recorded comments by Swedish royalty and a number of Swedish politicians. We are left, then, with the conclusion that Swedenborg's claims are so unusual, so abnormal, that on this basis alone some feel compelled to view him as mentally disturbed. His claims sound so implausible and so like the claims of mental patients suffering from paranoid schizophrenia with grandiose features, that we need to seriously examine this diagnostic possibility.

Schizophrenia is characterized by conspicuous and bizarre delusions. It is evident that Swedenborg either provided the world with valid revelations about the spiritual world or he was delusional. Delusions are usually quite evident when examined clinically. Non-bizarre delusions may sometimes be difficult to distinguish from factual events but, for the most part, they too are evident on careful clinical evaluation. The next step in our analysis is to compare Swedenborg's life with that of another prominent person who claimed to have a special religious mission but who was unquestionably psychotic.

SWEDENBORG AND DANIEL PAUL SCHREBER

Of the numerous autobiographies of persons suffering from psychoses, none is as famous as the memoirs of Daniel Paul Schreber. In his book *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* (Memoirs of a Nerve Patient) published in 1903 and translated into English in 1955, Schreber gave the

psychiatric world its most comprehensive self-analysis.¹³ The *Memoirs* provided the foundation for Freud's famous theory of the origin of paranoia, an accepted diagnosis in his day. The "Schreber case" finds its way into most textbooks on psychiatry and psychoanalysis because Freud used the *Memoirs* to develop his ideas concerning the role of projection and unconscious homosexual wishes in paranoia.¹⁴ Freud's analysis (1911) was titled "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)." His theory about the psychological mechanisms behind paranoia was later extended to all paranoid states including paranoid schizophrenia. This extension was largely the work of the psychoanalytic community, a small group within mainstream psychiatry dedicated to finding the causes of mental disorders. Strangely enough, there was little criticism of the theory until more recent times and yet Freud himself had serious reservations about using his theory to account for the origin of dementia praecox (schizophrenia).

Like Swedenborg, Schreber came from a socially prominent family. Schreber's uncle, Johann Christian Daniel Schreber (1739–1810), was ennobled and received many honors in the academic world. Schreber himself was promoted to Senatspräsident of the Superior Country Court at Dresden—the Supreme Court of Saxony. He achieved this honorable status at an early age and was proficient in a number of fields, including astronomy, philosophy, natural science, music and history. Like Swedenborg, Schreber had a reputation for good character, veracity and social sensitivity. His cultural interests were broad; he was apparently happily married but without children. Schreber was socially appropriate and well liked by his peers. In spite of these exemplary personality strengths, he suffered a mental breakdown in the autumn of 1884 and was hospitalized the following December in the psychiatric unit of the University of Leipzig. His psychiatrist, Paul Emil Flechsig, was to play a major role in Schreber's delusional system during his second breakdown a few years later but, at the time of the first hospitalization, no psychotic symptoms

¹³Daniel P. Schreber, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*. Ed. and trans. by I. Macalpine and R. A. Hunter. (London: Dawson, 1955).

¹⁴Sigmund Freud, *Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol XII (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958).

were evident as far as we can tell. Schreber recovered from his disorder in 1885 and remained well adjusted until he experienced a second disturbance in October of 1893. It was during this second hospitalization that he produced the *Denkwürdigkeiten*. This later and clearly psychotic disorder was the subject of Freud's celebrated analysis.

A little over a month after he was promoted to *Senatspräsident* in 1893, Schreber was once more admitted to the university clinic under Flechsig. In the months that followed, he was sent to other institutions but was eventually institutionalized at Sonnenstein Asylum in Pirna, a public mental hospital (Germany's first) where he remained for nine years. During these years Schreber produced the notes he would later use to compile the *Denkwürdigkeiten*. Schreber's intent in publishing his experiences was to invite the learned world to study his person in order to validate his experiences. He wanted to convince people that his religious revelations were real and not the product of hallucinations and delusions. Schreber fought hard to make his experiences available to interested parties. His own family attempted to buy up all the copies of his book in order to keep them out of the hands of the public; the memoirs were an embarrassment to the Schreber family. There is no evidence that Schreber sought in any way to profit from his memoirs or to use them as a forum to castigate the mental health professions. He felt it was his duty to disseminate information about the supernatural events impacting on his personal life. Schreber believed that his revelations would be of great benefit to humanity because they revealed important things about God, the soul and the relationship of these to his own circumstances. He also felt that a complete description of the events that were taking place in him would help his colleagues understand the reasons for some of his "oddities of behavior."

Clearly there are a number of similarities between Schreber and Swedenborg. Both came from prominent families. Both were extremely intelligent and accomplished in many fields, yet their primary interest was religion. Both claimed to have firsthand experience with the world of the supernatural and both considered themselves vehicles through which important truths were revealed. These learned men both functioned well in society and played a useful role in their respective governments. The major similarity, however, is that both insisted on the validity of their

supernatural experiences, experiences that strike the average person as improbable or even bizarre.

Similarities aside, what are the differences between Schreber and Swedenborg? Freud diagnosed Schreber as suffering from paranoia (Dementia Paranoides). Today, however, the diagnosis of paranoia is obsolete. Schreber's clinical diagnosis clearly meets today's criteria for paranoid schizophrenia. In support of this diagnosis, Drs. Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter who translated the *Denkwürdigkeiten* into English in 1955, unequivocally identified Schreber's disorder as paranoid schizophrenia.

The most important characteristic of schizophrenia is its debilitating effect on one's social and occupational functioning. Schreber was twice hospitalized and, during his second hospitalization, was delusional. He suffered from auditory hallucinations in the form of persecutory voices; his behavior at Sonnenstein Asylum was grossly abnormal. An example was his propensity to bellow. He would bellow loudly for prolonged periods and could be quite disruptive to those around him. At times he would fall into a catatonic state during which he scarcely moved for long periods of time. In addition, Schreber suffered from hyperaesthesia, or enhanced sensitivity to light and sound. According to his physician, Dr. Weber, Schreber experienced an acute phase of his disorder during which the symptoms described above were pronounced. These symptoms began to diminish as his condition became more chronic. Prior to his discharge, Schreber was allowed to leave the hospital for short periods and, during these times, displayed more or less normal behavior. His delusions, however, persisted. In the *Denkwürdigkeiten*, Schreber announces his motive for revealing the intimate details of his mental disorder.

This is the purpose of this manuscript; in it I shall try to give an at least partly comprehensible exposition of supernatural matters, knowledge of which has been revealed to me for almost six years. I cannot of course count upon being *fully* understood because things are dealt with which cannot be expressed in human language; they exceed human understanding. Nor can I maintain that *everything* is irrefutably certain even for me; much remains only presumption and probability. After all I too am only a human being and therefore limited by the confines of human understanding; but one thing I am certain of, namely that I have come infinitely

closer to the truth than human beings who have not received divine revelation.¹⁵

Schreber realizes that his readers will have difficulty accepting the authenticity of his revelations. He urges his readers to have faith when confronted with ideas that defy rational explanation.

