

Wild Beasts of the Philosophical Desert

Philosophy as Ideology
and Other Exceptional Experiences

Richard D. Wood, James Gardner
and Lisa Smith

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PUBLISHING

Wild Beasts of the Philosophical Desert:
Philosophers on Telepathy
and Other Exceptional Experiences

By

Hein van Dongen, Hans Gerding
and Rico Sneller

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5453-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5453-5

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FOREWORD

STANLEY KRIPPNER

An “anomalous phenomenon” is one that is rare, not well understood, or both. Mainstream science has not been open to these phenomena, claiming that they undermine the foundations of what is known about time, space, and energy. Philosophers, on the other hand, have been somewhat less dismissive. Indeed, some of them wrote extensively on such topics as telepathy, visions, and spiritual ecstasy. This remarkable book is somewhat of an anomaly. The impact of unusual experiences on the life and thoughts of well-known philosophers has rarely been reported in such detail and with such insight.

For example, readers who thought they were familiar with the work of Kant may be surprised to know of his keen interest in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. This Swedish mystic claimed to be in contact with spirits and angels. They were a vital part of his mystical experiences. But Swedenborg also had a vision in which he claimed to be present at a fire raging through Stockholm, a fire that actually occurred and stopped very near to Swedenborg’s house. In other words, the fire was a verifiable event as opposed to an unverifiable experience of heavenly beings.

The difference between “events” and “experiences” has been pointed out by such ancient philosophers as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. The former wrote, “It is not what happens to you, but how you react to it that is important.” Marcus Aurelius observed that events might shape one’s life but the meaning attached to those events is even more influential.

Mainstream science can tolerate experiential reports, even those that qualify as “exceptional human experiences.” However, once investigators provide evidence that the experience was linked to a verifiable event, most contemporary scientists react with dismissal at best and hostility at worst. Kant originally accepted Swedenborg’s vision of the Stockholm fire as veridical but later declared it to be impossible. More recently, more than one scientist has proclaimed, “Even if clairvoyance (or precognition, reincarnation, or other anomalies) were demonstrated to be true, I still would not believe in it.”

Schelling, on the other hand, maintained and even expanded on his proposal that nature and spirit form a continuum. His model places spiritual processes within material reality rather than external to it. This point of view resembles that taken by some recent writers who have suggested that the cosmos created itself and that a process of “self-organization” displays material nature and spiritual essence working in tandem.

A different type of self-organization was proposed by Schopenhauer who postulated a “dream organ” that was responsible for both night-time dreams and daytime visions, one that was activated by “animal magnetism.” These terms seem quaint by today’s standards and have morphed into brain centres, in the case of the “dream organ,” and suggestibility, in the case of “animal magnetism.” But tribal shamans would feel comfortable with Schopenhauer’s terms; dreams are so important in most indigenous societies that they are often seen as a “separate reality,” one that is just as concrete as everyday reality, if not more so. Further, they often heal the sick with rituals that employ “energies” that resemble the “magnetism” espoused by many acolytes of Franz Anton Mesmer whose “mesmerism” eventually became “hypnosis.”

America’s first major psychologist, William James, was also a philosopher, an identity that was looked down upon by his successors who ascribed to behaviourism. But James not only wrote about anomalies, he sought them out. He attended séances, ingested nitrous oxide, observed faith healers at work, and saw people with dissociative identity disorders “switch” from one personality to another. His work is often seen as the forerunner of “parapsychology,” the disciplined study of those anomalies that seem to transcend mainstream science’s understanding of spatial, temporal, and energetic constructs. Although a down-to-earth “pragmatist,” James investigated many of the celebrated claimant mediums of his day – “claimant” because they claimed to be in contact with the dead.

Bergson is also cited by 21st century parapsychologists; he handled the vaunted “mind/brain problem” by stating that all the brain was in the mind but not all the mind was in the brain. The brain’s filtering function was expounded upon by the 20th century essayist and novelist Aldous Huxley whose *Life* magazine article about parapsychology brought the field to the attention of millions of mid-century readers. Huxley used the parapsychological term “psi” to refer to phenomena that are wildly anomalous, those phenomena that he considered events as well as experiences. Huxley’s prophetic “brave new world” (the title of one of his novels) was glimpsed by Bergson who warned that humankind might

destroy itself if it disregarded what occurs outside of its ordinary filters, a world very much at odds with materialism and consumerism.

Driesch was a biologist as well as a philosopher. He used the term “entelechy” to refer to a living organism’s movement toward wholeness, and the self-healing and self-direction that result from this movement. Driesch used “entelechy” as the basis for his concept of parapsychology, stressing its biological aspects. Many current parapsychologists suspect that the future explanation of “psi” will come from biology rather than from quantum physics, the often-proclaimed key to psychic anomalies. Indeed, there are a host of supportive biological experiments demonstrating that if a group of cells is poisoned by toxic material, a group of similar cells will also fall sick, even though there is no physical connection between them. The hypothetical “morphogenic fields” are said to connect a species in ways so that when one member or group “learns” something new, that same new skill can be picked-up by other members of that same species, even at considerable distances. This hypothesis was first proposed by Hernani Andrade, a Brazilian engineer, who called it the “biological organizing principle,” and like the English biologist Rupert Sheldrake, saw it as the nexus for “psi” in all of its forms.

Marcel’s experiences as a Red Cross officer in the First World War provided the basis for his development of existential philosophy. But they also stimulated his interest in parapsychology because of his success in locating missing soldiers. Existentialists typically focus on “existence” rather than “essence,” and one could make the logical leap that psychic experiences should be taken more seriously than the “essential” understandings of nature from which they depart. Rollo May, who was instrumental in bringing existential psychology and psychotherapy to the United States, was interested in parapsychology and had no problem in accepting laboratory evidence of “psi.” May often made keen observations about the parapsychological work that I had done during my career; as colleagues at Saybrook University, we allowed students to write essays and even dissertations on parapsychological topics.

Many readers will be surprised to find Derrida in this collection of philosophers. However, many of his remarks on “synchronicities” and other exceptional human experiences indicate that he gave this topic considerable thought. An icon of “post-modern philosophy,” Derrida constantly questioned authority and tradition. He placed telepathy directly in the centre of his understanding of consciousness, often referring to Freud’s writings on telepathic dreams. Derrida went out of his way to show that experiences differed from “objective” events, but gave more importance to them than most current-day parapsychologists.

The study of consciousness went into eclipse, mainly in the United States, when William James left the scene. However, each of these philosophers is concerned with this topic, one which can be defined as the pattern of an organism's thoughts, feelings, and intentions, either from moment to moment or over time, whether in or out of awareness. This book clearly demonstrates the contributions that philosophers can make to the study of consciousness. Even such staunch materialists as Daniel Dennett are regular contributors to journals and conferences featuring consciousness studies. The writers featured in this volume present a mosaic, one that is not always congruent but, nevertheless, intriguing, provocative, and entertaining. One of the missions of philosophy, whether ancient or modern, Eastern or Western, spiritual or secular, has been to raise questions about "reality." Scientists see this as their mission as well, but philosophers have a freer rein, one that can encompass the humanities as well as technology, one that can speculate rather than form hypotheses, and one that can probe the depths and the heights of cosmic mysteries.

There are wild beasts in philosophical terrains. The authors of this book would not think of taming or capturing them, but of learning from them and appreciating the wonder of their wildness.

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INTRODUCTION

Telepathy, apparitions, psychic healing, hypnosis, the afterlife: in society, there is a lot of interest in such phenomena. However, in science and philosophy, we find them investigated only on a small scale. Still, there are several philosophers who wrote about them. This book attempts to shed some light on a number of well-known thinkers' views on phenomena that are currently labelled as *exceptional human experiences*.

Nowadays, people often use the term "paranormal". This term, which is now more than 80 years old, was probably coined by one of the philosophers to be discussed in this book: Hans Driesch (1867-1941). Driesch refers to research in "paranormal" phenomena as evidence against materialism. He claimed that in due time research of these phenomena would be at the centre of science. A science with an eye for life and consciousness would replace the present materialistic standards.

Taking a closer look at the history of research in telepathy and related matters, it becomes clear how the idea of phenomena apparently "in conflict with our current knowledge" only gradually became visible – proportional to Western science's mechanistic turn. Although never fully accepted by science, through time these phenomena have always generated curiosity. The philosophies of Kant, Schelling, Schopenhauer, James, Bergson, Driesch, Marcel and Derrida were more or less influenced by their cognizance of phenomena like telepathy. Their publications on these subjects, however, are not widely known.

A Glimpse on History

One finds most of the interest in extraordinary human experiences (trance, contemplation, ecstasy, magic, theurgy, out-of-body experiences, near death experiences, etcetera) in the Neoplatonic and Hermetic traditions. Although the term "telepathy" itself was not used until the nineteenth century, the concept of thought transmission already seemed to occur in antiquity. Up until modern times, it was explained by the ancient idea of *sympathy*: the assumption of an invisible bond between all living beings. Aristotle mentions people dreaming about events occurring at the same time in different places. He suggests coincidence as an explanation,

proposing at the same time the hypothesis that the thoughts of people are somehow able to travel through air.

Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535), a Renaissance author and occultist in the Neoplatonic tradition, writes about his tests with thought transmission. He assures us that, with the proper preparation, this should happen within 24 hours. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is probably the first thinker to suggest that research should be done to find out to what extent alleged thought transmission can be verified. In his "natural history", *Sylva Sylvarum*, Bacon proposes to simply count the hits and misses. However, it would take centuries for experimental and statistical research in the (human) sciences to actually take place. At the beginning of the twentieth century the first statistical tests on telepathy were conducted by Charles Richet in France, Gerard Heymans in the Netherlands and Joseph Banks Rhine in the USA.

Throughout the centuries developments in intellectual culture have influenced the way people dealt with experiences like telepathy. The eighteenth century produced both the influential seer Swedenborg's unusual views on the afterlife, and Franz Anton Mesmer's "animal magnetism". Philosophers did not fail to notice these ideas. Swedenborg's extraordinary claims greatly inspired Immanuel Kant's famous investigations on the limits of human knowledge. Arthur Schopenhauer was impressed by the research done in the field of animal magnetism, which he interpreted as a "practical metaphysics".

The nineteenth century gave rise to a world-wide spiritualistic movement. Claims by spiritualists about the possibility of thought transmission between humans and spirits led in 1882 to the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), a society that had as its goal the scientific investigation of these far-reaching claims. Its research considered the possibility that thought transmission occurs between living human beings, rather than between humans and spirits. Researchers like William James worked with large-scale questionnaires. Among the phenomena most frequently reported were apparitions of people who clearly seemed to be in distress. In many cases it turned out that the person in question, at that particular moment in time, although far away "in the real world", was actually in trouble. Accordingly, the term "telepathy" was born (coined by F.W.H Myers).

A number of well-known philosophers were presidents and members of the SPR, and did research for this Society. Aside from James, Bergson and Driesch, whom we will discuss later in this book, there were other philosophers, like the utilitarian moral philosopher Henry Sidgwick¹,

Edmund Gurney, a pioneer in the field of the philosophy of music² and the analytic philosophers C.D. Broad³ and H.H. Price.⁴

Many psychologists were active in the area of psychical research. Among them were Richet, Janet, Freud, and Jung. Jacques Derrida would also later consider the psychoanalytic approach of telepathy.

Research and Perspectives

To be able to follow the thoughts of the philosophers discussed in this book, the reader does not need to be completely informed about the current state of affairs in this area of research. Obviously, the philosophers we write about were only familiar with the research results and the corresponding expectations of their own time.

When referring to research in telepathy and related issues, most languages use the term “parapsychology”. This type of research is subject to the same criteria of any other experimental and statistical form of research. The data of parapsychological research over the last years have resulted in publications in leading journals in the fields of physics⁵, psychology⁶, medicine⁷, the neurosciences⁸ and statistics.⁹ For a recent publication regarding this research we may refer here to *Entangled Minds* by Dean Radin.¹⁰ Until today, this research did not cause a fundamental change in the opinions of the (already convinced) general public and the (mostly sceptical) academic world.

We would like to emphasise that, in addition to Western philosophy and psychology, it may be worthwhile to study insights from contemporary physics into these phenomena.¹¹ Moreover, it can be fruitful to look at these phenomena from a non-Western perspective: traditions and philosophical cultures not troubled with static Western norms and views on what is normal and “para”normal.¹²

Philosophers

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), probably the most famous philosopher of the Enlightenment, wrote a booklet about his contemporary, the mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), an author who seemed to live in a very different world, and experienced spirits and angels. In *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766) Kant describes how he had one such a vision by Swedenborg investigated. Witnesses confirmed how Swedenborg, in Göttenborg at the time, “saw” a fire in Stockholm, which was actually taking place at that very moment. Kant accepts the case, but wants to find out what it implies. He wonders if Swedenborg could really have been in contact with the

world of spirits and angels. Kant is open to this possibility. Nevertheless, this openness stimulates him to analyse the limits of our knowledge, an undertaking in which we can already discover his “critical period”. Later, in his magnum opus *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant explains that cases like the one he had accepted earlier could not possibly exist. Hardly underpinning his opinion with arguments, he thus dismissively seems to break away from his earlier standpoint. Kant’s position mirrors the nowadays still ambiguous attitude towards the current research practice in which these experiences are investigated. Whereas common opinion tends to adopt a favourable attitude towards exceptional phenomena, the self-declared “knowledge elite” do not deem them worthy of attention.

The philosophy of Schelling (1775-1854) considers nature and spirit as two poles that find themselves in a continuum rather than in radical opposition. A view like this leaves room for an approach to nature as something that cannot be reduced solely to the laws of physics. When speaking of the “influence of the world of spirits on nature”, Schelling does not refer to a mysterious force influencing material reality from the outside. Rather, he intends to point out the fact that nature itself, from the inside, displays powers that form part of its essence, and to which the human being, as a unity of body and spirit, has access. The human being is the kind of being, Schelling claims, in which nature has completely and fully awoken. In Schelling’s philosophy, we find the classical motifs of the “astral body”, ecstasy and subtle perception. Nevertheless, just like Kant, Schelling intends to offer a philosophical system. As a *Systemdenker*, Schelling differs radically from his later followers, for whom any systematic approach is perceived to be contrary to the “occult” qualities of nature.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) sketches in his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation* an image in which man recognises his own body as an object of his representation, and his inner life as will. The will is the reverse side of the body. In analogy with human beings, all animate and inanimate bodies come down to an objectified will. An *Urwille* emanates into a world of representations that come into existence and fall apart. But man appears to possess a capability to turn inwardly, and thus detach himself from the strongly determined, unfree world of representations. Following this inversion of knowledge man discovers a mysterious capability, the “dream organ” that can stimulate the brain, and can consequently bring a world of dreams and visions into existence.

Sometimes, these visions correspond to remote events taking place in the world of representations. In that case we speak of “veridical dreams”.

The “dream organ” is activated, according to Schopenhauer, by what was then called “animal magnetism”. This healing practice using the imposition of hands was taught at some fifteen German universities between 1800 and 1820, and was considered as a form of electricity transmission. The many transgressive experiences that were reported as animal magnetism’s epiphenomena (like magic, clairvoyance, somnambulism) did not only draw attention from physicians, but also from philosophers and theologians. Schopenhauer understood these phenomena as a direct and hidden operation of the will (i.e. of the world of metaphysics), an operation that works beyond causally connected representations (the world of physics). He had no doubts about the reality of such transgressive experiences, and saw them as “practical metaphysics”, i.e. as an empirical and scientific confirmation of his metaphysics of will. This led him to argue that the world of experiences as produced by the dream organ “(...) (is) from the philosophical point of view the most significant and pregnant of all discoveries that have ever been made” and that it is “(...) the duty of every scholar and man of science to become thoroughly acquainted with them.”

William James (1842-1910) was a ground-breaking pioneer in psychology. In James’ philosophy (usually called “pragmatism”) practical, everyday experiences are the touchstone for assessing the value of philosophical thinking. James argues that philosophers should only debate about issues that can be directly related to experience. This requirement disqualifies many debates from speculative metaphysics. Therefore, to some of his readers James offers just another variety of scientific positivism. But according to James, the pragmatist attitude also entails that any experience that makes itself felt is to be taken seriously by philosophy. Thus, James tries to make a case for different “wild beasts of the philosophical desert”: faith healers, mediums, mystics, people with multiple personalities, etcetera. He tries to develop a theory about such wild beasts. This theory was elaborated in his book *A Pluralistic Universe*, and it manifested signs of panpsychism.

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was one of the most famous philosophers of the twentieth century. With Janet and Richet, among others, he participated in a movement to renew psychology in France. Bergson did experiments with hypnosis. These led him to the conviction that people should in principle be able to get access to their entire past. Our memories are not stored in the brain, he contended, and only activated when useful for our actions. Essential for our psychological functioning is a “filtering” process. The brain limits our memories instead of generating them.

According to Bergson, the same goes for perception. Perception is basically founded on the subject of perception’s coinciding with the world,

while attention only selects or filters what is relevant to the survival of our body. Basing himself on these hypotheses, Bergson suggests that after one's death, memories and perceptions are no longer hindered by the body. If more people had a hunch of the possibility of an afterlife, he argues, it could lead to a cultural revolution and could bring about a necessary correction of the materialistic consumer society. Without this correction, humanity might be doomed.

Hans Driesch (1867-1941) was a biologist and philosopher. He started his career as an empirical researcher of embryos and their development, and ended his career as a metaphysician, psychologist and parapsychologist. This is remarkable: whereas many philosophers merely speculate about nature – and sometimes wrongly so – Driesch had a solid knowledge of the composition and growth of organisms. Driesch considered himself as a philosopher of life, i.e. as someone who attributes autonomy and spontaneity to life itself. Life, then, can only be partially understood by intellectual reflection. He (re-)introduced the old Aristotelian notion of *entelechy* in order to explain how an organism develops into an entity that operates as a unity, is able to recover from injuries, and is constantly moving towards an equilibrium. According to Driesch, it is impossible to perceive this “entelechal principle” with the senses. It can be derived empirically, though, and finally can even be accessed from within. It is therefore unsurprising that Driesch subsequently used the notion of entelechy as a basis for any possible interpretation of parapsychological phenomena. Driesch investigated telepathy and clairvoyance. For this research he tried to develop new theories and concepts. One of these concepts was the notion of the *paranormal*, which has often unjustly been taken out of its original context. In Driesch's opinion, paranormal phenomena could not yet be explained. One day, however, these phenomena would be at the heart of the life sciences, when biology and psychology will have abandoned materialism and when there will be a less restricted conception of the “normal”.

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) not only was the first “existentialist” philosopher in France; he also integrated repeated considerations of “paranormal” phenomena in his philosophy. He even showed signs of telepathic capabilities himself, as during World War I, when he was functioning as a Red Cross officer, he succeeded in tracking down several missing soldiers. This is something that has hardly been noticed by Marcel scholars up till now. All throughout Marcel's work, not only his philosophical but also his literary texts, we find testimonies of his taking seriously phenomena like telepathy, clairvoyance, and the like. We will see that, without allowing for “scientific” explanations, Marcel argues on

the basis of phenomenological and existentialist insights, giving due weight to the role of consciousness in the testified exceptional phenomena.

The work of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) has seldom been connected to exceptional human experiences. However, there are many reasons for making the connection,, one of them being that he offers an alternative understanding of exceptional experiences (here: telepathy) by providing a philosophical or a psychological analysis of consciousness. To do this, Derrida resorts mostly to Freud, a theorist who, reputedly, had many reservations regarding the phenomenon of telepathy. Now, not only do we find many experiences of synchronicity in Derrida's work, but his unravelling of the processes of consciousness also bring the exceptional within a certain reach.

"Exceptional" experiences, Derrida tries to show, are not "objective" events the existence of which can be confirmed or denied. They are adjustments of consciousness itself in its interaction with reality, and from which consciousness is inseparable. Derrida even claims that it is impossible for him to imagine consciousness to be other than telepathic. Consciousness, according to Derrida, whether it is the dreaming or the apocalyptic consciousness, is part of what it announces. It is engaged in its own message.

Starting-Points of This Book

In this book, we do not take any position regarding the truth value of research in exceptional human experiences, or regarding their most plausible interpretation. The easiest thing to do would be simply to write something like: "Driesch was still of the opinion that nature held teleological powers (...)" – to which we would then have to add a comment like: "but now we know it is impossible to prove this scientifically" – or: "nowadays we have genetic explanations that make his theories superfluous". We do not intend to discuss the truth value of the different philosophies, either. We see no need to refute the necessity of Kant's aprioristic system of thoughts, or to retort that Bergson's theories on memory and perception are incongruent with contemporary brain research.

The philosophers discussed in this book were not merely commentators on the works of others, but thinkers who followed their own sensitivity regarding the demarcations of philosophical questions, and tried to find their own answers or approximations to these questions. With respect to them, we do not want to be presumptuous and thus come up with all kinds

of criticism or corrections. All we intend to do is describe the theories, with the appropriate due regard and enthusiasm.

The different thinkers studied in this book offer us many variegated interpretations of exceptional phenomena, such as, for example, telepathy. In this book, we do not intend to make a choice between different interpretations; rather, we would like to point out the surprising differences between them. We are not only concerned with complementing the traditional, and sometimes stereotypical image of these writers. We also intend to demonstrate how it has been a challenge for each of them to approach unusual phenomena that defy our common standards of knowledge.

Do we believe in the “paranormal”? In parapsychology, exceptional human experiences are often portrayed as “anomalies” in relation to “the scientific worldview”. It thus not only becomes a question of if and how these phenomena can occur, but it additionally poses the question of whether it is possible to integrate incongruent data and theories from different sciences into an all-comprehensive, uniform theory.

In our view, science and philosophy today are in need of an openness to the complexity and equivocality of our existence. However, focusing on an artificial contrast between the ruling worldview and the anomalies that do not seem to fit, might not be much of a contribution to this openness. Most of all, a focus on this contrast leads to predictable and unfruitful quarrelling.

In sum, we do not believe so much in the “normal”. Those who research exceptional human experiences should possess some of what the poet John Keats called *Negative Capability*: the ability to dwell in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.” In other words: we should be able live with an overflow of the possibilities of interpretation, without secretly longing for definitive answers.

The authors view this book as a joint effort, but each chapter carries the stamp of one of us: Hein van Dongen (James, Bergson), Hans Gerding (Kant, Schopenhauer), Rico Sneller (Schelling, Driesch, Marcel, Derrida).

The authors are very grateful to Rozemund Uljée, Linda Roland Danil and Jos Meijer, who have provided the solid translation and to Josien Boetje for her editing work. Many thanks also to Stichting De Zaaier and to the publisher Cambridge Scholars Publishing, who made this book possible.

CHAPTER ONE

KANT AS A CITIZEN OF TWO WORLDS

HANS GERDING

On Swedenborg's Visions and the Limits of the Knowable

Philosophy often finds itself seriously embarrassed when it is confronted by certain stories: it is unable either to doubt some of them with impunity or to believe others without being mocked.¹³

—Immanuel Kant

The scientist, philosopher, mystic, theosophist and spirit-seer Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) received the dubious honour of having a book written about him by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In this book, Kant calls Swedenborg a fantasist whose fabrications rob us of our sleep. Swedenborg has become known mainly as the writer that Kant wiped the floor with. This is understandable, as a thinker from the Age of Reason would not have much patience with spirit-seers.

In 1766 Kant published *Dreams of a Spirit-seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics*. That title is meant ironically. For how could the dreams of the spirit-seer Swedenborg be “elucidated” by dreams of metaphysics? Kant wrote his book for the enlightened mind and thought that he would be able to satisfy the reader. But – and here it comes! – at the same time, he expected this same reader to not be able to understand the message of his book. The last lines of the foreword are remarkable. Kant writes:

Given its subject-matter, it ought, so the author fondly hopes, to leave the reader completely satisfied: for the bulk of it he will not understand, parts of it he will not believe, and for the rest – he will dismiss it with scornful laughter.¹⁴

What kind of book is this? The reader, who will not understand the most important part, will be satisfied by it and enjoy it! In this chapter, we will

concentrate on what could be a possible solution to the riddle that Kant sets us here. What is the message that eludes the reader? This message, as we shall see, has to do with a philosophical implication of some of Swedenborg's extraordinary and anomalous experiences. Swedenborg experienced contact with "the other side". Kant took this more seriously than many an enlightened thinker would expect at first. Is that why the message of this book is hidden and is that why later, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), a possible experience that reveals too much, is simply abandoned? In what follows, we will make an interesting journey through Kant's work by using Kant's own texts as stepping stones.

Kant on Spirits as a Possibility

On careful reading, Kant's book *Dreams of a Spirit-seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* (hereinafter referred to as *Dreams* or *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*) reveals a subtle point of view, where, apart from Kant's rejection, we also find a fascination with an important aspect of Swedenborg's experiences. In order to be able to solve the riddle that Kant sets in the Foreword, we have to read between the lines. This is not easy as *Dreams* is a book with many faces. It is playful, ironic, humorous and literary, but also confrontational and insulting. We will now pay attention to those aspects that shed light on Kant's intentionally hidden message.

Dreams consists of two parts. The first part discusses *dreams of metaphysics* and part two deals with the *dreams of a spirit-seer*. In part I, chapter One, Kant investigates what we mean when we talk about a "spirit". Unlike all the things that are impenetrable, we can see a spirit as an immaterial creature possessed with reason.

(...) beings, therefore, which lack the quality of impenetrability, will never constitute a solid whole, no matter how many of them are united together. Simple beings of this kind are called immaterial beings, and if they are possessed of reason, they are called spirits.¹⁵

To advance from the definition which explains what the concept of a spirit involves to the proposition that such natures are real, or, indeed, even merely possible, involves an unusually large step.¹⁶

The fact that we are able to think, without contradiction, of spirits as immaterial creatures possessing reason does not mean that they really exist. Kant has enough difficulty already with the mind, or soul, which together with our body forms a unity. And if death is perceived as the dissolution of this unity, we are confronted with questions that, in Kant's own words, are beyond his understanding.¹⁷ That does not imply, however,

that all this philosophizing about spirits or souls as immaterial beings could not potentially be true. It may be difficult to imagine that spirits truly exist as immaterial natures, but that does not mean that we can regard this as a known impossibility.¹⁸ Kant goes even further and allows us a glimpse into his suppositions.

I must confess that I am very much inclined to assert the existence of immaterial natures in the world, and to place my own soul in the class of these beings. (...) The reason which inclines me to this view is very obscure even to myself, and it will probably remain so, as well.¹⁹

How a Spirit-World Could Work Within Us

After this first chapter, contradictory lines of thought are presented to us; the “occult” chapter Two versus the “common sense” chapter Three. The title of chapter Two is: *A fragment of occult philosophy, the purpose of which is to reveal our community with the spirit-world.*²⁰ In this chapter, Kant claims that the conclusion of chapter One does not exclude the possibility that fantasy images that live within us can be stimulated by our contact with “the other side”, and that this contact (that we are often not aware of) will produce in us, mortal earthlings, visions.

It is thus not improbable that spirit-sensations may enter consciousness, if they arouse images in our imagination which are akin to them.²¹

Departed souls and pure spirits can never, it is true, be present to our outer senses, nor can they in any fashion whatever stand in community with matter, though *they may indeed act upon the spirit of man, who belongs, with them, to one great republic. And they can exercise this influence* in such a way that the representations, *which they awaken in him, clothe themselves, according to the law of his imagination, in images which are akin to them, and create the vision of objects corresponding to them, so that they present the appearance of existing externally to him. This deception can affect any of the senses. And no matter how much the deception is intermingled with absurd figments of the imagination, one need not let this prevent one from supposing that there are underlying spirit-influences at work here.*²² [Italics ours]

In other words: although we may not be aware of our contact with souls of the deceased and other immaterial beings as such, influences from the world of spirits could still have an effect upon us. This could take place in the following manner: these spirits stimulate images already present in our fantasy. Now we need to pay special attention to what Kant remarks about what, in the possibility outlined here, can manifest itself as an exception.

Not everyone will be aware of such an exception, as it would require a special receptivity. Kant writes:

However, if one draws up a balance of the advantages and disadvantages which could accrue to someone who was to a certain extent organized not only for the visible world but also for the invisible (assuming that there ever was such a person), such a balance would seem to be a gift like that with which Juno honoured Tiresias: she first made him *blind*, so that she could grant him *the gift of prophecy*.²³ [Italics ours].

Tiresias, who thus received the ability of knowing the future, predicted details about the life of Heracles when the latter was only a baby and revealed to Oedipus that he would kill his father and marry his mother. It turns out that Kant reckons with the possibility that influences from the spirit-world are responsible for the content of such visions, and that physical blindness would increase receptivity for them. Tiresias' visions are verifiable (we can check if they are based on truth) and extra-sensory (the content of such visions cannot be explained on the basis of normal sense perception). Further on it will become clear that it is precisely these aspects that are important to Kant when it comes down to proving that these visions do come from the other world. We will come back to this. But first we will look at what Kant has to say in this occult chapter about what is the matter with people who have these gifts.

Accordingly, it is as good as *proved*, or it could easily be *proved*, if one were willing to take the time and trouble to go into the matter, or, better still, it will one day, I know not when or where, be *proved* that the human soul, even in this life, stands in an indissoluble communion with all the immaterial natures of the spirit-world; that, standing in a reciprocal relation with these natures, it both has an effect upon them and *receives impressions from them*, though the human soul qua human being is not conscious of them, *provided that everything is in good order*.²⁴ [Italics ours]

Here it seems that Kant deliberately expresses himself hesitantly about this "evidence". In the first instance, contact with a spirit-world is "(...) as good as proved (...)", then he seems to check himself and writes that it "(...) [could] easily be proved (...)", which is finally reduced to that it will be proven in the future. As we said, it will become clear that for Kant verifiability and extra-sensory perception will have to be part and parcel of the kind of evidence he has in mind.

