

“A future interpreter will conclude that Swedenborg [*sic*] is an idealist”¹:

Kant’s Long Shadow on the Interpretation of Swedenborg

ABSTRACT

Among the readers of Swedenborg, the Swedish thinker’s ‘theory of correspondences’ is often interpreted as treating empirical realities as only imperfect manifestations of spiritual realities. After showing the genesis of Swedenborg’s theory together with an overview of this interpretative tradition that assumes Swedenborg to be either a modern Neoplatonist (e.g. Lamm 1915, Benz 1948) or a thinker committed to no particular philosophical school (Duner 2013), but in either case, endorsing (two-worlds) idealism, the paper will show that the roots of this tradition are Kant’s *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766). As few scholars (e.g. Hanegraaff 2004, Johnson 2010) have recently pointed out, Swedenborg, like Kant, thinks that *all* our cognitive abilities operate in time and space, i.e. in the empirical world, but for Swedenborg, as opposed to Kant, this does not imply that we cannot come to know the spiritual world. According to these scholars, Swedenborg thinks that such knowledge can only be acquired mystically, which would render him an idealist, just as Kant claimed. However, this paper attempts to show that Swedenborg should not be straightforwardly interpreted as a two-worlds idealist, because he devised his theory of correspondences in order to avoid such idealism. The paper claims that mystical experience is not the only or even the default way of coming to know the spiritual world according to Swedenborg. The paper argues that when positing that every empirical and spiritual reality ‘corresponds’ with one another, he means that human cognitions and even sensations (e.g. feeling of warmth) can be both spiritual in the sense of realising spiritual states (e.g. love), and empirical by occurring in time and space. Thus, by cognising or sensing something in the empirical world, we also realise something in the spiritual world, even if we were not aware of this. This element of Swedenborg’s theory according to which the spiritual world is realised in the empirical world, although it is greater than the empirical world insofar as it is infinite and the empirical world finite, distances him from idealism and brings him closer to pantheism. Although Kant might disagree, as in 1780s he extended his conception of idealism to include *all* philosophy other than his own, taking his road would make idealism an uninformative concept for an

¹ Kant, Immanuel, Gregory R. Johnson (tr.), *Dreams of A Spirit Seer and Other Writings*, West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002, TG AA 2:364.

interpreter of Swedenborg and apt to be replaced by ‘enthusiasm’, the term that Kant used to describe those with whom he disagreed.

1. FROM THE THEORY OF CORRESPONDENCES TO KANT’S INTERPRETATION

As a result of a dream that he had in Easter night 1744, Swedish scientist Emanuel Swedenborg, who had had a long-term ambition of empirically demonstrating the physical location of the soul in the body, decided to abandon the “empty vessel” of the empirical science one and for all.² By the time of this dream, Swedenborg’s investigations had led him to a hypothesis that the mind of God enlivens a human being by ‘flowing in’ (*influerere*) to a certain material substance, *fluidum spirituosum*, which is identical to the soul (*anima*), and which is located in the cerebral cortex, where the activity of soul constitutes the human mind (*mens*).³ Thus specified, the empirical ‘flow’ of *fluidum spirituosum* in the cortex can be said to *correspond* (*correspondere*) to the experience of conscious thinking.⁴ However, due to the inadequacy of the scientific instruments of his time, Swedenborg had been unable to gather any empirical evidence for this very radical, forward-looking hypothesis - a hypothesis that has inspired for example Charles Gross, one of the founders of cognitive neuroscience, to honour him as “a neuroscientist before his time”.⁵

The Easter night dream offered a way out from this situation for Swedenborg: the mystical visions that he experienced during it made him convinced that since God, who wants humans to always educate themselves, has not permitted science to have access to the physical facts behind the soul, for sure He has given us *another* mode of access. Around the time of the dream, Swedenborg had already logical space reserved for such a mystical possibility: in a treatise called *Clavis Hieroglyphica* he makes a claim that there are not only two, but “three aspects” of reality that correspond to one another: “empirical nature (*natura*), the human mind (*mens humana*), the divine mind (*mens divina*), or God”.⁶ In this scheme, *anima* is combined with *mens*, and a correspondence between the human and the divine mind is

² Berquist, Lars (ed.), Hallengren Lars (tr.), *Swedenborg’s Dream Diary*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2013.

