

From Swedenborg's Spiritual World to Kant's Kingdom of Ends*

Gregory R. Johnson

Ph.D. in philosophy, Catholic University of America, Washinton D.C.

Abstract

Von der geistigen Welt Swedenborgs zu Kants Reich der Zwecke

In diesem Beitrag wird die These aufgestellt, dass Immanuel Kants Konzept des "Reiches der Zwecke" von Emanuel Swedenborgs Konzept der geistigen Welt abgeleitet ist, welches Swedenborg in seinem Werk *Arcana Coelestia* ("Geheimnisse des Himmels", 1749–1756) ebenfalls als "Reich der Zwecke" (*regnum finium*) beschreibt. Der Artikel argumentiert, dass Kant Swedenborgs *Arcana Coelestia* kurz nach 1760 gelesen hat und dass die Konzeption der geistigen Welt, wie Kant sie in seiner Abhandlung *Träume eines Geistersehers* von 1766 vorstellt, von Swedenborg abhängig ist. Nimmt man ferner zu Kants veröffentlichten Werken Notizen von Studenten zu seinen Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Ethik hinzu, zeigt sich im Hinblick auf die geistige Welt eine direkte Linie von den *Träumen eines Geistersehers* zur *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* von 1785, in der erstmals der Ausdruck "Reich der Zwecke" im Druck erscheint.

Keywords

Emanuel Swedenborg; Immanuel Kant; Kingdom of Ends; Spiritual World; Ethics

1. The Idea of the "Kingdom of Ends"

In his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*) (1785), Kant offers three formulations of the ultimate principle of morality, which he calls the Categorical Imperative. He claims that these three formulations are merely different ways of representing the same moral law.¹

¹ This text was originally written for the International Kant-Swedenborg Workshop organized by the *Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für Erforschung der Europäischen Aufklärung*, Forschergruppe "Die Aufklärung im Bezugfeld neuzeitlicher Esoterik", Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 29–30 August 2006.

¹ Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:436; Beck, 53.

First is the “universal law” formulation: ‘Act only according to that maxim by which you at the same time can will that it should become a universal law’.² Kant rephrases the universal law formula as follows: ‘Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature’.³ Kant also speaks of testing the coherence of one’s maxim with reference to a ‘system of nature’.⁴

It is important to understand what Kant means by a “law” and how laws relate to “nature”. Kant claims that ‘Nature, in the widest sense of the word, is the existence of things under laws’.⁵ He also specifies that these laws are universal: ‘The universality of law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form) ...’.⁶ Nature, then, is more than just a collection of things, it is an *orderly* collection of things—a cosmos, not a chaos—and the principle of order consists of universal laws, laws that apply to all beings within the system.⁷ Thus acting upon maxims which can at the same time be willed as universal laws of nature means making ourselves citizens of the moral community, which derives its nature from the moral laws that constitute and govern it.⁸

Second, the Categorical Imperative bids us to: ‘Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, always as an end and never as a means only’.⁹ Kant claims that the second formulation emphasizes

²) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:421; Beck, 38.

³) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:421; Beck, 38.

⁴) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:422; Beck, 39.

⁵) Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, AK 5:43; Beck, 44. Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A216/B263, A418/B446, A693/B721; and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, AK 4:294.

⁶) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:421; Beck, 38.

⁷) Any beings not falling under the constitutive laws of a realm would be, *ipso facto*, outside that realm.

⁸) If the categorical imperative commands communal membership, and if communities are governed by universal laws, then even if we do not know what precisely those laws are, we do know one thing: those maxims which cannot at the same time be willed as universal laws of nature (common laws of community) cannot be in accordance with morality. This is the meaning of Kant’s universalizability criterion.

⁹) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:429; Beck, 46. In a manuscript *Reflexion* written in Dresden in 1817, Schopenhauer compares Kant’s second formulation of the Categorical Imperative with Swedenborg: ‘In the *Vera christiana religio* [*True Christian Religion*] §400 Swedenborg says that “the egoistical man with his bodily eyes certainly sees the rest as men, but with his spiritual eyes he sees as men only himself and his relations, whilst the rest he sees only as masks”. According to their innermost meaning, these words are the same as Kant’s precept that “we should never consider other merely as means but as ends in themselves”. But how differently expressed is the idea; how vivid, sharp and to the point, graphic and immediately

what he calls the “matter” of the first, i.e., the nature of the citizens of the moral realm: rational, free, and responsible beings; persons possessing dignity; beings who are ends in themselves and worthy of respect.