It is interesting to note that in this quote Kant claims that contact with the spiritual world is unconscious, "(...) *provided that everything is in good order* (...)". Here it can be read between the lines that when things

are “not in good order” something more may be the matter than just Tiresias’ blindness, namely a less unconscious contact with the other side than is usually the case in healthy persons.

So, in this “occult” chapter Kant goes one step further than in the first chapter, where he only points out that a spirit-world can be thought of as a possibility. Now he describes how contact with a spirit-world could happen without a person realizing it, and that when the person is aware of such a contact something is not in order. Here follows another quote from this “occult” chapter, in which he underlines this idea:

It is thus not improbable that spirit-sensations may enter consciousness, if they arouse images in our imagination which are akin to them (...) Phenomena of this type [and in this and in the next paragraph Kant literally writes ‘(...) genuine spirit-influence (...) real spirit-sensation (...) true spirit-influence (...)’] cannot, however, be something common and usual; they can only occur with persons whose organs* are endowed with an exceptionally high degree of sensitivity for intensifying the images of the imagination, according to the inner state of the soul, and by means of harmonious movement, and do so to a greater degree than usually happens, or, indeed, ought to happen with people of sound constitution.²⁵ [Italics ours]

[The * refers to ‘(...) not (...) the organs of outer sensation but rather the sensorium of the soul(...)’]

Kant is developing thoughts about a form of consciousness that could be receptive to influences from the other side. In this context, he explicitly speaks about a “(...) genuine spiritual influence (...) real spiritual sensation (...) true spiritual influence (...)”²⁶ about which we will obtain more evidence in the future.

Before going further into this, we first need to discuss chapter Three, in which a common-sense standpoint is presented which stands in opposition to the occult chapter Two.

Kant Protects Common-sense Against Spirit-Seeing

The title of chapter Three is: *Anti-Cabbala. A fragment of ordinary philosophy, the purpose of which is to cancel community with the spirit-world.*²⁷ This chapter explains how an incorrect interpretation of normal perception can make us believe that we are seeing things that are not really there. It also points out that strong fantasy images are sometimes indistinguishable from normal perception. A victim of such hallucinations and fantasy images mistakes his subjective impressions for objective ones, while the people around him understand that he is a victim of delusion.²⁸ A

person who has to judge these hallucinations can choose the easy way out and consider *all* hallucinations as normal delusions: in this case the possibility that there might be images that arise in us as a result of contact with the spirit-world is accordingly not an option. This is the message of chapter Three, in which, remarkably, Kant himself takes another point of view. He is not in favour of this widely held common-sense opinion.

The result of these observations involves the following embarrassing difficulty: *the deep speculations of the previous chapter* [the occult chapter two, the author] *are rendered wholly superfluous*, and the reader, no matter how ready he may be to give some support to the plans which exist only in idea, will nonetheless prefer the concept which enables him to resolve the difficulties with greater ease and speed, and which can expect more general support. For, apart from the fact that it *seems* more consonant with a rational mode of thought to draw the grounds of one's explanation from the material with which experience furnishes us rather than to lose oneself in the dizzy concepts of a reason which is half-engaged in creating fictions and half-engaged in drawing inferences, this approach also furnishes some occasion for mockery, as well; and mockery, *whether it be justified or not*, is a more powerful instrument than any other for checking futile inquiries. For to wish to offer, in a serious fashion, interpretations of the figments of the imagination of fantastical visionaries instantly arouses grave doubts; and philosophy, which allows itself to be caught in such low company, falls under suspicion.²⁹ [Italics ours]

Here, Kant says that he who accepts the argumentation in chapter Three, sides with the powers in society that “prefer the concept which enables him to resolve the difficulties with greater ease and speed, and which can expect more general support”. Kant does *not* say that this *is* “more consonant with a rational mode of thought” and that it avoids *justified* mockery, but that it “*seems* (...) more consonant with a rational mode of thought” and that it avoids mockery, *justified or not*. The door is therefore left ajar, but Kant does not want to open it any further for the reader who takes this common-sense view. The reader of this book, who, as Kant writes in the Foreword, will not understand its message, does not pay attention to the door that is ajar.

I do not, therefore, blame the reader at all if, instead of regarding the spirit-seers as semi-citizens of the other world, he simply dismisses them without further ado as candidates for the asylum, thus *saving himself the trouble of any further enquiry*.³⁰ [Italics ours]

The reader that Kant refers to will not seriously consider the possibility that some “candidates for the asylum” have seen more of reality than their

therapists. It is interesting to see that Kant himself does not choose the easy way, which would save him “the trouble of any further enquiry”. In this chapter on the common-sense point of view, Kant still takes into account “the deep speculations” from the occult Second chapter, in which it is argued that the cause of some mental occurrences may be found in contacts with a spirit-world on the other side.

I have not, in what I have said above, disputed the madness of such apparitions. On the contrary, although I have not made *madness the cause* of the imagined spirit-community, I have connected the two by supposing *madness to be a natural effect of such a community*.³¹ [Italics ours]

Kant leaves room here for the interpretation that, although common-sense thinking might not be open to this suggestion, visions or hallucinations that could be caused by influences from a spirit-world may actually exist. When subsequently, in the fourth and last chapter, Kant summarizes his argument from part I, he distances himself again from the common-sense position that he presented in chapter Three. He is unambiguous and clear about his own position, for which he refers again to the occult second chapter.

It is exactly the same ignorance which prevents my venturing wholly to deny all truth to the many different ghost-stories which are recounted, albeit with a reservation which is at once commonplace but also strange: *I am sceptical about each one of them individually, but I ascribe some credence to all of them taken together*. The reader is free to judge for himself. But for my part, the arguments adduced in the second chapter are sufficiently powerful to inspire me with seriousness and indecision when I listen to the many strange tales of this type.³² [Italics ours]

In that same last paragraph of part I, chapter Four, Kant also refers to “the reader”. We will return to this below, but this reader could be the reader that, as Kant expects in the Foreword, will not understand the tenor of his book. However that may be, Kant does not want to bother the reader any longer with his own way of thinking in this matter.

However, since there is never any lack of justifying reasons, if one’s mind is already made up beforehand, *I do not propose to incommode the reader by further extending my defence of this way of thinking*.³³ [Italics ours]

In this same paragraph, Kant writes that everything about spirits, as a comprehensive area in metaphysics, has now been dealt with and should be seen as a useless field of enquiry. Thus:

(...) prudence demands that one cut the coat of one’s projects to the cloth

of one's powers. If *great things* are beyond one's power, one must rest satisfied with what is *moderate*.³⁴ [Italics ours]

What in this last quotation is called the "great" project is the effort to clarify by reasoning the intriguing problem of seeing spirits. Kant recognizes that it is impossible to come up with an unambiguous solution to this problem. He understands that most people will adhere to the common-sense point of view, which is the easiest way. His sympathy, however, is with the arguments in the Second, "occult", chapter. Those arguments have not only won him over to the occult point of view, but also hold out the promise of proof in the future. A proof that convinces those who hold the common-sense point of view does not yet exist, however. As pure thinking alone is not able to solve the matter, and as empirical proof is something of the future, we have to be modest. That is borne out by the last sentence of Part I, which we just cited and where it says that "if great things are beyond one's power, one must rest satisfied with what is moderate".

As the book does not stop here, it is not too bold to think that what Kant discusses in Part II can be seen as what in his eyes is the only thing left that one can do, namely "rest satisfied with what is moderate".

True Contact With a Spirit-World?

In Part II Kant immediately sets about investigating the "moderate". It is what he already had expressed hesitantly in his favourite Second chapter of Part I: "(...) it will one day, I know not when or where, be proved that the human soul, even in this life, stands in an indissoluble communion with all the immaterial natures of the spirit-world".³⁵ The "moderate" that Kant now concentrates on is an anticipating reconnoitering. It was his expectation that in the future, mankind would be confronted with solid evidence. In the first chapter of Part II he thinks about the conditions for such proof and examines if spirit stories that he knows satisfy these conditions.

Nonetheless, this circumstance [Swedenborg claiming to have cultivated the closest contact with spirits and with the souls of the dead] cannot deter those who are otherwise favourably disposed towards spirit-influences from supposing that *there is still something true behind such fantasies* [we saw that Kant sees himself as such a person]. However, the credentials of all plenipotentiaries from the other world consist in the *proofs* of their extraordinary calling, which they furnish by means of certain *specimens in the present world*. That being the case, I must, selecting from what is circulated as an attestation of the extraordinary power of the man in

question, *at least mention that which finds some credence with the majority of people (...).*"³⁶ [Italics ours]

Kant now presents verifiable cases of "specimens in the present world", a kind of prophecy that Tiresias was also able to do. We will limit ourselves to one case here. This case is about Swedenborg, who, while he was in Gothenburg, saw in a vision that Stockholm was burning. Stockholm is 285 miles away from Gothenburg. On the evening that he had the vision, many people learned about it, because Swedenborg shared his experience with the public figures that he was spending that evening with. Two days later a messenger arrived from Stockholm and confirmed what Swedenborg had seen.

Much can be said about the correctness of this and two other cases that Kant reports.³⁷ But that is not the issue here. The point is that for Kant the case of the fire in Stockholm was a true case. Moreover, there is another source that demonstrates that Kant had no doubt about this case. Three years before the publication of *Dreams*, Kant wrote a letter to Charlotte von Knobloch about spirit-seeing in general and about Swedenborg's vision of the Stockholm fire in particular.³⁸ In this letter, Kant's tone is at first reserved:

So much is certain: that regardless of the many tales of apparitions and actions in the realm of spirits that I have heard, I have always submitted these stories to the test of sound reason and have been inclined to regard such tales with scepticism. Not that I see such things as impossible (for how little do we know about the nature of a spirit?) but, taken all in all, we simply *do not find sufficient evidence* to validate them.³⁹ [Italics ours]

After this passage, Kant devotes some words to fraud and how easy it is to fool people. But then he continues his letter to Charlotte von Knobloch with the following words:

That was my position for a long time, *until* I became acquainted with the stories about Herr Swedenborg.⁴⁰ [Italics ours]

Apparently the stories about Swedenborg had changed Kant's way of thinking. We shall see that he had become convinced that the kind of proof that matters in this case had now actually been provided by Swedenborg. The case of the fire in Stockholm is special because Swedenborg had made statements in the presence of witnesses about an event of which he could have had absolutely have no knowledge whatsoever (unless one believes that accomplices of Swedenborg had set Stockholm on fire at a prearranged moment). But Kant was cautious and had the facts verified by

a friend.⁴¹ This man reported that, according to the witnesses that he had spoken to in Stockholm and in Gothenburg, the events had taken place exactly as Kant had heard them.⁴² Consequently, in the letter to Charlotte von Knobloch, Kant reports Swedenborg's vision as a powerful proof.

To give you a few more proofs, gracious lady, that many still living people witnessed, proofs that could be examined then and there by the man who reported them, let me cite the two following incidents.⁴³ [Italics ours]
[In this quote the author has adjusted the translation: 'proofs' replaces 'examples', because Kant writes 'Beweisthümer']

After voicing his doubts in the opening part of this letter, and after stating that he modified his original point of view on hearing the stories about Swedenborg, he introduces the case of the fire in Stockholm in the following manner:

However, the following incident seems to me to have *the greatest probative power* of any of these stories and *really removes any conceivable doubt*.⁴⁴ [Italics ours]
[In this quote the author has adjusted the translation: '*probative power*' replaces '*weight*', because Kant writes '*Beweiskraft*']

Although Kant writes in the letter that it would have been better if he could have questioned Swedenborg himself, he is nevertheless convinced. Possibly he would have liked to ask more questions instead of just checking the facts. But, and this is the point here, the facts "seem to have the greatest probative power" and are certain for Kant. These same facts are mentioned in *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*, in which Kant discusses the fire in Stockholm again.

The third story is such that it must be possible to furnish a complete proof of its truth or falsity. It was, if I am rightly informed, towards the end of the year 1759, when Schwedenberg [sic], returning from England, disembarked one afternoon at *Gothenburg*. That same evening he joined a company of people at the invitation of a local merchant. After he had spent some while there, he reported to the company, with every sign of consternation, that at that very moment a dreadful conflagration was raging in Stockholm in the *Södermalm*. [Italics Kant] After a few hours had passed, in the course of which he periodically withdrew to be on his own, he informed the assembled company that the fire had been brought under control, at the same time describing the extent to which the fire had spread. That very same evening, this wondrous news was noised abroad and by the next morning it had spread to every part of the town. But it was only after the lapse of two days that the report of the fire eventually reached Gothenburg from Stockholm – *a report which coincided completely, it was*

said, with Swedenborg's visions.⁴⁵ [Italics ours]

We will return later to the deliberate misspelling of Swedenborg's name. It is more important now to realize that for Kant, Swedenborg's vision corresponds with the facts of a situation for which there is no explanation on the basis of well-known principles. Let us look at this more closely. When we apply Kant's reasoning in *Dreams* to this case, there are three aspects that demand our attention.

In the first place, we establish that Kant attaches importance to a specific kind of case. For a vision to qualify as a test of a seer's competence it must be anomalous and verifiable. A vision can only meet these requirements when its object is our earthly reality. Kant writes: "*proofs of their extraordinary calling, which they furnish by means of certain specimens in the present world*"⁴⁶ and "occurrences of the kind mentioned above, such as could be confirmed by living witnesses".⁴⁷ Swedenborg's vision meets these requirements. It is verifiable and no normal explanation is available.

In the second place, Swedenborg's vision of the fire is not only *verifiable*, but also sufficiently verified to be convincing, according to Kant. Kant felt certain about this, because he had had a researcher question witnesses in Stockholm and Gothenburg. That is why in *Dreams* he can write that the facts "coincided completely with Swedenborg's visions"⁴⁸ and in the letter to Charlotte von Knobloch that this same case "*really removes any conceivable doubt*".⁴⁹

In the third place, contact with a spirit-world is the only hypothesis that Kant suggests: "(...) it will one day (...) be proved that the human soul, even in this life, stands in an indissoluble communion with all the immaterial natures of the spirit-world; that, standing in a reciprocal relation with these natures, it both has an effect upon them and receives impressions from them (...)".⁵⁰ Kant's hypothesis follows the same line as Swedenborg's, who told Kant's researcher that "(...) God had given him a wonderful power enabling him to communicate with the souls of the dead whenever he pleased".⁵¹

There is also an implicit argument that can be adduced for the idea that contact with a spirit world is the only hypothesis that Kant considers. If Kant had thought that telepathy between two earthlings had been an option (with a "sender/witness" of the fire in Stockholm and Swedenborg as "receiver" in Gothenburg), with no need for the existence of a spirit world to make Swedenborg's vision possible, Kant would most certainly have used this explanation, as in that case he could have completely disregarded the "spirit-world hypothesis". The fact that he did not consider this position, which would have been much more in line with his critical

thinking, suggests that in his view the origin of Swedenborg's vision is to be found in a spirit world beyond. We even saw that Kant is sympathetic towards this hypothesis. This case shows that what in Part I of *Dreams* was outlined as a possibility, can now, in Part II, be established as reality: in the human psyche visions arise that indicate the influence of a spirit-world upon humans.

Together, these three points show that for Kant there exists at least one true story of a spirit-seer. As we will see shortly, this yields an interesting interpretation key. This case also is relevant to what Kant wrote in the Foreword of *Dreams*:

Is he (the author, Kant himself) completely to deny the truth of all such apparitions? What reasons can he adduce to refute them? Is he to admit the probability of even only one of such stories? How important such an admission would be! And what astonishing implications would open up before one, if even only *one* such occurrence could be supposed to be proven!⁵² [Italics Kant]

We see the same reasoning in the chapter on William James, who argues that we only need one white raven in order to prove the existence of white ravens, even though James does not draw the same conclusion Kant does.

Interpretation Key of Dreams of a Spirit-Seer

Whereas in the letter to Charlotte Knobloch (1763) Kant spells Swedenborg's name correctly, three years later in *Dreams of a Spirit-seer* (1766) he spells "Schwedenberg", calling him "the arch-visionary of all visionaries",⁵³ who wrote a long book that is "completely empty and contains not a single drop of reason".⁵⁴ Kant laments that he "went to the expense of purchasing a lengthy work, and, what was worse, he put himself to the trouble of reading it as well"⁵⁵ and that the "eight quarto volumes stuffed full of nonsense"⁵⁶ do not contain anything but "wild figments of the imagination (that) could only disturb the reader's sleep of a night".⁵⁷ It tires him to reproduce "the wild figments of this worst of all enthusiasts".⁵⁸

Many a reader will smile here. And this could be the reader that Kant refers to in his Foreword. The reader who will have to smile while he does not understand the tenor of the book. In any case, one can read Kant's *Dreams of a spirit-seer*, with all its apparently contradictory points of view regarding the possibility and the reality of contact with a spirit-world and his tirade directed at the man he deliberately misnames Schwedenberg,

with the following interpretation key in mind. We divide it into three points:

1. The possibility and reality of contact with a spirit-world cannot be pushed aside as a known impossibility. Kant is sympathetic to the possibility of such a contact. However, not a single experience in this domain can provide reliable knowledge of such a spirit-world. For, in order for a vision to be regarded as contact with a spirit-world, verifiable *earthly* events must have been seen in that vision, while known principles must not suffice to be able to explain the correspondence between the vision and those events. In other words: a spirit world will come into view as reality only in relation to earthly states of affairs and remains in principle unknowable *as* spirit world. For, if visions represented states of affairs in a spirit world, how would we be able to know if they were true or false?

2. For Kant, Swedenborg's vision of the fire in Stockholm satisfied the requirements. It was a verified event that could not be explained on the basis of familiar principles. For Kant, this implied that the only explanation for this "impossible" vision was: contact with a spirit-world. On the basis of this case, Kant was able to accept a spirit-world as really existing.

3. But Kant thought that more proof would be necessary (in the future) to convince the common-sense view as well. That is why he lets his own point of view show through only faintly, between the lines, and understands that others go along with the negative common sense point of view. In his book he keeps his own position veiled, as it were, protecting the still fragile common-sense position of the Enlightenment by creating a mist round his own point of view and unreservedly attacking Swedenborg's presumption of knowing the spirit-world.

Those who read *Dreams of a Spirit-seer* with this interpretation key in mind *do not find themselves contradicted by Kant!* Kant's ironical remarks are only aimed at Swedenborg's claim *that he knows the spirit-world*. That claim is unfounded. Here the outline of Kant's epistemology, as it will be later formulated in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, comes into view. Already in *Dreams of a spirit-seer* he writes that "metaphysics is a science of the limits of human reason"⁵⁹ and that therefore, with respect to the possibility of a spirit-world, we can say:

From now on, it will be possible, perhaps, *to have all sorts of opinions* about, but no longer *knowledge* of such beings. (...) The theory can be completed, albeit in the *negative* sense of the term, by securely establishing the limits of our understanding(...)

(...) the spirit-nature (...) can never be positively thought, for, in the

entire range of our sensations, there are no *data* for such positive thought.⁶⁰
[Italics Kant]

This does not contradict our conclusion that for Kant the real existence of an unknown world in the beyond was demonstrated when he was confronted with a true case: a verifiable anomaly. Our interpretation key demonstrates its validity because it reflects the multi-faceted nature of *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*. Now, what can we say about the riddle with which Kant concludes his Foreword? In it, he says that the reader will be satisfied but will *not* understand the message of the book.

Given its subject-matter, it ought, so the author fondly hopes, to leave the reader completely satisfied; for the bulk of it he will not understand (see below: A), parts of it he will not believe (see below: B), and for the rest – he will dismiss it with scornful laughter (see below: C).⁶¹

A. “(...) for the bulk of it he will not understand (...)”. Metaphysics, perceived as the science of the limits of human reason, teaches us that reason alone does not yield positive knowledge about a spirit-world, and that reports of experiences about such a world cannot be distinguished from fantasy. Nevertheless, we can still come to the conclusion that a spirit-world exists when we are confronted with proof of contact with such a world. Such proof will have to satisfy the demand that the communicated facts are verifiable, while known principles are not able to explain these facts. Therefore, such proof must necessarily refer to earthly states of affairs: an anomaly like Swedenborg’s vision of the Stockholm fire. This means, in fact, that although its existence can be established we will never be able to gain positive knowledge about a spirit-world.

B. “(...) parts of it he will not believe (...)”. Although future research will confront us with more proof, at least one case exists already that can count as such proof.

C. “(...) and for the rest – he will dismiss it with scornful laughter (...)”. The tirade against Swedenborg’s unverifiable claims satisfies modern common sense, the enlightened mode of thought.

This conclusion also sheds light on two other passages in the same Foreword, which at first sight seem hard to reconcile.

(...) Is he [the philosopher] completely to deny the truth of all such apparitions? What reasons can he adduce to refute them? Is he to admit the probability of even only one of such stories? How important such an admission would be! And what astonishing implications would open up before one, if even only *one* such occurrence could be supposed to be proven!” And Kant confesses to “(...) having been naive enough to investigate the truth of some of the stories (...) (but) (...) found (...)

nothing”.⁶² [Italics Kant]

In this case, our interpretation key works, because with some stories about the spirit-world we indeed have to take “*astonishing implications*” into account. This is the case when a spirit-story (only *one* is enough) leads us to the conclusion that there exists a spirit-world. At the same time, it is true that Kant “*found nothing*” because this same spirit-world remains, by definition, unknowable. That is why Kant writes near the end of Part I that with respect to a spirit-world “it will be possible, perhaps, *to have all sorts of opinions* about, but no longer *knowledge* of such beings.”⁶³ [Italics Kant]

Our interpretation key also fits Kant’s text when, in part II, chapter Three (about the common-sense view), he admits that he has not been able to satisfy the expectation of his readers.

I have (...) failed to contribute anything towards satisfying either the curious, by providing them with information, or the studious, by offering them reasons.⁶⁴

Because again, the other world itself remains unknowable, as the only empirical facts that refer to a spirit-world will need to contain information about earthly states of affairs, while our thinking-in-itself is not able to come to positive conclusions about a spirit-world.

Finally, our interpretation key turns out to fit this next quotation, where Kant draws conclusions and puts the reader at ease by referring to the safe and easy common-sense point of view, although we saw that he does not share this point of view himself.

We must therefore wait until we may, perhaps, be instructed in a future world, by means of new experiences and new concepts of forces within our thinking self, which are as yet concealed from us.

(...) If, however, certain alleged experiences cannot be brought under any law of sensation, which is unanimously accepted by the majority of people, and if, therefore, these alleged experiences *would establish* no more than an irregularity in the testimony of the senses (as is, in fact, the case with the ghost-stories which circulate), it is advisable to break off the enquiry without further ado (...).⁶⁵ [Italics ours]

(In this quote the author adjusted the translation: “*would establish*” replaces “*establish*”, because Kant writes “*beweisen würden*”)

We may be able to judge better in the future because then we may be able to learn from “new experiences and new concepts”. We will have to wait. We are not yet ready to decide in terms of common sense what the “forces within our thinking self, which are as yet concealed from us” can teach us.

As long as this desired clarity is not there yet, the reader had better ignore the tangle of experiences that refers to a world on the other side.

We have pointed out that *Dreams* is a book with several faces. Therefore, in this last quote we have to pay special attention to the fact that Kant explicitly writes “*would establish*” (just as at the end of the concluding chapter Four of Part I it says that influences from the spirit-world “*seem*”⁶⁶ to consist of only air). In an almost juridical fashion he leaves room for his own point of view, which, as our interpretation key shows, does not agree with the common sense standpoint that he attributes to most of his readers.

In the meantime let us, as Kant says in the last sentence of the book, quoting Voltaire, “*attend to our happiness, and go into the garden and work*”.⁶⁷ Up to the last line Kant keeps using ambiguous language. The friendly advice might be interpreted as a no-nonsense advice in favour of the common-sense attitude: go to work in this world and leave the spirit-world behind because we will never get positive knowledge about it. But, this friendly advice can also be read as an incentive for the exploration of roads that may lead to new evidence: collect and investigate more cases such as Swedenborg’s vision of the Stockholm fire in order to establish proof of the existence of the (unknowable) spirit-world.

To summarize, Kant’s lesson in *Dreams of a Spirit-seer* is that however convincing the cases that one may meet in the future may be, they will never be able to lead to knowledge *about* the content of the spirit-world; at most, they substantiate the conclusion that *there is* a spirit world. For Kant himself, Swedenborg’s vision of the fire in Stockholm was enough to get him over the hump: there exists a spirit-world, but it is fundamentally by definition unknowable.

The Critique of Pure Reason: No Building Permit for Castles in the Air

Fifteen years after *Dreams of a Spirit-seer* (1766), Kant published the book with which he conquered the world, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, hereinafter referred to as *Critique*). In it, he explicitly rejects the possibility that experiences such as Swedenborg’s vision of the fire in Stockholm – to which he connected such important, albeit veiled, conclusions in *Dreams* – could ever happen in reality. In order to evaluate Kant’s standpoint in the *Critique*, we will devote a few words to its basic ideas.

After the *Critique of Pure Reason*, metaphysics can no longer be the science of the absolute. Philosophy cannot and should not build

metaphysical castles in the air, as there is no basis for this whatsoever. Our knowledge must be based on intersubjectively shared experience. The task of metaphysics, says Kant, is to analyse our experience critically. His critical view shows us how our knowledge is composed and what its limits are. We will not go into how Kant reaches his conclusion; we will just present it here.

Our senses are affected by “something”, a “manifold”.⁶⁸ On being affected, the senses pass on data to a matrix that is lying ready, as it were, and which for the sake of simplicity we will call the “framework for our thinking”. This pre-existing framework receives the data supplied by our senses and shapes them into the world that we experience.⁶⁹ In other words, the world we experience is a synthesis of our senses being affected and a “thinking framework” that was there already. These two need each other, because without sense data our framework is empty and without the framework our senses are blind.⁷⁰ The world we experience is the same world for each and every one of us, because we all have this pre-existing framework within us.⁷¹

For Kant the conclusion from all this is that the world-as-it-is-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) is unknowable for us. What we experience is the world as it appears to us. This world will necessarily always bear the stamp of our human framework. What the world in itself looks like, as *Ding an sich*, and independent of knowing human beings, we cannot know. The only thing we can say about it is that this unknowable *Ding an sich* exists.

This way of thinking also turns inward, so to say. We cannot know our own soul either. We only know ourselves as a collection of remembered experiences. But the “something” that receives these experiences, our soul, remains an unknowable *Ding an sich*, analogously to the world outside of us.

Kant concludes that it is not the world that determines how we know it. Rather, it is the other way around: our framework determines what the world is. A telling expression that Kant uses in this context is “Copernican turn”.⁷² In the same way that Copernicus discovered a new and fertile paradigm for astronomy, by turning the way of thinking around (not: the sun turns around the earth, but the earth turns around the sun), so my philosophy, says Kant, turns out to be “Copernican”.

If metaphysics wants to be scientific, it must focus on outlining our “framework”, and do so on the basis of a fundamentally critical way of thinking. The harvest is abundant: because, with the knowledge of this framework, the limits of our knowledge come into view. Thus, scientific metaphysics also discovers that which we *cannot* know. This is expressed in Kant’s use of the term “transcendental” (rising above). Metaphysics

cannot give us knowledge about what lies beyond possible experience.⁷³ Philosophers with plans for metaphysical castles in the air are not granted a building permit by Kant.⁷⁴ There is only one way of “transcending” that is allowed: Kant’s transcendental philosophy. His philosophy allows us, it is true, to rise above the world of our direct experience, but not with the idea of finding a road to another world beyond it.⁷⁵ In this transcendental philosophy our reason rises up, transcends, but only to “turn back” immediately, to look at the “framework” of its own thinking, at our cognitive apparatus, which is now revealed as the condition for the possibility of our experience. So the transcendental move does not lead us away from experience but *remains close to it*, by investigating what the conditions for the possibility of (our) experience are. This is characteristic of Kant’s Enlightenment-era thinking: what is fundamental for our knowledge lies inside the human being, not beyond it. This is the liberating limitation with which Enlightenment-era thinking protects the humans from developing “incorrect knowledge” about worlds behind or beyond our experience.

While carrying out his project of finding the blueprint for our cognitive apparatus, Kant discovers that this pre-existing framework, the condition for the possibility of our experience, is endowed with two elements that are connected with the senses, namely time and space. Besides, our framework consists of twelve elements that are connected with pure thought, one of them being causality. This therefore means, and here we are looking at a core issue of Kant’s philosophy, that for Kant, causal processes in time and space are necessary forms of the world we experience. Why? Because we ourselves impose these forms on the “manifold” that affects our senses.

A Vision Denied

We have now arrived at an important point in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Critical thinking not only teaches us to perceive time, space and causality as elements of the pre-existing framework that shapes our experience; it also teaches us *what* we on the whole can encounter in the world of our experience *and what we cannot*.

(...) The conditions for the *possibility of experience* in general are at the same time conditions for the *possibility of the objects of experience*.⁷⁶

[Italics Kant]

In other words: transcendental philosophy makes it possible to establish what we can and what we cannot encounter in our experience. Our pre-

existing framework outlines, as it were, the playing field that will be “the world”. For, the possible-actual will have to correspond with that which has already arranged, beforehand, the appearance of phenomena. In view of our main topic, it is interesting to see that Kant uses Swedenborgian anomalous experiences to show what fundamentally can *not* be.