§ 277 Cf. Berquist, Lars, *Swedenborg’s Secret*. London: Swedenborg Society, 2005, pp. 182-3.

³ Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Oeconomica Regni Animalis II*, cf. Jonsson, Inge. *Visionary Scientist*, West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2019 (Kindle ebook), loc. 1271.

⁴ Swedenborg, Ibid., Cf. Gross, Charles. “Emanuel Swedenborg: A Neuroscientist Before His Time”. *The Neuroscientist* 3, 1997, pp. 142-7.

⁵ Gross, Ibid.

⁶ Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Clavis Hieroglyphica* (abb. CH), Example (Ex.) 1, Proposition (P) 3.

introduced as a layer that complements the correspondence between the cortical activity and conscious thinking.

The assumed correspondence between the human and divine minds enabled Swedenborg to begin treating the Bible mystically, that is, not as a chronicle of historical events, moralistic fables or causal explanations, but as the divine mind's mode of transmitting empirically undiscoverable facts about "our inner self", or human mind, and about itself, by means of a language of metaphors, allusions and parables that correspond with those facts. Apart from his personal experiences, the veracity of this approach, thinks Swedenborg, is confirmed by the fact that without it, certain parts of the bible would seem immoral, for example, when God encouraged Abraham to kill his son.⁷ In order to decipher the *arcana* of the Bible and convert its apparent immoralities into psychological teachings, Swedenborg ventured to analyse original, Hebrew text with the basic assumption that it needs to be decoded in the light of the Christ's message of overcoming the self-directed sensuous desires that characterise "the outer man", of which anyone is conscious without any cognitive effort, with understanding that comes only with a sustained attempt to penetrate beyond the world of immediate sense impressions to the principles of the inner self. According to *Arcana Coelestia*, Swedenborg's eight-volume exegesis of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, published between 1749-56, this systematic approach enabled him to learn that the story of creation is, factually, an account of the development of a human soul from the state of "stupidity and ignorance" through six cognitive steps, during each of which our "will" becomes more and more governed by the "understanding".⁸ In the final state of the development of the soul, that of harmony between "will and understanding" everything that one does is for the good of other humans.⁹ When read in the light of this *arcanum*, for example, the story of Abraham and Isaac becomes an account of "severest and inmost temptations" (symbolised by the command to kill) attempting to overcome one's rationality (symbolised by Isaac): by eventually resisting those temptations, Abraham reached the state of moral perfection.¹⁰

Among the interpreters of Swedenborg, regardless of whether their focus is on his scientific works or in the mystical ones that succeeded them, the theory of correspondences has been often regarded as an intellectual tool that enabled him to transition from a natural scientist's disenchanted and mechanistic conception of the world to mysticism without sacrificing the coherence of his thought: in Swedenborg's new worldview, the empirical reality does not become re-enchanted, but treated as a 'reflection' the

⁷ Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Arcana Coelestia* (AC), §2765.

⁸ AC §30.

⁹ AC §35.

¹⁰ AC §2786 ff.

ideas of the higher, spiritual reality. Most interpreters have traditionally used the label “Neoplatonism” in describing it: According to James Malin, Swedenborg’s mystical work was a manifestation of “Neoplatonism as carried over from his science”.¹¹ Earlier, Signe Toksvig made a similar point by claiming that he “was concerned with harmonizing his scientific conscience and his religious yearning, and with the aid of Neoplatonism he was able to sketch out a system, a picture of the whole, which began to fulfill this purpose.”¹² Even earlier, Ernst Benz concluded that “the historical prototype of [the theory of correspondences] is ancient Neoplatonism”¹³, echoing Martin Lamm, who had concluded in his 1915 biography on Swedenborg that “the doctrine of correspondences owes its origin to Neoplatonism.”¹⁴