To make myself at least somewhat comprehensible I shall have to speak much in images and similes, which may at times perhaps be only *approximately* correct; for the only way a human being can make supernatural matters, which in their essence must always remain incomprehensible, understandable to a certain degree is by comparing them with known facts of human experience. Where intellectual understanding ends, the domain of belief begins; man must reconcile himself to the fact that things exist which are true although he cannot understand them.¹⁶

All this sounds quite rational. However, early in his second illness, Schreber expressed a number of bizarre hypochondriacal delusions. At one point, according to Dr. Weber, Schreber insisted he was dead and decomposing, that he lived without his stomach and intestines and that he had to swallow parts of his own larynx with his food. He also felt that his brain was softening. Schreber's main psychotic symptom, apart from these somatic delusions, involved his conviction that certain insights were revealed to him alone and that he was to redeem the world. This mission of redemption was contingent on his being *transformed into a woman*. Like Renee's "System" quoted above, Schreber's mission was ordained by the "Order of Things," a construct he used to account for why certain events involving him were predestined. Prior to his 1893 psychotic break, Schreber had a number of dreams which portended the recurrence of his former disorder, for which he was hospitalized in 1884. He recounts:

During this time I had several dreams to which I did not then attribute any particular significance, and which I would even today disregard as

¹⁵ Schreber, *Memoirs*, 41.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

the proverb says "Dreams are mere shadows," had my experience in the meantime not made me think of the *possibility* at least of their being connected with the contact which had been made with me by divine nerves. I dreamt several times that my former nervous illness had returned; naturally I was as unhappy about this in the dream, as I felt happy on waking that it had only been a dream. Furthermore, one morning while still in bed (whether still half asleep or already awake I cannot remember), I had a feeling which, thinking about it later when fully awake, struck as highly peculiar. It was the idea that it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse. This idea was so foreign to my whole nature that I may say I would have rejected it with indignation if fully awake; from what I have experienced since I cannot exclude the possibility that some external influences were at work to implant this idea in me.¹⁷

Schreber's later delusion that he was to be transformed into a woman led Freud to conclude that paranoia is caused by projection of unconscious homosexual wishes. The paranoid patient repudiates these wishes and projects them onto the person to whom he or she is attracted. But instead of acknowledging the sexual attraction, it is experienced as a threat. The threat, perceived as coming from the object of attraction, is experienced as persecution by that object. The unacceptable thought "I love him (or her)" is changed to "I hate him (or her) because he or she is persecuting me." Paranoid people can be dangerous. They may attack the person to whom they feel unconsciously attracted. In Schreber's case his persecutor was none other than his physician Dr. Paul Emil Flechsig. Schreber initially viewed Flechsig as his persecutor but later transferred that role to God.

For Schreber, God was a plexus of pure nerves. The nerves in a human body could ultimately become God since both were nerves, but the nerves of God were able to metamorphose into any created object in the world, His most common manifestation occurring by means of divine *rays*. The concept of divine rays was central to Schreber's delusional system. Schreber's idea of God is highly unorthodox. He insists that God cannot

¹⁷ Ibid, 63.

relate to living persons. God does not understand the living and maintains relations solely with the dead. In Schreber's theology, God relates only to corpses. Also there is always the possibility that some short-circuit in the Order of Things could cause the vibrant nerves of living humans to exert an attraction on the nerves of God with the result that *God's very existence could come into jeopardy*. God eventually became Schreber's persecutor. Hallucinatory voices were interpreted as coming from God in the form of divine rays. The numerous "miracles" that Schreber experienced at first made him anxious and depressed but eventually they appeared childish or ridiculous. God then became an object of scorn to Schreber. In the course of his illness, Schreber and God become adversaries; Schreber had faith that he would prevail against God as was decreed in the Order of Things.

It is very interesting to compare the content of the revelations of Schreber and Swedenborg. There are some common elements in both but they appear to have different sets of meaning attached to them. For example, both Schreber and Swedenborg saw the sun as a symbol or cosmic representation of God. Schreber states:

In any case the light and warmth-giving power of the sun, which makes her the origin for all organic life on earth, is only to be regarded as an indirect manifestation of the living God; hence the veneration of the sun as divine by so many peoples since antiquity contains a highly important core of truth even if it does not embrace the whole truth.¹⁸

Schreber saw the sun as female, which tends to undermine Freud's theory that Schreber's persecutors—God, Flechsig, the sun—were father substitutes. Schreber felt that his views about the supernatural nature of the sun were supported by the sun worship of the ancients. The sun spoke with Schreber and was often a major source of his hallucinatory voices.

My own personal experiences leave me in doubt however whether even the astronomy of today has grasped the whole truth about the light-and

¹⁸Ibid, 46.

warmth-giving power of the stars and particularly of our sun; perhaps one has to consider her directly or indirectly only as that part of God's miraculous creative power which is directed to the earth. As proof of this statement I will at present only mention the fact that the sun has for years spoken with me in human words and thereby reveals herself as a living being or as the organ of a still higher being behind her.¹⁹

Swedenborg also maintains that there is a supernatural or spiritual sun. He too indicates that the ancients worshipped the sun because of its supernatural significance. For Swedenborg, our natural sun corresponds to the sun of the spiritual world which in turn corresponds to God. God is infinite and thus beyond human comprehension or perception. God is revealed to humans in the form of a sun whose warmth is love and whose light is wisdom. A sun then is the spiritual appearance of the Infinite Being who is the center and source of life. Just as the natural sun sustains natural life, so the spiritual sun sustains spiritual life. Those who enter the spiritual world do not see our sun any longer, just as we do not see theirs. Swedenborg tells us that:

Although the sun of the world is not seen in heaven, nor anything from that sun, there is nevertheless a sun there, and light and heat, and all things that are in the world, with innumerable others, but not from a like origin; since the things in heaven are spiritual, and those in the world are natural. The sun of heaven is the Lord; the light there is the Divine truth and the heat the Divine good that go forth from the Lord as a sun. From this origin are all things that spring forth and are seen in the heavens.²⁰

Swedenborg maintains that the ancients were aware that our natural sun corresponds to the Infinite Being and so worshipped God in the symbol of the natural sun. In the course of time, knowledge of this correspondence waned and people began to worship the natural sun itself—a form of idolatry. Swedenborg maintains that the ancients possessed knowledge of

¹⁹ Ibid, 46.

²⁰ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, n. 117.

the correspondence between natural and spiritual things but eventually lost it as they turned from spiritual to natural concerns. That knowledge, which was their science of sciences, is now completely lost.

Comparing Swedenborg's ideas about the spiritual sun with Schreber's reveals the latter's disturbed thought processes. For Schreber, the "other" sun is female and is the source of inner voices that rail at him and participate in what he calls "soul murder." His description of the sun reveals disturbances in the very *process* of thought formation. The following reveals the illogical thought patterns and loose associations typical of schizophrenia.

During the first weeks of my stay at Sonnenstein (in July or August 1894), I am convinced certain important changes took place with the sun. As before when discussing supernatural matters, I have to confine myself to relating impressions which I received and can only conjecture in how far these changes were objective events. I recollect that for a longish period there appeared to be a smaller sun. This sun, as mentioned at the end of Chapter VIII, was first led by Flechsig's soul but later by a soul whose nerves I identified as those of the Director of the present Aylum, Dr. Weber. While writing these lines I am fully aware that other people can only think this is sheer nonsense, as Dr. Weber is still among the living, a fact I myself have occasion to verify daily. Yet the impressions I received seem to me so certain that I must assume that some time in the past Dr. Weber departed from this life and ascended with his nerves to Blessedness, but then returned to life among mankind; this notion may be unfathomable for human beings and a possibility only to be explained in a supernatural manner.²¹

Here we have an example of disturbed thought processes. A further example of Schreber's thought disorder is evident in what he calls "miracles," which appear to be perceptual distortions, auditory hallucinations and disturbances in tactile sensations. These sensory disturbances are proof to Schreber that he is the target of supernatural forces and is unique among humans.

²¹Schreber, *Memoirs*, 124.

Having lived for months among miracles, I was inclined to take more or less everything I saw for a miracle. Accordingly I did not know whether to take the streets of Leipzig through which I traveled as only theatre props, perhaps in the fashion of which Prince Potemkin is said to have put them up for Empress Catherine II of Russia during her travels through the desolate country, so as to give her the impression of a flourishing countryside.²²

Perceiving common objects and persons as stage props is common in schizophrenia. Objects appear unreal, cut off from each other and from the world. Renee, quoted above, experienced a similar phenomenon in her struggle with schizophrenia. Her perception of the world, like Schreber's, appeared terrifyingly unreal to her at times.

It was in the course of the first year of analysis that I realized the danger I was in. For me, madness was definitely not a condition of illness; I did not believe that I was ill. It was rather a country, opposed to Reality, where reigned an implacable light, blinding, leaving no place for shadow; an immense space without boundary, limitless, flat; a mineral, Lunar country, cold as the wastes of the North Pole. In this stretching emptiness, all is unchangeable, immobile, congealed, crystallized. *Objects are stage trap-pings, placed here and there, geometric cubes without meaning.*²³ (Sechehaye, p. 33; italics added)

Swedenborg and Schreber considered themselves unique in their claim that they could communicate with the dead. Schreber concluded that he was preeminent among the "spirit seers," being the only one who ever enjoyed such an extensive capacity for supernatural communication.