A substance that was persistently present in space yet without filling it (like that intermediate thing between matter and thinking being, which some would introduce) [“spirit” – the author], or a special fundamental power of our mind to intuit the future (not merely, say, to deduce it) [“precognition” – the author], or, finally, the faculty of our mind to stand in a community of thoughts with other men (no matter how distant they may be) [“telepathy” – the author] — these are concepts the possibility of which is entirely groundless, because it cannot be grounded in experience and its known laws, and without this it is an arbitrary combination of thoughts that, although it contains no contradiction, still can make no claim to objective reality, thus to the possibility of the sort of object that one would here think.⁷⁷ [Italics Kant]

In Kant’s view, spirits and anomalous experiences are groundless because they “cannot be grounded in experience and its known laws”. In this context, it means that they are incompatible with the formal conditions for our experience⁷⁸ that determine which experiences are possible and which experiences are not. A more fundamental rejection of anomalous experiences cannot be imagined. Such experiences are groundless. Those who draw conclusions from these experiences are mistaken. An anomalous experience is at best “an arbitrary combination of thoughts”, which “can make no claim to objective reality”.⁷⁹

A careful reader with an interest in the subject will find a second passage in the *Critique*. As our temperament pushes reason beyond the limits that ought to be respected, we need to be disciplined by pure reason.⁸⁰ With this in mind, Kant formulates the rules that we have to follow in developing scientific hypotheses.⁸¹ In order to illustrate in the *Critique* with an example of what is not allowed in this respect, Kant again adduces experiences about which he earlier, in *Dreams*, thought very differently.

Thus we are not allowed to think up any sort of new original forces, e.g., an understanding that is capable of intuiting its objects without sense [extrasensory perception – the author] or an attractive force without any contact [animal magnetism – the author],⁸² or a new kind of substance, e.g., one which would be present in space without impenetrability [spirit – the author]; consequently we also cannot conceive of any community of substances that would be different from anything that experience provides

[a spirit-world – the author]; no presence except in space, no duration except merely in time. In a word: it is only possible for our reason *to use the conditions of possible experience as conditions of the possibility of things*; but it is by no means possible for it as it were to create new ones, independent of these conditions, for concepts of this sort, although free of contradiction, would nevertheless also be without any object.⁸³ [Italics ours]

Therefore, the requirement that every hypothesis must meet is for its object to be possible in a transcendental sense. Kant saw these “*conditions of possible experience as the conditions for the possibility of things*” as the implication of the pre-existing framework, the demarcation of the human playing field called the “world”. In that way Kant saw his discovery of *a priori* forms, the transcendental structures which determine our experience, as a liberating limitation that guards mankind against the development of false and unjustifiable “knowledge.” Crucial for us is that Kant uses experiences like Swedenborg’s as an example of how far one can go astray.

Is Denial the Only Possibility?

Newtonian physics (causal processes in time and space), has, partly due to Kant’s philosophy, become “the official true knowledge.” Even a paradigm shift such as the Copernican revolution in astronomy is possible within the limits of Kant’s transcendental thought. Thus, much is possible, but not everything. Kant demonstrates this by using the Swedenborgian world of experience as an example. However, an experience such as Swedenborg’s vision of the fire in Stockholm does not necessarily contradict Kant’s thought in the *Critique*. For, if we interpret Swedenborg’s vision as an unexplained human capacity for interaction with the environment, there is not a single reason *for Kant* to keep this outside of his transcendental philosophy.

Order and purposiveness in nature must in turn be explained from natural grounds and in accordance with laws of nature, and here even the wildest hypotheses, as long as they are physical, are more tolerable than a hyperphysical hypothesis (...).⁸⁴

But, a hypothesis that is physical and not hyperphysical is actually able to explain Swedenborg’s vision of the fire in Stockholm. An example may help to clarify this. In around 1920, the phenomenon of telepathy was discussed in terms of electromagnetic radiation. The discovery of electricity in the brain and variations in voltage led to the idea of “brain waves”

going out, which, as possible carriers of telepathic messages directly affected the electrical brain activity of a recipient.⁸⁵ The human brain could thus be seen as an organ capable of sending and receiving messages. A term used for telepathy at the time was “mental radio”.⁸⁶

This model explains Swedenborg’s anomalous vision of the fire in Stockholm. *It remains within Newtonian physics without violating Kant’s transcendental philosophy.* As an aside, the following needs to be emphasized. There is no scientific evidence for either the existence or non-existence of brain waves as carriers of messages. That is not what is claimed here. What matters to us here is how our subject can be reconciled with Kant’s transcendental philosophy. It is clear that the notion of a “mental radio” in the (linear⁸⁷) Kantian model can be seen as a *wild* and *physical* hypothesis that is *by no means hyperphysical*.

Here we see that Kant’s denial of Swedenborg’s anomalous vision, precisely in the light of his own thinking, is not very strong.⁸⁸ What is considered “possible” within Kant’s transcendental philosophy does not have to exclude Swedenborg’s vision, so long as we conceptualize it as separate from a spirit-world. Kant’s rejection of Swedenborg’s vision could indicate that he nonetheless still interpreted this vision against the background of a spirit-world, as he did when he was writing *Dreams*. But in the *Critique*, information that comes from a spirit-world is irreconcilable with his transcendental philosophy. As long as Swedenborg’s extraordinary vision can only exist in relation to a spirit-world, it has to be removed with conceptual necessity from our world of possible experience.

Swedenborg’s Vision Out the Door

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes an extremely sparing use of examples and metaphors – here, he makes one exception. He compares our knowledge to an island, a field of truth that is enclosed by nature itself in unchangeable borders and surrounded by a turbulent ocean of deceptive phenomena: fog banks, and melting icebergs that deceive us with images of new worlds. Because there is no other place where we feel solid ground under our feet, it is better for us not to put out to sea, but to stay where we are and be content with what we have.⁸⁹

As we saw, there exists a verifiable anomalous experience of Swedenborg that was able to convince Kant at the time of *Dreams*: the vision in Gothenburg of the fire in Stockholm corresponds with “unknowable” facts. In *Dreams*, Kant explained this correspondence by considering the existence of a spirit-world as real. In the *Critique*, such a vision is deemed fundamentally no longer possible. The question that presents itself is: what

is left of the Stockholm-fire case that once was convincing enough to be the foundation of Kant's personal stance on the existence of and contact with a spirit-world? This significant and revealing possibility of experience appears to be suddenly located on a misty sea outside the field of truth now. This could indicate that in the *Critique* Kant still associated these phenomena with a world on the other side, but did not know what to do with them, and therefore removed them by decree from the field of possible experience. However, he did this on unsubstantial grounds.

It is intriguing that in *Dreams*, Kant manifests himself as a critical philosopher with an open point of view regarding verifiable anomalous experiences such as Swedenborg's vision of the fire in Stockholm. Kant reflects in a veiled manner on the philosophical implications of those experiences and is conscious of the wide-open abyss between his personal opinion and the "easy" common sense position on this matter. He cannot and does not want to deny the problem he is faced with. In a veiled way he tells the attentive reader that the Stockholm-fire case implies something very important. Although Kant has to deny the possibility of our knowing anything about the content of a possible spirit-world, it nonetheless seems to be the case that information from this world occasionally reaches human beings. At the same time this provides hard evidence for the reality of this spirit-world.

In *Dreams*, Kant's sympathy lies closer to the occult point of view than many Kant-interpreters might think. To this it can be added that Kant adopts a wise position by opting for a layered and concealing style of writing. Doing this, he achieves important goals. He stays loyal to his own fascinations and imparts his message only to those that are able to read between the lines. Moreover, he protects the still fragile enlightened mind by putting the question about the existence or non-existence of and contact with a spirit-world on hold for the common-sense reader. Maybe there will be more evidence in the future. On the one hand, Kant openly and emphatically presents his conclusion that we will never be able to know anything positive about a spirit-world. On the other hand, he conceals his personal view that verifiable anomalies (such as the vision of the fire in Stockholm) show that a spirit-world really exists. And by making Swedenborg the object of his ridicule in *Dreams*, Kant educates his readers and warns them not to follow charismatic religious leaders when those leaders claim to know the unknowable.

For Kant-interpreters an interesting issue appears here that merits closer analysis. In *Dreams* there is something that exists, but fundamentally cannot be known (the spirit-world). In the *Critique*, there is also something that exists and fundamentally cannot be known (the *Ding an sich*). In both

books there is a critical philosophy that draws boundaries with regards to the knowable. Yet there is a deep abyss here, because the transcendental in the *Critique* interdicts what in *Dreams* appears as a transcendent reality: a spirit-world, revealed by anomalous facts. In the *Critique* the rational has more weight than the empirical, because a significant fact (a vision that corresponds with events taking place elsewhere) has to be ignored because thinking, with insufficient arguments, denies the possibility of this fact.

At the same time, Kant's educating attitude in *Dreams* has had a devastating effect on Swedenborg's reputation. As a mystic, Swedenborg made an honest and authentic attempt to explore and renew the religion of his time. History teaches us that it can be dangerous to go against ecclesiastical authorities on the basis of mystical experiences. The new, enlightened knowledge-elite seems to have continued the tradition of ecclesiastical authorities up until this very day. The way in which exceptional human experiences are represented in modern-day textbooks on psychology still makes a strained impression.⁹⁰

History also teaches us that people like Swedenborg are important. He has had more impact than many people realize, and his influence can be traced in the works of theologians, philosophers, writers and poets such as H. de Balzac, Ch. Baudelaire, W. Blake, J.W. Goethe, W. James, C.G. Jung, J.C.F. von Schiller, F.W.J. Schelling, A. Strindberg, and W.B. Yeats.

Conclusion

This chapter is intended as a contribution to the exploration of Kant's attitude concerning exceptional experiences in *Dreams of a Spirit-seer* and in *Critique of Pure Reason*. Acknowledging the possibilities of differentiation in the work of a figurehead like Immanuel Kant with respect to these experiences, will contribute to a clearer idea of our own identity as Westerners.⁹¹ In a manner more subtle than in many books on the history of Western philosophy, Kant's thinking reflects an intriguing issue: how does the enlightened mind deal with the epistemological aspect of verifiable anomalous experiences that are crucial in evaluating the writings of visionary people like Emanuel Swedenborg? Nowadays, such exceptional and anomalous experiences are reported in great numbers.⁹² They are not necessarily connected with "a world on the other side", but confront contemporary science and philosophy with a multidimensional, and above all, socially relevant issue that, as Kant demonstrates in *Dreams*, needs to be approached with discretion.

CHAPTER TWO

SCHELLING, OR THE TRANSFORMATION OF DEATH

RICO SNELLER

Is it a coincidence that Friedrich Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) is the very first philosopher whose painting has been handed down? Among the great German idealists (Kant, Fichte, Hegel), he was the one who paid the most attention to nature. Fichte, his great predecessor, perceived nature as “the abstract limitation of the infinite striving of spirit”. Schelling’s friend and contemporary Hegel saw nature as “the realm of difference”, which is to say the domain in which things exist insofar they differ from other things. It seems as if these abstract definitions take away someone’s courage to study nature itself, as an independent force with its own capacities and hidden potentialities.

Schelling did not let his courage be taken away. When he acquainted himself at a young age with the rapidly developing natural sciences, he did not ignore the natural sciences philosophically. He was also deeply influenced by his friendship with members of the romantic circle in Jena (where he became a professor at the age of 23) when he was older. Romantics such as Tieck, Schlegel and Novalis were not experimental scientific researchers in the modern sense, but their fascination for the occult knew no boundaries.

During his entire life, Schelling occupied himself with animal magnetism, clairvoyance, rhabdomancy (the art of dowsing), siderism, somnambulism, etcetera.⁹³

The following is a remarkable anecdote: Schelling was supposed to marry Auguste Böhmer, daughter of Karoline Schlegel. Auguste fell critically ill. The medical science that the spirited Schelling practiced on her did not work and she died from dysentery. When her mother Karoline divorced her (second) husband August Wilhelm Schlegel shortly afterwards, Schelling himself married Karoline, who was his senior by

twelve years. Schelling wrote his first important texts on the philosophy of nature such as *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature: as Introduction to the Study of this Science* (1797) and *First Design for a System of Natural Philosophy* (1798/99) in Leipzig and Jena. In contrast to Fichte, and more explicitly than Hegel, Schelling assigned a *subjectivity* to nature. That is to say, he recognized that nature was, to a certain extent, free and conscious, just like a human “subject”. In other words, that nature is alive.

We have to be careful not to interpret this as a platitude. Indeed, it would be impossible now to find someone who would deny that nature is alive, but nonetheless nature is still sometimes treated as *de facto* lifeless, even by serious lovers of nature. Many contemporary biologists approach organic processes as a refined form of mechanics or chemistry, without their being able to name the specific *living* aspect of their research material. Finally, many people, however ready they are to just be with nature, would respond strangely when nature really started to stir, as an independent agent, just as strangely as those sailors in the fantastical story from the Talmud, who landed on a beach unknowingly, made a fire, and then found out that this “land” was actually a whale that started to move.

However, there are more and more people who conceive of the present climate crisis and ecological disasters as evidence that nature really is “alive” and an independent agent.

All of this serves as an illustration of the fact that the controversy between Fichte and Schelling remains a topic of the day. The controversy coincided with the incremental popularity of *biology*. In 1802, Gottfried Reinhold Treviranus published his *Biology: or the Philosophy of Human Nature*. In that exact same year, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Karl Friedrich Burdach also used the term “biology” instead of “philosophy of nature”, or “natural history”, names that were common at the time.

Throughout the nineteenth century, “biology” struggled with the question about the essence of life itself, and why this life surpasses mechanics or chemistry. Further in this book, we will take a closer look at biologist-philosopher Hans Driesch, for whom *vitalist* biology could provide the basis for *parapsychological* research.

The controversy between Fichte and Schelling coincides more or less with the “discovery” by Frans Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) of so-called “animal magnetism”, a mysterious power of nature that attempts to explain a (healing) effect from a distance, which means healing without touching. We will take a closer look at this in the chapter about Schopenhauer. The observations by Mesmer about the use of this magnetism, later also called *mesmerism*, were at the basis of the previously mentioned occult research that many in the nineteenth and twentieth century were involved in.

“Mesmerism” or “animal magnetism” became an umbrella term for this kind of research. Schelling conceived of mesmerism as a revival of old magic and as an indication of the existence of the hidden potential of nature. We will return to this last point later on.

Philosophically-historically, Schelling’s specific philosophical interest in independent living nature was translated into *vitalism*, or the philosophy of life, of which Schopenhauer, Fechner (partly), Ludwig Klages, Gustav Carus, Hans Driesch, and Henri Bergson were representatives. In the twentieth century, Gabriel Marcel was a great admirer of Schelling.

But the step towards a radical vitalistic recognition of life as a completely unpredictable and radically intangible power is too extreme for Schelling. His fascination for mesmerism, magnetism and spiritism as *non-philosophical* access routes to higher insight had been prevalent for a short period of time, when his beloved wife Karoline passed away in 1806. But the general intention of his philosophy was to integrate all his discoveries and findings in an *idealistic*, rational system.⁹⁴

Crucial for Schelling’s conception of nature is that nature for him does not form the radical antithesis to the human mind, but finds itself in a continuum with it. Nature reaches a higher consciousness in the human being, but this does not mean that nature in itself is without consciousness. The way that leads from the inorganic to the organic is not fractured, but rather, ascends gradually. The organic is only more complex, possesses more activity, sensibility and inwardness than the inorganic.

For Schelling to be able to make such a claim he has to assign to human consciousness a direct access to this nature; if this were not the case, his claim would be nothing but an empty cry or a dogmatic standpoint. Indeed, Schelling appeals to that which seems both an easy and fascinating philosophical solution: *intellectual intuition*. Intellectual intuition is an immediate consciousness of unity. Thus, this consciousness is not the product of reason; it is latently present in every human consciousness. The intellectual consciousness exists in a position in consciousness that coincides with the human *consciousness of freedom*.⁹⁵ And within it also resides the capacity to participate in the deepest “divine” powers that govern the cosmos. When we think of the theme of this book, “paranormal” appearances only exist for a lower, “mediated” (which means: reasoning) position of consciousness. For those who are in a situation of intellectual intuition, or possess an absolute consciousness of freedom, there are no paranormal appearances, but only “normal” appearances. To make this more concrete, we can think here of the consciousness of the artist or the genius. Later in this book, we will see how Schopenhauer takes a similar standpoint and how Jacques Derrida

remarks that what he cannot understand is precisely non-telepathy. In Schelling's text *Clara*, which we will presently examine, it is said that "[m]ost people are scared of freedom as they are of magic, of anything that can't be explained, and of the spirit world [*Geisterwelt*] in particular. Freedom is the true and actual appearance of spirit [*Geistererscheinung*]"⁹⁶

We would like to dedicate a word to Schelling's cosmology. Schelling perceives spirit as the *ground* of the world. With this he means that the centre of earthly existence in its entirety is accessible to the human being in itself. Just because it is accessible, it is spirit, and therefore also conscious, free, creative and eternal. That which we call "matter", is not in opposition to, but only a lower capacity of this spirit. Matter has, as capacity of spirit, its own potential to produce, or, in other words: it has its own, lower form of subjectivity or consciousness. The tragedy of world history consists in the fact that matter has turned away from spirit and has become independent. The laws of matter have started to oppress the laws of spirit. It is not difficult to guess how this process takes place in human beings: people do not follow anymore the "seed of the spirit" or the soul that they carry within them, but they follow the dynamic of their sensible desires. The latter ones are not wrong in themselves, according to Schelling; they only need to be entrusted to spirit again. When this does not happen, people lose their sense of direction.

Death and Dying

In around 1810, Schelling wrote a peculiar text that was never published during his lifetime: *Clara. Or, on Nature's Connection with the Spirit-world*. The text deals with the death of his wife, Karoline, who has been mentioned before. It is set up as a dialogue between a doctor, a priest and Clara, a young widow whose husband has died in a struggle. Because of its style and theme, *Clara* reminds us of Plato's *Phaedo*, the classic dialogue about the immortality of the soul. But the writing is also influenced to a certain extent by the aforementioned Swedenborg⁹⁷, as well as Jacob Böhme and Franz von Baader. Some issues in *Clara* are important for the theme of our book. Schelling suggests here that nature is "interconnected" with the spirit-world (*Geisterwelt*). The spirit-world is not only the world of the spirit, but also the world of spirits, that is to say, those who have passed away, or, in Schelling's terms, the "awoken" or the "separated". Somehow, they make up an interconnectedness with the world we live in.⁹⁸ It cannot be any other way for Schelling, since we have seen that for him nature and mind are different poles or capacities of the

same continuum. "Spirit" and "nature" are to be understood more as different *capacities*, rather than as constituting different domains.

We could say that through this perspective, Schelling overcomes the seeming omnipotence of the five senses that urge us to consider as real only those perceptions received through the senses, and to reconstruct the world according to a conglomerate of touch, vision, hearing, taste and smell. A hundred and twenty years later, Ludwig Klages will claim that in Western thought since Plato, touch and vision have entered into a fatal cooperation that has led to an "idealization" and "reification" of reality. The Chinese, and especially the Taoist tradition, adds Klages, has prioritized the visual capacity, but without taking touch into account, which has made vision capable like no other sense to perceive complex structures or "cohesions", whereas Westerners mostly perceive isolated objects.⁹⁹

We now return to *Clara*, Schelling's treatment of death and dying. When Schelling speaks of the connection between nature and the spirit-world, he does not primarily mean the possibility of the appearances of spirits, but rather the continuity and development that the process of dying means for the human ladder of life. Dying is not the disappearance into a completely different, purely immaterial reality, let alone a disappearance in the absolute sense. For the human being, death means a return to balance, whereas during his material life the powers of his inner being (of his "seed of spirit" or soul) have come under too much pressure from the outside world (which results in self-isolation or independence).

Although we often perceive death as a radical incision, according to Schelling this is an unjust conceptualization. Dying entails a phase of transition that needs to be continued after physical death, just as someone can attempt to subordinate his natural, material existence to spirit during his natural life (or, to start living more consciously and intensely). In comparison, we can think of the process of dying that the Dutch novelist Louis Couperus (1863-1923) describes in his 1902 story "Over Shining Doorsteps". We have seen that Kant demonstrates something similar in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. According to Schelling, those who give too much importance to the material during their lives will spend some time in an in-between space. The point is for man to open his "natural-I" for the light of the spirit and to be transformed by it, up until the point that man's entire personality is penetrated with spirit, or, understanding consciousness. It must be remarked at this point how Schelling refers back to similar thoughts that Socrates expresses in the *Phaedo*. But we also see here Spinoza's plea for a conscious ("rational", sic!) way of living. Again, the material or natural dimension of human life does not have to be

abandoned, but has to become “spirited”. It has to become a support (*Halt*) or “silent, inactive foundation” of its true self.¹⁰⁰

Dying and Ecstasy

In *Clara*, Schelling presumes a specific anthropology. On the one hand, the human being consists of a body (“externality”) and on the other hand, it consists of spirit (“thinking”, “consciousness”). But these two dimensions are interconnected through what Schelling names “soul”. Such a philosophical statement can only be meaningful, however, if we are able to perceive the soul as something *differentiated*, just as we have seen with the intellectual intuition. Schelling attempts this through what the priest says in conversation with Clara. The soul is accessible in the internal, intimate self-experience. She is a *milder being*, he says, in comparison to the two poles that connect them, meaning body and spirit. From this formulation it can be derived that apparently, the two poles possess a certain “harshness” or “impersonality” that is unknown to the soul. As a connection between spirit (thinking) and the body, the soul represents life itself, or, the *living circulating* that I accomplish as a living being between my thinking and my corporeality.¹⁰¹ The soul is my personality itself, and in the deepest recess of my soul I am convinced that the soul is eternal. To die is to pass into another form of existence, and consequently the personality does not get lost.¹⁰²

“During my life”, says Schelling, “my soul has to let my body be entrusted to it. Insofar as the soul is successful, body and spirit form a unity.” In this context, Schelling refers to the old teachings of the astral body that were meant to serve as the vehicle of the soul.¹⁰³ But in contrast to the old traditions concerning this astral body, Schelling attempts to give a systematic explanation. To make things more clear and concrete, we could perhaps refer to that which we call “radiance”, “charisma”, or maybe even “aura” when we try to describe someone: it is not something that is easy to circumscribe, but which nonetheless unmistakably presents itself as a “feeling” or “experience” with regard to someone’s physical appearance. For Schelling, the point is that the continuity between nature and spirit can remain intact and in this continuity, the mind, or consciousness, takes on a leading role. He even goes as far as stating that not only the human being, but nature in its entirety is inhabited by a soul, and therefore has the capacity to sublimate its own natural, material appearance.¹⁰⁴

In relation to dying, or more generally, with regards to human finitude, Schelling describes a remarkable experience: that of *ecstasy*. According to

M.-C. Challiol-Gillet, who made “ecstasy” the hermeneutical motif of her entire interpretation of Schelling, *Clara* is the first text where Schelling uses the term “ecstasy”.¹⁰⁵

We encounter two kinds of ecstasy in *Clara*. At first, the kind about which the main character, the young widow Clara herself speaks. In the conversations she has with the priest and the doctor, she remarks that she increasingly has “experiences of intensity”:

In moments like this, she continued, my conviction needs no reason; I see everything as if it were present. To me, it feels as if the spirit life were already embracing even me, as if I were still strolling on Earth but as a completely different kind of being, as one borne by a soft, gentle element, as if I were without need and without pain—why can’t we hold onto these moments?¹⁰⁶

To this, the priest answers:

Perhaps, I said in reply, this level of profundity isn’t compatible with the limitations of our present life, whose destiny appears to be such that everything will be explained and recognized only bit by bit. And isn’t it so, I added, that when you are in such a state it seems as if your whole being were unified in One focal point, as if it were one light, one flame?¹⁰⁷

The second type of ecstasy, that of the hour of dying, is remarkably described in the exact same words. This time it is the doctor, Clara’s other conversation partner, who speaks. The conversation now considers the process of disconnecting that the dying are subjected to, in which, “[a]lthough they have their eyes closed, they see everything that is externally perceptible; indeed, many of their senses seem to be a lot sharper.”¹⁰⁸ When the doctor adds that from this most sensitive consciousness the dying person slowly slips into a state in which no noise from the outside world can penetrate, Clara asks:

And only then (...) does the highest clairvoyance come about?

Of course, the doctor said. At just this point the highest, inner life is revealed. Everything heralds their most profound consciousness; it is as if their whole essence were pressed into one focal point that unites past, present, and future within itself.¹⁰⁹

Whereupon the doctor confirms that the suggestion of the priest, that “the spiritual essence of our corporeality, the essence that follows us in death” is already present during our life. This, he says, would follow from “[a] whole range of phenomena” [*Eine Menge Erscheinungen*] during life, which cannot be derived from either the soul or the body as such”. In the

end, Clara makes the connection with the aforementioned ecstasy, which she herself has intermittently experienced during her life, and which has consisted of the feeling of intensity and unity. With this, Schelling marks that the process of dying is of a more general nature and possesses (ecstatic) traits that can be experienced before dying. In this context, one can draw upon the connection that the French philosopher Georges Bataille makes between the ecstatic experience of dying and the ecstasy that is manifested in the erotic. It does not need further explanation that Schelling and Bataille interpret the notion of ecstasy in a radically different manner.¹¹⁰

In the classical Platonic terminology, the process of dying could be called a *process of purification*. This purification or *Seelenreinigung* (Schelling) occurs especially, but not exclusively, on the deathbed. With regards to dreaming, Schelling further argues that: "To me, dreams seem to be one such condition and actually an imperfect attempt to effect waking, and hence clairvoyance, within sleep."¹¹¹ We will come to see that Schopenhauer expresses himself in a similar manner when he talks about the relationship between dreaming and higher insight. The amount of realized freedom in the position of consciousness is a decisive factor for Schelling. To maintain the analogy with dreaming as clarifying, we could refer to the *lucid* dream, in which the dreamer possesses a great deal of freedom to make happen in the dream whatever he desires. Schelling writes:

Thus, it doesn't seem impossible to think that when released from its own body that essence could have greater freedom to affect other things and that, like a corrosive, it could free that similar essence within them, too.¹¹²

What Schelling claims here seems unheard of, and, with a little imagination, reminds us of what Jesus said about faith as the smallest seed of mustard that would be able to move mountains. In fact, Schelling suggests that a durable increasing process of purification during life can liberate the astral body within the body itself, so that the carrier can use it as an instrument to "bring about changes merely through will."¹¹³ To a certain extent, the purified is additionally able to look into the future and his/her senses are so aware that he/she can notice the subtlest sense data. Such convictions might be remarkable within the Western history of philosophy, but they are not in the history of culture in humankind. They occur already in the later Veda's, in the *Baghavat Gita* and the *Upanishads* (in the *Bharanyaka-Upanishad*).¹¹⁴

Cosmic Experiences

In *Clara*, there is also talk of extraordinary cosmic experiences. Schelling refers to them in the first part of his dialogue, especially in the conversations that were held in the autumn. Autumn as a setting is significant, as it refers to the passing away not only of human life, but of nature in general.

The doctor and the priests, with whom Clara speaks, both remark that nature expresses itself in “signs and gestures” [*Zeichen und Mienen*]. Nature also laments, because she is involuntarily subordinated to a passing away and wants to be redeemed from this. But in order to understand this, we have to be attentive to the language of nature. Schelling refers to Romans 8, 22-23:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

That nature mourns together with man has to do, according to Schelling, with the destructive force that nature possesses. This force is not inherent in nature itself. It originates because the human being refuses to turn to the spirit and instead lives from the downward-pulling forces of the exterior, material world. For Schelling, the decline of nature is due to human action. Its destructive force is in fact not an anti-power that arises in opposition to the silent forces of the good. Rather, it is to be understood as a distortion of the good. Because the human being refuses the tendency towards a more spiritual existence, the world in its entirety becomes steeped in pain and fear; however, this pain is nothing else but a distorted yearning to go upwards. Evil consists in a (affected) separation of nature and spirit. In the end, it is a form of regression, a refusal of individual progress and development.¹¹⁵

[T]he whole Earth is one great ruin, where animals live as ghosts and men as spirits and where many hidden powers and treasures are locked away as if by an invisible strength or by a magician’s spell. And we wanted to blame these powers that are locked up rather than thinking about freeing them within us first?¹¹⁶

The human being possesses much more capacities than he or she realizes. The human being would be able, according to Schelling, to read important future events in “signs from heaven, in the air and on earth”.¹¹⁷ Similar thoughts can be found in Ludwig Klages, C.G. Jung and Jacques Derrida.

In this context, Jung uses the term “synchronicity”. This phenomenon, which can be found in all times and cultures, is often called “divination” or “manticism”, and its most famous forms of expression are the *I Ching* and Tarot cards. Through the doctor’s character, Schelling even suggests that nature in its entirety participates in great changes in the fates of people, by mirroring or announcing these changes.

The entire range of human possibilities is in the end a manifestation of human *freedom*. Of this, Schelling says, human beings are scared.

Most people are scared of freedom as they are of magic, of anything that can’t be explained, and of the spirit world in particular. Freedom is the true and actual appearance of spirit; that’s why the appearance of freedom brings man down; the world bows to it. But so few know how to handle this delicate secret; that’s why we see that those to whom the capacity falls to use this divine right become like madmen and, gripped by the madness of caprice, they try to prove freedom in actions that lack the character of internal necessity and that are thereby those that are the most accidental.¹¹⁸

Thus, the extraordinary capacities that humans possess are, according to Schelling, connected to a necessity. To apply these capacities arbitrarily perverts them, or even *stimulates* them: after all, sometimes these efforts produce a result, and sometimes they do not. True “paranormal” capacities always possess a certain necessity: they *have* to be exercised. However, it remains uncertain as to whether people are sufficiently prepared for this. In 1818, in a letter to Atterbom, Schelling ridiculed his friend Franz von Baader, who, in his enthusiasm for the occult, enjoyed the fact that his daughter was possessed and suffering from terrifying attacks. Schelling called him an amateur.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

In Schelling, we are dealing with a philosopher who takes extraordinary experiences extremely seriously, and also attempts to place them within a philosophical system. Nature possesses unknown capacities and the same goes for human beings, who are understood as the highest natural being. According to Schelling however, it is of the utmost importance that the human being cares for an adequate position of consciousness: of intensity and spiritedness. Without this, the human being runs the risk of being either blind to the mental capacities of living nature, or of treating those capacities without respect.