On one hand, it is not difficult to find reasons for the prominence of this line of interpretation. Some claims of Swedenborg can easily appear as Neoplatonic. For example, although the divine mind corresponds with our every mental reality, the materiality of our soul - that it is realised by the ‘flows’ of *fluidum spiritosum* in our cortices - prevents it from being one with the divine mind, which, unlike our mind, is not vulnerable to decay and corruption that defines the material world. Thus, in *Clavis Hieroglyphica*, Swedenborg claims that our conscious experiences are only imperfect “simulacra” of the spiritual realities and in *Arcana Coelestia*, he presents a metaphor of two suns, the “spiritual sun” being God’s love that enables the “earthly sun” to lighten the aspects of empirical reality to us, which would otherwise lie in darkness and be unintelligible for the human mind.¹⁵ In his later works, he also speaks of “New Jerusalem”, an ideal society based on mutual charity, and organised according to a specific “heavenly doctrine”, which our earthly communities should approximate¹⁶, i.e., an ‘idea’ of the city.

On the other hand, even in his clearly mystical works, Swedenborg never refers to Neoplatonic authors,¹⁷ Nor is there any evidence that he ever seriously studied Neoplatonist thinkers such as Plotinus,

¹¹ Malin, James C., “Emanuel Swedenborg and His Clothes Philosophy”. *Scandinavian Studies* 33, no. 2, 1961, p. 52.

¹² Toksvig, Signe, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Scientist and Mystic*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948, p. 113.

¹³ Benz, Ernst; Goodrick-Clarke, Nicolas (tr.) *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002 (ebook), p. 902.

¹⁴ Lamm, Martin, *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Development of his Thought*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000 (ebook), p. 285.

¹⁵ CH §67, AC §3862: cf. e.g. DL§84.

¹⁶ Swedenborg, Emanuel, *De nova Hierosolyma*, §7.

¹⁷ Although there is evidence that Swedenborg had anonymous Neoplatonic, pseudo-Aristotelian *Theologia Aristotelis* in his library, and he quotes it once in CH (however, referring to Aristotle), Inge Jonsson (in *A Drama of Creation*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2014, p. 31) argues that the importance of this single book to his philosophy should not be exaggerated.

Paracelsus or Böehme in any detail, the latter of whom he even denied having read in his 1766 letter to a German theologian C. H. Oettinger. In the same letter, he moreover claims that “spiritual knowledge that is revealed to this day can be rationally learned and naturally understood”.¹⁸ This view that implies that for Swedenborg, our current inability to empirically explain the operations of human soul and its interaction with the divine can be overcome in the future, would be unacceptable for a Neoplatonist, for whom the world of ideas is beyond natural cosmos (*physis*), and only accessible to pure intellection (*noesis*). The scarcity of sources together with his willingness to contradict Neoplatonic core doctrines, gives us a valid reason to think, as David Duner has suggested, that although mystical Swedenborg might have developed some conceptions that may easily “seem Neoplatonic”,¹⁹ it is no less possible that his theory of correspondences came only “from his own human cerebrum in its encounter with the world,”²⁰ and that its association with Neoplatonism may only be due to the interpreters reading Neoplatonism *in* his passages.²¹ Also Wouter Hanegraaff, has questioned associating Swedenborg with Neoplatonism, and argued that he came to endorse Neoplatonic-looking hierarchy of correspondences, “somewhat ambiguously and half-heartedly”²² as a result of his dreams, because *as such*, the theory of correspondences does not imply that the empirical aspect of reality is an imperfect simulacrum of the spiritual aspect.

As an alternative to the Neoplatonist interpretation, Hanegraaff has suggested that although Swedenborg thinks that the empirical and spiritual worlds are distinct, he also thinks that with some divine help, we have the potential to cognise the both worlds with the same set of cognitive abilities: no *noesis* is needed. As the Swedish thinker writes, “Nature has two basic properties: space and time [...] we use them to create all the concepts of our thinking and therefore the way we understand things”, but “once we *know* how to raise our minds above appearances derived from space and time, we pass from darkness into light and taste things spiritual and divine.”²³ However, this *arcana* is given by God only to exceedingly few people, such as to Swedenborg himself.²⁴ Likewise, Gregory Johnson has argued that Swedenborg “departs from Platonism and Neoplatonism” insofar as he thinks that we conceive both empirical and spiritual worlds by means of the “ideas” of space and time, and thus even Swedenborg

¹⁸Hitchcock, E. A., *Swedenborg: The Hermetic Philosopher*. New York: Appleton, 1858, p. 118.