Third is the “autonomous legislator” formulation. It is here that Kant brings together the first formulation, which deals with universal laws which are the form of the moral community, and the second formulation, which deals with the “matter” of the moral community, namely beings that are ends in themselves. Free beings can be subject to laws only if the laws are those they would freely impose upon themselves. It is here that the idea of the “kingdom of ends” (*Reich der Zwecke*) makes its first explicit appearance:

The third practical principle of the will [is] the supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, viz. the Idea of *the will of every rational being as making universal law*.

By this principle all maxims are rejected which are not consistent with the will’s giving universal law. The will is not only subject to the law, but subject in such a way that it must be conceived also as *itself legislating* the laws, of which reason can hold itself to be the author; it is on this ground alone that the will can be regarded as subject to the law.¹⁰

Kant glosses this formula as follows: ‘Every rational being must act as if by his maxims he were at all times a legislative member of a universal kingdom of ends’.¹¹ Kant describes the kingdom of ends as follows:

The concept of any rational being as a being that must regard itself as giving universal law through all the maxims of its will, so that it may judge itself and its actions from this standpoint, leads to a very fruitful concept, namely that of a *kingdom of ends*.

By *kingdom* I understand the systematic union of different rational beings through common laws. Because laws determine which ends have universal validity, if we abstract from personal differences of rational beings, and thus from all content of their private purposes, we can think of a totality of all ends in systematic connection, a totality of rational beings as ends in themselves as well as a totality of particular purposes which each may serve for himself. This is a kingdom of ends, which is possible on the principles stated above.

adequate are the words of Swedenborg (whose manner and way of thinking I do not usually find enjoyable), and how indirect, abstract and expressed through derived connotation are the words of Kant!’ (Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains*, vol. 1, 521).

¹⁰) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:431; Beck, 48.

¹¹) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:438; Beck, 55.

For all rational beings stand under the law that each of them should treat himself and all others *never merely as means*, but in every case *also as an end in himself*. Thus there arises a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws. This is a realm which may be called a kingdom of ends (surely only an ideal) because what these laws have in view is just the relation of these beings to each other as ends and means.¹²

Kant also speaks of the kingdom of ends as a “world of rational beings” and as an “intelligible world” (*mundus intelligibilis*).¹³

What does Kant mean when he says that the kingdom of ends is ‘surely only an ideal’ (*freilich nur ein Ideal*)? The kingdom of ends is ideal in the sense that it can serve as a regulative principle for guiding our actions in the phenomenal realm. But it is more than a mere principle, because Kant also believed that it had a transcendent or noumenal reality. My argument for this is simple. The kingdom of ends consists of moral persons—i.e., free and rational beings—related to one another by moral laws. Kant believed that human freedom is real. Freedom cannot, however, be observed in the phenomenal realm, which is subject to determinism. Thus we are entitled to conclude that freedom is a noumenal feature of human beings. Since Kant believed in the noumenal reality of moral persons, and the kingdom of ends just is these moral persons, as a systematic unity, Kant believed in the noumenal reality of the kingdom of ends.¹⁴

2. The Origin of the Kingdom of Ends

The kingdom of ends is clearly an important concept of Kant’s moral philosophy. Its historical origins are, however, are not well understood. According to R. Wimmer’s article in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, the idea expressed by the phrase “kingdom of ends” has many known historical parallels and precursors, from Plato and Augustine to Luther and Leibniz:

¹²) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:433; Beck, 50.

¹³) Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:438; Beck, 55.

¹⁴) A skeptic might argue that I have established that Kant believed in the reality of only half of the kingdom of ends, namely the moral persons who compose it, but not of the other half, namely the moral laws that constitute and govern it. This objection takes us into the question of the status of the moral law for Kant. I would argue that if moral persons have a noumenal reality, then *ipso facto*, the moral law does as well, on the grounds that a plurality of moral persons, absent any countervailing factors, must exist in some sort of order, and the order that prevails among moral persons would be precisely a moral order.

Kant's conception of a kingdom of ends is in part, as he himself explicitly remarks, connected in many ways with philosophical and theological topics in the tradition: philosophically with Plato's ideal of a perfect republic, with the ancient doctrine of the highest good and its adoption into the Stoic conception of a lawful or ethical cosmopolitanism; theologically with the New Testament and medieval chiliastic concept of the kingdom of God in union with the Augustinian concept of the city of God and the Lutheran two cities doctrine.

Kant's opposition between the kingdom of ends and the kingdom of nature can be read as a philosophically rationalized formulation of the primarily theologically motivated pair of concepts "kingdom of grace/kingdom of nature".¹⁵

One should also add Rousseau's account of an ideal republic in *On the Social Contract* to this list.¹⁶ However, no instance of the actual phrase "kingdom of ends" prior to Kant is given, leaving one with the impression that the phrase is original to Kant.