CHAPTER THREE

WHO CAN RISE HIGH, AND REMAIN SILENT? THE EMPIRICAL METAPHYSICS OF ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

HANS GERDING

Whoever at the present time doubts the facts of animal magnetism and its clairvoyance should be called not a sceptic but an ignoramus.¹²⁰

—Arthur Schopenhauer

When Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) wanted to dry the ink on a letter he had just written, he picked up the little shaker from his desk to sprinkle some fine sand on the letter. But he had grabbed the wrong shaker. Instead of the sand, he had picked up the inkpot. So he poured ink on his letter instead. The ink dripped from the letter onto the ground. He called his servant. She saw what was going on and started to mop up the ink from the floor. While doing this, she told Schopenhauer that that night she had dreamt that she had to mop up ink from the floor, and that she had told the dream to her colleague when she woke up.¹²¹ The colleague was just coming into the room. Schopenhauer jumped at the chance. Before the two women could speak to each other, he asked the maid who had entered what her colleague had dreamt that night. She said that that morning her colleague had told her a dream in which she was mopping up ink from the floor. Thus, Schopenhauer was witness to a believable, precognitive dream. The words of the maid that had just come in made it difficult to maintain that the other maid made up a dream while cleaning the ink from the floor.

Three questions present themselves here. Does Schopenhauer really think that we can see “otherwise unknowable” aspects of the future in a dream? Does he think that such dreams are significant for philosophy? And if so, has Schopenhauer thought about what this significance might be?

To all three questions, the answer is yes. Yes, for Schopenhauer there is not a shadow of a doubt that the “dream organ” can show us things that are beyond the limits of time and space, and outside the realm of the senses. For philosophy, this is the most important discovery ever made.¹²² For him, his maid’s dream was further proof that the future is determined and can be known through the “dreaming of reality” (wahrträumen). How is this possible? That is what he explains in several texts that we shall focus upon in the present chapter. For Schopenhauer, the heart of the matter is that his maid’s dream is an important argument in favour of that one fundamental idea on which his whole philosophy rests.

Thus, precognitive dreams and other unusual experiences are not just footnotes to Schopenhauer’s philosophy. On the contrary, such anomalous experiences, which he calls “somnambulism”, “clairvoyance”, “second sight”, “animal magnetism” and “magic”, were the very centre of his focus, because he saw them as the empirical confirmation of his metaphysics of the will. For him, there was not the slightest doubt that these extraordinary experiences truly exist and that they are exceptional because of their philosophical implications. As will be demonstrated, Schopenhauer never tires of pointing this out.

Silence on Approaching the Mystery of Life

We will start with some biographical details and information about his cultural environment, to give some idea of the context in which Schopenhauer’s thinking about unusual experiences came about. Schopenhauer’s father was a wealthy merchant and he wanted his son Arthur to be his successor. From a childhood friend, Arthur knew what this would entail: ten years of apprenticeship on the way to a position as an independent merchant. He did not want this and preferred studying philosophy. His father forced him to choose: either join his parents on a trip through Europe and after that be apprenticed to a merchant, or study without travelling Europe. Arthur chose the trip, with a feeling of having sold his soul to the devil. At the age of fifteen, Schopenhauer travelled through Europe for a year with his parents and a servant, in their own carriage. Highlights of this trip were when he climbed to the top of certain mountains. It took him two days, with a guide, to reach the top of the Schneekoppe, at sunrise. In his travel notes, he wrote:

Like a transparent ball and much less radiant than when one views it from below, the sun floated up and cast its first rays on us, mirrored itself first in our delighted glances, below us in the whole of Germany it was still night (...).¹²³

His parents read young Arthur's travel notes. What they did not read was the note that he left in the guestbook of a hut in the mountains. He wrote: "Who can rise high, and remain silent? Arthur Schopenhauer from Hamburg."¹²⁴

Not long after the trip through Europe, Arthur was able to start studying after all, because his father died young, leaving him a considerable sum of money. By carefully managing this inheritance, he was able to devote the rest of his life to philosophy without ever having to work for money.

He spent his entire life trying to clarify and develop one single philosophical insight, which is expressed in his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). He was a philosopher for whom self-examination and directly-experienced philosophy are indissolubly connected, and for whom philosophy was a vital necessity. He was not interested in entering into a dialogue with the "professors' philosophy or the philosophy professors". He did not hold a university position in the period that he wrote his most important work and only gained recognition towards the end of his life.

In many ways he was a modern man. He travelled a lot, and besides his mother tongue he also spoke fluent French, Italian and English. He kept abreast of new developments in science, linking them with his philosophy. Notwithstanding the hundreds of pages of philosophy that he left us, the effect of his early experience always remained strong: to remain silent in the face of the mystery of life.

Schopenhauer was one of the first thinkers to give to Eastern thought the same importance as Western thought, rather than, as many of his contemporaries did, seeing it as an early stage of thinking that we in the West have already surpassed.¹²⁵ This can be evidenced from the fact that he regularly points out parallels between his own philosophy and Eastern philosophy, and that he utilizes these parallels as support for his own work. Among other things, these parallels have to do with the cognitive aspects of altered states of consciousness and with the ontological status of dimensions of reality as experienced in those altered states of consciousness. It should come as no surprise then that exploring altered states of consciousness and the latent capabilities that lie hidden in the human being are central issues for him.

Exceptional Experiences and Schopenhauer's Philosophy

Magical practices and uncommon phenomena and experiences have been reported in all times and cultures. Schopenhauer discusses and interprets magic, clairvoyance, second sight and somnambulism. The literal meaning of this last term is "sleepwalking", but in this case it refers to "lucid action in a state of sleeping, without memory", with a further claim to clairvoyant capacities. Schopenhauer saw all these unusual phenomena as closely related.¹²⁶ In Schopenhauer's days, these phenomena and experiences were referred to with the expression "animal magnetism".

Magnetizing, or healing through the laying on of hands, was a medical technique and, as part of magical procedures among others, has likewise been part of all cultures in all times. The many exceptional experiences that the magnetiser observed as side effects of these practices did not only draw the attention of medical doctors, but also of philosophers and theologians. These many exceptional phenomena and the points of view they entailed, met with resistance, as they were seen as irreconcilable with the scientific knowledge that was dominant at the time. Many scientists saw experiences that imply crossing the limits of space and time, of individuality, and of death, not literally as a crossing of limits but as a fantasy. Unlike Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Schopenhauer, who saw these experiences as a real possibility of crossing into another dimension, did not have a *Weltanschauung* that "prohibited" these phenomena per se.

He saw that a combination of his own philosophy and the "impossibility" of all these exceptional experiences could be very productive, and would connect explicitly to the world of Mesmer and his followers.

Animal Magnetism

The year 1766 saw the publication of the dissertation of Franz Anton Mesmer (1743-1815), in which he claimed a connection between celestial bodies and the human nervous system. According to Mesmer there exists a universal fluid in the cosmos that also runs through the human nerves and responds to magnetism and electricity. The natural amount of fluid in a human being is lower when the person is ill and it is higher in a magnetiser. The magnetiser is able to restore the natural balance in a person who is ill by transferring his own excess fluid, which he can draw from the cosmos to himself, to the patient – he does this through his hands. The fluid can also be transferred through water and ropes, while glass and

silk work as insulators.¹²⁷ Mesmer was able to write about “animal magnetism” as a scientist because it connected with the science of his time.

The second half of the eighteenth century had seen the development, in scientific circles, of a comprehensive view of the electrical activity of our nerves. The “nerve fluid” and other aspects of the human body that were material, but invisible and impossible to measure, were seen as connected, and sometimes even as identical. In this field of research one felt supported by the ideas of Newton, who had spoken of the “universal ether”, which was seen as underlying the forces of attraction, repulsion, gravity, heat, light and electricity. As it was a non-measurable entity, the active principle in these phenomena was referred to in terms of “subtle matter”, which could be guided into the human body and then distributed.¹²⁸ Against this background, the science of the time investigated the relations between magnetism, electricity and nerve functions.

Close to these new scientific ways of thinking about the activity of our nerves are the occult philosophers (Kirchner and Paracelsus among others), whose ideas are related to the *prana* principles as we find them in Eastern philosophy.¹²⁹ *Prana* is Sanskrit for breath, psychic energy and life force. It is thought to manifest itself everywhere in the universe and also to have a seat in the human being. Even in Europe, magnetisers are called pranic healers.

Mesmer’s work is difficult to categorize, because he was a scientist as well as an occultist. But it is precisely because of the link between his teachings on fluid and the natural science of his time, and the connection of his thinking with occultism, that his ideas were enthusiastically received first in France, and subsequently in Germany and England.

Mesmer settled in Paris in 1788, had members of the nobility as his patients, and soon gained fame in the rest of France. In the *Sociétés de Harmonique des Amis Réunis* that were founded in several places in the country, people could learn the magnetizing technique.¹³⁰ The French scientific establishment viewed the overwhelming public interest for the new therapy and Mesmer’s scientific claims with scepticism. Research was needed to come to a conclusion, and therefore the king appointed a commission composed of representatives of various prestigious scientific institutions. Tests to identify the active principle of Mesmer’s therapy (the fluid) as magnetism or electricity, failed.¹³¹ Many French scientists did not recognize Mesmer. After the French Revolution in 1789, the *Sociétés de Harmonique des Amis Réunis* had disappeared. Mesmer’s aristocratic friends had either fled or been killed. In 1803 Mesmer settled in Switzerland, where he died in 1815.

Animal Magnetism and Exceptional Experiences

For a better understanding of Schopenhauer's fascination with the phenomena that occurred around Mesmer's therapy, we must trace those phenomena in the work of one of Mesmer's disciples. This disciple, the Marquis De Puységur (1751-1825), who was in hiding during the French Revolution, was a great inspiration in the 19th century for those who continued this work. De Puységur held the opinion, just as Mesmer, that there exists one universal fluid that can be manipulated and employed therapeutically to heal the sick. However, as De Puységur saw it, this fluid was not a magnetic, but an electrical phenomenon. According to this idea the celestial bodies, as electrostatic generators, keep the universe in a constant state of electrical charge, which further exerts its influence on the earth and its people.¹³² A therapist was able to compensate a shortage of electricity in the nerves of somebody who was ill. Where Mesmer spoke in terms of animal magnetism, De Puységur spoke of animal electricity and this made him a natural part of the scientific-medical discourse of his time.¹³³

It is a specific feature of De Puységur's thinking that the electric fluid in a patient is susceptible to the will of the therapist and can be manipulated by that will. A precondition for a successful treatment was the will-to-heal on the part of the therapist. In order to be able to heal, the therapist had to strongly believe in this therapy and then direct the electric fluid in the patient through his will. De Puységur's motto was: "Croyez et Veuillez" (believe it and will it), something that, as we shall see, was very close to Schopenhauer's heart.¹³⁴ In line with the opinions that were prevalent at the time, De Puységur saw the will as a characteristic feature of the soul and the soul as the driving force of the body. For our understanding of Schopenhauer it is important that the magnetic treatment could put the patient in an altered state of consciousness or trance, which was caused by the therapist because of his rapport with the patient. An interesting footnote here is that all this is somehow in line with the "mind-cure" movement of the American transcendentalists that William James (see chapter 4) was strongly interested in.

Much more than Mesmer, De Puységur was interested in the magnetic sleep or trance that the magnetic treatment caused in his patients. In this magnetic sleep, also called somnambulism, a person is not only able to find his or her way walking with closed eyes, but is also able to speak automatically, and is susceptible to impressions that seem to come from inside rather than outside.¹³⁵ These impressions arising from the inside can be veridical when they turn out to correspond to things that the

somnambulist has no access to with his or her senses in a normal manner. They are experiences that nowadays would be called extrasensory perception. With patients that have gone into a trance through magnetic treatment, we can speak of artificially induced somnambulism. These patients seem to be sleeping, but afterwards they report exceptional experiences. In this state of trance, which resembles sleep, an “inner sense” becomes active that makes observations that often cannot be remembered by the “sleeper” and that, as we mentioned, concern things that are outside the reach of the senses. This curious way of perception was sometimes called “clairvoyance”, and the nineteenth century term “travelling clairvoyance” refers to the original link with sleepwalking.

De Puységur regularly put the therapy to the test. He discovered that magnetised people had the idea that they were able to talk to the spirits of the deceased or with people who were far away. These “higher powers”¹³⁶ were usually at the service of (self) diagnosis. Many doctors relied on the diagnostic skills of somnambulists who were able to look into their own bodies, and thus saw their own organs and blood flow. They were even able to name the day on which they would be healed.

After the French Revolution, interest in animal magnetism was particularly great in Germany. Between 1800 and 1820 it was taught at fifteen German universities. The exceptional experiences of magnetised patients did not only appeal to medical doctors, but also to philosophers and theologians of the time. In addition to Schopenhauer, philosophers such as Goethe, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel were also convinced of animal magnetism and studied the experiences of magnetised patients. Romantic writers and poets used these exceptional experiences as themes in their work or as a way to reach higher insights.¹³⁷

Schopenhauer’s *On The Will In Nature*, which contains the text *Animal Magnetism and Magic*, was published in 1835. In it, he writes that animal magnetism had only just become accepted at the time of the publication of his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation* (1818).¹³⁸ In *Animal Magnetism and Magic* he does mention Mesmer’s theory, but sees the correct vision reflected in De Puységur’s ideas about the influence of the will of the magnetiser. How could I be so blind, Schopenhauer seems to think, for De Puységur had already written about the role and significance of the will in animal magnetism in 1784. But it never hit me that I could see a direct confirmation of my own philosophy in it.¹³⁹

Kant's Role in the Shaping of Schopenhauer's Philosophy

In order to be able to see exceptional experiences in the light of Schopenhauer's philosophy, we will first give a brief review of his central ideas. Schopenhauer is often called a pessimist. This is arguably strange, as he teaches a way towards liberation which, also in his own view, is akin to the wisdom traditions of the East. His main work, *The World as Will and Representation (part I)* was published in 1818. It starts with the following sentence:

The world is my representation: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being, although man alone can bring it to reflective, abstract consciousness. If he really does so, philosophical discernment has dawned on him.¹⁴⁰

In *The World as Will and Representation (part II)* (1844), additions to the unchanged basic position of Part I were published. In Part II he writes that everyone who opens themselves up to it must see the truth of that sentence.¹⁴¹

Schopenhauer takes Kant's epistemology as his point of departure, and with Kant sees the human being as the shaper of phenomenal reality. The world, Schopenhauer says, is *my* representation. What we experience as the world (representations) are phenomena in our own brain. All our representations are placed in space and time, and move along lines of cause and effect. The world of our representation behaves in a causal way in linear time. These three, time, space and causality, are not qualities of the world outside of us, but are a priori forms of knowledge, present in every human being. They play an active role in bringing about reality as it appears to us (Kant), and as we represent it to ourselves (Schopenhauer).¹⁴²

Kant tries to find an answer to the question of how knowledge is possible. That answer is formulated in his *Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft)*, where he speaks in terms of a Copernican turn, impressed as he is by the fact that (as Copernicus demonstrated) the thing that seems to be correct (the sun turns around the earth) is demonstrably wrong, while the reversal (the earth turns around the sun) actually reflects reality. Kant discovers a Copernican turn in philosophy: it is not the world outside us that determines how we know it, but rather, it is the other way around. What is "the world" is determined by how we know. That world is a world that appears to us, and it is based on human a priori forms of knowing; these a priori forms structure our experience. We "impose" space, time and causality on data that come in through our senses. As a result, "knowledge of the world" cannot be seen as separate from the

human being that knows. Science does not investigate the world, but the world-as-it-appears-to-us. For all of us, this world of human experience is structured in the same way. The a priori structures that are responsible for this constitute the conditions for the possibility of our experience, and according to Kant, describing those structures is the task of scientific metaphysics. In Schopenhauer's opinion, Kant had performed this task in a masterly way, and he adopts this part of Kant's philosophy in its entirety.

Schopenhauer's "Will" as Kant's "*Ding an sich*"

The "something" outside of us that is "captured" as it were in the a priori structures, after which we experience a "phenomenal reality", is called *Ding an Sich* by Kant. This "thing-in-itself" we do not experience. As a thing by itself, it is unknowable. What we experience is reality as it appears to us, and which always carries the mark of having been formed by us. Like Kant, Schopenhauer sees space, time and causality as human a priori ways of forming the world that he however calls "representation". The world that we experience and in which we live is a representation that we have made. Unlike Kant, however, Schopenhauer sees the Kantian *Ding an Sich* not as unknowable, but as knowable. We find it deep inside ourselves, as "will".

A closer look demonstrates that according to Schopenhauer, representation is the first fact of consciousness; in it, an immediate split into object and subject is given.¹⁴³ We know *ourselves* in two ways: as "representation" (body) and as willing. This is about a direct act of knowing, an immediate experience that cannot be derived from any more-immediate knowledge.

My body and my will are one; or, What as representation of perception I call my body, I call my will in so far as I am conscious of it in an entirely different way comparable with no other; or, My body is the *objectivity* of my will; or, Apart from the fact that my body is my representation, it is still my will, and so on.¹⁴⁴ [Italics Schopenhauer]

This knowing consciousness can never become representation or object of knowledge itself and cannot experience itself other than as willing. This is the most immediate knowing, a mystery, and Schopenhauer calls it the "world knot".

Now the identity of the willing with the knowing Subject, in virtue of which the word 'I' includes and designates both, is the *nodus* (Weltknoten) of the Universe, and therefore inexplicable. (...) [The] actual identity of the knower with what is known as willing –that is, of Subject and Object-

is *immediately given*. Now, whoever has clearly realised the utter impossibility of explaining this identity, will surely concur with me in calling it the miracle *par excellence*.¹⁴⁵ [Italics Schopenhauer]

This philosophical truth *par excellence* is articulated by Schopenhauer in many ways, among others in a way that shows that for him, Eastern thinking is affirmative. This willing/knowing I, says Schopenhauer, is just like it says in the Upanishads.

It cannot be seen: it sees everything; it is not to be heard: it hears everything; it is not to be known: it knows everything. Apart from this that sees, knows and hears there is no other being. (...) My answer to the objection 'I not only know, but know also that I know,' would be (...) 'Your knowing that you know only differs in words from your knowing. 'I know that I know,' means nothing more than 'I know,' and this again, unless it is further determined, means nothing more than 'ego'.¹⁴⁶ [Italics Schopenhauer]

Now Schopenhauer argues that in analogy with ourselves we can see the will manifesting itself in *all* representations. So there is a "world will" that pours itself out in a staggering variety of representations. This world will seeks matter to manifest itself in, and thus to bring about the manifold of representations. This happens through Platonic ideas.

We could clarify this with the following argument: On its way to matter, this one world-will runs into a zone of Platonic ideas. So the "pouring out" of the one world-will into the world of representations passes, as it were, through a platonic layer where it receives form. The representations we experience, the overwhelming diversity of minerals, plants, animals and humans, have received their way of being from Platonic ideas. This world is not peaceful at all. Among these objects of our experience, a battle is going on of all against all, for one organism lives by eating the other. The world will is fighting against itself.

Liberation: Turning Away From the Representations

In this battle we are caught up in the world of representations. That world, as we have seen, unfolds via causal processes in time and space. Science describes this world by describing its mechanism, thereby also enabling its manipulation. This manipulation is an illusory freedom, because the world of representations is deterministically nailed shut. There is not a single representation that escapes the a priori structures of time, space and causality. As representations among other representations, we perform

slave labour for the will. If it went on like this forever, we would be pretty bad off.

Luckily, we are capable of freeing ourselves from this forced labour. When this happens, pure knowing, free from the will, comes into view; it lies beyond scientific knowledge. This happens in aesthetic experiences, amongst other things. This experience liberates knowledge from its slavery to the will. In the aesthetic experience, consciousness turns away, as it were, from the world of representations and does not *look* anymore, but *sees*. This "seeing" is a form of awareness in which the identification with the struggle for life (the world of representations in which the will is fighting with itself) drops away. In the aesthetic experience, consciousness is lifted from its individuality. With regard to scientific knowledge, the aesthetic experience takes in an objective knowing-position, in which the Platonic idea is experienced and known. So for Schopenhauer art, the aesthetic "seeing", is cognitive, an act of knowing, while science never takes us further than the description of the relation of one representation to the other.¹⁴⁷ In art, we are pure subjects of knowing.

We are only that *one* eye of the world which looks out from all knowing creatures, but which in man alone can be wholly free from serving the will.¹⁴⁸

Schopenhauer calls this state of consciousness "the better consciousness",¹⁴⁹ This better consciousness is capable of even more than only aesthetic "seeing". Feelings of compassion and altruism, too, for example, show a state of consciousness that only becomes possible by turning away from the world of representations, by denying the "default position" of the will, pouring itself out into representations that are at war with each other. Saints have taken this to the extreme. If we want to know more about this, we need:

(...) to refer to that state which is experienced by all who have attained to complete denial of the will, and which is denoted by the names of ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with God, and so on. But such a state cannot really be called knowledge, since it no longer has the form of subject and object; moreover, it is accessible only to one's own experience that cannot be further communicated.¹⁵⁰

In chapter 4, we see that in the case of William James too, mystical experience remains a private affair, about which society only has indirect knowledge, as for example when it witnesses the selfless actions of the holy man. As James argues, "We recognize the tree by its fruit". But this chapter is not concerned with the path towards liberation that Schopenhauer

teaches us. Instead, we direct our attention to the curious phenomenon that in the lives of ordinary people, who are not engaged in art, philosophy, wisdom traditions, altruism and holiness, there are still incidents in which there is a diminished identification with the world of representation. This means that the straitjacket of time, space and causality suddenly hangs loose on them, and they are confronted with anomalous experiences. These are experiences that can take one by surprise, but that can also be called up artificially, that can inspire us with fear and can console us, and can, to Schopenhauer's surprise, be explained as empirical confirmations of his metaphysics of the will.

Swimming Away From the World of Representations With a Trout

We will give an example of such an anomalous experience. In *Transcendent Speculation on the Apparent Deliberateness in the Fate of the Individual*¹⁵¹ Schopenhauer cites an article in *The Times* of December 2nd, 1852. A judge had started an enquiry into the brother of the drowned Mark Lane. When the brother was notified of the fact that Mark was missing, he immediately said that Mark had drowned: "I dreamt that I was standing in deep water and that I tried to pull him out." After this, he had another dream in which it became clear that Mark drowned close to the lock of Oxenhall and that *there was a trout swimming right beside him*. When he went to Oxenhall the following day he suddenly saw *a trout in the water* (we take over Schopenhauer's italics). At that moment he knew that his drowned brother was lying there. So, Schopenhauer says, "(...) something as fleeting as the swimming of a trout was foreseen some hours previously exactly to the second."¹⁵² According to him, this proves the strict determinism that prevails in the world of representations. In *Freedom of the Will* he writes:

If we do not accept the strict necessity of all that happens by means of a causal chain which connects all events without exception, but allow this chain to be broken in countless places by an absolute freedom, then all *foreseeing of the future*, in dreams, in clairvoyant somnambulism, second sight, becomes *objective* and hence absolutely *impossible*, and so inconceivable. Because then there is no objectively real future which could possibly be foreseen, but instead of saying this we merely doubt the *subjective* conditions, hence the *subjective* possibility of this foresight. Even this doubt can no longer be entertained today by the well-informed, after innumerable testimonies of the most trustworthy kind have established those anticipations of the future.¹⁵³ [Italics Schopenhauer]

For Schopenhauer, there is no doubt that which lies in the future and that which is far from us spatially can be known in the present through phenomena such as second sight, clairvoyance and precognitive dreams.

The proof of this is given by clairvoyant somnambulists who in the period of the extreme climax of their condition can at once bring into their intuitive dream perception any locality whatsoever to which they are led and can give a correct account of the events there. But occasionally they can even predict that which does not yet exist but still lies in the womb of the future and only in the course of time comes to be realized by means of innumerable intermediate causes that come together by chance. For all clairvoyance in somnambulist sleepwalking, (...) is simply nothing but *true dreaming* (...). Meanwhile, we have in these phenomena (...) positive proof that that mysterious intuition which is conditioned by no impression from without and is familiar to us through the dream, can stand to the external world of reality in the relation of *perception*, although the connection with that perception which facilitates this remains to us a mystery.¹⁵⁴ [Italics Schopenhauer]

We have seen that the course of events in the world of representations is determined by causal processes in space and (linear) time. If we accept this, future events can never “cause” dreams in the present. In Schopenhauer’s philosophy, causes are by definition in the past. How, then, can we have dreams in which the future, as it were, throws her shadow backwards and is already known in the present? This is possible, as we will see further on, because according to Schopenhauer, we are not only representations but also timeless and spaceless will, and by means of “truth-dreams” that arise in this sphere of the will, we can be cognitively connected in a mysterious manner to what takes place on the surface in the world of representations.

Dreaming: A Reversed Physiological Process

Our rational thinking and our scientific understanding cannot grasp this mystery. Then let us at least try, argues Schopenhauer, to clarify this riddle phenomenologically and try to describe its physiology in scientific terms.

(...) all we know is that here the dreamer *dreams what is real* (...). Thus far does this elementary fact take us for our consideration. What we can do to explain it, in so far as this is possible, is first to compile and classify properly by grades all the phenomena connected therewith, with the object of discovering their mutual relationship and in the hope of thus one day arriving at a closer insight to it.¹⁵⁵ [Italics Schopenhauer]

Schopenhauer carries out this “compiling and ordering properly” in his *Essay on Spirit Seeing and everything connected therewith*. (1851). He discusses somnambulism, which was discovered as a side effect of magnetising. We should actually call this “artificial somnambulism”, as we can induce it consciously. But we also know “natural somnambulism, which manifests itself spontaneously, usually during our sleep and, in visions, shows us aspects of the future.”¹⁵⁶ We experience visions, Schopenhauer says, in our dreams, and as such most people know them. We see and experience something while we are asleep. As the brain receives few or no sense data during sleep, we are therefore confronted with the question of what prompts the brain to produce dreams. The prompt, writes Schopenhauer, does not come from outside, but from within. Our nerves and blood vessels stimulate our brain. With this material, the brain will exercise its characteristic function, i.e. “apply” a priori. This means that it will produce images that are extended in space and that move in time.

Accordingly, every case of vision through the dream-organ is the activity of the intuitively perceiving brain-function that is stimulated by *inner* instead of outer impressions as previously. That such an activity, however, can have objective reality and truth, even when it relates to *external* and indeed remote things, is a fact whose explanation could be attempted only in a metaphysical way, from the restriction of all individuation and separation to the phenomenon in contrast to the thing-in-itself (...). The physiological course of events in somnambulist perception is a difficult riddle to whose solution, however, the first step would be a genuine physiology of the dream (...).¹⁵⁷ [Italics Schopenhauer]

Everything that plays a role in building our experience during the day comes into play at night as well: brain functions, applying a priori, process data and produce experiences.

The dream-organ is, therefore, the same as the organ of conscious wakefulness and intuitive perception of the external world, only grasped, as it were, from the other end and used in the reverse order. The nerves of the senses which function in both can be rendered active from their inner as well as from their outer end (...).¹⁵⁸

Because of this different, reversed mode of functioning, “second sight” would be an excellent name for our dreams. Unfortunately, says Schopenhauer, that name is already in use, namely for a special subcategory of visions (clairvoyance), and that is why here dreams have been attributed to the “dream organ”, that, as we have seen, is capable of “truth-dreaming”.¹⁵⁹

Our Omniscience is Veiled

Through the dream organ, events that in the world of representations are in time and/or space outside the realm of our senses, can “(...) from an entirely different direction (...) come in through the back-door, so to speak.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, truth-dreaming can give us a glimpse of the future, for example in order to console us. Schopenhauer refers to Goethe who had to say farewell to his lover. After this farewell, Goethe sees himself in a vision, wearing certain clothes, on a horse and in a place where he is riding back towards his lover again. Eight years later things turned out to happen in exactly this way. In other words, for Goethe, in this vision, the veil of the future was lifted to console him.¹⁶¹

We see here an operation, Schopenhauer says, that occurs only rarely. Here it happened for consolation. Incidents in the present too, can make themselves known in this way. This may happen, for example, when in a dream or in a daytime vision we find out about the death of someone where we are not physically present.¹⁶² Further, Schopenhauer recommends that those who are keeping a secret should not speak about it close to the person from whom the secret is being kept. This is because speaking about it increases the chance of the secret being betrayed unintentionally through the direct transmission of thoughts. Lovers are also able to get to know each other's thoughts directly.¹⁶³ Moreover, there are numerous playful incidents where this happens spontaneously. Within this context, Schopenhauer relates an event that happened to him:

Many years ago, my handsome hostess in Milan asked me in a very animated conversation at the dinner-table what the three numbers were that she had taken as a tern in the lottery. Without thinking, I correctly mentioned the first and second, but then gave the third incorrectly because her merriment confused me; I woke up, as it were, and now reflected.¹⁶⁴

Many reports exist of this disrupting influence of our thinking consciousness on allowing in information about the outside world that comes to us by an “inverted way”, and that Schopenhauer notices here.¹⁶⁵ We already mentioned that the somnambulist trance is a favourable condition for allowing these impressions to come in. Kant points out that the seer Tiresias was blinded in order to “see” better.¹⁶⁶ And much later in controlled experiments in this field, researchers shielded their subjects from the overwhelming presence of the outside world and the consciousness clinging to it. It is for this reason that nowadays the impressions that subjects have in dreams¹⁶⁷ and in artificially induced trances,¹⁶⁸ are used in the research of extrasensory perception.

In coming to his conclusions, no experimental results were available to Schopenhauer. He had to make do with his own experiences and with the cases he encountered in literature and which he considered reliable. However, he did not consider the reporters of experiences competent enough to come to an informed philosophical conclusion about their own experiences.¹⁶⁹ Schopenhauer himself arrives at a vision that is based on his own philosophy. He draws the interesting conclusion that in principle humans, by way of “truth-dreams”, can get to know everything, although often they do not realize it. Truth-dreaming could, in its highest degree of clairvoyance, extend to all events on earth.¹⁷⁰ This is why, says Schopenhauer, the human being is all-knowing in principle.