¹⁹ Duner, David, *The Natural Philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2013, (ebook), p. 1374

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 83

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *Swedenborg, Oettinger, Kant*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2007, p. 10.

²³ Swedenborg, Emanuel, Dole, Jonathan (tr.), Johnson, Gregory (introduction), *Divine Love and Wisdom* (DL). West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003, §69.

²⁴ Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *Swedenborg, Oettinger, Kant*, pp. 104-5.

himself can only experience the spiritual world through the empirical realities (such as images that appear in his dreams) that mediate information about its various aspects in virtue of imperfectly manifesting the spiritual realities.²⁵ On Johnson's account, Swedenborg is thus a non-Platonic idealist, for whom the ideas of space and time are *a priori* conditions of the possibility for experience, and thus, only by means of his theory of correspondences he can come to know about the spiritual realities that lie behind the empirical ones - that is, *pace* the Platonists, there is no *noesis* that would allow him to see the spiritual world as it is.

As the above overview of interpretations shows, the scholarly debate around Swedenborg's theory of correspondences is concentrated on asking whether the Swedish thinker's theory is Neoplatonic or 'only' idealist. However, it has not been asked, *what*, given far from conclusive evidence, has made so many interpreters to think that two-worlds idealism must be the only or at least the most plausible way to understand the relationship between the spiritual and empirical worlds in Swedenborg. I would like to suggest that the main culprit here is Kant, who was the first to label the Swedish thinker as an 'idealist.'

Acknowledging that Kant's account of Swedenborg's theory of correspondences in the *Dreams of the Spirit-Seer*, published in 1766, has had enormous influence to the non-Neoplatonic interpreters of Swedenborg is not controversial: for example, both Hanegraaff and Johanson refer to Kant in their interpretations of Swedenborg: Hanegraaff thinks that the main difference between the two thinkers is that Kant considered us unable to cognise *anything* about the non-empirical world and Johnson that although critical Kant came to endorse Swedenborg's conception of space and time as the conditions of the possibility of experience, he rejected his idealist thesis that these entities exist outside our minds as self-sufficient "ideas".²⁶ No doubt, the striking similarities between some of Swedenborg's passages and Kant's transcendental idealism, together with the philosophical prestige that Kant's critical project eventually achieved, can appear as flattering to Swedenborg: had the Swedish thinker not been a 'great philosopher', a surely Kant would not have appropriated his theory of correspondences for the purpose of building his own critical philosophy. Thus, there is a certain temptation among the readers of Swedenborg to also take Kant's conclusion about Swedenborg's two-worlds idealism at face value. However, in what follows, I shall show that in the *Dreams*, Kant misinterprets Swedenborg's theory of correspondences.

²⁵ Johnson, Gregory, "Introduction" in DL, p. 22, cf. DL § 69.

²⁶ Johnson, Ibid.

2. FROM KANT'S INTERPRETATION TO A MORE BALANCED READING

Given its influence, it might be surprising to observe that Kant's interpretation of Swedenborg's theory of correspondences in the *Dreams* is rather brief, only a couple of pages long. The first part of the *Dreams* concentrates on criticising Leibniz and Wolff's rationalist metaphysics on account of its assumption that rational speculation can lead us to discover truths that cannot be found by means of empirical observation. For Kant, this assumption, which treats one's subjective thinking as a source of objective truths is a root of all sorts of enthusiasm, bigotry and fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) and should be abandoned and replaced with the assumption that all truth-claims are to be based on evidence that is intersubjectively accessible, i.e. on empirical evidence.²⁷ The second part, in which Swedenborg appears, describes him as a "spirit-seer", i.e. a person who can receive truths that are inaccessible to empirical observation not through reasoning, but through mystical visions. This way of thinking Kant compares with the previous one, and claims that there is no essential difference between Swedenborg's "delusions of senses" - i.e. his fantastic interpretation of the Bible in *Arcana Coelestia* - and the rationalist philosophers' "delusions of reason".²⁸ Before engaging with the theory of correspondences, Kant also makes a detour to second-hand claims about Swedenborg's clairvoyant abilities (which have no basis in the Swedish thinker's writings).