I have, however, noticed that the Latin equivalent of *Reich der Zwecke*, "*regnum finium*", occurs in the following five passages of the *Heavenly Secrets* (*Arcana Coelestia*, 8 vols., 1749–1756) of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), the Swedish scientist, statesman, theologian, and visionary:

696. Every single thing in the next life is balanced in such a way that evil punishes itself. So evil carries its own punishment with it, as likewise does falsity which comes back on him in whom falsity dwells. Consequently the punishment and torment which anybody suffers he brings upon himself, and at such times exposes himself to the devilish crew who inflict them. The Lord never sends anyone to hell, but wishes to lead all away from hell; less still does He bring anyone into torment. But since an evil spirit rushes into it himself the Lord turns all the punishment and torment to good and to some use. No punishment can possibly take place unless the Lord has some use as the end in view, for the Lord's kingdom is a kingdom of ends and uses.¹⁷

3645. The universal kingdom of the Lord is a kingdom of ends and uses. It has been given me manifestly to perceive this Divine sphere of ends and uses, and certain things at the same time which are inexpressible. Each and all things flow forth from this sphere, and are directed by it. Insofar as the affections, thoughts, and actions have within them the end to do good from the heart, so far the man, spirit, or angel is in the Grand Man, that is, in heaven; but insofar as a man or spirit has the end to do evil from the heart, so far he is out of the Grand Man, that is, in hell.¹⁸

¹⁵ Wimmer, 'Reich der Zwecke', 509; my trans.

¹⁶ Cassirer, 'Kant and Rousseau', 25–35.

¹⁷ Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 696 (Swedenborg's theological works are cited by numbered section, which remain constant throughout all editions and translations).

¹⁸ Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 3645.

3796. That the end determines the quality of the affection, that is to say, whether it is genuine, spurious, or false, is because a man's end is his very life; for a man has that for his end which is of his life, or what is the same, of his love. When the good of his neighbor, the general good, the good of the church and of the Lord's kingdom, is the end, then as to his soul the man is in the Lord's kingdom, thus in the Lord; for the Lord's kingdom is nothing else than a kingdom of ends and uses for the good of the human race (see no. 3645). The angels themselves who are with man are solely in his ends. Insofar as a man is in such an end as that in which is the Lord's kingdom, so far the angels are delighted with him, and conjoin themselves with him as with a brother; but insofar as a man is in the end of self, so far the angels retire, and evil spirits from hell draw near, for there reigns in hell no other end than this; from all of which we can see how important it is to explore and know from what origin the affections are, and this can be known solely from the end.¹⁹

6574. ... they who have been alienated from truth and good, as are the spirits who induce temptations, intend nothing but evil, but that the Divine turns it into good, and this according to order from eternity, whence comes life to those who are in the truths of good. For be it known that the infernal spirits to whom it is permitted thus to trouble the good, intend nothing but evil; for they desire with all their might to drag them down from heaven and cast them into hell; because it is the very delight of their life to destroy anyone as to his soul; thus to eternity. But not one whit is permitted them by the Lord, except to the end that good may come of it, namely, that truth and good may be brought into shape and strengthened with those who are in temptation. In the universal spiritual world reigns the end which proceeds from the Lord, which is that nothing whatever, not even the least thing, shall arise, except that good may come from it. Hence the Lord's kingdom is called a kingdom of ends and uses.²⁰

9828. 'And a belt'. That this signifies a general bond in order that all things may look to one end, is evident from the signification of a "belt", or "girdle", as being a general bond; for it gathers up, encloses, holds in connection, and secures all the interior things, which without it would be set loose, and would be scattered. That "the belt" denotes a general bond to the intent that all things may look to one end, is because in the spiritual world the end reigns, insomuch that all things there may be called "ends"; for the Lord's kingdom, which is a spiritual world, is a kingdom of uses, and uses there are ends; thus it is a kingdom of ends.²¹

The phrases "*regnum finium*" and "*Reich der Zwecke*" have the same sense. In both cases, the primary meaning of "end" is a goal of action, the correlative of "means". Also, in both cases, there is a secondary sense of "end": a moral person. Kant speaks of moral persons as ends "in themselves", and Swedenborg does

¹⁹⁾ Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 3796.

²⁰⁾ Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 6574.

²¹⁾ Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 9828.

not. But even here, the substance of their thinking is the same. Both thinkers recognize that moral persons can and indeed must make use of each other. But how does one make use of a free and rational being without reducing him to a thing? We have to use others in a way that is consistent with their freedom and rationality. In practice, this means that we have to attain their consent; we have to persuade them, usually by offering to be of use to them in exchange. This is what Kant means by treating people not merely as means, but as ends “in themselves”. And although Swedenborg does not use this phrase, he is equally concerned with preserving human freedom and reason in all relations with others, including God.