The origin of these *momentous visions* is to be thought in the fact that that mysterious faculty of knowledge which is concealed within us and is not restricted by relations of space and time and is to that extent omniscient and yet never enters ordinary consciousness, but is for us veiled in mystery – yet casting off its veil in magnetic clairvoyance –, that that faculty of knowledge has once espied something of great interest to the individual. Now the will, as the kernel of the whole of man, would like to acquaint cerebral knowledge with this matter of interest (...).¹⁷¹

Wilhelm Tenhaeff (1894-1981), the Dutch professor of parapsychology who in 1953 was the first ever to be assigned to such a post, based himself on the same way of thinking when he held the results of his research up to the mirror of philosophy. This is what he saw in that mirror: to the Godhead, omnipresence is attributed. Humans, with their clairvoyant abilities, possess at least fragmentary omnipresence. This makes man in principle equal to the Godhead.¹⁷²

It seems that searching for meaning in this field not only transcends the borders of a single discipline, but also tries to find the limits of material reality itself, trying to reach beyond them, incorporating what it finds beyond these limits in the interpretation of the phenomena under investigation. This is what Schopenhauer does too. In the flow of representations that constitute our life, he writes, we are sometimes confronted with representations that defy the laws of nature that were deemed inescapable, so that what is thought impossible, does actually take place.¹⁷³

The art of soothsaying, whether in a dream, somnambulistic prophetic vision, second sight, or anything else, consists only in discovering the path to the freedom of knowledge from the condition of time.¹⁷⁴

Because physics is not able to explain this truth-dreaming, we must not try to find this explanation in physics but in metaphysics. We will return to Schopenhauer's metaphysical interpretation later. First, we will discuss magic, or "actio in distans".

Witches Can Truly Do Magic

An interpretation from the metaphysical point of view not only concerns unexplained perceptions, but also unknown effects, "magic". In *Animal magnetism and magic* (1836), Schopenhauer gives examples of direct effects of pure willing on material processes.

The thing is however brought to a climax when this immediate power of the will is extended even to inanimate bodies. (...) the somnambule caused the needle of the compass to deviate at one time 7° and at another 4°, this experiment moreover repeated four times. She did this moreover without any use of her hands, though her mere will, by looking steadily at it.¹⁷⁵

Apart from clairvoyant perception (*passio a distante*), there exists a physical influence that is realized directly out of the will (*action in distans*).¹⁷⁶ Just as with clairvoyance, the real existence of this phenomenon is beyond any doubt for Schopenhauer. And those, he writes, who start to giggle as soon as the word magic is even mentioned, regard the world with an exceptionally superficial outlook and have no idea that we are actually floating on a sea of riddles. The magical power that is attributed to witches cannot be swept aside as nonsense. Magic is a secret art. In all times and cultures humans have been convinced that it is real and that it works.¹⁷⁷ The fact that the witch trials finally ended was due to the fact that only a small circle of influential people denied the possibility of magic. The general population has always continued to believe in magic. And in wise men we always see, apart from a belief in omens,¹⁷⁸ a belief in the magic power of the will as well.¹⁷⁹

It is interesting to have a closer look at Schopenhauer's cultural-philosophical analysis of the witch hunts. Magic, which is what witches were accused of, exists and is an attempt to exercise influence on nature. The dominant religions have put nature in the dominion of gods and demons, and the magician who performed magic actually did not do anything but ask the gods to help him. This worked well in the divine aristocracy of polytheism, because the magician was able to approach and enlist a great variety of gods, each with his or her own special powers, for very different issues. All these gods, Schopenhauer argues, are personified forces of nature. They are "tools", as we would say nowadays, archetypes

that are working inside, from and towards us.¹⁸⁰ But when, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, polytheism was replaced by a divine monarchy, problems arose for the magician. When there is only one single God who commands all of nature, it is too megalomaniac a thought for the magician to think that he can direct personal requests to that God. When a magician nevertheless succeeds in achieving something impossible, and in doing so puts the laws of nature aside, it can only be interpreted as a result of a pact with the devil, Schopenhauer writes. All magic becomes black magic. And precisely herein lies the reason for witch trials and laws against sorcery.¹⁸¹ The hatred of the churches for psychokinesis and animal magnetism is not directed against the devil that dwells in hell, but within us.¹⁸² For Schopenhauer, magic exists, but in no way is there a pact with a polytheistic world of gods or with the devil. With magic, we see that:

(...) the will (...) the thing in itself, the kernel of Nature, accomplish through the human individual, in Animal Magnetism and even beyond it, things which cannot be explained according to the causal nexus, i.e. in the regular course of Nature; if we find it in a sense even annulling Nature's laws and actually performing *actio in distans* [action at a distance], consequently manifesting a supernatural, that is, metaphysical, mastery over Nature.¹⁸³

That is why Schopenhauer can argue that “natural magic” is a contradiction in adiecto, and just as absurd as the term “supernatural physics.”¹⁸⁴

Somnambulism and Magic Are Empirical Metaphysics

Magic (*actio in distans*) and somnambulism (*passio in distans*) are phenomena that occur in the world of representations, but that bypass the laws of nature that are in force there. As Schopenhauer argues, they have never been understood correctly, but due to his philosophy they will finally be seen for what they are. According to Schopenhauer, Kant's philosophy was one of the first to prepare the acceptance of animal magnetism in the first decennia of the nineteenth century. Thanks to Kant we are able to see space, time and causality as frameworks of phenomenal reality, the world of human experience. Beyond this world is the *Ding an sich* as unknowable reality. The *Ding an sich* (Kant) and the Will (Schopenhauer) are not subject to the inevitable laws of nature of the world of phenomena (Kant) or representations (Schopenhauer).¹⁸⁵ Those who reject magic on grounds of incommensurability with the laws of nature, think superficially, for there is more at stake than just the laws of nature. Such individuals have not yet understood Kantian enlightenment.¹⁸⁶

The fact that magic and somnambulism exist, precisely points to an organization of reality where there is life going on behind the scenes. This reality behind the scenes does not only exist, but also manifests itself in a way that is clearly visible to all of us.

(...) that apart from (...) the *nexus physicus* [physical connection] (...), there must exist another besides, passing through the very essence in itself of all things: a subterranean connection, as it were, by means of which immediate action was possible from one point of the phenomenon on to every other point, through a *nexus metaphysicus* [metaphysical connection];

that accordingly, it must be possible to act upon things from inside, instead of from outside, as is usual; *that* it must be possible for phenomenon to act upon phenomenon by means of that being-in-itself, which is one and the same in all phenomena;

that, just as we act causally as *natura naturata* [created nature], we might probably be able to act also as *natura naturans* [creating nature], and momentarily enable the microcosm to play the part of the macrocosm; *that*, however firm the partition walls of individuation and separation might be, they might nevertheless occasionally permit a communication to take place, as it were, behind the scenes, or like a secret game under the table;

that, just as a neutralisation of individual isolation takes place in somnambulist *clairvoyance*, so likewise might a neutralisation of the will in the individual be possible." [Italics Schopenhauer].¹⁸⁷

In other words: we are capable of spontaneous creation and there are no restrictions around our psyche. This is quite something. After letting Paracelsus, Roger Bacon, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Van Helmont and Jacob Böhme have their say on the matter in *Animal magnetism and magic*, Schopenhauer says the following about the mysterious events that are connected with this unexplained knowing and willing:

This much is at any rate certain, that at the bottom of all experiments, successful or unsuccessful which have ever been made in Magic, there lies an anticipation of my Metaphysic. For in them is expressed the consciousness, that the causal law only connects phenomena, while the inner nature of things remains independent of it; and also, that if any *direct* influence on Nature be possible from within, it can only take place through the *will* itself. But even if Magic were to be ranked as practical Metaphysic, according to Bacon's classification, it is certain that no other theoretical Metaphysic would stand in the right relation to it but mine, by which the world is resolved into Will and Representation.¹⁸⁸

Schopenhauer does not tire of proclaiming the same message in all kinds of places and in different texts: the world is will and representation, and that he is right due to this being proven by the whole group of phenomena that we can see as one related family, and that we call animal magnetism, somnambulism, clairvoyance, second sight and magic.¹⁸⁹ These phenomena represent practical metaphysics, and they form, Schopenhauer thinks, the empirical evidence that his philosophy is correct. At first, I did not get it, he seems to think, but once my eyes were opened, evidence accumulated itself.¹⁹⁰ This is the message that Schopenhauer disseminates again and again. One choice from many possible quotes underlines his point of view.

(...) an effect of this kind (knowledge in clairvoyance and action in magic) can be understood only metaphysically; physically it is an impossibility. (...) magic is (...) a confirmation of my doctrine of the sole reality of the will as the kernel of things. In this way, Bacon's statement is again confirmed that magic is practical metaphysics.¹⁹¹

The few commentators of Schopenhauer who take the meaning of exceptional experiences for his philosophy seriously are, amongst others, the biologist and philosopher Hans Driesch (1867-1941) (who we will discuss in another chapter of this book), the German (para)psychologist Hans Bender (1907-1991), Andrea Kropf, who amongst other things discussed this aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy in her doctoral thesis (1999), and David Cartwright, who recently published a voluminous biography of Schopenhauer.¹⁹² Many other commentators go out of their way to ignore this side of Schopenhauer. In the recently published and otherwise brilliant biography of Schopenhauer by Rüdiger Safranski there is not a word mentioned about it. Further, whoever searches under "somnambulism", "magnetism", or "magic" in the seven chapters on Schopenhauer in the online Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy will not get any results.¹⁹³

Schopenhauer's Vision of the Future of This Discipline

Experiences that are interpreted as contacts with a dimension of reality that is difficult to access have always been ignored. We see this in the case of Schopenhauer, even though he uses these experiences as an argument in support of his philosophy.

It was not any different in the period just before Schopenhauer's days. The church did not tolerate magic and put witches on trial. But, Schopenhauer thinks, Kantian enlightenment ideas will break things open, because they show that causality does not cover all of reality. However,

this did not happen. In chapter I, we saw that Kant had an ambiguous standpoint. In practice, nobody agrees with Schopenhauer. Because of the dominance of science, a dominance that had been further justified by Kant's philosophy, an epistemological wall has gone up in society that creates a world where clairvoyance and magic are "exiled" phenomena. Science does not do much with them, although there are regular periods of interest such as the second half of the eighteenth century in France and the early nineteenth century in Germany and England. In the middle of the nineteenth century, this interest finds form in the rise of spiritism, and, a little later, theosophy. In the thirties of the 20th century, interest revives with Jung, and later again in the sixties and the seventies.¹⁹⁴ The knowledge elite as a group keeps its distance because the phenomena do not fit the rhetorical and political process that science (also) embodies.

Schopenhauer sees it differently. When, he says, theoretical metaphysics (his own philosophy) and empirical metaphysics (animal magnetism and magic) operate together, there is a great future, because:

(...) a time will come when philosophy, animal magnetism, and natural science, that has made unparalleled progress in all its branches, will shed so bright a light on one another that truths will be discovered at which we could not otherwise hope to arrive.¹⁹⁵

On the question of how this is going to work in practice, Schopenhauer has a remarkably modern vision, although the contours of what he imagined are only gradually starting to take shape now, a century and a half later. It is true, says Schopenhauer, that the phenomena under discussion have been fought with conviction over a hundred and fifty years, but there is still hope, because:

It is a fortunate circumstance, that the rectification of this view in our time should have come from *medical science*; because it ensures us at the same time against the danger of the pendulum of opinion receiving too strong an impulse in the contrary direction, and thus carrying us back to the superstition of ruder ages.¹⁹⁶ [Italics ours]

Indeed it seems that scientific research in this field is increasingly emerging from medical circles. Studies that show the effectiveness of *mindfulness* and *guided imagery*, and fundamental research into consciousness show a receptivity for research that is opening fundamentally new horizons.¹⁹⁷ At the same time, we must watch out for pitfalls. This may happen, Schopenhauer says, when for our understanding of this field, we seek advice from the people who report these phenomena as experience. There is no other place where lies and deceit have more

opportunity than exactly here.¹⁹⁸ And who does want to penetrate deeper, should

(...) not pay any attention to the metaphysical utterances and theories of somnambulists, for they are often paltry views which have sprung from the dogmas that were learnt by the somnambulist and are an admixture of these with what she happens to find in the mind of the magnetizer; they are, therefore, not worth considering.¹⁹⁹

We Figure in Each Other's Lives

We will also look at Schopenhauer's *Transcendent speculation on the apparent deliberateness in the fate of the individual* (1851), because here exceptional experiences once again played a role in developing his philosophy.

The course of our life is determined, and with it our fate. Schopenhauer finds it risky to write about this topic, because unambiguous, definitive answers about our fate are the last thing that a reader can expect. He still brings up the subject because so many people have the impression, especially when looking back on their lives, that there was a supernatural force exerting its influence. Especially when accidental events have given our life a turn that we did not wish, but that in the end made us happy, the saying is true that: "I then had a good voyage, although I was shipwrecked."²⁰⁰ In these accidental events, trifling things with sometimes great consequences, people often see the hand of providence at work.

How does this connect with Schopenhauer's conclusion that the world of representations in which we live is strictly determined? Because this, in his eyes, is doubly proven. First, because the Kantian a prioris of space, time and causality give this world a structure that implies a complete determinacy. Second, somnambulist precognitive perceptions also prove this (see the examples of the ink bottle and the trout, above). Even when one tries to deliberately frustrate predictions that come to us in dreams or through an oracle, one in fact helps those predictions come true.²⁰¹

The thought that our seemingly chaotic course of life is actually subjected to a faultless control, can be seen in all times and cultures. Casual occurrences in our lives are then experienced as instruments in the hands of the controlling instance. This is reinforced when two casual events that each by themselves form part of causal chains that develop independently from each other, suddenly turn out to be interconnected in some meaningful way. Carl Jung (1875-1961), who refers to Schopenhauer²⁰² in his research in this field, gives the following example. Just when a patient is telling him about a meaningful dream regarding a

scarab (beetle), such a beetle flies into the room.²⁰³ Like many people in such a situation would be, Jung and his patient are strongly impressed. In his search for an explanation, Jung speaks of synchronicity and calls this a non-causal meaningful connection. In his book on synchronicity he also quotes Schopenhauer, who writes the following:

Now if we represent those individual causal chains by meridians that would lie in the direction of time, then that which is simultaneous, and for this reason does not stand in direct causal connection, can be everywhere indicated by parallel circles. Now although all things situated under the same parallel circle do not directly depend on one another, they nevertheless stand indirectly in some connection, though remote, by virtue of the interlacing of the whole net or of the totality of all causes and effects that roll along in the direction of time. Their present co-existence is therefore necessary; and on this rests the accidental coincidence of all the conditions of an event that is necessary in a higher sense, the happening of that which fate has willed.²⁰⁴

What this “necessity in a higher sense” is, Schopenhauer explains in the following way. Take a dream. A secret power deep within us and outside of our conscious control composes this dream. In this dream there is a secret systematic connection between “casual” events, that we have put there ourselves. Our “will” does this, though it is not perceived as the director. Exactly the same thing happens in our waking life. The method that we discover in our course of life is analogous to the method of the events that occur in our dreams. Fate stimulates one and systematically obstructs the other. We try to read these meanings, says Schopenhauer, in *omina* (signs) or we call them “hints from God”. Often, it is only in hindsight that we see how a failure turned out to be beneficial to our true well-being.²⁰⁵

(...) just as everyone is the secret theatrical manager of his dreams, so too by analogy that fate that controls the actual course of our lives ultimately comes in some way from the *will*. This is our own and yet here, where it appears as fate, it operates from a region that lies far beyond our representing individual consciousness; whereas this furnishes the motives that guide our empirically knowable individual will. Hence such will has often to contend most violently with that will of ours that manifests itself as fate (...).²⁰⁶ [Italics Schopenhauer]

Now we will take a step towards the greater context. The people who perform in our dreams are phantoms created by us. In our waking life, the people we meet are not phantoms but real people that figure in the dream that is our life, just as we figure in those of others. There exists a subtle

harmonia praestabilita (established order), according to which a human being experiences in the course of their life what is good for them, and thereby at the same time brings about what is necessary for other people. Thus everyone is the hero in their own drama and at the same time an “extra” in someone else’s drama. The *harmonia praestabilita*, says Schopenhauer, is staggering and goes beyond our understanding. It resembles a super-harmonious symphony with that one will of life as the composer.²⁰⁷

This composer did not write the symphony only for people, but for all of nature. Everything has been gathered together in a great *harmonia praestabilita*. Here, Schopenhauer immediately sees connections again with the phenomena that are central in this chapter. The image sketched here gives meaning to a primal phenomenon that belongs to all times and cultures, and that we know as *omina*, *praesagia* and *portenta* (omens, premonitions and miraculous signs). These signs take place with strict necessity, but can at the same time be viewed as:

(...) a mere image or picture of me, as the subject-matter of *my* life-dream, happening and existing merely with reference to *me*, or even as a mere reflection and echo of *my* action and experience. Accordingly, that which in an event is natural and can be causally demonstrated as necessary, does not by any means do away with the ominous element therein; and in the same way, the ominous element does not eliminate the other. And so those people are entirely mistaken who imagine they remove the ominous element of an event by their demonstrating the inevitability of its occurrence, in that they show quite clearly its natural and necessarily operating causes (...) And so the would-be wise, especially when they become physically minded, should specially remember Shakespeare’s words: ‘There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy’.²⁰⁸ [Italics Schopenhauer]

Contrary to the well-known but incorrect Shakespeare-quote (“there is more *between* heaven and earth”), Schopenhauer quotes Shakespeare correctly (“there is more *in* heaven and earth”, an important distinction). According to Schopenhauer it is not nonsense to see more than just “blind coincidence” in casual events that give our course of life a decisive turn. Consulting oracles is a way of discovering something about our future through precognition. One of the many ways of doing this is to turn towards a medium that is capable of consulting deceased ancestors. Schopenhauer also studied the question of whether this is possible.

Is Contact With the Deceased Possible?

Sometimes our dream organ can work when we are awake too, and make us see human forms that are hardly distinguishable from real people.²⁰⁹ These can be visions caused by fever, hallucinations that occur in insanity, but also hallucinations without fever or illness.²¹⁰ These visions can contain information that is new for the person concerned. Schopenhauer points to the case of Miss Lee, who was notified of the exact day and the hour of her death in a vision of her “deceased mother”. Aside from deaths in the future, deaths in the present can also be observed in visions. Finally there are also visions in which spirits from the past appear. These can be caused by material remains (one drop of blood is sufficient) and/or correlate with places where murders have been committed or executions have taken place.²¹¹

But, Schopenhauer says, even when a deceased person appears in a vision and gives information about things that were unknown, this does not have to lead to the conclusion that we are dealing with the spiritual continuation on the other side of a human being that once lived on the earth.²¹²

Now if in the case of the few examples of the kind we are considering it is reported that the apparitions of the dead had revealed to the man beholding them certain facts hitherto unknown, this is in the first place to be accepted only on the most certain evidence and till then should be regarded as doubtful. But then in any case, it should still be explained through certain analogies with the clairvoyance of somnambulists.²¹³

“In fact, even in the case where such an appearance has revealed things that no one could know, this could (...) still be taken as (...) spontaneous somnambulistic clairvoyance (...).”²¹⁴

We saw that Kant interpreted Swedenborg’s vision of the fire in Stockholm as a form of contact with the beyond. Here, we see that Schopenhauer interprets such a vision as a somnambulist perception. In other words, even if the “spirits of the deceased” give us correct information about matters that are unknown to us, this is not a sufficient reason to think we are dealing with a person from the other side. Because it may also be the case that in a somnambulist sub-personalities arise and express themselves. And if then these sub-personalities get to know verifiable facts about which the somnambulist knew nothing, we do not need a “spirit of a deceased person” to interpret the facts. The fact, Schopenhauer says, that apparitions of individuals who are not deceased are being perceived too, does not make the problem any simpler.²¹⁵ In his

view, we must switch to a completely different way of thinking regarding this issue.

(...) this utterly untenable *spiritualistic* (...) assumption of an immaterial yet mobile substance, which moreover acts on bodies as does matter and consequently on their senses as well, has to be entirely given up so that a correct view of all the relevant phenomena may be reached. Instead, we have to gain the idealistic standpoint whence we look at these things in quite a different light, and to obtain quite different criteria as to their possibility.²¹⁶ [Italics Schopenhauer]

Schopenhauer uses his philosophy in order to understand somnambulism and magic. And on the other hand, these phenomena, as we saw, prove the correctness of his metaphysics of the will. This metaphysics makes it possible to not immediately embrace facile and gullible conclusions concerning contact with the deceased as truth in terms of folk metaphysics.²¹⁷ Spirits of deceased persons are experienced in all cultures,²¹⁸ there can be no doubt about that. Discussion arises about the question of how to interpret these experiences. Schopenhauer shows that there is an alternative explanation for the facts and experiences that in folk metaphysics are considered the spirits of the deceased. But, says Schopenhauer, we cannot rule out the possibility of what we have disputed. For, human beings are also will. And to the extent that they are will, they stand outside of time, space and the causality of the world of representations. When someone dies, the physical body may disappear, but not the will of the deceased. It is then possible that:

(...) the will of the dead man is still always passionately directed to mundane affairs. Now in the absence of physical means for influencing these, the will has recourse to that *magic* power which belongs to it in its original and hence metaphysical capacity and consequently in death as well as in life.

(...) Therefore only by virtue of this *magic* power would it be capable, perhaps even now, of that whereof it may also have been capable in life, namely of exerting a real action in distans, without the assistance of a body and accordingly of influencing others directly without any physical intervention, by affecting their organism in such a way that forms were bound to present themselves intuitively to their brain (...). (...) we might perhaps venture to take the bold step of not limiting it to human organisms, but of conceding it also to inanimate and thus inorganic bodies that could therefore be moved by it (...).²¹⁹ [Italics Schopenhauer]

Schopenhauer stops short of saying that the spirits of deceased people can appear to us. His philosophy does not rule out such a possibility and

he leaves this openness intact. But in concrete cases, we should not decide too quickly that we are dealing with a “spirit from the other side”.

Conclusion

It was no problem for Schopenhauer to accept clairvoyance and magic as actually existing phenomena. This was particularly the case when he realized that these phenomena gave an empirical foundation to his metaphysics of the will, and thus were able to shed an interesting new light on many important issues at the same time. Philosophical reflection on clairvoyance and magic led him (1) to the phenomenon of truth-dreaming that demonstrates, amongst other things, that the human psyche is not enclosed and is “veiled omniscience”, (2) to more insight into magic that works over distance, and with that to a new and controversial cultural-philosophical view of witch trials, (3) to the discovery of an important and subtle nuance concerning experiences that Kant (in 1766) still interpreted as contact with the other side, and (4) to a balancing of the limits of the knowable regarding our destiny, providence and the working of divination techniques that are meant to give knowledge of the future.

Often Schopenhauer says that he needs to stop, because it becomes clear that unambiguous knowledge is not feasible in this field. In those moments, he is silent, just as he was silent when he climbed those high mountains as a fifteen year old young man. In being silent, he does not only point to art and Eastern philosophy, but also to all the phenomena, that although, as he argues, raise more problems than they solve, nonetheless deserve our attention.

Whoever at the present time doubts the facts of animal magnetism and its clairvoyance should be called not a sceptic but an ignoramus.²²⁰ Considered, of course, not from the economical and technological, but from the philosophical, point of view, animal magnetism is the most significant and pregnant of all the discoveries that have ever been made, although for the time being it propounds rather than solves riddles. (...) the phenomena we are discussing are, at any rate from the philosophical point of view, incomparably the most important of all the facts that are presented to us by the whole of experience. It is, therefore, the duty of every scholar and man of science to become thoroughly acquainted with them.²²¹

It is interesting to connect Schopenhauer’s “better consciousness”, a “seeing” state of consciousness from which an entirely different, and according to him, more objective perception is possible, with clairvoyance. On the one hand, clairvoyant perceptions are often nowhere near as “clear”

as the perceptions that can be done in science. On the other hand, clairvoyant perceptions could be called "clear" because they (in crisis telepathy for example) bear witness to empathy, a "better consciousness", a "seeing" state of consciousness that can be taken up by an "inverted" consciousness that is liberating itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

WILD BEASTS OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL DESERT: WILLIAM JAMES AS PSYCHICAL RESEARCHER

HEIN VAN DONGEN

In contrast to most philosophers who were interested in exceptional experiences, William James (1842-1910) had researched those experiences intensively for years. In one of his books, James calls the world of psychical research and religious experience the “wild beasts of the philosophical desert”.²²² His attention to these untamed animals is connected to his conviction that science and philosophy should take all experiences seriously, however strange they might appear at first sight.

Empiricism

People who have a predilection for categorising still do not know whether William James was a psychologist or a philosopher. He was a professor in both subjects at Harvard. For a psychologist, he has quite a philosophical approach: he constantly welcomes fundamental questions about the methods and concepts of his field. But also for many philosophers, James does not fit the common profile. They are of the opinion that philosophy solely requires abstract concepts. Robert Solomon writes aptly about his philosopher colleagues: “questions that require actually looking at and living in the world are dismissed with a patronizing chuckle and ‘but isn’t that an empirical question?’”²²³ With this, it seems like the final judgement has been passed: another all too practical matter that is not interesting to us, philosophers! For James, it was the complete opposite: philosophy is about empirical matters, or it is about nothing at all.

James, in short, states that (1) philosophers should only debate things that can be related directly to experience, and (2) that everything that is relevant to experience, can be a subject for philosophy.²²⁴ This is empiricism, but, as James calls it himself, empiricism of a radical character.

Nowadays, with “empirical”, one often means something along the lines of: “resting on repeatable observation” (in sentences as: “is there any empirical support for that?”, “the empirical evidence has been given” etcetera). James rejects these curtailments: non-repeatable phenomena should be taken just as serious as repeatable phenomena.²²⁵

Traditional empiricism assigned a primary status to properties such as number, speed and weight. Colour, smell, taste and so forth only received a secondary status. For James, this is illegitimate as well, because it neglects day-to-day experience in favour of scientific abstractions.²²⁶ Not only “experience”, but also “experiment” has a broad meaning for James. He has no difficulty in naming the fruits of a religious conviction in the life of an individual as “experimental test by which they are verified”.²²⁷ The experiment is “the right of the individual to indulge his personal faith at his personal risk”.²²⁸ Thus, according to James, philosophy is only about empiricism, albeit in its broadest sense.

James' Childhood and Crisis

William James was the offspring of a very wealthy and cosmopolitan American family. His father, Henry James sr., was friends with authors such as Emerson, Carlyle and Thoreau. He once started studying theology, but later abandoned it because of its dogmatism. Later, he was taken by the thinking of Swedenborg (see chapter 1). The emphasis that his father put on religious experiences (although of unorthodox character) deeply influenced William James' work. The passion for art and literature in the family was a source of inspiration for William's younger brother Henry, who became one of America's most famous novelists.

During his childhood, William was often sick; he did not attend school and spent a lot of time in sanatoriums in Europe. After abandoning ambitions to become a painter, he studied chemistry, switched to physiology and anatomy, took part in a biological expedition in the Amazon, and finally chose to study medicine. Only with great difficulty did he manage to succeed in his studies. He was suffering from depressions, neurasthenia (“weakness of the nerves”) and most of all he had a weak heart. A doctor he was friendly with diagnosed that he suffered from a grave kind of angina pectoris. In search for relief, James travelled throughout Europe again, where he *en passant* encountered a new science, psychology. Back in the US, he finally managed to finish his studies in 1869. But his vitality was so limited that he did not feel capable of practicing his profession.

Deterministic materialism was in fashion those days, and James not only suffered from this philosophically, but also personally. For him, it implied the potential threat that because of his heart condition, he would never be able to bring about something exceptional. He was tormented by despair and the fear of death. In James' 1902 book, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, in the chapter "The sick soul", there is a description of internal despair that James expresses through "a Frenchman", but actually comes from his own diary: "I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before".²²⁹

The diaries that he kept in this period show that each day he had to fight deep anxieties. In 1870, at the age of 28, he considered suicide. Everything seemed better than leading a life in which each effort was an overcharge. In an attempt to conquer his anxiety James took the following decision: to live and be afraid of death, but let not this anxiety be a reason for making his own life a living hell. This decision was enhanced after reading the works of the French philosopher Charles Renouvier (1815-1903). These works produced a decisive change in James' life and thought. On April the 30th, 1870 James wrote in his diary: "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will."²³⁰

During his entire life, James kept an interest in the possibilities of the will (in order to find and use latent powers in yourself, for example), and in *mind cure* techniques that were popular at the time.²³¹ Willpower helped James and it led him to being a very productive researcher; he often got out of bed at two in the morning, and would consequently write from four in the morning until dinnertime. But throughout his entire life, he remained susceptible to depression.²³²

The Principles of Psychology

In 1872, James became a lecturer in physiology and anatomy at Harvard. He specialized in what was at the time the very new subject of psychology. At Harvard in 1875, he opened the first psychological lab in the world (four years before the lab of Wundt in Germany), where later Hugo Münsterberg would do most of the practical research. James' first essays already show that he was a very gifted writer and that he possessed exceptional introspective capabilities.

In 1878, the year of his marriage, James accepted the invitation to write a textbook that reflected the state of affairs in this new field of science. He acquired fame with the prepublications. When the work was finally published in 1890, James, professor in psychology at the time, had

not only summarized the entire field in the two big volumes of *Principles of Psychology*, but also provided it with a new conceptual basis. Of course, as a summary of psychology, this book is now outdated, but it had a lasting influence, on the work of Husserl²³³ and Wittgenstein²³⁴ for example. (After Wittgenstein's return to philosophy in the thirties, James' *Psychology* was the only book in his bookcase for a long time – he studied it intensively for twenty years.)

The Principles of Psychology has an empirical basis: the study of “the soul” is the study of *experiences*. But James parts with some characteristics of classical British empiricism.