Kant's interpretation of Swedenborg's theory of correspondences begins from a declaration that "a chief concept of Schwedenberg's (*sic*)²⁹ vision is this: corporeal beings have no substance of their own but exist only through the spirit world, although each body exists not through one spirit alone but through all taken together."³⁰ For Kant, all empirical realities in Swedenborg are manifestations of the spiritual world as a whole. However, why this must be so is "unknown to human beings" and "it is this" Kant writes, "that Schwedenberg, whose inmost soul is opened up, wishes to make known to man"³¹ by means of his theory of correspondences. According to Kant, this theory proposes that although empirical realities are "merely symbols", or "husk" for the higher, spiritual realities that constitute "the kernel of their value", they "nevertheless cause such a clear and enduring deception of the senses that it is the same

²⁷ Cf. e.g. TG 2:333: "It would be splendid if such a systematic constitution of the spirit world as we presented it [i.e. that there are immaterial spirits or souls] could be inferred or only supposed with some probability, not merely from the concept of spiritual nature as such, which is far too hypothetical, but from a real and universally acknowledged observation."

²⁸ TG 2:361.

²⁹ It is unclear why Kant writes the name in this way. After all, on the title page of *Arcana Coelestia*, it is written Emanuel Swedenborg, and Kant claims to have read and acquired this whole work.

³⁰ TG 2:364.

³¹ *Ibid.* However, Swedenborg did not have a concept of "an inmost soul".

as the genuine sensation of such objects.”³² That is, one has to have the ability to transcend empirical mode of perception (like Swedenborg himself) to *see* that empirical realities are *only* symbols for certain spiritual realities (e.g. the sensation of warmth corresponds divine love, as he claims³³), and *nothing* in themselves. As for the conclusion of his reading, Kant states, “a future interpreter will conclude from this that Schwedenberg [*sic*] is an *idealist*, since he denies the matter of this world its own subsistence, and he thus might regard it merely as a coherent vision springing from the connection to the spirit world.”³⁴

This is the interpretation from which all the interpretations of Swedenborg discussed in the previous parts originate. We might want to compare it with what Swedenborg actually writes about correspondences. First, it has been mentioned already that correspondences have three layers, one between the empirical realities, the human mind, and the divine mind. By speaking of the whole of spiritual (*geistliche*) realities, Kant could mean human and divine minds taken together, which he then contrasts with the empirical realities. When taken in this way, merely empirical realities may indeed appear to have no ‘value’. In this sense, e.g. the cortex and *fluidum spiritosum* that flows inside its fibres can be regarded as a perceptible ‘symbol’ for human soul (*anima*) and mind, or, as Swedenborg writes: “[empirical] nature has been created simply for clothing the spiritual (*spiritosum*) and for presenting it”.³⁵ However, by failing to clearly separate the human and the divine minds, Kant misleads his readers, because Swedenborg also thinks that among the two spiritual realities, at least the human mind, the instrument of our striving (*conatus*), is “dead” if separated from the empirical realities: “So long as [empirical] motion lasts, so long does *conatus* last, for *conatus* is the motive force of nature, although *conatus* alone is a dead force.”³⁶ In other words, the empirical realities are not *merely* symbols, but preconditions for the realization of the mental realities. Already this Swedeinborg’s position can contradict Kant’s idealist interpretation, by making *one* aspect of spiritual reality, conscious thinking, subsistent upon “the matter of this world”.

However, if Kant, like a significant part of subsequent readers, meant only one aspect of Swedenborg’s spiritual reality, the divine mind, by the term “spiritual reality” (although this reading would make it unclear why Kant referred to the whole of this reality), then his interpretation could be still valid. Evidently, Swedenborg thought that the divine mind is the source of the *conatus* of the human

³² Ibid.

³³ DL § 3-4.

³⁴ TG 2:364.

³⁵ Swedenborg, Emanuel, *De Caelo*, § 102.