Both Kant and Swedenborg hold that human beings have a dual nature and a dual citizenship in the natural and spiritual realms. Nature is the realm of material things governed by Newtonian laws which do not permit freedom, dignity, and moral responsibility. The kingdom of ends or the spiritual world is the realm of rational persons governed by spiritual laws that are consistent with freedom, dignity, and moral responsibility. In Kant’s kingdom of ends, as in Swedenborg’s spirit world, these spiritual laws are identified with the moral order. The moral problem faced by embodied rational beings is thus to identify and somehow live in accordance with spiritual laws in a world governed by physical ones. Thus, despite the radical differences of style and method between Kant the philosopher and Swedenborg the mystic, there are some striking parallels between Kant’s kingdom of ends and Swedenborg’s spiritual world.

3. The Spirit World in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*

But there are more than just parallels between Swedenborg’s spirit world and Kant’s kingdom of ends, for it is possible to trace the development of the kingdom of ends back to Kant’s encounter with Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia* in 1763–1765. I have argued elsewhere that before his encounter with Swedenborg, Kant’s philosophy contained no doctrine of a kingdom of ends or spiritual world.²² I have also argued that at the time Kant began reading the *Arcana Coelestia*, he was wrestling with a philosophical question to which Swedenborg’s account of the spiritual world and its relationship to the material world could seem like an answer, namely the question of how the moral person as Kant conceived him—free, dignified, and responsible—fits into the natural

²²) Johnson, ‘A Commentary on Kant’s *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*’, ch. 4.

world as Newton conceived it—a deterministic material realm.²³ The answer suggested by Swedenborg is to split the cosmos into two distinct realms, the natural world governed by physical laws and the spiritual world governed by moral laws. Insofar as we are moral persons, human beings exist in the spiritual world; insofar as we are embodied, we exist also in the natural world.

Kant received his set of the *Arcana Coelestia* in the late summer of 1763, at the very earliest.²⁴ By November 1764, Kant definitely had the *Arcana* in hand and was already well into writing the text that would become *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*.²⁵ *Dreams* was probably published near the end of 1765, with a publication year of 1766.²⁶

In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant offers two accounts of a spiritual world. In Part I, Chapter 2, ‘A Fragment of Occult Philosophy to Reveal Our Community with the Spirit World’, Kant offers an account of the spirit world which he claims is based solely on his own speculations. In Part II, Chapter 2, ‘Ecstatic Journey of an Enthusiast Through the Spirit World’, Kant offers a masterfully concise and accurate summary of Swedenborg’s account of the spiritual world distilled from the eight immense quarto volumes of the *Arcana Coelestia*.

Kant claims that his own speculations about the spirit world just happen to be confirmed by Swedenborg’s visions. But there is no evidence that Kant ever speculated about a spirit world before reading Swedenborg. Thus, as I have argued at length elsewhere, the real reason Kant’s speculations correspond so closely to Swedenborg’s visions is because Kant’s spirit world is *nothing but* a careful philosophical reconstruction of Swedenborg’s.²⁷

Kant first argues for the existence of the spirit world as an explanation for the phenomenon of life, which cannot be explained in purely materialistic terms, forcing us to posit the existence of non-material, non-locatable animating principles (souls). Kant, like Swedenborg, claims that the spirit world consists

²³ See Johnson, ‘Swedenborg’s *Positive* Influence on the Development of Kant’s Mature Moral Philosophy’.

²⁴ Kant mentions having taken steps to acquire a forthcoming book of Swedenborg’s in his letter to Charlotte von Knobloch of 10 August 1763. Although this work could not be the *Arcana Coelestia*, which had already been completely published by then, it indicates that Kant was actively pursuing Swedenborg’s writings at the time. See *Kant on Swedenborg*, 71.

²⁵ See Johann Georg Hamann’s letter to Moses Mendelssohn of 6 November 1764, *Kant on Swedenborg*, 113.

²⁶ On the publication of *Dreams*, see Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy*, lxvii.