In the soul-language, during the time dealt with in this chapter, I was called "the seer of spirits," that is, a man who sees, and is in communication with, spirits or departed souls. In particular, Flechsig's soul used to refer to me as "the greatest seer of spirits of all centuries"; to which I, from

²² Ibid, 102.

²³ Sechehaye, *Autobiography*, 33.

a wider point of view, occasionally retorted, that one ought at least to speak of the greatest seer of spirits of all millennia. In fact since the dawn of the world there can hardly have been a case like mine, in which a human being entered into continual contact, that is to say no longer subject to interruption not only with *individual* departed souls but with the totality of all souls and with God's omnipotence itself.²⁴

Schreber is aware that some people suffer from hallucinations and that his voices and communications could be considered symptomatic of a mental disorder. He was convinced, however, that his experiences involved genuine supernatural events. Prior to his psychosis, Schreber was not religious. His lack of religious belief and interest were proof to him that his visions and revelations were genuine and not merely elaborations of a prior religious zeal. It seemed logical to him that religious hallucinations only occur in persons who are by nature, religious.

It seems psychologically impossible that I suffer only from hallucinations. After all, the hallucination of being in communication with God or departed souls can logically only develop in people who bring with them into their morbidly excited nervous state an already secure faith in God and the immortality of the soul. *This, however, was not so in my case, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.* Even so-called spiritualist mediums may be considered genuine seers of spirits of the inferior kind in this sense, although in many cases self-deception and fraud may also play a part. Therefore one ought to beware of unscientific generalization and rash condemnation in such matters. If psychiatry is not flatly to deny everything supernatural and thus tumble with both feet into the camp of naked materialism, it will have to recognize the possibility that occasionally the phenomena under discussion may be connected with real happenings, which simply cannot be brushed aside with the catchword "hallucinations."²⁵

²⁴Schreber, *Memoirs*, 89.

²⁵*Ibid*, 90.

Like Schreber, Swedenborg was aware that people might conclude that his published accounts of interactions with the spiritual world are simply products of an overactive imagination or of dreams. Both men acknowledge the fact that their writings will be viewed as implausible by their readers. Swedenborg states:

I foresee that many who read the things which follow, and the Memorable Relations at the end of the chapters, will think that they are inventions of the imagination; but I asseverate in truth that they are not inventions but are things actually done and seen; nor were they seen in any state of a mind asleep but in a state of full wakefulness. For it has pleased the Lord to manifest Himself to me and to send me to teach the things which shall be of the New Church, meant by the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse. To this end, He has opened the interiors of my mind and spirit, whereby it has been granted me to be in the spiritual world with angels and at the same time in the natural world with men, and this now for twenty-five years.²⁶

Swedenborg consistently warned against communicating with the spiritual world, because there are many spirits there who believe they are divine beings. After death, grandiose and arrogant persons continue to attempt to manipulate others and control them because they have acquired such a disposition prior to death. In the spiritual world, when they become aware of the mental presence of human beings, these arrogant people attempt to infuse their grandiosity into others with the result that the infested person comes to share the distorted affections and delusions of those spirits. Swedenborg has little regard for visionaries or occult dabblers who open themselves up to influence from what he calls “enthusiastic spirits,” that is, spirits who sustain spiritual delusions about their own holiness and power. Such spirits can, in a manner of speaking, “possess” persons who speak with them. Religious fanatics and visionaries are often strongly infested with spirits of this kind. Communication with these spirits can lead to psychosis. It is dangerous to indulge in fanatic religious zeal and practices.

²⁶ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugal Love*. n. 1.

But such persons are visionaries and enthusiasts; and whatever spirit they hear they believe to be the Holy Spirit, when, in fact, such spirits are enthusiastic spirits. Such spirits see falsities as truths, and so seeing them they induce not themselves only but also those they flow into to believe them. Such spirits, however, have been gradually removed, because they began to lure others into evil and to gain control over them. Enthusiastic spirits are distinguished from other spirits by their believing themselves to be the Holy Spirit, and believing what they say to be Divine.²⁷

Again, unless one is spiritually prepared, it is extremely dangerous to communicate with spirits. Swedenborg's mission as a revelator required that God protect him from malignant influences in the spiritual world. In Swedenborg's day, science and rational thinking were becoming more prevalent than superstition and mythology. Today the need for insight into ecclesiastical matters is even more critical. Swedenborg claims that humans need to know about heaven and hell and the life after death in order to know how to live the life that leads to heaven. Knowledge of these things in the churches has waned and new insights are necessary. This was the reason why Swedenborg's inner sight was opened to the spiritual world. A timely revelation was necessary to provide a foundation for a *rational faith*.

There are two worlds, the spiritual world, where spirits and angels are, and the natural world, where men are. That there is a spiritual world, in which spirits and angels are, distinct from the natural world in which men are, has hitherto been deeply hidden even in the Christian world. The reason is, because no angel has descended and taught it by word of mouth, and no man has ascended and seen it. Lest therefore from ignorance of that world, and the uncertain faith concerning heaven and hell resulting from it, man should be infatuated to such a degree as to become an atheistic naturalist, it has pleased the Lord to open the sight of my spirit, and to elevate it into heaven, and also to let it down into hell, and to present to view the quality of both.²⁸

²⁷ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, n. 249.

²⁸ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Intercourse of the Soul and Body* (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1947), n. 3.

How then do we explain Schreber? There are so many striking similarities between Swedenborg and Schreber it seems evident that we are dealing with an overlapping phenomenon. One hypothesis is that both were psychotic. Another is that both Swedenborg and Schreber participated in supernatural events but Schreber was not protected from the influence of malevolent spirits. Psychosis might result from unprotected exposure to the spiritual world. Schreber perceived events much like Swedenborg, but hostile and grandiose spirits distorted his perceptions. His voices, like those of all psychotic patients, appeared to be more than mere auditory hallucinations originating in his own mind. Swedenborg explains how dangerous it is to become aware of spirits as separate entities and to converse with them.

Something shall now be said about the speech of spirits with man. Many believe that man can be taught by the Lord by means of spirits speaking with him; but those who believe this and are willing to believe it do not know that it is attended with danger to their souls. So long as man is living in the World, as to his spirit he is in the midst of spirits, although spirits do not know that they are with man, nor does man know that he is with spirits; and for the reason that as to the affections of the will they are immediately conjoined, while as to the thoughts of the understanding they are mediately conjoined. For man thinks naturally, but spirits think spiritually; and natural and spiritual thought make one only by correspondences; and in a oneness by correspondences neither one of the two knows anything about the other. But as soon as spirits begin to speak with man they come out of their spiritual state into man's natural state, and they then know that they are with man and they conjoin themselves with the thoughts of his affection and speak with him from those thoughts.²⁹

The above quote provides a possible explanation for paranoid phenomena. When, by whatever means, biological or psychological, the veil between the spiritual and natural worlds is lifted, the person in whom it is

²⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Apocalypse Explained* (New York, Swedenborg Foundation, 1946), n. 1182.

lifted, becomes the target of malevolent influences. Normally awareness of the spiritual world is completely unconscious. We are influenced by it but do not realize it. I suggest that conscious awareness of the presence of malevolent spirits is the core of paranoid delusion formation. These spirits attempt to control and harm the psychotic patient. The patient is *actually* the target of persecutors and the vilifying voices do originate outside the patient's mind. Grandiosity results from identification with "enthusiastic" spirits whose delusions of importance and power infest the patient who cannot separate his own perceptions from those of the infesting spirit. The content of auditory hallucinations is almost always hostile and demeaning. Sneering voices may urge the patient to harm himself or herself. Like O'Brian's "Operators" and Renee's "System," awareness of the spiritual world is interpreted as persecution by malignant beings and the grandiosity of such beings is fused with the patients mental processes and interpreted as their own. Other quotes from persons suffering from psychosis reveal a communality of experience. Swedenborg too was subject to malicious attacks while exploring the spiritual world but was protected.