According to the old empiricists, experiences were constructed out of discrete units. With this, according to James, they missed precisely the aspect of the “flux of life” in which experiences pass into one another.

Kant corrected this empiricism with the thesis that our sense impressions are disorganized and need to be ordered by the concepts and categories of our understanding. James also refutes Kant's theoretical world of thought and disputes the problem his theory was expected to solve. There is almost no disorganized experience: our direct experience already demonstrates all sorts of conjunctions and relations.²³⁵

Language is capable of connecting certain experiences even further. But it is also the case that concepts can interrupt the continuity of the stream of thinking by compartmentalizing this stream in all sorts of seemingly independent feelings and thoughts. These limitations are a by-product of the way in which we name psychological processes.²³⁶ The relation between *concepts and percepts* constituted a lasting interest in James' entire philosophical development.

As a psychologist interested in the points of departure of his subject, James had to discuss metaphysical views about the relation between body and mind. Even after *Principles*, the problem remained philosophically important to him. The problem was finally resolved in his philosophy of “radical empiricism”, which he developed in the final years before his death.

James published a shorter version of the *Principles* in 1892 called *Psychology – Briefer course*. It was probably the most-read book during his lifetime, whereas nowadays this work is mostly ignored. James' views seem to have changed on interesting points. It is in the *Briefer course* that James introduces the famous expression *stream of consciousness*. The short philosophical final chapter shows James' vision of metaphysics at the time and consists altogether of questions that are dealt with again in James' later radical empiricism.²³⁷

James became world famous with the *Principles* and the *Briefer course*. Often, one reads that after the *Principles*, he turned his back on psychology, and turned towards philosophy. But for James, there was not a significantly sharp distinction between philosophy and psychology such as we see nowadays. In 1897, his nomination as professor in psychology at Harvard was changed to an assignment in philosophy. We could say that after *Principles*, James specialized in an area that we could describe in fashionable terms as the *search for meaning*: “The most interesting and valuable things about a man are his ideals and over-beliefs”.²³⁸

The “New Darwin”

James himself did not perform many experiments: he trusted data that others produced and in *Principles*, he drew a lot from introspectively acquired material (letters, literary sources and his own experiences). In fact, the biggest part of James’ own investigations are in the area of what is now called *exceptional human experiences*. He liked to work with hypnosis, and performed research on the effects of alcohol, laughing gas²³⁹ and peyote²⁴⁰, using himself as a subject. From the starting days of the Society of Psychical Research, James was involved in research in telepathy and the like alongside the other members, the classics scholar F.W.H Myers, philosopher Henry Sidgwick, physiologist Charles Richet and the musicologist Edmund Gurney. James was one of the most important members of this society, and was its president in 1894 and 1895. Furthermore, he was the driving force, financially as well as organizationally, of the American division of the Society.

For 25 years, James investigated the spiritualist medium Leonora Piper. He first met her in 1885, and after his first few séances he was so impressed that he put her on the Harvard payroll for half the salary of an academic (1000 dollars per year) in order to be able to conduct unlimited research and to keep her out of the séance circuit. During the séances Piper went into a deep trance and in this state, she shared information about both living and deceased family members, whom she had never met, of those present. The reports that James published in the *Proceedings* of the SPR, demonstrated that the information she provided was often correct.²⁴¹

James was not only interested in the question of how the medium could acquire this information, but also in the features of the trance state. In the *Principles*, he argues that research in trance is “one of the greatest needs of psychology”.²⁴² He notes that he pricked a needle on the lips and tongue of the mediums in order to see how (in)sensitive they were to sense impressions. When Leonora Piper was in trance, she spoke as if she was a

different person. To James' impression, these trance-personalities were very different from her normal personality. These different people could be absent for a long time, but when they subsequently returned (sometimes after years), they seemed to express the exact same sentences as those in which they got stuck years earlier. As a preliminary conclusion, James wrote in 1897 that, in the first instance, the information that Leonora Piper provided could be attributed to information coming from the other side. But the circumstances were so complex that a judgement ultimately needed to be postponed.²⁴³

At first, the researchers of the British SPR reacted somewhat reservedly to the success stories from America. Piper was invited by them to collaborate on research in England, where she was followed by a detective in order to rule out any possibility of fraud. The initially sceptical British researcher Richard Hogson would later travel to the States in order to do further research with Piper, because James did not always have the time.

The front man of the SPR, Frederic Myers, had fervently hoped that James would spend all his talents and his time on psychical research. He wrote to James that he thought James had the gift to become the new Darwin: "even to your own ultimate fame, it is essential that a main part of your energy shall henceforth be devoted to these S.P.R. inquiries".²⁴⁴ James, who had the highest respect for Myers, returned the ball and wrote "I think it quite on the cards that you (...) may live to be the ultra-Darwin yourself".²⁴⁵

James' most famous essay about the merits of the SPR, "What psychical research has accomplished", can be found in his book *The Will to Believe* (1897). The essay is an elaboration of his *Presidential Address* for the SPR from the year before. He notes here that he feels attracted to psychical research "by my love of sportsmanlike fair play in science".²⁴⁶ He is optimistic about the future of this research. He expects a field of new discoveries in this area of still unclassified phenomena.²⁴⁷ Psychical research can contribute to a "broader" and "thicker" view of reality.²⁴⁸ He doesn't care about the objections of sceptics, who *a priori* assume that phenomena such as telepathy are impossible. It can be necessary in this domain to "defend (...) 'experience' against 'philosophy'".²⁴⁹

In the essay, James introduces the view that attempts to solely *verify* a theory gives unreliable results in comparison with attempts to *refute* a theory. This vision later became popular through the work of the famous philosopher Karl Popper. James writes: "a universal proposition can be made untrue by a particular instance. If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you mustn't seek to show that no crows are; it is enough

if you prove one single crow to be white. My own white crow is Mrs. Piper. In the trances of this medium, I cannot resist the conviction that knowledge appears which she has never gained by the ordinary waking use of her eyes and ears and wits. What the source of this knowledge may be I know not, and have not the glimmer of an explanatory suggestion to make; but from admitting the fact of such knowledge I can see no escape."²⁵⁰

However, James himself had some objections to the strategy of falsification. The refutation of "the scientific worldview" is never possible, because in fact, such a worldview does not exist. According to James, unity and comprehensiveness of scientific knowledge is (mostly by sceptics) highly exaggerated.²⁵¹ "The attempt of these sceptics to draw disparate facts from the various sciences and weave them together into a whole belies the fact that science as yet contains no such unity".²⁵² "Science means, first of all, a certain dispassionate method. To suppose that it means a certain set of results that one should pin one's faith upon and hug forever is sadly to mistake its genius, and degrades the scientific body to the status of a sect."²⁵³

James ends his article with a plea for attention to personal meaning within science. Outside of science, religious, ethical, poetical, teleological and emotional ways of thinking are dominant. It is the "chronic belief of mankind", that "events may happen for the sake of their personal significance".²⁵⁴ From a mechanistic perspective however, this belief is considered erroneous: personality is not even perceived as a category. However, the "romantic view of life" is constantly fed by "facts of experience, whatever the ulterior interpretation of those facts may prove to be". James writes that science should be able to deal in a successful manner with "a world in which personal forces are the starting-point of new effects."²⁵⁵ But when it continues to ignore people's personal experiences, many people will become alienated from science. Finally, James expresses his understanding and respect for people who find science narrow-minded and choose to not engage with it.²⁵⁶

Philosophy For Life

In the 1890's, James was part of a circle of very popular speakers. Many of his lectures, especially those on the topic of what we would now call "the art of living", are collated in *The Will to Believe* and *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*.

In the latter, James presents the findings of psychology to teachers, with which he initiates a new research field, namely the psychology of

education. The lectures for students are mostly about the art of making something of your own life. Time and time again, James emphasizes the possibility that willpower and trust in our world can be perfected, and could be the deciding factors in realizing our ideals. On the other hand, the lectures show how James is enough of a realist to perceive the tragedy and deficiencies of existence.

The lecture format was distinctive for James. Aside from giving him the opportunity to focus on a specific theme, the accessible character of a lecture was intrinsically connected to James' pragmatic vision on philosophy. In James' case, lecturing about "popular philosophy" was not a concession of the expert to the public. When the value of philosophical thoughts was at stake, James inquired into their *cash value* and their worth for practical living. If these thoughts didn't have any cash value, it was meaningless to be preoccupied with them. In a letter to G.C. Ferrari, James even called technical writing about philosophical problems "a crime against the human race".²⁵⁷ Thus, according to James, if there is to be any practical importance in what is written philosophically, "everybody" should be able to follow it, and if it is not of any practical importance, philosophy has therefore no right to existence. This was, and in fact still is, a rebellious stance.

Exceptional States of Consciousness

In 1896, James held the Lowell lectures in Boston, on the theme of *Exceptional Mental States*. These lectures were never been published by James himself. A reconstruction of the lectures was published in 1983. For this purpose, the American philosopher Eugene Taylor used James' notes and added information from the media and passages from letters and other works by James.²⁵⁸

The first lecture, about dreams and hypnosis, focuses on the hypnagogic state, the twilight zone between waking and sleeping. In James' vision, this transition is closely related to the state of the hypnotized person. According to James, hypnosis makes it possible to extend and investigate these hypnagogic processes, which would be inaccessible otherwise.²⁵⁹

In the second lecture, James speaks about "automatisms". Here, this term has a more specific meaning than in our current everyday language (For example, consider the person unconsciously tapping his or her fingers as a stereotypical automatism we all can relate to "stop tapping your fingers!" "sorry, that is an automatism").

Following F.W.H Myers, James makes a distinction between sensory and motor automatisms. The former are visual, audio or kinaesthetic

hallucinations. We could describe this as the seeing, hearing or feeling of an object that is not visible to others, and yet that is the source of these impressions. With regards to motor automatism, in those days it included messages written without intention (automatic script) or words uttered without intention (as in “speaking in tongues” and trance-utterances). Automatic speech was reported by people in religious ecstasy and was cultivated mostly by spiritualistic mediums at the time of James’ life.²⁶⁰ Motor automatisms often produce an “amnetic barrier”: after the trance, one does not remember what one has said or written.

James, just as Myers does, understands sensory and motor automatisms as a communication between different aspects of the personality. Hypnosis is a technique that is additionally used here to get access to this field of phenomena. With “posthypnotic suggestions” (tasks instructed by the hypnotizer that the test person only starts to perform after the state of hypnosis has ended), automatic writing can be invoked.

In the second lecture, James also speaks about the “subliminal consciousness” that is present in all of us “below the threshold of awareness”. This concept, which is further elaborated upon in the other lectures, seems at first sight similar to “the unconscious” in psychoanalysis, but should rather be viewed as a simultaneously operating, distinct consciousness. The threshold (*limen*) of which we speak in the context of the concepts of the sub- and supraliminal is for James a given form of experience, and not a theoretical construction with the aim of distinguishing hypothetical compartments of the mind.²⁶¹ We will take a closer look at this later in this chapter.

The third lecture about hysteria demonstrates the power of what James calls a “buried idea”. “Hysteria is possession”, he summarizes, “not by demons, but by a fixed idea of the person that has dropped down.”²⁶² Often, such an idea has been split from consciousness by a traumatic shock, and leads to a life that is independent from this consciousness, a “parasitic” life. James’ views are parallel to those of Myers, who saw hysteria as “a disease of the hypnotic stratum”.²⁶³

In the fourth lecture on “multiple personality”, James shares his conviction that every personality is governed by forces that are focused on growth. Because of that, elements that are split off are capable of developing themselves further into personalities that in terms of talents can transcend the ordinary person.

Lectures five to eight discuss the extraordinary mental phenomena in the context of different societies, from “primitive” possession, through witchcraft in the 16th century, to developments in psychiatry in James’ own time. Attention to the social consequences of witch-hunts leads James

to the conclusion that some victims of the inquisition may have been suffering from hysteria, and that the insane were actually the witch-hunters.

In the seventh lecture about "degeneration", different phobias are discussed, such as a mania for cleanliness. He shows that the border between "abnormalities" and that which is perceived as normal ("one idea'd persons", "monomaniacs", "déséquilibrés") is extremely vague.²⁶⁴ From there onwards, it is a small step to the next chapter about genius.

For contemporary readers, it might be remarkable that genius is treated in the same vein as possession and hysteria. But in those days, it was a customary perception (by, for example, Lombroso²⁶⁵) that geniuses and people who suffer from hallucinations were seen as similar, and that the only difference was that the anomalies of geniuses were perceived as propitious. This claim is heavily disputed by James.²⁶⁶ For a start geniuses must be judged according to the fruits of their actions and not according to the question of whether their mental processes were considered normal.²⁶⁷ In relation to the tendency to call that which deviates from the norm "abnormal", James has a view that is distinctly different from that of his contemporaries. We should broaden our notion of health instead of narrowing it.²⁶⁸ He writes: "Just as a room is neither dark nor light absolutely, but might be dark for a watchmaker's uses and yet light enough to eat in or play in, so a man may be sane for some purposes and insane for others, sane enough to be left at large, yet not sane enough to take care of his financial affairs".²⁶⁹ "The only sort of being, in fact, who can remain as the typical normal man, after all the individuals with degenerative symptoms have been rejected, must be a perfect nullity".²⁷⁰

The conclusion of Taylor's reconstruction of the lecture about genius seems a conclusion of the entire lecture series and reads: "Who shall absolutely say that the morbid has no revelations about the meaning of life? That the healthy minded view so-called is all? A certain tolerance, a certain sympathy, a certain respect, and above all a certain lack of fear, seem to be the best attitude we can carry in our dealing with these regions of human nature".²⁷¹

What is remarkable in this series of lectures therefore is that James criticizes the rigid conceptual schemes of psychiatry. Against a tight taxonomy of possible mental illnesses, James suggests that individuals are "types of themselves". Through meekly following existing categories, a student loses the perspective on specific individual cases. "The purely symptomatic forms of our classifications are based on the expressive appearances that insanity assumes according to the temper and pattern of the subject whom it affects."²⁷² Also, a category based on character-type is

dismissed with one apt remark: "there are no incompatibles in human nature, and (...) any random combination of mental elements that can be conceived may also be realized in some individual".²⁷³

James' criticism on needless substantiations and categorisations is in line with his thoughts on the effects of language, which he elaborates upon in his posthumously published work *Some Problems of Philosophy*. According to James, our concepts create ever sharper borders between processes which are indissolubly connected within our experience itself. Thus, in many philosophical discussions, aspects of experience are confused with concepts that are substituted for these aspects.²⁷⁴

The editor of the edition of the Lowell-lectures, Eugene Taylor, remarks that James' ideas imply that there are different treatments possible than those commonly used in the last decennia. Instead of impersonal classifications and treatments that lead to a dependency on care, an understanding of the uniqueness of the person should play a central role, so that one is stimulated to be engaged in his or her own healing process.²⁷⁵

Light Through Coloured Glass

In 1898, James gives the Ingersoll-lecture on the theme *Human Immortality*. Nowadays, the small book in which the lecture was published has been added to the Dover-edition of *The Will to Believe*.

If we, says James, express the interconnectedness between brain processes and thoughts in the formula "thought is a function of the brain", the term "function" as it is used is ambiguous.²⁷⁶ The brain could produce thoughts, but could also serve as an organ of transmission. The latter is illustrated by an image derived from Shelley's *Adonais*:

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

If "our brains are coloured lenses in the wall of nature, admitting light from the super-solar source, but at the same time tingeing and restricting it", one can imagine that thoughts are independent from the brain and yet still remain a function of the brain in the strict sense.²⁷⁷ Around the time of this lecture, this "filter theory" with regard to the functioning of the brain was also developed in *Matière et mémoire* by Bergson, a work that James did not know at the time (see chapter 5).

To what extent James personally believed in a life after death remains an open question. When his friend F.W.H Myers was dying in a hotel in France, James went to the same hotel. According to an anecdote that was

spread by Axel Munthe, Myers' doctor, the grief-stricken James was sitting in the corridor with a notebook in his lap. Munthe suggested that apparently, Myers had promised James to send him a post mortal message.²⁷⁸ That James took this as a serious possibility is demonstrated by a note by Bergson, in which he wrote that James' inquisitive attitude went so far that he even wanted to perform post-mortal tests.²⁷⁹

Later, in reflecting on his career as a "psychical researcher", James would make the remarkable statement that the effect the research on survival had on the personality and happiness of his friends Myers and Hodgson had made an indelible impression. "When a man's pursuit gradually makes his face shine and grow handsome, you may be sure it is a worthy one".²⁸⁰

Religious Experience

During a mountain hike in 1898, James put too much pressure on his heart, and this consequently led him back into a state of health that was just as vulnerable as the one of his childhood. Nevertheless, six more books were published in the twentieth century, two of which were published posthumously.

The Gifford lectures in Edinburgh (1901-1902), on which *The Varieties of Religious Experience* were based, had to be postponed a number of times because of James' health. The lectures were published in 1902. The book was the start of a new science: the psychology of religion. Despite being considered controversial in theological circles, it was well received by the general public as well as philosophers, including Mach²⁸¹ and Wittgenstein (as Wittgenstein commented, it was "a book that helped me a lot").²⁸² *Varieties* became a great success, with 33 editions in the first 20 years.

In the book, James states that religious convictions go back to personal experiences. He distinguishes between original religious experiences and what he calls "second hand" religion, which is based on imitation. He writes: "I speak not now of your ordinary religious believer, who follows the conventional observances of his country, whether it be Buddhist, Christian, or Mohammedan. His religion has been made for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, determined to fixed forms by imitation, and retained by habit. It would profit us little to study this second-hand religious life. We must make search rather for the original experiences which were the pattern-setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct. These experiences we can only find in individuals for whom religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather."²⁸³

Therefore, James understands religion as: “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow.”²⁸⁴

For some theologians, this approach was nothing less than offensive. James ignores the ecclesiastical conceptions and orthodox views about religious life, but he is irresistibly curious about the pain of people involved in self-flagellation, hallucinations of the ascetic, the work of faith healers, and the visions of the founders of all sorts of peripheral religions. Because of his attention for the individual, he seems to focus on those whom the Dutch writer Jan Oegema calls the “soloreligious”. His work fits in a timeframe in which churches lose authority and inner experience becomes increasingly important.

It is sociologically and historically possible that James’ statement that religion originates from individual experiences is inaccurate. The philosopher Charles Taylor noted in a small book with the title *Varieties of Religion Today* that the content of religion often isn’t “individualising”. In our time, with secularism on the one hand, and the rise of traditionalism on the other, religious experience often has a sense of recognition or strengthening of collective ties.²⁸⁵

James was probably excessively anxious that people start to believe because of the authority of others, and thus he restricts the influences of mystical experiences as a result: they can only say something to those who have experienced them.²⁸⁶ With the emphasis on individual experience, Charles Taylor fears a “slide towards the feel-good and the superficial”, or even to a “momentary sense of wow.”²⁸⁷

The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk also has a criticism along these lines: he even speaks of “the Americanization of the religious”, an “oil search mentality”, and “success devoutness”, in which God becomes an “internal Texas”. According to Sloterdijk, the question of the effect of religion opens the way to the “postmodern religion supermarkets”.²⁸⁸ It is remarkable that Sloterdijk’s approach does not offer many arguments on why this somewhat condescending attitude is not correct, and it is also remarkable that he clears James of this attitude in the end.

James indeed starts with the principle: “one recognizes the tree by its fruits”. He states that this is in line with the spirit of Christianity. He quotes Jonathan Edwards, who writes: “In forming a judgment of ourselves now, we should certainly adopt that evidence which our supreme Judge will chiefly make use of when we come to stand before him at the

last day. (...) The degree in which our experience is productive of practice shows the degree in which our experience is spiritual and divine."²⁸⁹

The paradox of result-oriented thinking is of course that time and time again, the seemingly useless turns out to be useful and the seemingly useful turns out to be useless. However, the criteria that James offers for the sense or use of religion do not consist of a small bundle of pleasant stimulations, but a broad area of "workings". Precisely because there is such a broad range of characters, cultures and needs, there is room for big differences between religions, according to James.²⁹⁰

James believed in the great importance of what we would now call the "comparative science of religion". But aside from the obvious comparison between religious texts and different "schools", the different *experiences* within the traditions needed to be investigated.²⁹¹

Radical Empiricism

In his later writings, James worked slowly towards the development of his own philosophy. He was burdened by the suspicion that he would not be able to finish those writings before his death. However, this suspicion was not only fuelled by his fragile health, but also because his thoughts between 1900 and 1910 were still developing. Around 1904, over the period of six months, James wrote eight articles that were published in philosophical journals. A few years later, he let extra prints of these articles be bound for students. This is how *Essays in Radical Empiricism* came into existence. However, James did not publish the articles in this format. Some of them were published in *The Meaning of Truth*, or as an appendix to *A Pluralistic Universe*. The essays were compiled by James' student R.B. Perry, but only after his death, under the name that James gave to the collection.

James uses the term "radical empiricism" to indicate his own *Weltanschauung*. Following his books, one can retrace the development of this central notion. The formulation can be found for the first time in the preface to *The Will to Believe* from 1897. There, James writes that the essays in the collection are expressions of an attitude that he calls radical empiricism. The explanation James offers concerning this radical empiricism might not have been clear for every reader.

Empiricism means here, James initially argues that certain conclusions about facts are treated as hypotheses that are susceptible to modification because of future experiences.²⁹² This empiricism is called "radical" in order to distinguish it from a "half-way empiricism" (such as positivism or scientific naturalism) that has as its basic principle that "monism" is

justified. James elaborates on this aspect of monism versus pluralism, before returning to the first aspect.

James understands monism as a theory that understands the world as a unity or claims that the world can be reduced to a single principle. On first sight, the world is a multiplicity, but once we postulate a unity, our investigation will discover this unity. However, there never is absolute unity: particularities will always remain that are simply given, and cannot be explained from this principle of unity. Moreover, there are always different *points of view*: what is clear straight away from one standpoint remains inaccessible from the other.²⁹³ The radical empiricist, James states, starts from the hypothesis that pluralism is “the permanent form of the world”.²⁹⁴ That implies that philosophy cannot reduce or reinterpret the world of experience, inclusive of its possibilities, meanings, crises, and even “a real God”, into a monistic form.²⁹⁵

These points, that also return in later treatises on radical empiricism, are in *The Will to Believe* important for James’ plea for the right to believe and the possibility of the justification of belief in our always incompletely known, plural world.

He promises his readers to return to this matter, which he does in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and in his book *A Pluralistic Universe*, while we can perceive *Varieties of Religious Experience* as an example of concrete research on a radically empiricist basis. In this research, radical empiricism does not only mean that “unassimilable data” have to be taken seriously, but also that the theories that conceive them as unimportant or maybe even impossible do *not* have to be taken seriously.²⁹⁶

While James in the *Will to Believe* mentions radical empiricism in relation to pluralism and the hypothetical character of our knowledge, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* goes much further. It attempts to show the hypothetical and ambiguous character of the most basic nominalisations of philosophy: mind and matter. Radical empiricism now means for James that all philosophical concepts should be traced back to experience, and that philosophy should not glance over direct experience.²⁹⁷ For James, nothing is won with a reduction of the perceived context to non-experienced fundamental categories.²⁹⁸

This leads to doubt the necessity, or even the point, of understanding substantial existence as “matter” and “consciousness”. To the question: “does consciousness exist” (the title of one of James’ essays), the answer is “no”, and the same goes for objective matter.²⁹⁹

James does not claim that we do not have thoughts, feelings and the like. On the contrary, our feelings and thoughts are our world of experience. However, there is no ground, core, foundation, substance or

subject of which this world of experience is a manifestation. In the same way, it is meaningless to assume an objective-material reality that would be inaccessible to this experience. Therefore, consciousness and matter should not be understood as irreducible substances, but rather as contingent abstractions.³⁰⁰ Profound questions such as how it is possible that consciousness can know matter or how matter causes consciousness, do not have to be posed, *let alone* solved. Eugene Taylor points out that James' vision here is similar to the Buddhist teachings of "anatta", according to which there is no permanent "self".³⁰¹

Pragmatism

In an 1898 article about "Philosophical conceptions and practical results"³⁰², James borrowed the term "pragmatism" from his friend Charles Sanders Peirce, and also uses the term in his *Varieties*.³⁰³ The term became widespread in the first decade of the twentieth century. James saw other philosophers associated with pragmatism (Peirce, John Dewey, F.C.S. Schiller and the young Giovanni Papini) as important partners and after some hesitation allowed his philosophy to be "sold" under this brand name.³⁰⁴

At the end of 1906 and at the start of 1907 James gave a series of lectures in Boston and New York (the Lowell lectures) that were published in 1907 under the title *Pragmatism – a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. The pragmatic method boils down to the question that the value of every concept can be tested with the question: "what sensible difference to anybody will its truth make".³⁰⁵ Philosophical questions to which their answers bear no practical consequences are considered arbitrary.

James presents a concept of truth in *Pragmatism* that is quite controversial. According to James' pragmatic view, truth is not a "reflection" of reality, but a human construction that needs to be measured according to its value for living and therefore to its possibilities for *action*.³⁰⁶ His ideas contain a radical break with the prevailing truth concept in the past centuries that understood a "true" theory as a "mirror of nature".³⁰⁷ James' conception of truth is pluralistic. For James, experiences, in their crude, unpolished form, are based on interpreted connections (a frightening storm, a hateful man, a mean action).³⁰⁸ They can be perceived and investigated in many different ways, because experience seen in its plenitude always has multiple meanings.³⁰⁹

The pragmatic notion of truth brought up a multitude of reactions, so that time and time again, James felt forced to defend this notion. This

resulted in many essays that are compiled in *The Meaning of Truth* of 1909.

Pluralism

In 1909, James gave eight Hibbert Lectures in Oxford about “the present situation in philosophy”. They were published under the title *A Pluralistic Universe*. This book can be seen as a philosophical sequel to *Varieties*. Strangely enough, it has always stood in the shadow of James’ bestsellers, the *Principles*, the *Varieties*, and *Pragmatism*. Although the book was titled *Philosophie de l’expérience* in French, it might be seen as James’ most metaphysical work. In the book, James is critical about Hegel’s philosophy, which was popular in the US at the time. He also enthusiastically introduces Bergson to the English-speaking audience, is arguably even more enthusiastic about the panpsychism of Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887). Moreover, he returns to the two characteristics of radical empiricism that he presented in *The Will to Believe*.

As we have seen, radical empiricism is first and foremost a theory that, departing from the absolute primacy of experience, deletes all its abstract “foundations” as not being based on experience themselves. But how can we then build a general theory about the world?

The solution James presents is surprising: the universe *is* experience. If the world is constructed only out of experiences, it could be called pan-experientialistic. That is maybe why James writes in *A Pluralistic Universe* that he sees radical empiricism as “a subspecies of pantheism”³¹⁰, that makes total experience or total knowledge impossible. The latter might need further clarification.

According to James, knowledge and experience are “disseminated”, “disturbed” and “incomplete”.³¹¹ If experience is the limit to our system, our system cannot go any further than the *relative* connectedness between some experiences that we encounter in daily reality: thus, our system is also incomplete. Therefore, James refutes ideas such as “everything is connected to everything”. For radical empiricism, some parts of the world are connected in some ways, but others are not.³¹² Disjunctive relations are as much part of the flux of experience as conjunctive relations.³¹³ There are “degrees of connection”,³¹⁴ there are different kinds or relations possible, but not all of them always work³¹⁵ Thus, things are only knowable in an “each form” and not in an “all form”.³¹⁶

We might be able to summarize this last, pluralistic understanding of a radical empiricism in the following way. It is only possible to talk about the world in a meaningful manner when you hold on to (a broadly

interpreted) experience. Outside of that, you end up in a vacuum in which the philosopher, the scientist and common man all choke. How could a cosmology look like that does not transcend the level of experience? Of such a cosmos, experience itself is the *materia prima*, the *stuff* of which it is made.³¹⁷ Such a cosmos is an “experience continuum”.³¹⁸ However, this stuff is ambiguous, complex, pluriform. Thus, as a consequence, the world is ambiguous and pluriform, or pluralistic. A monistic hypothesis has to transcend reality and does not pass the “pragmatic test” with the “extra” that it must postulate.

Thinking With Thresholds

In the last decade of his life, James still conducted a great amount of research in the area of psychical research. From 1905 onwards, James spent more time attending the séances with Leonora Piper. Richard Hodgson, who investigated her for years, died suddenly, and consequently appeared from “the other side” in the messages of the medium. James scrupulously investigated the dramatic play in which an “entity”, which spoke through the medium, presented itself as Richard Hodgson. On this topic he published his most elaborate article in the field. In the article, James doubt whether the “dream life” of the medium, possibly supplemented with telepathy, is capable of explaining the phenomena. In a number of pages, he outlines the idea that people who have known someone who has passed away, and who attend a séance, serve as a “psychometric” object that prompts in the medium a “will to personate”.³¹⁹ (“Psychometry” or “object reading” is a term that refers to a form of telepathy in which a material object, a picture or even a building or a body, seems to give rise to mediumistic impressions, and to steer them.)

But, according to James, this is possibly not the entire story. The friendly conversations between “Billy” (WJ) and “Dick” (the “entity” RH) from time to time not only contain remarkably truthful information, but also give James the feeling that he is communicating with the personality of his friend. About the sessions with the “Richard Hodgson Control”, he writes: “I myself feel as if an external will to communicate were probably there”.³²⁰

The hypothesis that James himself presented in the research to mediums was not intended to find a straightforward answer to questions as to whether spirits exist or not. For him, it was about “the constitution of the subliminal consciousness”.