³⁶ CH, Ex. 1, P 1.

mind, because otherwise he would not need to have considered its inflow to the cortex necessary to enliven us.³⁷ Indeed, if anything, this Swedenborg's view constitutes the strongest available evidence for his idealism, i.e. that everything empirical ultimately subsists upon spiritual reality. However, whether or not this evidence and Kant's interpretation turns out to be convincing in the end depends entirely on Swedenborg's conception of the 'divine mind', i.e. whether this mind is realised or only reflected in the empirical reality. According to him, its defining feature is that unlike the human mind, it does not presuppose spatio-temporal, that is, material extension.³⁸ Unlimited by space and time, the divine mind is thus *infinita*.³⁹ This concept is usually translated as 'infinite', but a more appropriate translation would be 'limitless', because for Swedenborg, *infinita* does not mean only infinitely divisible, but *what contains everything*. Since everything has a cause, 'the infinite' (*infinito*) is therefore "the first cause of the finite".⁴⁰

Thus far, Swedenborg's claim may seem close to Leibniz and Wolff and in line with the idealist metaphysics in their pursuit of showing the subsistence of the empirical upon the spiritual. However, Swedenborg adds that in virtue of containing everything, the infinite must also contain its own cause, and be a "*causa sui*."⁴¹ This view is no longer in line with the said idealists, because they held that if the spiritual world (i.e. God) is not uncaused, it is not necessary to separate it from the empirical world any more - a 'Spinozist' conception that can justify reducing the spiritual to the empirical.⁴² Swedenborg does not seem to believe in this threat, however, because for him, the distinction between the "created", or empirical, reality and the "uncreated" - and henceforth, as he believes, self-caused (i.e. not uncaused) - spiritual reality is sufficient to maintain a conceptual distinction between the two types of realities.⁴³

Swedenborg's definition of infinity as limitlessness and God as *causa sui* allows him to treat the totality of the empirical reality as being contained in the spiritual one. We have seen Hanegraaff and Johnson, and Kant, to suggest that the only way to come to know God is through mystical experience and

³⁷ DL § 340.

³⁸"[God] is not matter, but essence; whose being is life; whose life is wisdom; and whose wisdom consists in containing the ends to be promoted by the determinations of matter and the forms of nature." *Oeconomica Regni Animalis II* §311.

³⁹ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *De infinito*, Dresden: Fredric Hekell, 1734, 35.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid. This has been noticed also by Francesca Maria Crasta (in *La filosofia della natura di Emanuel Swedenborg*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1999, p. 143) and David Dunder (in *The Natural Philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg*, p. 279).

⁴² See Morrison, James C. "Christian Wolff's Criticisms of Spinoza", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31, no. 3, 1993, p. 412-414.

⁴³ See DL §3 that posits the difference in the terms created vs uncreated. Cf. Garrett, Aaron V., *Meaning in Spinoza's Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.163 that attributes a similar distinction to Spinoza

although support for this claim can be found from Swedenborg's writings, Kant mistakes in regarding this as the *only* possible way to cognise the divine. Provided that the empirical reality is in God, there can be also another, more accessible way to know the spiritual reality. The theory of correspondences is meant to show way for this sort of cognition. Often one sees Swedenborg's theory being associated with Leibniz and Wolff's theory of pre-established harmony. However, Leibniz and Wolff did not problematize the relationship between the divine mind and the human mind, because they regarded both as immaterial and the latter modelled according to the former; rather, they were concerned about the relationship between the mind and material, or, 'mindless' bodies. The theory of pre-established harmony describes this relationship as parallel flows: there is no interaction between the mind and matter, rather, they are created in such a way by God that they co-occur (*correspondre*) with one another. However, Swedenborg criticises this theory as being extrapolated from mathematics and lacking any connection with empirical reality.⁴⁴

As an illustration of his own, alternative conception of correspondence, in *Clavis Hieroglyphica* Swedenborg presents a proposition that "as the world is to man so man is to God".⁴⁵ That is, in the same way as he thinks as a scientist, that the flows of *fluidum spiritosum* inside the cortex realise the human mind, he thinks that our limited sensations and cognition realise the divine mind. In *Divine Wisdom*, Swedenborg expresses this though as follows: "Divinity is the same in the largest and smallest things. This follows from [...] Divinity [on account of its limitlessness] being non-spatially realised in all space and non-temporally realised in all time."⁴⁶ Instead of Leibniz and Wolff's co-occurrence, Swedenborgian correspondence is a logical relationship in which two distinct realities are completely realised as one occurrence. The Swedish thinker suggests that such co-realisation can be empirically perceived through, for example, the phenomena of "warmth" and "love". As a matter of fact, we can sense only warmth, but love, which is the state of divine mind, is nevertheless realised in our sensation, which allows us to describe our state in the terms of spiritual language, and say that we "feel love" (and vice versa when God loves us, his love is realised in our sensation of warmth).⁴⁷ However, in our ignorant natural state, we can be unconscious of these correspondences (just as we are ignorant of the fact that cortical events realise our mental states or that our soul is material). That is why Swedenborg emphasized in *Arcana Coelestia* that we must learn to recognise them by developing "understanding". Acquiring understanding (to which, he