If evil spirits perceived that they are with man, and that they are spirits separate from him, and if they could flow into what is of his body, they would try to destroy him in a thousand ways, for they hold man in deadly hatred. And as they knew that I was a man in the body, they were in a continual effort to destroy me, not only as to the body, but especially as to the soul; for to destroy man and any spirit is the very delight of life of all those who are in hell; but I have been continually protected by the Lord. From this it is evident how dangerous it is for man to be in living company with spirits, unless he is in the good of faith.³⁰

The cause of schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders is unknown. Autobiographies of psychotic people are replete with references to hostile spiritual beings experienced as existing outside the self. People are unaware of such influences unless they become psychotic. Mental health professionals attempt to explain the bizarre symptoms of psychosis as

³⁰ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1941), n. 5863.

manifestations of the unconscious because they see no other explanation. Schizophrenia with its array of bizarre hallucinations and delusions, is one of the most debilitating human conditions.

By now it should be clear that Swedenborg's description of the spiritual world and reports of psychotic people share important communalities. Is his prediction of the rise of a New Church prophetic or merely autistic fantasy? Is he then a prophet and revelator, or merely paranoid? The allegation that he had some sort of paranoid disorder of a non-schizophrenic variety needs to be examined. We know with a reasonable degree of certainty that Swedenborg did not suffer from any form of schizophrenia because of his high level of functioning. We can easily rule out schizophrenia because social and occupational dysfunction is part of the definition of this psychosis, but what about paranoid states or paranoia and, more recently, the diagnosis of delusional disorder?

PARANOIA AND DELUSIONAL DISORDER

The oldest diagnostic concept germane to our analysis is "paranoia." Paranoia is from the Greek "paranoos" (para, beyond; noos or nous, mind) meaning "wrong or faulty logic or knowledge." The concept of paranoia predates Hippocrates and was, in those times, equivalent to the generic term madness or insanity. Later, a diagnosis of paranoia became synonymous with "partial insanity" or "monomania." In Freud's day and into all but very recent times, a diagnosis of paranoia was given to persons whose disorder was primarily manifested by a set of complex but relatively encapsulated delusions. The disorder was considered rare and the clinical literature noted that some patients with paranoia, of which Schreber is an example, were remarkably intelligent. Thus as recently as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders II* (1968), paranoia was considered a valid and reliable diagnostic entity. The DSM-II notes that this disorder was considered very rare.

This extremely rare condition is characterized by gradual development of an intricate, complex, and elaborate paranoid system based on and often proceeding logically from misinterpretation of an actual event. Frequently

the patient considers himself endowed with unique and superior ability. In spite of a chronic course the condition does not seem to interfere with the rest of the patient's thinking and personality.³¹

The diagnosis of paranoia seems ideally suited to Emanuel Swedenborg. It takes into account his high intelligence, his intact social and occupational relationships and can explain away his revelations as complex and elaborate delusions. His mission to bring a new revelation into the world is then consistent with the grandiosity typical of paranoid disorders. Also consistent with this diagnosis is the fact that, apart from his alleged delusions and hallucinations about the spiritual world, his thinking and social relations remained intact.

While this diagnosis seems appropriate at first glance, there are difficulties. The most serious problem is that paranoia is no longer considered a valid diagnosis. It was dropped from later revisions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III-R and DSM-IV). The DSM-IV is at present the most authoritative criteria for making reliable diagnoses.³² It is based on an exhaustive literature review in conjunction with feedback from the world's leading mental health experts. The diagnosis of paranoia has been replaced by delusional disorder in DSM-IV. The hallmark of delusional disorder is that a person can have a set of complex delusions while maintaining a reasonable degree of adjustment socially and occupationally. A person with a delusional disorder appears quite normal until he or she starts talking about the delusional subject. It is only then that gross psychopathology becomes evident.

Now how does one diagnose a Delusional Disorder? The following criteria from the DSM-IV are applicable (see pages 296–301):

There must be *non-bizarre delusions* of at least one month's duration. If the person manifests visual or auditory hallucinations, the hallucinations cannot be prominent or conspicuous. The behavior of the individual, apart from the delusion(s), is relatively normal and cannot be odd or bizarre.

³¹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Second Edition (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1968), 38.

³² *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Fourth, any manic or depressive episodes are brief relative to the length of the delusional disorder. Finally, the individual must not meet the criteria for schizophrenia and the delusional symptoms must not be due to an organic factor (illness or brain dysfunction). The DSM-IV describes six subtypes of delusional disorder, namely the erotomantic type, jealous type, the grandiose type, persecutory type, somatic type and a mixed type when no single delusional theme predominates. An unspecified type which is a catchall class for atypical delusional disorders is also a possible sub-diagnosis. In the case of Swedenborg it is easy to dismiss most of these, but looking at the definition of the grandiose type we find that a person with this type of disorder has an inflated sense of worth or power. He or she considers himself or herself privy to special knowledge or claims to have a unique relationship with a deity or famous person. Since we can rule out the diagnosis of schizophrenia on the basis of Swedenborg's exemplary record as a scholar, citizen and scientist par excellence, we are left with the possibility that he had a delusional disorder of the grandiose type. Certainly his claim to have talked continually with spirits and angels by virtue of his mysterious "internal respiration" appears to meet several of the DSM-IV criteria. Let's examine this further.

I must remind the reader that delusional disorder can only be diagnosed if there are *nonbizarre delusions* (false beliefs resistant to evidence). Some examples of nonbizarre delusions are (1) a false conviction that one is being poisoned, (2) a conviction that one is loved by some person without any evidence of this, (3) a belief that one is being followed or (4) that one is being deceived by one's spouse or lover. Nonbizarre delusions are not limited to these specific delusions. In addition, the content of a delusion, to be considered nonbizarre must be something that is *possible within the realm of ordinary experience*. Thus a person may falsely believe that his boss is trying to poison him, but such a thing is possible in reality. Communicating with angels and other spirits is not the kind of activity that most people would consider possible in ordinary life, and if delusional, would be considered bizarre. Bizarre delusions are characteristic of schizophrenia, not delusional disorders. Swedenborg's experience of intercourse with the spiritual world, if not genuine, would be hallucinatory (distorted perceptions), according to DSM-IV. Because these experiences continued for so many years, they would be classified as *prominent*. Now,

prominent hallucinations *cannot* be present in delusional disorders. They are characteristic of schizophrenia. But we cannot diagnose someone as schizophrenic simply because we do not believe in their ideas. Given these considerations, it seems clear that, according to contemporary diagnostic nomenclature, no known mental disorder is consistent with what is known of Swedenborg. Another explanation is that Swedenborg's revelations were genuine. We cannot diagnose him as suffering from a delusional disorder or from schizophrenia simply because his claims are dramatically different than those of most people. But there is nothing else to support the presence of a mental disorder in this unusually gifted individual.

THE CASE FOR EPILEPSY

When psychiatric diagnoses don't work, the medical profession has another way of dealing with unusual religious experiences. Recall the James quote at the beginning of this paper: "Genius," says Dr. Lombroso, "is a symptom of hereditary degeneration of the epileptoid variety, and is allied to moral insanity." While the diagnoses in this quote are obsolete, the tactic of interpreting altered states of consciousness during religious experience as manifestations of epilepsy is still among us. In the Foote-Smith and Smith article alluded to earlier, Swedenborg is diagnosed as suffering from temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE). In order to make their case, these authors draw on Swedenborg's statements in his diaries and other works. From these sources, Foote-Smith and Smith conclude that Swedenborg's own autobiographical statements establish that he suffered from TLE or "psychomotor seizures." Since the Foote-Smith and Smith paper is reprinted in this issue, I will refrain from directly quoting these authors, but my comments on their inferences assumes that the reader is familiar with their paper.