In the *Principles*, James had already offered a fundamental criticism on the idea that the drawing of distinctions between psychic processes could

be just as sharp as those between concepts. Even the determination of a distinction between “thoughts” and “feelings” is already artificial. When we are engaged in the terminology of mental distinctions, we should say that the “thresholds” between states of consciousness do not have any fixed positions. The border between “subliminal” and “supraliminal” is ever shifting.³²¹

James suggested that we should call the question of “the precise constitution of the subliminal” the “problem of Myers”.³²² This Frederic W.H. Myers, (1843-1901), whose name has been mentioned before, was one of the most important researchers of the Society for Psychical Research. Myers exerted a lot of influence in the conceptual area especially: he formulated the concepts “telepathy”, “telekinesis” and “subliminal”. From the eighties of the nineteenth century onwards, he published essays about the subliminal self in the *Proceedings* of the SPR.³²³ When they were finally added to Myers’ posthumous main work *Human Personality* in 1903, the texts were, to James’ disappointment, more or less transformed into a theory about spiritualism and “the soul” – which must have been very unattractive to a radical empiricist.³²⁴

The theory of the subliminal consciousness was initially based on the perception of “divisions” of memory, whereby a part that is not accessible to someone at a certain moment, can be accessible later. This happens when the person has a “subliminal uprush” or expresses him/herself in a hypnotic or mediumistic trance. With the “threshold” between the supraliminal and the subliminal, we should not imagine an abstract distinction, but rather a zone between two streams of experience, that we pass multiple times a day, and in the transitions between waking and sleeping. A “lowering of the threshold” can not only unlock inaccessible parts of memory, but also makes possible a flood of a “sense of a tremendous *muchness*”.³²⁵

The concept of the subliminal self plays a role in James’ approach of mystical experiences and of creativity. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, he suggests that the distinction between the subliminal and the supraliminal runs across our “experience continuum” of our world.³²⁶ James expresses his presumption that herein might be a foundation for a theory about the “wild beasts of the philosophical desert”, the phenomena that Myers was engaged with, and which are, in his opinion, “rooted in reality”.³²⁷

For contemporary readers, the concept of the “subliminal self” might seem related to the Freudian subconscious and the Jungian unconscious. According to radical empiricism however, something like Jung’s “collective unconscious” – in the sense of something that is unknown to everybody - would be meaningless. In such a situation, the concept cannot

be connected to experience in principle, and therefore has no place in science or philosophy.³²⁸

Every “depth psychology” that seeks to explain experiences in the light of hidden motives creates the greatest contrast possible with James’ attitude, which can be summarized as: “taking given conjunctions at their face-value”.³²⁹ Aside from this contrast with the psychoanalytical attitude, the striving for a strict categorisation of Freud and others, is in contradiction with James’ attempt to let go of fixed points of demarcation (between types of personalities, different psychic abnormalities and between the “sickly” and the “healthy”). James met Freud and Jung in person during the great psychoanalytical tour in 1909. In a letter, he calls Freud someone “obsessed by fixed ideas” and in another letter even “a regular *halluciné*”.³³⁰

James’ Last Confessions

In 1909, James published a review of his career as psychical researcher. At the start of this review, disappointment seems to prevail. James sighs that he was engaged in this area for 25 years, and that he has observed uncommon phenomena, or tried to observe them, but that he did not make any progress from a theoretical perspective. It seems like the phenomena do not want to cooperate with the research.³³¹

However, it does seem like James wants to limit the lack of progress only to the theoretical domain, because despite sometimes confusing test results, he says that he wants to be “on the record” for having the conviction that there are phenomena that are ignored by orthodox science³³² - and for the presence “in the midst of all the humbug, of really *supernormal knowledge*.” With this, he means “knowledge that cannot be traced to the ordinary sources of information — the senses namely, of the automatist.”³³³

Remarkably, James states that he finds the strong protection that the SPR wanted to develop against fraud irrelevant.

In most things human the accusation of deliberate fraud and falsehood is grossly superficial. Man’s character is too sophistically mixed for the alternative of ‘honest or dishonest’ to be a sharp one.³³⁴

He even describes how, as an assistant to a professor, he helped the phenomena during a medical demonstration by simulating certain effects, in order to save the experiments from their tendency to fail.

To the descriptions about the unpredictability of phenomena, James connects the suspicion that it is inherent to their nature to escape attempts

at being investigated and objectified. On the basis of a “radical” interpretation of the evolutionary theory, he suggests that the universe used to be extremely chaotic, and fixed patterns and forms evolved only gradually. The “psychic phenomena” might be the remains of this chaos. They are not sufficiently organized in themselves in order to be able to follow natural laws. Sometimes, they would touch the periphery of the cosmos, but not sufficiently strongly enough so that they could be chased and caught.³³⁵

In his “Confessions” James presents again Myers’ theory about the subliminal consciousness, whereby he makes a connection with the panpsychism that he discussed in his book *A Pluralistic Universe*. Our normal experience could be just an “extract” of a broader psychic reality, “a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir.” James ends his article with the suspicion that great scientific breakthroughs await the coming generations.³³⁶

Perceptions and Concepts

At the end of his life, James worked on a book about his “own” metaphysics, that was supposed to be his first work since the *Principles* that was not based on lectures or essays. In this book, with the modest title *Some Problems of Philosophy*, he started a more extensive investigation into the relation between concepts and perceptions. James wanted to put his metaphysical insights into logical order, but he could not stop himself from writing for a wider audience: the book also became a general introduction into philosophy.

In beautiful passages, James makes clear how different philosophical questions bear the mark of the confusion between characteristics of experience and those of concepts.³³⁷ James was a thinker who defended the world of experience and not the world of abstract concepts. He wrote in his *Varieties* that it is impossible to satisfy one’s hunger with a raisin, but it is even more impossible to satisfy one’s hunger with the *word* raisin.³³⁸ Philosophers master the “trick of turning names into things”³³⁹ or in substituting complex data for simple abstractions.³⁴⁰ Accordingly, the story about the relations between those abstractions becomes more important for them than the relations between experiences.

James died in 1910 from his incurable heart condition. His last work was published in unfinished form in 1911. Also published posthumously are *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912) (compiled by his later biographer

Ralph Barton Perry), *Memories and Studies* (1911) and *Collected Essays and Reviews* (1920).

A Lesson For Future Research?

In parapsychological literature, James is often mentioned as one of its pioneers. But he predominantly conducted research into mediums, which clearly bears the mark of the spiritualistic atmosphere in which it occurred. As a philosopher, James was way beyond his time. The interest in James' pragmatism and radical empiricism has increased a lot over the last couple of decennia (Rorty, Putnam, and others).

These attitudes as they were lived by James have not penetrated the small world of parapsychologists. In a manner that seems dramatically out of touch in the world of social sciences, realistic claims are made, by "sceptics" as well as "believers". Both parties seem to start from the basic principle that "indications for the existence of telepathy" mirror an objective aspect of nature: it either exists or it does not exist. It is not surprising that parapsychology and organised scepticism with such aged pretences are seen as pseudo sciences.

James pointed out that the phenomena of psychical research are mostly related to a personal sense of meaning. The attitudes, conceptual systems and the response of nature to our activity are connected and form together "a phenomenon", which can always be explained in multiple ways. In this manner, the question whether something does or does not exist always has multiple meanings.

CHAPTER FIVE

A MACHINE FOR THE MAKING OF GODS: ON THE MEANING OF “FILTERS” IN HENRI BERGSON

HEIN VAN DONGEN

“The mind is independent of the body”. “The senses do not produce our perceptions, but restrict them”. When asked which philosopher held these views many people will think of Plato. When asked next which famous philosopher found the spirit’s survival after death probable, the answer is also likely to be Plato.

Liberation From Platonism

In the philosophy of the last centuries, the break with Platonism seems complete. In a booklet entitled *Plato in 90 minutes*, we read that Platonists are probably an extinct species.³⁴¹ It is not only the idea of an enduring existence after death which is no longer a theme for philosophy; Plato’s famous “theory of ideas” has almost no followers anymore either. According to this theory, our world of experience is based on unchanging forms (ideas) that can only be known by the mind. The sense perception of things around us distracts us from this knowledge of the mind. This is why Plato has said that the senses are not the windows through which we perceive, but the bars in those windows. Almost all contemporary philosophers reject this idea.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) also distanced himself from Plato in many aspects. In his main work *L'évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*), he criticizes what we could call “our inborn Platonism”: the tendency of our intellect to assign a higher reality to concepts than to perceptions.³⁴² According to this Platonism our concepts (when we use them correctly) are concerned with unchanging truths, while our perceptions have to do with unstable and relative issues. Bergson’s

own philosophy does not give the artificial permanence of concepts a central role, but rather the temporality (*durée*) of concrete experience. Seen from this perspective, his way of thinking is an inversion of the Platonic tradition and maybe also an inversion of the biggest part of Western metaphysics, which for centuries has been understood as a search for unchanging reality. Bergson writes: “Not things made, but things in the making, not self-maintaining states, but only states in the making, exist.”³⁴³

Bergson literally pleads for an “inversion of the habitual direction of the work of thought”.³⁴⁴ Often, we do not perceive things, but “the labels affixed to them”.³⁴⁵ Philosophizing is an attempt to return to what we experience. Philosophy does not strive for “a generalisation of facts”³⁴⁶, “but nevertheless it might be defined as *integral experience*”.³⁴⁷

The Body as Prison of the Soul

The sentences that were used as an opening to this article are however not constructed from fragments from Plato. They are quotations from Bergson. Bergson pleads for the independence of the mind with regard to the body and suggests in a number of places in his work the probability of continued personal existence after death.³⁴⁸ He inverts the Platonic way of thinking – although he himself is indebted to it.

Although we can trace influences from the Neoplatonist Plotinus on Bergson, the manner in which Bergson deals with the problematic of continued existence after death is substantially different from what James called the “classic Platonizing Sunday-school conception”.³⁴⁹ Plato’s argument for immortality is a priori. In different dialogues by Plato, we read how Socrates attempts to show that the soul has to be unchanging “by definition”. The very moment that Socrates’ discussion partners accept his definition, the point has been made. Because if the soul is unchanging she must be immortal too. James and Bergson find such “evidence” (the soul has to be this or that by definition) useless, because it attempts to derive properties of experience from the relations between postulated concepts. Furthermore, they point out that the analysis of psychic processes is significantly indicative of the changeability of the soul.

However, Bergson does defend the thought that the soul or the spirit transgress the limits of the body, and that the soul might be immortal. These motives are explicitly present in his work, to such an extent that it is surprising that many philosophers who follow his ideas do not pay any attention to it, and rather read Bergson as a thinker who gives our embodiment a central place.³⁵⁰

An unknown person

During his life, Bergson was world-famous. His books have been reprinted hundreds of times and in 1927, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. The hairdresser in the Swiss village where he had his summer cottage kept his cut hair as sacred relics. During his lectures, people stood outside with ladders in front of the big windows of the university building to try and catch a glimpse of him. His lectures in the United States attracted so much attention that they reportedly led to the first traffic jam in history.

In the midst of positive reactions, there was vehement criticism. The Roman Church placed his work on the Index, i.e. the list of books forbidden for Catholics. A number of colleagues also scoffed at him. He who reads the condescending pages in Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, will feel little encouragement to dive into Bergson's work. But someone like Levinas counted him among the five greatest thinkers of all time.³⁵¹ William James put him on the same level as Kant, and he wrote to Schiller about Bergson's *Creative Evolution*: "it seems to me that nothing is important in comparison with that divine apparition".³⁵² And John Dewey wrote: "no philosophic problem will ever exhibit just the same face and aspect that it presented before Professor Bergson invited us to look at it in its connexions with duration as a real and fundamental fact."³⁵³

Biographical research into Bergson is relatively rare. He was discreet about his life: as if he coincided with the thinker we know from the books. In his will, he forbade the publication of letters and personal documents, a command that was only ignored recently.

Bergson writes in a letter to James that in his life, aside from the discovery of the *durée*, nothing mentionable has ever taken place.³⁵⁴ That remains to be seen. His career knew more milestones than those of most other philosophers, his fame and influence are unparalleled and his background and fascinations were uncommon.

Henri Louis Bergson was the child of Jewish parents. His father was a Polish composer, who taught at various conservatories in Europe and never had a permanent appointment. His mother was English. Bergson was raised in an English-speaking home: later, he would be able to authorize English translations himself. In 1870, his parents left for England. The young Henri stayed behind in a Paris troubled by war and revolt.³⁵⁵ As a secondary school student, he solved a mathematical problem by Pascal – it became the subject of his first publication. But nonetheless he was refused entrance into university because he was a foreigner. When he was 21, Bergson was naturalized as a French citizen. After his studies, he worked

as a teacher in the countryside for some time. In 1889, he received his doctorate for probably his most important book: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Translated as: *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*).³⁵⁶ From 1900 onwards, he was professor of philosophy at the Collège de France, first in Greek and Roman philosophy, and from 1904 in modern philosophy. After the publication of *Le Rire*, (*Laughter*), his fame in France followed. *Creative Evolution* (1907) subsequently made him internationally renowned. But he did not care much for the enormous interest in him and, therefore retired as a lecturer prior to the First World War.

In 1917, as a diplomat for France, he negotiated with the president of the United States in order to convince the US to participate in the war.³⁵⁷ After the war, he collaborated with “the great minds on earth” (among them was Einstein) in an organization that had as its aim to further promote international collaboration. After the German invasion of France, he refused an invitation by the Vichy-government to give him the possibility of an escape, because he wanted to remain among the persecuted.³⁵⁸ When, in January 1941, he had to assemble in a line with other Jews, he caught pneumonia and died a couple of days later.

That a philosophy like Bergson’s was in fashion does not mean that it was really understood. Fame attracts caricatures. Many people want to form an opinion about famous figures, and therefore their story has to be compressed into something that fits in a *Bluff your way through philosophy*.

In his work, Bergson defends the view that there are important aspects of our life and our experience that cannot be approached with our understanding and that escape the language of the intellect. Add to this that one of his key words is *intuition*, and people who like quick conclusions have their opinion ready: irrationalism.

Gilles Deleuze averted this criticism in his book on Bergson by defending that intuition forms a precise method, “one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy”.³⁵⁹ Deleuze wrote an early study on Bergsonism and used Bergson’s thought mainly in his famous books on cinema. A consequence is that a number of recent studies on Bergson clearly read his work through a Deleuzian prism. There is even a recent study that is dedicated to an approach that collates Deleuze, Whitehead, and Bergson together, into the trinity of “Deleuze-Whitehead-Bergson.”³⁶⁰

If we take Bergson’s philosophy seriously, his concrete biography, historicity and particularity must be considered of the greatest importance. Regarding this, it is a loss that we do not know many personal things about Bergson himself, despite his turbulent life.

One of his sisters Moina was married (against the will of her family) to Mac Gregor Mathers (alias of Samuel Liddell Mathers), who was the founder of the occult "Golden Dawn" society in London.³⁶¹ Moina Mac Gregor Mathers, as Comtesse Mac Gregor, enabled the Isis culture in Paris to experience a revival between 1899 and 1903. There, she played the role of the Great Priestess of Anari. After the death of her husband, she published his *The Kabbalah Unveiled*. Little is known about the relationship between Bergson and his sister.

A more interesting biographical fact is Bergson's relation with the pioneers of French psychology. In his main works, Bergson often includes subtle introspective and psychological observations in his arguments. Sometimes, these are ordinary observations, such as the famous sentence "I must wait until the sugar melts", which illustrates the "duration" and the irreversibility of physical processes.³⁶² Other times, they are of a less common character, and are derived from, for example, the experiences of patients with aphasia, from mystics or from people that were hypnotized.

Bergson not only knew, but was also friendly with a number of researchers in France who worked on an introspective psychology and on psychical research.

The French philosophers used as their mouthpiece the prestigious journal *Revue Philosophique*, which was founded in 1878. Not only did Pierre Janet and Théodule Ribot publish pioneering articles; English-speaking authors such as William James and Frederic Myers also had connections with this group. In this journal, some of James' preliminary studies for *Principles* were published. Bergson also published one of his first articles in the journal, an article about hypnosis to which we will return shortly.³⁶³

In 1900, Bergson joined the new *Institut Psychologique International*, to which Janet, Lombroso, Richet and James were also connected. He also joined the *Institut Général Psychologique*, an organization of which Liébault, Fouillée and Madame Curie were also members. These are the same names we encounter as French practitioners of psychical research (called *Métapsychologie* in France). Janet was occupied with hypnosis from a distance by means of telepathy. Charles Richet (the physiologist and psychologist who won the Nobel prize in 1913) conducted research with mediums and statistical experiments. And Madame Curie was in 1903 and 1904 together with Bergson present as an observer in the *Institut Général de Psychologie* at séances with the medium Eusapia Paladino.³⁶⁴

Aside from professional journals and institutes, some of these researchers discussed their ideas in an exclusive group, the so-called "club of thirteen". The club consisted of thirteen members, Bergson being one of

them, who convened on the thirteenth of every month. Charles Richet and Eugène Osty (director of the *Institut Métapsychique International*) were also members. The physicists Emile Boirac and Claude Flammarion were probably members as well, although very little is known about this group.³⁶⁵

From 1905 a warm friendship grew between Bergson and William James: Bergson had a portrait of James above his writing desk.³⁶⁶

In 1913, Bergson was appointed as the president of the Society for Psychical Research in London. He spoke in his *Presidential Address* about the theme of “‘*Fantômes de vivants*’ et ‘*recherché psychique*’”. The text of this address has a confusing history. Bergson gave his lecture in English on May 28, 1913, but the published version in the *Proceedings* of the SPR (XXVI) is in French. A shortened version was published in a French journal (*Annales des sciences psychiques*), which was copied in Bergson’s collected essays *L’énergie spirituelle*. An English text of the original lecture was (as “authorized translation” by H. Wildon Carr) in 1914 published again in the *Proceedings*. In Bergson’s collected works we find the text twice, the original version in the *Mélanges* and the shortened version in *L’énergie spirituelle*, while in the English translation thereof, *Mind energy*, the longer version has been included. Also in some other articles from this collection, Bergson elaborates on psychical research.

Arguably one of the most outstanding instances in his work where he brings up Psychical Research is to be found in the final passages of his last book, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* from 1932. Here, this research is connected with nothing less than the hope for the peaceful existence of humankind. We will take a closer look at all these texts.

Hypnosis

Of the phenomena presently known as *exceptional experiences*, Bergson was probably most influenced by tests with hypnosis that he either studied or performed himself. During the time when he was a teacher in Clermont-Ferrand (1883-1888), he collaborated on hypnosis sessions that were organised by a certain Doctor Moutin.³⁶⁷ In 1886, he performed tests on the effects of hypnosis and suggestions on the observations of a number of subjects. Bergson’s short publication about this is easy to summarize. It seems like two boys are in telepathic contact with one another during hypnosis. Bergson shows that it is plausible that under hypnosis their senses are more sensitive (hyperaesthesia). He predominantly writes about the internal imagery that occurs in this situation.³⁶⁸ This publication by

Bergson did not go unnoticed: both Myers and James devote attention to it in their work.³⁶⁹

In his thesis from 1889, Bergson writes that the hypnotic suggestion is related to the aesthetic effects of movements.³⁷⁰ Of greater influence is hypnosis on *Matière et Mémoire* (*Matter and Memory*, 1896). One of the ideas from this work is that during special occasions, we can get access to our entire past. “Many facts seem to indicate that the past is preserved even down to its slightest details, and that there is no real forgetting.”³⁷¹ He indicates cases whereby people that are reanimated after an accident, claim that “during a moment they had the panoramic vision of the totality of their past”.³⁷² According to Bergson, this also occurs in situations where there is no brain damage, for example by soldiers, who run through a shower of bullets without being hit.³⁷³

If the past remains preserved, the question is why we forget it. Bergson argues that if the possibility existed that we would be able to remember everything, we would be so overwhelmed by the past that we would be unable to concentrate on the actions that are necessary for our body. From the abundance of our entire past, the brain thus activates only those impressions that we need for practical purposes. This means, as Bergson states explicitly, that our brain does not need to store memories, and rather that it works in order to focus and limit memories. We will return to this way of thinking shortly.

Filters

In daily life, we use all kinds of filters. Dutch coffee is made by pouring coffee out in a pot with a coffee filter on top of it in order to prevent the coffee granules from ending up in the pot. Fishing with a net is also a filtering process, so that one does not scoop water or small organisms out of the sea, but only those fish that cannot escape the net. In his work, Bergson uses this metaphor in relation to what at first sight seem to be very different questions.

Bergson sees language as a filter. On the first page of his first book, (his dissertation from 1889), he writes that language “requires us to establish between our ideas the same sharp and precise distinctions, the same discontinuity, as between material objects”.³⁷⁴ According to him, language is made to label independent objects, and its application to “the immediate data of consciousness” results in a mostly artificial decoupage. He states that therefore, language is not only deficient in expressing our feelings and thoughts, but also the things around us. In *Le Rire* from 1900, he writes that we no longer observe things, but “we confine ourselves to

reading the labels affixed to them".³⁷⁵ And "the word intervenes between the thing and ourselves".³⁷⁶

We can also point to a remarkable passage from 1907 in which he writes that "in the domain of life the elements have no real and separate existence. They are manifold mental views of an indivisible process."³⁷⁷ Does Bergson mean to say that the distinction of, for example, "the eye" in relation to "the brain", is already in the field of language and not in the field of data that has yet to be interpreted? However, in Bergson's philosophy the final goal is to attain knowledge of the "indivisible process". Language, with its cutting of concepts, is perceived of as an obstacle.

Bergson is thus of the opinion that the philosopher has to work on a language that is able to follow the agility of things. He tries to attain this flexibility himself by not applying one system of concepts, but by using different images every time: "many different images, borrowed from very different orders of things".³⁷⁸

In the ever-growing literature on Bergson, not much attention is dedicated to the structural role of metaphors in his work. For the interpretation of the filter metaphor however, these remarks by Bergson on the use of images is not unimportant: they tell us how he himself thought about dealing with the filtering function of language: it is possible to come to new conceptions that follow experience and invert the "usual act of thinking".

In *Creative Evolution*, we find different applications of the filter model. Here, it becomes clear how the force of life "cannot pass through matter without settling on it, without adapting itself to it."³⁷⁹ Species are, to say it with a pun, comparable to "specializations" – they realise certain possibilities by excluding others. When Bergson applies this thought to the evolution of man, the consequences are drastic. Our thinking, which seems familiar to us, has developed itself evolutionarily by excluding other possibilities. However, the exclusion that has occurred is not final. Higher forms in evolution fight a risky battle with lower, physical structures that made the higher forms possible, but the outcome is uncertain. It is possible that life holds on to matter in order to bring about the highest possible degree of freedom in it.³⁸⁰

The final work of Bergson *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*), applies the filter theory to society. The creative impulse for renewal is often hindered by social structures. In an "open" society, these structures are debatable: therefore morality can be renewed. In contrast to Karl Popper, who

derived the concept of the “open” society from Bergson, mystics play an important role in bringing about these changes. We will return to this later.

Two important filter functions are discussed by Bergson on different occasions. The first filter occurs during remembering and the second takes place in perception. According to Bergson, the brain is a sieve that only passes information from the outside world (perceptions) or the mind (memories) that is of vital importance for an organism at a certain point in time. The most elaborate discussions on these themes are to be found in *Matière et Mémoire (Matter and Memory)* and *L'énergie spirituelle (Mind energy)*.

Remembering as Filtering

Bergson calls the brain “the organ of attention to life”.³⁸¹ Its function is not to preserve the past, but rather to hide it in order to bring forward those parts of the past that are practically useful. The brain delivers a list and a frame, in which a recollection can occur. It makes us focus on the here and now because if not, we would not be able to survive.³⁸²

This is a rather astounding view: in daily life, firstly, we assume that memories need to be kept in some closet in our brain, and secondly, we assume that the past, if it is not kept in that closet, does not exist anymore. Bergson denies both points, and argues that:

The truth is that our whole past is always present behind us, and to perceive it we have but to look back; only, we cannot and we must not look back. We must not, because our end is to live, to act, and life and action look forward. We cannot, because the cerebral mechanism is fashioned to this end,— to mask from us the past, to let at each moment only so much past through as will throw light on the present situation and favour our action.³⁸³

Bergson conducted an extensive study of literature on aphasia and brain damage. He was of the opinion that cases in which brain damage lead to disorders can from the viewpoint of his theory be understood in the following manner. Memories have not disappeared because of the damage, but summoning the memories has become difficult or impossible.³⁸⁴ To use a metaphor that is not Bergson's, but comes from James' *Human Immortality*, a scratched or dirty window can dim the sunlight in the room, but has no influence on the sunlight itself.

Perceiving as Filtering

According to Bergson, this filtering not only occurs in memories, but also in thoughts and perceptions.³⁸⁵ The brain only transmits those thoughts that can lead to movements of the body at a certain time.³⁸⁶ The brain prevents us from “turning our eyes to right and left, and even, for most part of our time, behind; it would have us look right before us in the direction in which we have to go.”³⁸⁷

The filter model is the basis of an aesthetics, which is described in some pages of his book *Laughter* (1900):

Life is action. Life implies the acceptance only of the *utilitarian* side of things in order to respond to them by appropriate reactions: all other impressions must be dimmed or else reach us vague and blurred. I look and I think I see, I listen and I think I hear, I examine myself and I think I am reading the very depths of my heart. But what I see and hear of the outer world is purely and simply a selection made by my senses to serve as a light to my conduct; what I know of myself is what comes to the surface, what participates in my actions. My senses and my consciousness, therefore, give me no more than a practical simplification of reality. In the vision they furnish me of myself and of things, the differences that are useless to man are obliterated, the resemblances that are useful to him are emphasised; ways are traced out for me in advance along which my activity is to travel. These ways are the ways which all mankind has trod before me. (...)

Not only external objects, but even our own mental states, are screened from us in their inmost, their personal aspect, in the original life they possess. When we feel love or hatred, when we are gay or sad, is it really the feeling itself that reaches our consciousness with those innumerable fleeting shades of meaning and deep resounding echoes that make it something altogether our own? (...) Mostly, however, we perceive nothing but the outward display of our mental state. We catch only the impersonal aspect of our feelings, that aspect which speech has set down once for all because it is almost the same, in the same conditions, for all men. Thus, even in our own individual, individuality escapes our ken. We move amidst generalities and symbols, as within a tilt-yard in which our force is effectively pitted against other forces; and fascinated by action, tempted by it, for our own good, on to the field it has selected, we live in a zone midway between things and ourselves, externally to things, externally also to ourselves.

From time to time, however, in a fit of absentmindedness, nature raises up souls that are more detached from life. (...) This one applies himself to colours and forms, and since he loves colour for colour and form for form, since he perceives them for their sake and not for his own, it is the inner life of things that he sees appearing through their forms and colours. Little

by little he insinuates it into our own perception, baffled though we may be at the outset. For a few moments at least, he diverts us from the prejudices of form and colour that come between ourselves and reality. And thus he realises the loftiest ambition of art, which here consists in revealing to us nature.

Others, again, retire within themselves. Beneath the thousand rudimentary actions which are the outward and visible signs of an emotion, behind the commonplace, conventional expression that both reveals and conceals an individual mental state, it is the emotion, the original mood, to which they attain in its undefiled essence. And then, to induce us to make the same effort ourselves, they contrive to make us see something of what they have seen: by rhythmical arrangement of words, which thus become organised and animated with a life of their own, they tell us -or rather suggest- things that speech was not calculated to express.

Others delve yet deeper still. Beneath these joys and sorrows which can, at a pinch, be translated into language they grasp something that has nothing in common with language, certain rhythms of life and breath that are closer to man than his inmost feelings, being the living law -varying with each individual- of his enthusiasm and despair, his hopes and regrets. By setting free and emphasising this music, they force it upon our attention; they compel us, willy-nilly, to fall in with it, like passers-by who join in a dance. And thus they impel us to set in motion, in the depths of our being, some secret chord which was only waiting to thrill.³⁸⁸

The idea that creative art is connected with a different manner of perceiving is again a theme that is related to the Neoplatonic tradition, in which the artist is related to the "seer". It is also remarkable that in these passages, Bergson does not connect art with the control of techniques, crafts, skills, or a certain "grasp" of matter.

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson states that our perception should in principle not be bound by the position in space our visual field is in. "As we have shown in a former study [*Matter and Memory*], vision is a power which should attain *by right* an infinity of things inaccessible to our eyes. But such a vision would not be continued into action; it might suit a phantom, but not a living being. The vision of a living being is an *effective* vision, limited to objects on which the being can act: it is a vision that is *canalized*, and the visual apparatus simply symbolizes the work of canalizing."³⁸⁹

The consequences of this view reach very far. It not only implies that our perceptions go literally and figuratively further than we are conscious of, so that hyperesthesia is no longer a psychological curiosity, but the basis of our common perceptions. It also holds that our perception in principle is *not* conveyed through representations. This is also a controversial view. Many philosophers and psychologists start from a

model in which human cognition is not concerned with the things in themselves, but rather with their representations which affect our senses and nerves. Thus, the “real world” is unattainable: we only know what it invokes in us. This is called “phenomenalism”, and we recognize a somewhat simplified version of Kant’s philosophy, which seems to have become the prevailing way of thinking for many people.

For Bergson, things are very different. He recommends simply forgetting the distinction between “existence” and “appearance”.³⁹⁰ He denies that perception is concerned with objects that are inaccessible in themselves, as Kant claims, what would thus make perceptions into “veridical hallucinations”.³⁹¹ The things around us are simply present outside of us – and in principle, we have access to them in our perception. If our mind makes these things into representations, they are only temporary “excisions” to help us to act. This representation restricts our perception instead of making it possible.

Thus, our mind does not possess images of things around us. And that is not needed: the things are where we see them.³⁹² Just as it was the case for the past, things do not need to be preserved “inside our head”: they are with themselves. Our brain does not create the world around us, and nor does it create the past, or the future; rather, it selects what is necessary in order to serve our actions. The hardware of our brain contains, to use a modern metaphor, nothing more than a “work memory”. Everything that is temporarily saved on that hard drive, thoughts, memories as well as perceptions, has - with regard to that hard drive - an external source. True perceptions, that we are engaged in all the time, but that we filter for ease of use - are part of the outside world.