⁴⁴ Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Opuscula*, pp. 91–122.

⁴⁵ CH, Ex. 6, P 1, Rule.

⁴⁶ DL §77.

⁴⁷ DL §3-4.

believes, some are more naturally disposed than others)⁴⁸ will enable us to acknowledge that God realises itself in everything that we experience and that our sensations are hence only a shell for divinity in us.⁴⁹

Swedenborg's theory of correspondences, which permit us to regard our cognitive apparatus that operates in time and space as able to cognise spiritual realities that are realised in empirical occurrences, can now seem to be closer to Spinozism than idealism. However, although agreeing with Spinozist conception of God as *causa sui* and what contains everything, the Swedish thinker disagrees with a "crazy thought" (whom Bayle had influentially associated with Spinoza, but which most probably originates from Socinians)⁵⁰ that God exists in time, which supposedly renders *causa sui* an efficient cause, implying that God has some "beginning" in itself, which, Swedenborg thinks, would prevent God from being limitless, but rather equate God with the empirical world.⁵¹ In the light of this criticism, Swedenborg's own *causa sui* must be, then, a formal cause: God causing its own form, which is everything, that is, spiritual and empirical as one. In this case, the theory of correspondence would entail that all sensible occurrences are the realisations of this one form - not 'only' imperfect manifestations, as an idealist might claim. Since the empirical world is, however, finite, and God is limitless, the divine mind is greater than the empirical world: it is only partially realised by the empirical phenomena. Thus, Swedenborg's theory of correspondences is neither a pantheistic, but a more appropriate adjective for it would be panentheistic.

By now, it should be clear that Swedenborg's theory of correspondence does not represent the kind of idealism that claims that empirical realities are only imperfect manifestations of spiritual realities, which can be perceived only mystically, although this is how a large proportion of the readers of Swedenborg conceive it, thus following Kant's interpretation of this theory in the *Dreams*. Rather, thanks to correspondences, spiritual realities, or God, can also be cognised through the perception of empirical realities. However, although pre-critical Kant's interpretation is thus quite one-sided and mistaken, it needs to be acknowledged that Swedenborg's panentheistic thinking would nevertheless fall under what *critical* Kant calls idealism. For according to his 1780s note, titled "On Philosophical

⁴⁸ DL §78 "The person may be different, but Divinity within the person is not. [...] A wise person is a more adequate receiver of divine love and wisdom than a simple one, and therefore a fuller receiver."

⁴⁹ *De nova Hierosolyma* §36: "We are created in such a way that we exist in the spiritual world [i.e. in God] and the empirical world simultaneously. And because that is how we are created, we are given an inner nature that allows us to be in the spiritual world, and an outer nature that allows us to be in the empirical world."

⁵⁰ See Ogonowski, *Leibniz and Socinianism*,

⁵¹ DL, §76.

Enthusiasm”, any theoretical construction that promises us to be able to know what we cannot know (but only postulate according to him), i.e. that something supersensible exists, has its roots in Platonism, and includes virtually all philosophy before Kant’s own critical philosophy.⁵² However, an interpreter of Swedenborg would not achieve much by using this conception of idealism, because it would make idealism such a broad category of philosophy that it would be no longer informative. Moreover, Kant himself considers this broadly defined idealism equivalent to philosophical enthusiasm (*Schärmerei*), and not essentially different from religious fanaticism, an assumption that would not be a charitable starting point for reading Swedenborg. However, from another angle, the figure of Swedenborg may serve as a demonstration for Kant’s critical approach: Swedenborg shows that the difference between idealism and Spinozism can be very small indeed.

⁵²AA 18:434-7.