What is epilepsy? The word comes from a Greek word that means "a condition of being seized or attacked." The cause of epilepsy was thought to be supernatural, the work of some demon or spirit. The word "epilepsy" means only that one has the tendency to experience seizures. Epilepsy is not a disease; it is a symptom of a brain disorder. If the brain disorder can be identified, the condition is known as symptomatic epilepsy, if not, the epilepsy is called idiopathic. Brain dysfunction is as-

sumed in all epileptic cases even though approximately seventy percent of all cases are idiopathic.

Epilepsy is the oldest known indication of a brain disorder, references to it being found as early as 2,000 years B.C. In modern times the demon theory was abandoned in light of the connection of epilepsy with brain disease. Sir Charles Locock instituted the earliest known medical treatment for epilepsy in 1857 when he prescribed sedatives to control seizure activity. It is important for the reader to understand that epilepsy is a complex phenomenon, with at least forty different kinds of seizures. Foote-Smith and Smith casually ascribe at least two kinds of seizures to Swedenborg without acknowledging just how different these two kinds of seizures are and without mentioning that each tends to have a different etiology. While focusing on evidence for TLE, these authors then suggest that Swedenborg also suffered from generalized tonic-clonic seizures or GTCS (grand mal in the older classification system). Today, temporal lobe seizures are called complex-partial seizures and are present in approximately 30 percent of epileptic conditions. Both these and GTCS involve impaired consciousness. Again, epilepsy is not a disease; it is a symptom of a brain disorder.

Foote-Smith and Smith present a laundry list of characteristics associated with TLE (complex partial seizures). I will not spend a great deal of time reviewing this list but, in spite of what appears to be a genuine effort to shed light on Swedenborg's life and works Foote-Smith and Smith draw what would appear to be some rather ludicrous conclusions. Relying on Bear and Fedio's study of associations between interictal behavioral characteristics and TLE, Foote-Smith and Smith apply eight of Bear and Fedio's 18 characteristics to Swedenborg.³³ Among these are intense emotion, elation and a sense of personal destiny. Now, unless I am greatly mistaken, it would be highly abnormal for a person called to an exalted office *not to manifest these characteristics*. Under the quasi-paradigm described above, however, these characteristics are by definition abnormal and, in this case, symptomatic of TLE. Foote-Smith and Smith also conclude that humorlessness and sobriety characterize interictal TLE. I fail to under-

³³ D.M. Bear, P. Fedio, "Quantitative analysis of interictal behavior on temporal lobe epilepsy." *Arch. Neuro.* 34 (1977): 454-7.

stand how one can suffer from excess emotionality and humorlessness and sobriety. In any case, there is no reference anywhere indicating that Swedenborg was morose or lacked humor. As Foote-Smith and Smith themselves point out, according to Count von Höpken, an acquaintance of Swedenborg for more than 40 years, the latter was serene, dignified, tranquil and never fretful or morose. The other characteristics cited in support of interictal personality anomalies turn out to be quite normal human characteristics. I would be surprised not to find references to sadness, discouragement, periodically depressed mood and other dysphoric states in any normal person's diary if they recorded their mental states for any length of time. Some aspects of Foote-Smith and Smith's approach to diagnosis are known in the mental health professions as the "Barnum effect," named after P.T. Barnum, of entertainment infamy. One sees this effect in some psychological test reports that state, for example, "...the patient responds with anxiety to stress and has periods of depression when important relationships terminate." Because such statements are true of nearly everyone, they have no diagnostic significance and are little more than profound statements of the obvious. Barnum statements occur frequently in the mental health professions because professionals have great prestige and so the illogic or vapid contents of their statements are readily accepted. The Barnum effect manages to survive because the majority of trait names in psychology fail to be quantitatively defined. The statement "This patient tends to be anxious," is an example. Don't we all? Lacking any context or quantitative measure of "anxiety," the statement can apply to just about anyone. In order to understand another person, we need to know just when a person becomes anxious, under what circumstances and, most importantly, how their anxiety level under a given set of circumstances differs from that of others. This information is almost always lacking in psychiatric and psychological evaluations. For many years I supervised the psychological report writing of interns and postdoctoral fellows in clinical psychology and, sad to say, the majority contained numerous Barnum statements. Some had to be entirely rewritten.

Another characteristic that leads Foote-Smith and Smith to a diagnosis of TLE is the presence of "religiosity—holding deep religious beliefs...mystical states." This is an example of the "natural-only," quasi-

paradigm. Religious experience, especially mystical experience, cannot be real, therefore it must be symptomatic of a psychotic disorder or—absent that—of an epileptic condition. I am not going to belabor Foote-Smith and Smith's analysis of Swedenborg in terms of the eight interictal behavioral or correlates they select from Bear and Fedio's 18. What is more important is a comparison of Swedenborg's experience with what is known about epilepsy. We need to keep in mind that it is very difficult to make differential diagnoses on patients in the same room with us, much less attempting to garner evidence for a specific kind of seizure disorder in a person who lived over 200 years ago.

During my postdoctoral fellowship in neuropsychology, the treatment team would often have to make a differential diagnosis between genuine seizure activity and what are called pseudoseizures. The latter are sometimes called psychogenic seizures because they are not due to epilepsy. Some of these seizures result from hyperventilation and are stress related. *This is not epilepsy.* To make the distinction, we had a detailed history, the benefit of psychological tests, EEG results and other clinical measures at our disposal. Even then, it was sometimes difficult to make a differential diagnosis. The complexity arises because an individual can sometimes have both epileptic seizures *and* pseudoseizures. In my opinion, Foote-Smith and Smith could make a better case that Swedenborg suffered from pseudoseizures than from TLE and GCTS. The incomplete loss of consciousness, the fact that no one ever observed Swedenborg having a seizure, and the consistency, logic and creative genius of his theological ideas do not support an epileptic diagnosis. Epilepsy is a *chronic* course of seizures; a seizure here and there does not establish a diagnosis of epilepsy *even when the seizures have an organic basis.* Such non-chronic seizures may be due to a temporary cerebral insult, high stress levels, toxic conditions or other transient phenomena. Even if it could be established that Swedenborg's account did describe genuine seizure activity, this, by itself, would not justify a diagnosis of epilepsy.

There is a strong correlation between TLE and psychopathology, as Foote-Smith and Smith themselves point out (see reference to Geschwind's observations on page 214 of the Foote-Smith study). In 1973, I was coordinator of a TLE study to determine whether a sample of persons with TLE also had a high incidence of psychopathology. The finding supported such

a correlation; nearly the entire TLE sample had significant psychopathology. Since I believe the above analysis casts serious doubt that Swedenborg suffered from any known category of psychopathology, Foote-Smith and Smith's reference to studies supporting a correlation of *behavioral* anomalies and TLE appears to weaken their case rather than support it. If psychopathology is not evident, then one could argue that TLE is less likely to be a valid diagnosis. However, even with the diagnostic tools mentioned above, making accurate psychiatric diagnoses of the patients in our TLE study was difficult. The problem of making diagnoses in this and other studies brings up the question, "How good are mental health specialists at making psychiatric diagnoses anyway?"

In a now famous study entitled *Being Sane in Insane Places*, David L. Rosenhan had graduate students admit themselves to various mental hospitals stating only that they heard a voice saying "hollow" and "thud." The students were all admitted and diagnosed as psychotic *in spite of the fact that, in all respects other than their initial report about hearing a voice, they behaved in a perfectly normal fashion.* During their "treatment" the students' activities were pathologized by the staff; for example, when the pseudo-patients took notes on their experiences, the staff's comment in the record was, "Patient engaged in writing behavior." It is interesting that during their stay in the mental hospital, the staff never questioned any student's diagnosis. The real patients all figured out that the students were not really patients but no one on staff ever became aware that they had hospitalized a perfectly normal person. The statement that the pseudo-patient heard a voice was all that was necessary to make an enduring diagnosis. The psychotic label stuck even when the students said that the voice had gone away. In some cases the pseudo-patients even had difficulty getting out of the hospital!³⁴ One can imagine the psychiatric community's response to Swedenborg's voluminous production of thirty volumes of theology, "Bright epileptic patient still engaged in obsessive writing behavior."