²⁷ Kant circumspcctly admits to this point in *Dreams*, AK 2:357–359; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 47–48. On this point, see also Robert H. Kirven, ‘Swedenborg and Kant Revisited’, esp. 114. See also C.D. Broad, ‘Kant and Psychical Research’, 143.

of a systematic unity or whole of spiritual beings: ‘Since these immaterial beings are spontaneously active principles, hence substances and self-subsisting natures, the conclusion that first suggests itself is this: that immediately united with one another they may perhaps make up a great whole that one can call the immaterial world (*mundus intelligibilis*)’.²⁸ Kant argues that such a spirit world would be inhabited by essentially the same kinds of beings as Swedenborg does:

The immaterial world would thus then include, firstly, all created intelligences, some of them being bound with matter into a person, but others not; furthermore, the sensible subjects in all animal species; finally, all principles of life wherever they may be in nature, even if these manifest themselves through no external characteristic marks of voluntary motion. All these immaterial natures, I say, whether they exercise their influxes on the corporeal world or not, all rational beings, for which animality is an accidental state, whether they be here on earth or on other heavenly bodies, whether they may be animating the raw stuff of matter now or in the future, or have done so in the past—these beings would, according to these concepts, stand in a community consonant with their nature ...²⁹

Since spirits account for the phenomenon of life, which cannot be reconciled with causal determinism, Kant, like Swedenborg, concludes that they must have causal laws of their own: ‘the characteristic causal laws of [these immaterial beings] are called *pneumatic*, and, insofar as corporeal beings are the mediating causes of their effects in the material world, *organic*’.³⁰ Like Swedenborg, Kant also claims that the spirit world would exist outside of space and time: ‘these beings would, according to these concepts, stand in a community consonant with their nature, which does not rest upon the conditions through which the relationship of bodies is limited, and where the distance of places or ages, which in the visible world makes up the great chasm that cancels all community, vanishes. The human soul, already in this present life, would have to be regarded as simultaneously tied to two worlds’.³¹

Having introduced the idea of a spirit world upon speculative grounds, Kant then applies the idea to morality. He argues that the hypothesis of the spirit world explains two related phenomena: (1) the existence of a *sensus communis*, which leads us to submit our private judgments to intersubjective adjudication, and (2) the existence of peculiarly moral motivations of duty and benevolence

²⁸) Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:329; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 16; Kant’s parentheses.

²⁹) Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:332; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 18.

³⁰) Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:329; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 16.

³¹) Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:332; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 18.

that lead us to thrust aside our private, selfish, and sensuous motivations and take up a universal standpoint:

Among the forces that move the human heart the most powerful appear to lie outside of it, thus they do not relate as mere means to self-interest and private need, as means to an aim that lies *within* the human being himself, but rather they make the tendencies of our impulses displace the focal point of their union *outside us* into other rational beings; from this springs a conflict between two forces, namely selfishness, which relates everything to itself, and charity, through which the soul is driven or drawn out of itself toward others. ...

... While we relate external things to our requirements, we cannot do this without at the same time feeling ourselves bound and limited by a certain feeling that draws our attention to the fact that an alien will, as it were, is at work in us and that our own choice requires the condition of an external decree. A secret power requires us to adjust our intentions to the welfare of others, or according to this alien will, although this often happens grudgingly and in strong conflict with our selfish inclination, thus the point at which the vectors of our drives run together is not merely in us, but rather there are powers that move us in wills other than ours. Hence arise the moral impulses that often sweep us away from the prize of self-interest: the strong law of duty and the weaker of benevolence, each of which wring from us many a sacrifice, and although self-interested inclinations now and then overrule them both, they still never fail to assert their reality in human nature. Thus we see that in our most secret motives we are dependent upon *the rule of the General Will*, and from it springs in the world of all thinking natures a *moral unity* and systematic constitution according to purely spiritual laws.³²

Kant then claims that his concept of a spiritual world is particularly useful for the problem of theodicy, broadly understood. It is morally offensive to see good deeds punished and evil deeds rewarded. It makes us question the goodness of the creator or the moral structure of the cosmos. The idea of a spirit world organized according to moral laws does much to answer these objections, and it does so in a way that does not require recourse to special acts of divine justice:

... For it seems in this case that the irregularities that otherwise, in the contradiction between the moral and the physical relations of man here on earth, strike the eye as so strange, for the most part vanish. All the morality of actions, which according to the order of nature never has its full effect in the bodily life of man, may well do so in the spirit world according to pneumatic laws. The true intentions, the secret motives of numerous endeavors fruitless through impotence, the victory over oneself, or sometimes the concealed malice of seemingly good actions are, for the most part, lost to physical consequence in the corporeal state, but in the immaterial world they

³²) Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:334–335; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 20–21.