It was Freud, more or less single-handedly, who dismissed all mental states that could be called religious as merely manifestations of the instincts. According to Freud, all religious experiences, be they dysfunc-

³⁴ David Rosenhan, L. "On Being Sane in Insane Places." *Science* 179 (1973): 250-58.

tional or self-actualizing, are pathological strategies of the ego when faced with the possibility that impulses in the id verge on breaking forth into awareness. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud makes a case that religion constitutes an institutionalized form of obsessive-compulsive neurosis.³⁵ In psychoanalysis and much of general psychiatry, religious experiences are nothing more than the ego's defenses at work, defenses that transform aggressive and sexual drives into something that bears little resemblance to their primal components. The process resembles the transformation of two deadly elements, sodium and chlorine, into common table salt. Yet who but a chemist would know?

Swedenborg, on the other hand, insists that human beings are precariously poised between the loving presence of heavenly spirits (angels) and the dehumanizing influences of those who smolder with hatred in the hells. There is a hell, his Writings teach. In fact, there are many hells, and many heavens. Heaven and hell are states, internal states manifested as places in the other life. These regions appear real to their inhabitants, more real than the objects and geography of the natural world. In these worlds are the deceased who continue to live as spirits, bearing either heavenly or hellish natures. While these spirits influence us, we are unaware of their presence unless we become psychotic. Yet we live in a sea of spiritual influence. Human freedom consists of the power to align with one side or the other in this universal tension. By avoiding what is self-serving and dehumanizing to others, we become increasingly committed to the sphere of heaven. This tiny fragment of freedom is the essence of our humanity. The power of the heavens or the hells is beyond human comprehension. We cannot overcome hell. We can only appeal to God to help us avoid activities injurious to our fellow humans. We cannot and should not seek to be "good," which leads to arrogance and negative judgements of others whom we may judge not as "good" as we are; we need only avoid participating in evil. By resisting evil we are increasingly transformed into heavenly citizens.

These principles in Swedenborg's theology do not appear to be products of temporal lobe epilepsy nor to originate from the delusions and

³⁵Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1964). (The original German version, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* was written in Vienna in 1927.)

hallucinations of schizophrenia. Medical science has given us much to be grateful for; its healing arts and scientific discoveries have prolonged our lives and eased our pain. Still, the most useful enterprises can miss the mark. I believe that the tendency to diagnose great contemporary and historical persons and to pathologize their achievements is a sad detour from the business of truly understanding the best and the worst of the human condition. □

"EMANUEL SWEDENBORG": SOME COMMENTS

Kurt Simons, Ph.D.

Foot-Smiths and Smith's¹ attempt to explain Swedenborg's revelation as a mental aberration is perhaps unique in the history of such attempts in being both evenhanded, and indeed even respectful, of its subject as well as clearly representing the result of a fairly extensive study of both Swedenborg and his theology.

One noteworthy aspect of this analysis is its demonstration, albeit unwitting, of the difficulty of arriving at a diagnosis of insanity, of distinguishing just where the dividing line lies between thought or behavior that is appropriate to a situation and that which is inappropriate and hence abnormal. The problem is compounded by the fact that, if a revelatory experience did in fact take place, it could only be measured against the standard of revelatory experience, not simply the experience of everyday life. Indeed, the issue is even more complicated than that if Swedenborg's statements are correct that his revelation was qualitatively different, in involving his rational mind, from that of all previous revelations.²

One temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) characteristic cited by Foote-Smith and Smith is a trance state. Revelation, if there is such, is by definition a paranormal state, and it certainly seems likely that it would distract the revelator's attention from external, worldly things—as in a trance. But a particularly unusual aspect of Swedenborg's claimed revelation is that he states that he received much of it in a state of full wakefulness, when he appeared to be behaving perfectly normally to bystanders, some of whom were eminent people.³

¹ Elizabeth Foote-Smith and Timothy J. Smith. Historical note. "Emanuel Swedenborg." *Epilepsia* 37:2 (1996): 211–218, reprinted in this issue.

² O. Odhner, "The divine inspiration of Emanuel Swedenborg." *New Church Life* 100 (1980): 191–195, 256–264; F.L. Schnarr, "Dreams, visions and sleep." *New Church Life* 100 (1980): 289–294, 349–355, 404–410, 447–454, 496–498.

³ C.O. Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg epic. The life and works of Emanuel Swedenborg*. (Bookman Associates: New York, 1952). Reprinted (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1981).

Foote-Smith and Smith also mention “double thought.” The Swedenborgian scholar Hugo Odhner once pointed out that

When Swedenborg records how he perceived spirits insinuating contrary thoughts and emotions into him, how could it be otherwise than that an experience of “double personality” would ensue! When spirits caused the sensations of pains or pleasures in various parts of his body, the apparent results would be symptoms like those of hypersthenia or exaggerated or imagined sensations.⁴

Citing both trances and double-thought as symptoms also creates something of a logical problem: either revelation comes while “asleep” to this world, as in a trance state, or while awake, when what Foote-Smith and Smith characterize as “double thought” occurs. If both behaviors are considered aberrant, then there would appear, by definition, to be no “normal” channel available for revelation—creating the logical necessity that revelation is not normal, and hence merely a mental aberration!

Returning to Foote-Smith and Smith’s list of symptoms, “mental confusion and memory loss” would appear a difficult pair of criteria to apply to an individual whose theological writing alone is not only of extraordinary size, scope, and detail, but highly organized and containing, as Hartley pointed out,⁵ a great deal of cross-referencing. Continuing down the symptom list, an individual having a religious revelation might be expected to have a “deepening” of emotion, feel euphoric on occasion (moderated in Swedenborg’s case, as Foote-Smith and Smith in fairness point out, by his focus on humility), and have a feeling of “divine guidance” certainly. Although Foote-Smith and Smith cite “humorlessness [and] sobriety” as two characteristics of TLE patients, they themselves quote Count von Höpken’s characterization of Swedenborg as in fact being serene, contented, and “generally pious, sober, dignified, measured

⁴ H.Lj. Odhner, “Emanuel Swedenborg. The relation of his personal development to his work as a revelator.” *New Church Life* 85(1965): 7.

⁵ S. Noble, *An Appeal in behalf of news of the eternal world and state, and the doctrines of faith and life held by the body of Christians who believe that a New Church is signified (in the Revelation, chap. XXI) by the New Jerusalem: including answers to all principal objections*. London (10th ed.): 1881, 237.

and tranquil.” They also themselves dismiss the hypermoralism and abnormal sexual interest TLE characteristics, and for the aggression characteristic only cite doctrinal passages critical of other churches in the *Summary Exposition*—while not mentioning the far more voluminous teachings throughout the Writings about charity. (Furthermore, Foote-Smith and Smith fail to note that the *Summary Exposition* was in part written in the first place as a response to far more virulent attacks by those who sought to have Swedenborg’s books destroyed and his readers condemned as heretics.)

Religiosity, with “deep religious beliefs,” hardly seems inappropriate behavior for a religious person, revelator or not, and a new religious presentation would by definition be idiosyncratic. (Of note here, however, is that while Foote-Smith and Smith observe that Swedenborg “prophesied” that a church based on his teachings would arise, and that one did, they do not point out how unusual—and non-messianic—it is in the history of avowed revelators for the revelator not to attempt himself to found a new religious movement or organization.) Finally, Swedenborg certainly does stand convicted of “hypergraphia”—in the company, however, of scholars of voluminous written output throughout history!