would have to be regarded as fruitful grounds, and in respect of it—in accordance with pneumatic laws, in virtue of the connection between the private and the General Will, i.e., the unity and the whole of the spirit world—either exercise an effect consonant with the moral quality of the free will or be reciprocally affected. For since the morality of the deed concerns the inner state of the spirit, it can naturally only produce an effect that is adequate to the whole of morality in the immediate community of spirits. Thus it would now happen that the soul of man must already in this life in virtue of its moral state take up its place among the spiritual substances of the universe, just as, in accordance with the laws of motion, the material components of the universe reciprocally settle in such order as is consonant with their corporeal powers. When the community of the soul with the corporeal world is finally cancelled by death, life in the other world would only be a natural continuation of that connection in which it had already stood in this life, and all the consequences of the morality practiced here would reappear there in the effects that a being standing in indissoluble community with the whole spirit world would already have brought about earlier in that world in accordance with pneumatic laws. The present and the future would, therefore, be of one piece, so to speak, and constitute a continuous whole, even according to *the order of nature*. This latter circumstance is of particular importance. For in a speculation merely according to the principles of reason it is a great difficulty when one has to take refuge in an extraordinary divine will in order to remove the difficulty that springs from the imperfect harmony between morality and its effects in this world ...³³

Kant even adds a footnote setting forth the Swedenborgian idea of heaven and hell without naming them as such.³⁴ Heaven and hell are communities to which good and evil individuals gravitate of their own accord, thus there is no Final Judgment in which God assigns rewards and punishments.

In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, Kant identifies a Swedenborgian spirit world with the realm of moral persons who freely choose good or evil and are responsible for the appropriate consequences. These moral persons always-already live under moral laws, which draw them together into a systematic whole. These moral laws also order our actions in this world. Kant treats duty and benevolence as “influxes” from the spiritual into the material world, from the “better angels of our nature” into our embodied minds, influxes which contradict and sometimes overcome the selfish impulses that usually govern our worldly activities. Although in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* Kant does not use the phrase “kingdom of ends” to describe this moral/spiritual world, it is essentially the same as what he later designates with that phrase: a realm of moral persons which exists in systematic unity because it is constituted and governed by moral laws.

³³) Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:334–335; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 20–21.

³⁴) Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:334–335; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 20–21.

4. From *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* to the Kingdom of Ends

So far I have argued that both the phrase “kingdom of ends” and the realm it designates in Kant’s moral philosophy are found in Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia*. Now I wish to trace how Kant actually came to call his reconstructed Swedenborgian spirit world the “kingdom of ends”.

In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, we have seen that Kant speaks of Swedenborg’s spirit world as the *mundus intelligibilis* and the source of moral obligation. The spirit world is described as a community in which we participate in this life as well as in the next.³⁵

In section 9 of his *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770, *Concerning the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*, Kant assigns the ground of moral obligation to the ‘intelligible world’ (*mundus intelligibilis*).³⁶

In *Metaphysics L₁*, a set of student notes on Kant’s lecture course on metaphysics from the latter half of the 1770s, Kant explicitly identifies Swedenborg’s spirit world with the ‘intelligible world’ (*mundus intelligibilis*) and its order with the moral order. I beg your indulgence of another long quotation, but I think that the following passage on Swedenborg’s spirit world so closely resembles Kant’s own account from *Dreams*, Part I, chapter 2 that it leaves no doubt that Swedenborg was Kant’s model:

The thought of Swedenborg on this matter is quite sublime. He says: the spirit world composes a special real universe; this is the *mundus intelligibilis* [intelligible world], from which this *mundo sensibili* [sensible world] must be distinguished. He says: All spiritual natures stand in union with one another; but this community and union is not bound up with the body as a condition; there one spirit is not near to or distant from another, but is in a spiritual union. Our souls now stand with one another as spirits in this union and community, and indeed already in this world; we do not now see ourselves in this community while we still have sensuous intuition; but even if we do not see it, we do in fact stand in it. Now, once the hindrance of sensuous intuition is cancelled, we see ourselves in this spiritual community, and this is the other world; now this consists not of other things, but of the same things, which, however, we intuit in another way. Now when a man has been righteous in this world, and his will has been well-meaning and strives to carry out the rules of morality, he is already in this world in community with all righteous and well-meaning souls, be they in India or Arabia; only he does not yet see himself in this community, until he is freed from sensuous intuition. In the same way the evil is already here in community with all evildoers,

³⁵ Kant, *Dreams*, AK 2:329; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 16.

³⁶ Kant, *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principii* (*Inaugural Dissertation*) AK 2:396; Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy*, 388.

who loathe one another; he does not now see himself therein. But when he is freed of sensuous intuition, then he will see himself there. Accordingly, each good deed of the virtuous is a step toward the community of the blessed, just as each evil deed is a step toward the community of the depraved. It follows that the virtuous person does not go to heaven, but is already in it here and now; but after death will he first see himself to be in this community. In the same way, the evil cannot see themselves to be in hell, although they are really already there. But when they are freed from their bodies, then they first see where they are. Terrifying thoughts for the evildoer! Must he not fear at every moment that his spiritual eyes will be opened? And as soon as they are open he is already in hell.³⁷