More complexly, there are the problems of interpretation that arise from lack of familiarity with the full scope of Swedenborg’s life, work and context, already noted in this issue’s editorial. For instance, Foote-Smith and Smith cite as one symptom that Swedenborg experienced “loss of consciousness,” on the evidence of the *Journal of Dreams*, n. 51 passage they quote in which Swedenborg says that he fell asleep after experiencing shuddering. In fact, Swedenborg was well aware of the difference between fainting and sleeping, and he would not have described a fainting spell or loss of consciousness as falling asleep. (His word for a loss of consciousness was *delirium*, often translated “swoon.”) In the passage in question here, Swedenborg merely says that he fell asleep at night.⁶ Similarly, Foote-Smith and Smith classify Swedenborg’s revelatory writing as “automatic.” As noted above, Swedenborg contends that his revelatory experiences—unlike the in-fact “automatic” writing of the biblical

⁶I am grateful to Rev. John Odhner for pointing this out.

revelators—involved his rational thought in an unprecedented way, and specifically a unique interaction of the Lord with his understanding as well as will. This of course may still not sound like the exercise of free will. However, even with the voluminous explanations of Swedenborg's writings, to understand the existence of free will in any context is difficult if there is the assumption that the universe is guided in its operation from the galactic to the subatomic by God's Providence. As a senior clergyman once observed to this writer, "If we could understand free will, we wouldn't have it." So explaining the operation of free will in the context of Swedenborg's revelatory process becomes only one small piece of the larger free will question—a question perhaps ultimately answerable only by that fundamental of any religion, faith.

In conclusion, while the Foote-Smith and Smith article, again, points up the difficulty in arriving at a diagnosis like TLE—especially two centuries after the fact—their article does raise an intriguing question: Swedenborg's writings have a good deal to say about the two sides of the brain—i.e. the location of the temporal lobes—and their relation to the understanding and will (*Arcana Coelestia*, ns. 641, 644, 3884, 5725, *Heaven and Hell*, n. 251, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, n. 384). For instance,

On one occasion when the interior heaven was opened to me and I was talking to the angels there I was allowed to observe the following activities there...On this particular occasion I perceived four activities taking place, the first being into the brain at the left temple. This was a general activity involving the organs of reason, for the left side of the brain corresponds to the rational powers or those of the understanding, but the right to affections or the will. (*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 3884)

The deluge of evil desires affects the will part of the mind and right side of the brain, whereas that of falsities affects the understanding part, with which the left side of the brain is connected. (*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 5725)

(It should be noted that the right-left correspondence holds for all the other paired organs and sections of the body as well, such as the heart, lungs, limbs, eyes, nostrils, etc. [*Divine Love and Wisdom*, n. 384].) As with all other processes of the created universe, revelation by definition pro-

ceeds according to the laws of order applicable to it. Is it thus possible that some of the physiologic mechanisms involved in TLE are also involved in the more external ultimates of the brain utilized in the revelatory process, and so of help to more fully understand the operation of that process? Correlates of TLE with the near-death experience have also been proposed,⁷ again suggesting a connection of these loci in the brain with mechanisms involved in awareness of the other world. In summary, the TLE "connection" with Swedenborg's experiences suggested by Foote-Smith and Smith may in the last analysis be useful, not for being a correct or incorrect interpretation per se of those experiences, but rather for coming to better understand the operation of the correspondential spiritual-natural "connection" in revelation. □

⁷ J.C. Saavedra-Aguilar, J.S. Gómez-Jeria, "A neurobiological model for near-death experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* (1989): 7: 205-222; J.F. McHarg. Comments on "A neurobiological model for near-death experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* (1989): 7: 229-231.

SEIZURES OF A SPIRIT-SEER?

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There is an old joke that is germane to any discussion of spiritual revelation:

Prayer is when you talk to God. But when He answers, it's called schizophrenia.

Old jokes are good jokes, because within them is often some subtle cultural or ideological bias, the absurdity of which becomes glaringly apparent in the light of day. In the question of Emanuel Swedenborg's mental status, a certain rationalistic bias can be seen peeking through several psychological studies, published over many years, purporting to diagnose the "Swedish Seer" with a variety of disorders.¹ The necessity, for one who subscribes to this bias, is to explain the comprehensive, other-worldly nature of Swedenborg's thirty-volume theological corpus in terms suitable for consumption in a modern (or now *post-modern*) age. Since all revelation, in this materialistic mind-set, is "schizophrenia," then schizophrenia it must be. But there are questions here, begging to be asked, about how this definition came to be so universally accepted, and who decides such things.

Van Dusen, in a recent exploration of the question of Swedenborg's sanity, lays the essential groundwork for any discussion of mental illness.² Many who have ascribed Swedenborg's visions to mental illness have clearly done so out of ignorance; insanity is not as easily defined as lay persons are inclined to believe. Insanity *is* as insanity *does*, he argues—the disorderly and unproductive life of chronic insanity does not yield the accomplishments of a Swedenborg. Consistency and integration settle the argument for Van Dusen, an experienced clinical psychologist. His is a

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¹ The first scholar to publicly question Swedenborg's sanity was philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*, of 1766.

² Wilson Van Dusen, "The Issue of Swedenborg's Sanity." *New Church Life* 118: 7 (July 1998): 305–313.

clear and rational argument, from experience, for the validity of Swedenborg's claims of revelation. But as always, this will not satisfy all people. No matter what the argument, it seems, we are always left with two schools of thought on matters of spirit.

There are two important distinctions regarding these matters that deserve our attention. First, investigators recognize two very different forms that transcendent experiences may take. Van Dusen's "visionary experience," the apparently valid spiritual experience of prophets and saints, "makes sense," and leaves the subject with "a deeper understanding of religion." In short, these experiences tend to order and enhance the lives of those who have them. In contrast to this experience are the hell-like attacks of psychotic hallucinations. These are not integrative or instructional, and tend to leave the subject in a confused and diminished mental state. The distinction between these two forms of experience is important in the discussion of Swedenborg's sanity, because here lies the crux of one of the major arguments concerning the validity of Swedenborg's theological corpus: the *argument from quality* for validity of the revelation.

The second distinction regarding matters of spirit is that of the source of the visionary experience. As expected, we find our perennial two schools of thought here as well, in the mutually exclusive possibilities of spiritual and material models. In the spiritual model the transcendent experience flows in from its source in the spiritual world; the (natural) brain, serving as a platform for the (spiritual) mind, acts as the "receiver" for this spiritual influx, which it then somehow presents to the consciousness. In the natural model the experience is a product of the neurological activity of the brain alone. The brain is perfectly capable, say the materialists, of producing all the sensations necessary for experiences of every kind; this model requires no spiritual source. This distinction between spiritual and natural mechanisms of the transcendent experience is the most basic element in our discussion of Swedenborg's sanity, because it is assumptions at this level that turn *transcendence* into *schizophrenia*. (Let us not forget what happens when God answers our prayers.) It is this distinction that has produced our two "camps," and has produced the tacit but prevalent bias that sees schizophrenia when others may see answered prayer.

The first distinction has been argued before—most recently by Van Dusen, but in the past by many—especially by those with actual clinical experience in psychiatry and psychology. To them, the degree of order and integration of the experience in question speaks for its validity. And although this is a sound approach, it has its limitations. Anyone dismissing Swedenborg's revelation as insanity must first become familiar with his system, and most scholars are neither willing nor able to invest the time and effort necessary into mastering a thirty-volume theological corpus. To effectively argue insanity also requires more than passing knowledge of the nature of insanity itself, and this too represents essentially career-sized preparation. To further confuse the issue, the nature of transcendence of any kind remains essentially unknown, to the materialist and the spiritually-minded person alike. So in our *argument from quality* we are resigned to arguing vague notions of poorly understood phenomena. It is no wonder that few if any are convinced to change camps by this argument alone.

The second distinction, that of *argument from source*, is no less frustrating, because it too, depends on our understanding of a very difficult mechanism: the brain/mind continuum (or *contiguum*, depending on one's bias). With all the progress of this century's science, neurobiology is still in its infancy. But there is promise here, perhaps beyond that of any other approach to the problem of transcendence, because of the rich findings that are beginning to appear.

On first inspection, it is the materialists who stand to gain from this work. The better we come to understand the brain, the more it seems to be no more than an elegant machine—hardly a new idea, but strengthened now by ever more evidence for awesome magnitudes of natural complexity. The requirement for something “out there” is no longer necessary with a machine this elegantly complicated. In Francis Crick's *Astonishing Hypothesis*?³ the human mind is solely a function of the activity of the brain. Astonishing? Hardly. This is an old idea. The only astonishing thing here is an amateurish attack on religion unbecoming a Nobel laureate. But Richard Dawkins has gone to these excesses too,⁴ as have a few emboldened

³ Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1994).

⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987).

others, for this is an age of boldness in the science of transcendence. Spirit? Don't need it, thank you.

In an unexpected turn of events, however, science is now about to serve the other camp, as well. The ability to objectify the transcendent state—until now a fantasy—has arrived, in the form of Positron Emission Tomography (PET Scans) and enhanced Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). These tools measure rates of cellular metabolism and cerebral blood flow in intact, normally functioning human subjects, without interference with brain activity in any way. Different mental activities and “states” produce characteristic patterns of glucose uptake and regional blood flow. It is finally possible to accurately “observe” states of sleep, wakefulness, meditation, and even transcendence, as reported by the experimental subjects. The findings are revealing, and their implications promise to change the paradigm of what is spiritual and what is not. The mutually exclusive nature of our two models may represent a false dichotomy, forcing us to make choices that do not adequately explain the phenomena at hand.

Psychiatrist Eugene d'Aquili, and nuclear medicine specialist Andrew Newberg have been using these tools to study mental and emotional states, and from preliminary findings they are assembling some interesting principles: the transcendent experience may be a product of “eruptive overflows” of neuronal pools, reverberating circuits, and increased activity in frontal lobes concomitant with decreased activity in parietal lobes—transcendence may in fact be “hard-wired” into the human brain.⁵ One possible explanation for the altered mental states of monks and seers is the result of simultaneous outflow from the two complementary limbs of the autonomic nervous system, the ergotropic (sympathetic) and trophotropic (parasympathetic), which do not normally operate in such a balance. This unusual neurological event may be associated with what d'Aquili and Newberg call a state of *absolute unity of being* (AUB), in which the subject reports loss of discrete boundaries between things, time sense, and the self–other dichotomy.

⁵These findings were reported in a talk on “Science and Soul” in Philadelphia on February 10, during the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Now published, Eugene d'Aquili and A. Newberg, “The Neurophysiological Basis of Religions, or Why God Won't go Away.” *Zygon* 33: 2 (June 1998): 187–201.

So how might these apparently mechanistic findings give aid and comfort to those in the “spiritual” camp? The question raised by all these possibilities is of central importance to our fundamental problem: Is transcendental “enlightenment” an authentic taste of ultimate reality, or is this illumination nothing more than the brain’s perceiving its own activity? The crux for these researchers is in *causality*: Certain mental states may be the result of specific brain activity, but is it not also just as plausible that changes in brain function may be the *result* (not the cause) of changes in consciousness? Mystics universally agree that spiritual causes are primary and natural effects are secondary to these, but Western science has turned these assumptions around, making matter the primary substance. Who is correct? It depends on the philosophical position from which one starts, and proof becomes a “chicken and egg” conundrum. Both camps come to rest in an uneasy stalemate, where argument gives way to belief, and fact becomes dogma; two religious armies, exchanging occasional shots at one another across the trenches.

The problem of Swedenborg’s mental status comes to mind in the light of this discussion; every attempt to dismiss his revelation as mental aberration rekindles these same fundamental issues. The most recent mechanistic revision is from neurologists Foote-Smith and Smith, who identify temporal lobe epilepsy as the cause of his visions and spiritual experiences.⁶ They are not the first to propose this mechanism for transcendence,⁷ and from a purely medical point of view, it is a much better guess in Swedenborg’s case than schizophrenia.⁸

I will leave it to others to refute their argument on clinical grounds (which will employ the *argument from quality*). My intention is to make some assumptions based on their hypothesis and the ideas of d’Aquila and Newberg, mentioned above, and raise some questions from these.

⁶ Elizabeth Foote-Smith and Timothy J. Smith, “Historical Note: Emanuel Swedenborg.” *Epilepsia* 37: 2 (1996): 211–218. Reprinted in this volume, pp.137–156.

⁷ Transcendence in the form of the “near-death experience” is discussed at length by neurobiologists in the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Summer 1989. Articles by Saavedra-Aguilar and Gomez-Jeria and by Neppe propose neural mechanisms for the “spiritual” experience in terms of temporal lobe seizure activity.

⁸ Many historical figures have been retrospectively diagnosed with temporal lobe epilepsy and a host of other mental and physical disorders, in a diversion common to clinicians of all specialties. The medical literature is spotted with these hypothetical accounts.

Let's suppose that the brain is capable of producing its own transcendent states by means of purely neurological mechanisms. But in the normally functioning brain there is no regular sensation of transcendence. We might call this the "default state" of the human brain and mind. Suppose that something intervenes—disease, injury, genetic abnormality, chemical influence—that causes a change in the neurological platform that supports the mind (whatever this "mind" may be).

We may now assume one of two very different possibilities: In one case the altered physical circuitry of the mind (the brain) produces an altered state of awareness called insanity. The machine is broken, and secondary to this, its function is predictably abnormal. This is the mechanistic model, in which there is no allowance for "revelation" of any kind, regardless of the nature or quality of the experience itself.

In another case this same altered platform allows spiritual influx (which was present all the time) to enter into the consciousness and be perceived as "visionary experience" by some, hallucination by others, or nothing at all for most people. Might there be a continuum of spiritual states, produced by the degree and location of the alteration, based on genetic predisposition, physical or chemical injury, toxins, psychoactive drugs, seizure activity, or *any* agent of change in the natural platform for the spiritual mind? If this spiritual model of transcendence were found to be the case, how then would we define normal–abnormal, sane–insane, or seizure–transcendence?

Both of these possibilities explain the phenomena of transcendence to some degree of satisfaction. Both are based on valid arguments. Neither possibility can be proven, at the expense of the other. We are forced back to the only argument that is of any use: the familiar *argument from quality* for the visionary experience. The question becomes not *what is it*, but *what does it do*? The next assignment for Foote-Smith and Smith might be to continue their study of Swedenborg, but this time to objectively read those "*seizures of a spirit-seer*," and decide for themselves if the observations recorded there are of any utility in the structural integrity of their lives. Because in the final analysis, this is the only measure of revelation: Does it work? Does it do you any good? What effect, if any, does it have on your life? All else is argument. Science, with all its power, is leading us back to our beginnings: choice, belief and adherence.

The brain is a receiving vessel for the spiritual influx that enlivens us and makes us human. Or it is not. Swedenborg's revelation enhances our lives by explaining the interaction of the spiritual and natural worlds, the soul and body. Or it does not. Swedenborg heard the answer to his prayer to understand the cosmos. Or he was schizophrenic. He received his revelation from the Lord Himself in authentic spiritual experience, and recorded it for the world in the thirty life-changing volumes we call the Writings for the New Church. Or he had temporal lobe seizures. You decide. With all the science and religion we can bring to bear on this problem, you are still on your own. This is the good news of spiritual freedom, at work in this most important issue.

We must acknowledge that there will always be two ideological "camps" concerning the nature of transcendence. All the reasoned arguments of the ages have not changed this fact, nor will they ever change it, because what determines these camps is not fact, but faith. Both arguments, even those of the most scientifically inclined, are based on articles of faith. And faith rests not on argument, but on belief. This is not a bad thing. It is a very good thing—an essential thing in fact, if the human mind (be it spiritual or natural) is to operate in freedom.

The presence of spiritual influx that is presented to our consciousness by interaction with a natural neural structure cannot be proved. But neither can it be disproved, by all the power that science can muster. Membership in a camp is a matter of choice, made in freedom, from a philosophical base. It could be no other way, for

A person's free will depends on his feeling life as his own; and God permits this for the sake of communion, which must be reciprocal; and it becomes so when the person acts in complete freedom. If God deprived him of this feeling, he would no longer be a human being, nor have eternal life; for communion with God raises man above the beasts, and gives him eternal life. This is the effect of free will in spiritual things.⁹

⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion* n. 504, as n. 893 of *Everyman's Library* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1933).

The arguments will continue, and likely should, because they sharpen our minds and more clearly define our beliefs.

With these things said, the urgency to prove or disprove “revelation” as visionary experience, hallucination, or just the brain’s electrical activity disappears. The best each of us can do is address the problem as clearly as possible, choose our religion, and live with our decision. □