In 1781, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant equates the ‘moral world’ (*Moralische Welt*) of ‘rational beings’ (*vernünftigen Wesen*) and the ‘intelligible world’ (*intelligible Welt* [= ‘*mundus intelligibilis*’, ‘*Verstandeswelt*’, and ‘*noumenon*’]), and then equates them both with the ‘*corpus mysticum*’ (the mystical body), which is St. Paul’s name for the invisible church and a possible allusion to Swedenborg’s idea of the *Maximus Homo* or Greatest Human Being (his assertion that the spiritual world is organized in the shape of a vast human being); and with Leibniz’s ‘*regnum gratiae*’ (the kingdom of grace), which Leibniz contrasted with the kingdom of nature.³⁸

The *Mrongovius Metaphysics*, a set of student notes reliably dated to the Winter Semester of 1782–1783, quotes Kant identifying the afterlife and heaven and hell (again described in Swedenborgian terms) with the ‘intelligible world’ (*Intelligiblen Welt* [sic]), the ‘intelligible kingdom’ (*intelligiblen Reiche* [sic]), and ‘things as they are in themselves’ (*Dinge ... wie sie an sich selbst*).³⁹

Kant completed his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* in 1784. He sent it to the publishers in the early fall of 1784, and the book appeared in print in March or April of 1785. During this 1784–1785 time period, Kant is quoted as follows in the *Volckmann Metaphysics*:

The consideration of the state of the soul after death. The first question here is this: If the soul lives after death then where is it? If the corporeal world is only appearance, then we cannot at all place the soul in it, but rather in another world, heaven, which means the totality of intellectual beings [*das Ganze der intellektuellen Wesen*]; if the souls will know the same things *as they are*, then this is the other world. Now we can say: The virtuous [person] is already in heaven, only he is not conscious of it, for he knows the

³⁷) Kant, *Metaphysik L1*, AK 28.1:298–299; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 91–92.

³⁸) Kant refers to the moral world/*corpus mysticum*/*regnum gratiae* in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), A808 = B836.

³⁹) Kant, *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, AK 29.1,2:919–920; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 95–96.

things in themselves [*Dinge an sich selbst*], and the rational kingdom [*das vernünftige Reich*] is considered under moral laws: the kingdom of God [*Reich des Gottes*] and the kingdom of ends [*Reich der Zwecke* (sic)], and he is a true member in the kingdom of ends; the passage to the other world would be only the intuition, that is called coming into another world; this is only with respect to form another, but with respect to the content it is always the same; further than this we cannot go.⁴⁰

Here Kant equates the afterlife with heaven and hell (described in Swedenborgian terms) and describes this world as ‘the totality of intellectual beings’ (*das Ganze der intellektuellen Wesen*), ‘things in themselves’ (*Dinge an sich selbst*), ‘the rational kingdom’ (*das vernünftige Reich*), the ‘kingdom of God’ (*Reich des Gottes*), and the ‘kingdom of ends’ (*Reich der Zwecke*).

In the Winter Semester of 1784–1785, during which the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* appeared in print, Kant also lectured on moral philosophy. In Christoph Coelestin Mrongovius’ notes on these lectures, which begin on 3 January 1785, Kant speaks of a man as a legislative member of a ‘system of rational beings’.⁴¹ He then speaks of man as a legislative member of the ‘kingdom of ends’, thus Kant clearly equates the ‘kingdom of ends’ with a ‘system of rational beings’; Kant then claims that ‘Leibniz also calls the kingdom of ends moral principles of the kingdom of grace’.⁴² A few pages later, Kant equates the kingdom of ends with ‘a kingdom of purposes with autonomy, which is the kingdom of rational beings, who have a general system of ends in view’. Then he equates ‘the members of the kingdom of ends, whose ruler is God’ with ‘the intelligible world’ and ‘the kingdom of grace’ of Augustine and Leibniz.⁴³

In the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant equates the moral world and the ‘intelligible world’ (*mundus intelligibilis*, ‘*intelligibele Welt*’) with the ‘kingdom of ends’ (*Reich der Zwecke*), which he understands as ‘the systematic union of different rational beings though common laws’ (*die systematische Verbindung verschiedener vernünftiger Wesen durch gemeinschaftliche Gesetze*); as ‘a totality of all ends’ (*ein Ganzes alles Zwecke*); and as a totality of ‘rational beings as ends’ (*vernünftigen Wesen als Zwecke*).⁴⁴

In 1788, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant identifies the moral world with ‘the totality of all ends’ (*das Ganze aller Zwecke*) and the ‘intelligible world’

⁴⁰ Kant, *Metaphysik Volckmann*, AK 28.1:445; *Kant on Swedenborg*, 97.

⁴¹ Kant, *Moralphilosophie Mrongovius*, AK 29:610; *Lectures on Ethics*, 233.

⁴² Kant, *Moralphilosophie Mrongovius*, AK 29:610–611; *Lectures on Ethics*, 234.

⁴³ Kant, *Moralphilosophie Mrongovius*, AK 29:6129; *Lectures on Ethics*, 246.

⁴⁴ Kant, *Foundations*, AK 4:433; Beck, 50.

(*intelligibelen Welt*).⁴⁵ Furthermore, in his discussion of ‘The Immortality of the Soul as a Postulate of Practical Reason’, Kant identifies the intelligible world and the community of rational beings with the afterlife, arguing that since we are required to completely subject our wills to the moral law, but find this impossible in this life, we are entitled to postulate the existence of an afterlife in which, shorn of the limitations of our sensuous natures, we can engage in endless progress toward the good.

Kant then claims that his practical argument for belief in the afterlife is superior to two other alternatives. The first is a moral naturalism which denies the existence of an afterlife and therefore lowers moral standards down to what is attainable in this world. The second is moral enthusiasm, which refuses to lower the standard of the moral law and, lacking better grounds, proclaims its faith in the afterlife on the grounds of ‘enthusiastic *theosophical* dreams which totally contradict our knowledge of ourselves’ (*schwärmende, der Selbsterkenntnis ganz widersprechende theosophische Träume*).⁴⁶ This is a clear allusion to Swedenborg. It should be noted, however, that Kant’s objection is not to Swedenborg’s belief in a spirit world, but rather to his mystical grounds for believing in it.⁴⁷

In 1790–1791, in *Metaphysics L₂*, another set of student notes from Kant’s course on metaphysics, Kant describes heaven, hell, and the afterlife in general as ‘the kingdom of rational beings’ (*das Reich der vernünftigen Wesen*).⁴⁸ I have argued extensively elsewhere that Kant’s descriptions of the afterlife in

⁴⁵ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, AK 5:87; Beck, 89.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, AK 5:122–123; Beck, 127.

⁴⁷ It should be noted that in *Dreams*, part I, ch. 2, Kant’s account of the conditions for the possibility of influxes from the spirit world argues that such influxes, although unlikely, are not ‘*Selbsterkenntnis ganz widersprechende*’. Nor did Kant maintain after his Copernican revolution that spiritual influx totally contradicts our self-knowledge. Indeed, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* itself Kant offers an account of the feeling of respect for the moral law that sounds remarkably like an influx from the intelligible world. Kant does, however, wish to limit his appeals to spiritual influxes as much as possible and depend instead upon moral and aesthetic hypotheses to ground belief in God and the spirit world. The latter are preferable insofar as they can be better submitted for intersubjective adjudication. Indeed, one of the great weaknesses of Kant’s ethics are his appeals to subjective experiences like the feeling of respect, which simply invite his opponents (honestly or not) to deny that they have had such experiences. On Kant’s appeal to intersubjectivity as an alternative to enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*), see Johnson, ‘A Commentary on Kant’s *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*’, chs. 8, 9, 12, and Conclusion; ‘The Kinship of Kant and Swedenborg’; and ‘The Tree of Melancholy: Kant on Philosophy and Enthusiasm’.

⁴⁸ Kant, *Metaphysik L₂*, AK 28.2,1:592.

the *Lectures on Metaphysics* are derived from Swedenborg's account of the spirit world; indeed, in the eight surviving sets of notes on Kant's lectures on the state of the soul after death, he refers explicitly and approvingly to Swedenborg in seven and clearly alludes to him in the eighth.⁴⁹

In 1797, in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, the second part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant equates the community of rational beings with the 'moral world' ('*moralische Welt*') and with the noumenal or 'intelligible world' ('*mundus intelligibilis*').⁵⁰

If we piece all these quotes together, Kant offers the following intellectual equation: Swedenborg's spirit world = the intelligible world = the moral world = the *corpus mysticum* = the kingdom of grace = the totality of intellectual beings = the rational kingdom = the kingdom of God = the afterlife (heaven and hell) = the intelligible kingdom = the thing as it is in itself = the totality of all ends = the kingdom of purposes with autonomy = the totality of all rational beings as ends = the kingdom of rational beings = the kingdom of ends. There is, therefore, a straightforward line of intellectual development from Swedenborg's spirit world to Kant's kingdom of ends.

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⁴⁹ See Johnson, 'Kant on Swedenborg in the *Lectures on Metaphysics: The 1760s and 1770s*', and 'Kant on Swedenborg in the *Lectures on Metaphysics: The 1780s and 1790s*'.

⁵⁰ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, AK 6:449.

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