In the debate about the relation between body and mind, this is an “ultra-externalistic” theory of perception.³⁹³ This view is such a radical departure from the common way of thinking that it might seem difficult to understand. We actually cannot say anymore that our perceptions are “internal”³⁹⁴, no more than with Descartes that they are “not extended in space”. If the things we see are extended in space, our perceptions are extended in space as well. A perception just is those (wholly external) properties of an object which are selected by a body for possible response.³⁹⁵ There is no doubling or copy that is necessary or even possible of something that is from the “outside”.

Remarkably, in this anti-phenomenalism, Bergson follows the Neoplatonist Plotinus, who denies that when something is perceived, it exists “in” the mind. This means that he also denies that memory would be able to store these perceptions, because how is it possible to store something you have never possessed? So the view that our mind is not a

“mirror of nature”, does not therefore originate from Rorty, who became famous with the book *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*.

The Function of the Brain

The filter model leads to a theory about the relation between consciousness and the brain that differs from what many people hold to be true these days. Bergson writes:

What in fact does experience tell us? It tells us that the life of the soul, or, to use a term which does not appear to beg the question, the life of the mind, is bound to the life of the body, that there is solidarity between them, nothing more. (...) A coat is solidary with the nail on which it hangs; it falls if the nail is removed; it sways if the nail is loose and shaken; it is torn or pierced if the nail is too pointed; it does not follow from all this that each detail of the nail corresponds to a detail of the coat, nor that the nail is the equivalent of the coat, still less that nail and coat are the same thing. So, too, the mind is undeniably attached to the brain, but from this it does not in the least follow that in the brain is pictured every detail of the mind, nor that the mind is a function of the brain. All that observation, experience, and consequently science, allows us to affirm is the existence of a certain *relation* between brain and mind.³⁹⁶

With a peculiar expression, Bergson calls the brain an “organ of pantomime”.³⁹⁷ Using a combination of metaphors, he says that if someone would be able to look into our brain, his view would be comparable with someone who, from far away, would see actors on a big stage. He watches them move, but cannot hear what they are saying.³⁹⁸ Or he would be in the same situation as someone who would have to understand from the movements of the director what the music sounds like that is being played by the orchestra.³⁹⁹ This hypothesis takes, as far as we were able to trace, no part in contemporary brain research. However, there are some theories about the mind-body problem that have a Bergsonian tendency, such as the theories by John Eccles, Wilder Penfield, Karl Pribram or Mario Beauregard.

Phantasms of the Living

Bergson’s lecture as the president of the Society for Psychical Research from 1913 applies the filter model in its approach to telepathy. It is called: “‘Fantômes de vivants’ et ‘recherche psychique’”. *Fantômes des vivants* is a translation of *Phantasms of the Living*, named after the research and book title of Myers, Gurney and Podmore (1886). Phantasms are images

of living persons, who appear to someone else the very moment that this person experiences something exceptional (and almost always something fatal). They are also called (in the literature of those days and also by Bergson) “veridical hallucinations”. They are hallucinations (someone sees something that is not present in space at that very moment), but they are veridical (“truthful”), because they are concerned with something that appears to be true.

In this lecture, Bergson blames the resistance against psychical research on the hidden metaphysics in science. This metaphysics remains unconscious and is therefore incapable of adapting itself to observations and experiences.⁴⁰⁰

Bergson is conscious of the fact that some scientists desire different evidence from this research than it has to offer. Psychical research is primarily about *historical* data. It is impossible to experiment with history, since we can only document and interpret it.⁴⁰¹ Evidence in this context has therefore more in common with juridical and historical certainty than with mathematical certainty.⁴⁰²

When these kinds of experiences are evaluated by means of statistical methods, a threat of misunderstanding arises. A single case, in which a phantasm seems to correspond with an event elsewhere, is insignificant from a statistical perspective, because it has to be compared with all the cases in which someone has dreamt or hallucinated *without* it having a relation to something from the outside. In other words: it would become a matter of coincidence. Bergson has an objection to this, which also plays a role in other places in his work.

If we reduce someone’s complex experience to a statement that can only be either “correct” or “incorrect”, we have replaced a description of something alive and concrete with one singular claim. It is indeed possible to count statements that are true or false. But if this is done, one stops talking about someone’s experiences and instead, starts to talk about abstract substitutions for those experiences. The rich cases of veridical hallucinations form, according to Bergson, not one single characteristic that is possible to verify, but instead, offer a lot more. They resemble a portrait of someone, rather than constitute a simple expression. If someone drew an exact portrait of a situation others will, if they find that the portrait resembles reality, recognize many (and not just one) elements in the image that correspond with reality.⁴⁰³

Further, in his *Presidential Address*, Bergson set forth his ideas about the relation between mind and body, which he had already published elsewhere. Imagine that our “attention to life” would weaken for a moment. In this *disinterestedness of life*, we can get access to many more

memories or perceptions. Here, we see some similarity with the idea of a “subliminal consciousness” as it appears in Myers and James. When the attention for life weakens, we could be overwhelmed by memories and extended perceptions (like telepathy).⁴⁰⁴ He writes:

Our bodies are external to one another in space; and our minds, in so far as they are attached to those bodies, are separated by intervals. But if the mind is attached to the body only by a part of itself, we may conjecture that for the other part of the mind there is a reciprocal encroachment.⁴⁰⁵

This idea, in which a part of our mind has descended into a body extended in space, with another part that has not, is also found in Plotinus and other Neoplatonists. It could imply that overlaps might occur between the experiences of different persons that remind us of telepathy. Bergson suggests that telepathy could operate everywhere and at every moment, but its intensity would be too small to be noticed.⁴⁰⁶ Our physical constitution would do anything possible to prevent such connections. If the “resisting functioning” of the brain somehow lessened, the door, that it keeps closed, would open halfway. Something would enter of a “without”, which might be a “beyond”.⁴⁰⁷

The Survival of the Soul

From the perspective of this filter model, Bergson is positive about the possibility of survival. “I should not think of attacking (...) the most formidable problem that humanity can face. But still less should I think of stealing away from it.”⁴⁰⁸ When we get used to the idea of a *conscience qui déborde l'organisme* (a consciousness overflowing the organism), an idea of life after death would become more natural and probable.⁴⁰⁹ “The one and only reason we could have for believing in an extinction of consciousness after death is that we see the body become disorganized; however, this reason no longer has any value if the independence of almost the totality of consciousness with respect to the body is also a fact of experience.”⁴¹⁰ “If mental life overflows the cerebral life, if the brain only translates into movements a small part of what takes place in consciousness, then survival becomes so probable that the onus of proof falls on the person who denies it rather than the person who affirms it”.⁴¹¹ “The brain is a storehouse of motor habits, but not of memories”, and “the other functions of thought are even more independent of the brain than memory is”.⁴¹²

Bergson discussed this in two lectures in *L'énergie spirituelle* and in the lecture that he gave in the US in 1913.⁴¹³ To what extent he himself

took the possibility of an afterlife into account is, considering Bergson's silence about himself, difficult to trace. We know however, that when he met Gabriel Marcel, who in the First World War helped the Red Cross as a medium by trying to contact spirits of missing persons, Bergson tried to contact the spirit of William James.⁴¹⁴

Bergson was not blind to the fact that the belief in a continued existence after death also has another source. The human being is conscious of its mortality, and the speculating function of reason makes one construct myths in which this restriction is resolved. Bergson is of the opinion that the manifold of religious imaginations and ethical points of view have two backgrounds, of which one points at the influence of our material constitution, and the other points at the force of life and freedom. Hence the title of his book: *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

It is also important to mark that all the examples in which filters are surpassed (artists, telepaths, people who have near-death-experiences), are distinguished by Bergson from people who make "a laborious, and even painful effort to remount the natural slope of thought, in order to place themselves directly, by a kind of intellectual expansion, within the thing studied: in short a passage from reality to concepts as opposed to from concepts to reality".⁴¹⁵ This is the task of metaphysics, and its method is intuition, in which, to use a metaphor by Bergson, the door is not open because of a trick of nature, but is rather opened consciously.

In April and May 1914, Bergson delivered the prestigious *Gifford Lectures* at the University of Edinburgh about the theme of "the problem of personality", that have never been published in an edited form. In a short summary, Bergson calls the question of personality the central theme in philosophy.⁴¹⁶ For many of us, the question of what we are is a main question: where do we come from, and where are we going. Bergson observes that philosophers have always searched for universality, and this shows a certain contempt for the person in his or her particularity. When we are capable however, of considering changeability more real than permanence, we should apply this to our self-image as well. In these lectures, Bergson also repeats that our entire past remains accessible and could survive even death.⁴¹⁷ The preservation and even intensification of personality is not only possible, but even probable after the disintegration of the body.⁴¹⁸

The Survival of Mankind

This conviction has a great social importance, according to Bergson. In the conclusion of his final book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*,

he says that the contemporary human being, who is driven towards the satisfaction of his carnal desires by irresistible forces, should take mysticism and psychical research far more seriously. Technology has immeasurably increased the capacities of the "body" of the human being, and therefore its possibilities for action in the material realm. This has led to many dangers. Bergson points out the risks of population increase⁴¹⁹, weapons of mass destruction,⁴²⁰ and the unrestrained demands of more wealth on the basis of artificially generated needs.⁴²¹ He writes: "Mankind lies groaning, half crushed beneath the weight of its own progress."⁴²² "That is why the body, now larger, calls for a bigger soul, and that mechanism should mean mysticism".⁴²³

Bergson calls for the people to renounce the suffocating freedom of *plaisir* (pleasure), and to try to find *la joie* (joy) again:⁴²⁴

Nature warns us by a clear sign that our destination is attained. That sign is joy. I mean joy, not pleasure. Pleasure is only a contrivance devised by nature to obtain for the creature the preservation of its life, it does not indicate the direction in which life is thrusting. But joy always announces that life has succeeded, gained ground, conquered.⁴²⁵

In order to find joy again, psychical research can fulfil an important task. With regard to a survival of bodily death, we have to acknowledge our ignorance, but we could be able to discover the means with which we can investigate the "beyond" (*au-delà*).⁴²⁶ The early findings of psychical research, such as telepathy, support the idea that spiritual reality transcends material reality:

Even if one retains only a portion of what it would fain look upon as certain, enough remains for us to divine the immensity of the *terra incognita* that it has just begun to explore. (...) Maybe this would be sufficient to turn into a live, acting reality a belief in the life beyond, which is apparently met with in most men, but which for the most part remains verbal, abstract, ineffectual.⁴²⁷ This could mean that pleasure would be eclipsed by joy. Joy indeed would be that simplicity of life diffused throughout the world by an ever-spreading mystic intuition; joy, too, that which would automatically follow a vision of the life beyond attained through the furtherance of scientific experiment.⁴²⁸

If such a drastic change in mentality does *not* take place, we will probably have to constrain our brutish desires with rules and regulations. But it is a serious situation for humankind:

Men do not sufficiently realize that their future is in their own hands. (...) Theirs [is] the responsibility, then, for deciding if they want merely to live,

or intend to make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods.⁴²⁹

The final sentence of the last book that he wrote is a remarkable one: *l'univers est une machine à faire des dieux*. The filter process seems to not have the last word. The resistance of fixed matter can be vindicated by the creativity of the mind. But whether this will happen is up to us.

CHAPTER SIX

SCIENCE OF THE FUTURE: HANS DRIESCH AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY

RICO SNELLER

Then parapsychology will be the proper centre of all science and philosophy, the true foundation of what we call in German *Weltanschauung* (worldview).

—Hans Driesch

In the Spring of 1935, H.J. Pos, professor of Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, received a letter from the German philosopher and biologist Hans Driesch, a professor in Leipzig. Driesch asked him whether it would be possible to establish a chair in parapsychology, the “science of the future”. We do not know how, if at all, Pos answered, and nothing is known about any potential follow-up action on his part either. A chair in parapsychology was established, but later and somewhere else.

Driesch’ Course of Life

Apparently, Hans Driesch was very convinced of the importance of “the youngest of all sciences”; he contributed a lot to the research that was known to James as *Psychical Research*, to Bergson as *Métopsychoologie* and to Driesch as “parapsychology”. Driesch researched mediums (Rudy and Willie Schneider, Gladys Osborne Leonard). He contributed to the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* and was president of this society in 1926. He assisted the American biologist J.B. Rhine in establishing a parapsychological lab and in designing his research strategy. He translated Rhines’ book *New Frontiers of the Mind* into German in 1938. In 1932, Driesch himself published an introductory overview of parapsychology. He was probably the first to use the concept “paranormal”. We will return to this later.

Hans Driesch lived from 1867 to 1941: the era of two world wars, National Socialism and the slow emergence of parapsychology. In his autobiography, Driesch mentions that he is fascinated by his own course of life. It is, he says, as if someone “wanted” something of him.⁴³⁰ Indeed, Driesch experiences an important shift: from experimental biology and nature research to philosophy. He starts with his famous research into the embryos of sea urchins and he ends as a metaphysician who writes about the soul, ethics, psychology and parapsychology. But Driesch does not see a discontinuity in this. His metaphysical reflections, as he notes at the end of his autobiography, were always in the service of the grounding of his first biological findings. In experiments as well as philosophy, he was searching for the nature of life itself. The living organism, Driesch states, is something fundamentally different from a mechanically working machine. It is under the care of what he calls “entelechy”: a non-spatial, non-temporal principle that differentiates the growing organism up to the point that it forms a capable unity.

We already referred to it: a fundamental discovery was at the basis of Driesch’ concept of entelechy: his experiments with the embryos of sea urchins, performed in a Neapolitan lab in the nineties of the nineteenth century. To his surprise, Driesch discovered that he was able to “mutilate” these embryos to a certain extent, without lasting damage to the embryo itself. During a certain period, the remaining cells were capable of overseeing the total functioning of the embryo. From this, Driesch concluded that it is not the internal cell structure, but rather, the external cell reality which cannot be located in a cell, that determines the harmonious growth of this organism. He called this external principle “entelechy”, after a similar concept developed by Aristotle.

Driesch’ career was prosperous. He worked in different German universities, mostly in Leipzig, the city that would make him an honorary citizen. He alternated his teaching activities with some long trips around the globe. In 1907 and 1908, the opportunity arose to give the prestigious Gifford Lectures, on the area of natural theology. Henri Bergson and William James also gave these lectures. The Gifford lectures were published in the splendid *Science and Philosophy of the Organism* (1908)⁴³¹. The original text in English can be found online.⁴³² Other works by him are his famous *Ordnungslehre* (1912) and the *Wirklichkeitslehre* (1917), *Leib und Seele* (1916), *Grundprobleme der Psychologie* (1926) and *Parapsychologie* (1932).

We will first take a closer look at Driesch’ famous notion of entelechy and his vitalistic philosophy. It will become clear that this philosophy served as a basis from which parapsychological phenomena could be

understood. Not only because the vitalistic notion of entelechy refers to a reality outside of time and space, but also because Driesch wanted to do justice to the fullness of the experience of life. This experience should not be reduced to general concepts that cut life from its own sources and specific shapes. It is a fact that Driesch is not as radical as his contemporaries Bergson or Klages. Driesch remained Kantian-oriented and “thinking” and “understanding” played a more central role than “experiencing”.

In a lecture given on March 18, 1926 for the acceptance of his presidency of the *Society of Psychical Research* in London, Driesch made the fascinating remark that there will be a time when parapsychology will be at the heart of all sciences.⁴³³

Whether his university colleagues appreciated this remark, is not told by history. In an earlier phase, Driesch’ mentor, the great biologist Haeckel, had given Driesch the advice to spend some time in a clinic for neurotic patients, after Driesch had sent him a manuscript in which an alternative view was presented.⁴³⁴ With students however, Driesch was always very popular.⁴³⁵

Entelechy and Life

Driesch saw it as his big task to make the singularity of life plausible, against all those who wanted to reduce life to a mechanical or chemical process. The tendency towards the latter was very strong in the nineteenth century. Rooted in the mechanical cosmology of Newton and Kepler, - and even Kant’s, in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, nineteenth century biologists such as Roux, Helmholtz, Haeckel and Loeb, developed a conception of a machine-like foundation of every organism. However, characteristic of such a construction is that it can never be goal-oriented in a direct manner. Organic development on the other hand can only be understood from a certain goal-orientation.

From his earliest biological-philosophical publications, we see Driesch struggle with the question of how the specific element of a living organism can be named. Indeed, the power of the reduction of mechanical conceptions of life is strong. He has to respond to those who object that often, machines are purposefully designed and show an internal coherence analogous to that of the organism. Driesch does this by stating that machines obey a static teleology, while organisms follow a dynamic teleology.⁴³⁶ Machines are only capable of realizing possibilities that have been provided to them when they were made (something that is said to annoy computer-users, who unjustly blame their machine for not doing what it is supposed to do). Organisms, on the other hand, can relate freely to

their circumstances, can adapt themselves to the environment, and can recover from their injuries. In other words: *dynamic* teleology or even the *entelechy* of a living organism does not mean determinism or the fate for the organism, but rather, self-realisation. Therefore, it is for a reason that later definitions of entelechy that Driesch offers are *Einheitswerdebestimmer* (unifying force), *etwas Beharrliches im Werden* (something lasting in becoming)⁴³⁷, *ganzmachende Kausalität* (completing causality) or even *seelenartiger Faktor* (soul-making factor).⁴³⁸

How does entelechy work in a concrete manner? Entelechy guarantees the increase of differentiation within a cell-dividing organism. It transforms a homogenous division of elements and possible reactions into a heterogeneous division. The early and shapeless group of cells that the embryo consists of at the start, will not become a bigger shapeless group, but are subjected to a process of differentiation in which different organs and functions develop. In Driesch's own words: "*Entelechy, though not capable of enlarging the amount of the diversity of composition of a given system, is capable of augmenting its diversity of distribution in a regulatory manner, and it does so by transforming a system of equally distributed potentialities, into a system of actualities which are unequally distributed.*"⁴³⁹ It is exactly this differentiation that distinguishes the organic from the inorganic system.

There are cases to be found which mechanistically oriented biologists can refer to in order to identify the organic as not distinctively different from the inorganic. Processes of crystallization or the formation of coral seem close to the organic process. Complex systems are also brought into existence here. Driesch refers to the first kind of processes as processes of accumulation: material joins material, but the result could never be understood as a real unity. A coral reef is never finished. If you take a part of it away, the system hasn't suddenly disappeared: it continues to exist. It is impossible however to take away a crucial organ from a living organism without also dismantling its unity and completeness. Different from the accumulation of material, an organism needs to be considered as a process by which an indiscernible multiplicity transforms itself into a discernible multiplicity. In Driesch's terms: from an *intensive* to an *extensive* multiplicity. Aside from this, Driesch mentions two other differences between an organism and an inorganic system. Inorganic bodies are always made, in contrast to the organic from the same material. Moreover, both relate differently to their surroundings: for an inorganic system (a crystal structure for example), the medium in which it is created is fundamental, and thus one could argue that the inorganic structure is "parasitic"; for an organic system however, it is only a means to growth. A

human being lives *from*, not *of* or *in* oxygen. An organism has an external relation to its surroundings, and an inorganic body has an internal relation.⁴⁴⁰

Entelechy can be understood as a potential complex structure that affects matter. Of course this matter remains subject to the laws that apply to it (such as the law of the preservation of energy, the entropic principle). At the same time, it becomes subject to another, higher principle of order, of unity or completion which applies another type of causality. Driesch calls this *Ganzheitskausalität*.⁴⁴¹ An organism, aside from acting in subordination to the laws of physics and chemistry, acts at the same time always as a unity; it takes itself, so to say, with it.

As a biologist, Driesch thematises an issue that will play a role later in ethics and in the philosophy of action. A good example is that of Charles Taylor's *The Explanation of Behaviour* from 1964. Taylor also struggles with the mechanical, "behaviouristic" explanation of behaviour, and he also introduces terms such as "goal" and "meaning" in order to give a more accurate description of behaviour. The same goes for Paul Ricoeur, in his later work *Soi-même comme un autre*. But it is not unimportant to mention here that in this respect, both approaches are rooted in nineteenth century philosophies of life, (mostly that of Dilthey).

How does entelechy work? If, as Driesch claims, it is not a principle extended in space or time, and cannot be observed empirically, and can therefore not be understood as "energy", it cannot function in the usual way. Right from the start it would disrupt the law of the preservation of energy, by adding energy to a system "from the outside". According to Driesch entelechy thus functions differently. Its specific activity (the multiplication of differentiation) functions by *blocking* or *suspending* possibilities of realization. It is able to activate possibilities again, but only once it has first suspended these possibilities. Again, one can think of the structured cell division of the embryo: it does not just take place spontaneously, but rather, it follows a pattern. The "morphogenesis" (the taking up of a shape by an organism) would never be possible if cell division could not evolve but is suspended instead.

We note here that the type of "causality" we hear Driesch defend is entirely different than the usual understanding of the term, where cause and effect can be clearly distinguished and can be observed independently from one another. Entelechial causality, when observed in a growing or acting organism, has an ungraspable dimension. It presupposes a different attitude of perception. Returning to the Kantian intuition of time and space, Driesch claims that they need to be complemented with the intuition

of “completion” (*Ganzheit*). Only when we take this seriously, will we be able to distinguish the type of causality from entelechy.

Memory and Recollection

In his defence of entelechy as the life principle *par excellence*, Driesch does not yet intend to understand “occult” phenomena. It is remarkable however that in the later editions of his *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, he has added short references to spiritism, telepathy and thought-reading. He writes towards the end of his first *Abteilung*: “It is clear that vitalism does not only not contradict the «occult», but that it even prepares the way for it.”⁴⁴² In this, Driesch focuses more on the parapsychic (telepathy, clairvoyance and such) than the paraphysical (telekinesis).⁴⁴³

There is a dimension of entelechy that stands in direct relation to the psychical, and therefore deserves our attention. This is recollection or memory. For Driesch, memory is partly, but not exclusively, an effect of experience. How does this work? In the *Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, he makes a distinction between secondary and primary willing. While secondary willing is dependent on experience, primary willing is not. We could also speak about “instinct”. Only a small amount of imagination is needed to relate this primary, instinctive willing to telepathy: it is an expression of its “recollection”. Entelechy as such could be characterised as a kind of “memory”, but a memory independent of experience, that cannot be situated in time and space (such as, for example, in the brain).

A different distinction is of importance here: that between entelechy and *psychoid*.

“Psychoid” is Driesch’s name for that aspect of entelechy that directs and guides the human consciousness and the inner world. Every time Driesch makes this distinction, “entelechy” stands for the purely *morphogenetic* process that determines the development of the body. “Psychoid”, on the other hand, indicates the process that makes the development of the *inner world* possible: thinking, wanting and feeling. Thus, the distinction between primary and secondary willing only applies to the psychoid. Entelechy and morphogenesis occur “automatically”, independent of experience, and are therefore to be understood as “primary” processes. However, it is possible to partially influence the inner life of the human being, and this is dependent on experience; thinking, willing and feeling can be partially directed and controlled, which makes them “secondary” activities. They are “primary” when there

are “unconscious” internal tendencies. Driesch could not rely here on Freud’s psychoanalytical theory, which he did not know of. However, he does refer to Eduard von Hartmann and Schopenhauer, who both wrote on the unconscious before Freud did so.⁴⁴⁴ “But it is my firm conviction that we cannot avoid the admission of vitalistic autonomic agents possessing no experience, i.e. no ‘secondary’ faculties, and yet endowed with *specific* knowing and willing”.⁴⁴⁵

Neither the recollection of entelechy, nor that of primary (psychoidal) willing, can be located according to Driesch. What about recollection in the more general sense that, as we tend to say, “stores” experiences? It is possible to locate that?

In an article about recollection that Driesch wrote in the Proceedings, the journal of the *Society for Psychical Research*, Driesch objects to the theory of the “engrammata”.⁴⁴⁶ This theory starts from the idea that it is possible to locate recollection in the brain. It leaves unexplained however, the fact that it is possible for memories to return, even after serious brain damage. In order to understand the functioning of the brain *without* disregarding the meaning of the brain, Driesch suggests the possibility of *object reading* (psychometry) or the *psychometric* relationship that we can have with an object.

Object reading is (according to Driesch) a paranormal phenomenon. A telepathist sees or feels a photo of or an object that belongs to someone else and from this receives impressions of this person. It is in the same manner that Driesch understands recollection. Recollection, or the mind, is the capability to use as *material* in order to re-live or re-perceive something. The brains do not serve as storage space of memories, but they are a means to memory, just like the object is a means to the telepathist. This theory of recollection, which renounces sensualism and associationism in the line of Hume and Condillac, blossoms in phenomenology. This theory is able to explain how it is possible that brain damage does not necessarily erase memories forever.

It is remarkable that Driesch places a phenomenon that belongs to the world of mediums and telepaths in the centre of his theory. In doing so, this phenomenon is no longer an anomaly, but a phenomenon that grounds every act of memorization. In this theory of recollection, we easily recognize Driesch’ concept of entelechy; indeed, entelechy is also understood to be the capability to guide an organism in its development and to generate healing in cases of damage.

Higher Metaphysics

In some places in his work, Driesch makes more general remarks about the existence of a “higher metaphysics”, meaning: a teaching in which there is not only place for entelechy and psychoid, but also for “occult” or “paranormal” phenomena. He names three in his *Wirklichkeitslehre*.⁴⁴⁷ First, he refers to the spiritless, inorganic nature; in this occur powers or potentialities that work from a distance in their entirety, such as magnetism, electricity and energy. Second, he names the spirited, organic nature. It is possible that this is a reference to entelechy. This does not work *im Raum*, but in *den Raum hinein*; she resides outside time and space but affects it. Third, Driesch points at the hypothetical possibility (which he also elaborates on in the *Science and Philosophy of the Organism*) of an ultra-personal *Überentelechie*: a greater unity that is realized through independent organisms. Phylogenetics, or the study of relationships among groups of organisms, is an example.

In the *Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, Driesch adds three additional indications⁴⁴⁸ that further elaborate on the former. He starts with the moral intuition of man, which expands man beyond his bodily, “physical” limits. Next, he describes the earlier mentioned capacity of memory. In memory and recollection, man is able to hold present and past together. From the fact that memories are not constantly present, but can be brought out, Driesch deduces that there must be an unconscious ground on which our consciousness rests, and which transcends our consciousness. Driesch finds a third indication for the validity of a higher metaphysics in the physical reality, in which there is coherence and there can be discovered a continuity that is not exclusively dependent on the human brain. A stone that rolls off a mountain rolls continuously, whether I am looking or not, and always seems to be in the place where I expect it to be. All these considerations, Driesch says, can be viewed as windows through which we can see the absolute, although they are also windows with frosted glass.⁴⁴⁹

Parapsychology

In the twenties and thirties, Driesch became increasingly interested in parapsychology. He dedicated part of his second edition of *Ordnungslehre* from 1926 to the subject. The topic is also discussed intensively in his *Grundprobleme der Psychologie*, published in the same year.

Driesch’ book on parapsychology from 1932 most of all provides a methodological justification of this research area. Driesch discusses the

resistance parapsychology often invokes. People who view themselves as “enlightened”, are often bound to materialist dogmas. Universities behave as “Konservierungsanstalten”. But parapsychology also suffers from people that “are too faithful.” The origin of the term “parapsychology” is found in the work of the philosopher Max Dessoir, who introduced the term in 1889.⁴⁵⁰ Dessoir uses the prefix “para” beside “psychology” in order to name a study area that deals with exceptional, yet neither pathological nor “supernatural” phenomena. As far as we know, Dessoir doesn’t use the term “paranormal”, and neither can it be found in other literature from the sphere of *psychical research*: the term supranormal (from F.W.H. Myers⁴⁵¹, also used by James) is used. Until the thirties, the term “parapsychology” was used only in German, and became common worldwide only after the American researcher copied it from Driesch.

In his 1932 book, Driesch uses the prefix “para” consistently in order to indicate phenomena that cannot be placed within a mechanistic worldview: parapsychical and paraphysical. The term “paranormal” (strangely composed from a Greek and a Latin term) is already used a number of times before he discusses these notions systematically.⁴⁵² On page 61, he categorizes the *paranormale Dinge* in two groups: psychical (those who deal with an exceptional way of knowing) and the psychophysical, which includes telekinesis, ghosts and object-reading. From this point onwards, the concept of the paranormal is used hundreds of times.

In the first part of the book, many phenomena are discussed, and an overview of the corresponding research methods is offered. It is remarkable that Driesch makes a distinction between telepathy and the reading of thoughts. In the first phenomenon, the sender has an active role, and in the second, the receiver.

In the second part of Driesch’ book on parapsychology, many different theories on telepathy and the like are presented, which include spiritistic theory, which was widely discussed at the time. In light of vitalism and the rejection of materialism, a continued existence after death has become a *meaningful problem* again, according to Driesch. When we are liberated from the chains of materialism, reasons to a priori reject a continued existence and to treat it as something ridiculous or absurd, are not valid any longer.⁴⁵³ Driesch even writes that “no problem concerns man as much as this one”.⁴⁵⁴

It seems that here, Driesch interprets the experiences of and with mediums as arguments for “immortality”. However, he would like to replace the term spiritism for “Monadismus”, of which the notion “monad” is derived from Leibniz.⁴⁵⁵ Some mediums give very detailed

information of the deceased, and this makes Driesch veer towards a monadic theory. We read a remarkable statement of a biologist that is used in his small book *Überwindung des Materialismus*: “if man is immortal as a person, the higher animals are likely to be immortal, too”.⁴⁵⁶

We have a short remark about Driesch’s use of the term paranormal. One could say perhaps that Driesch, probably against his will, has made materialism into a norm after all of what is called “para”-normal. If materialism is as outdated as Driesch finds, it might be possible not to compare that which transcends materialism with materialism. The fact that Driesch does not take this step may have to do with the dualism between the vital (which includes the paranormal) and the mechanical present in his thought.

Later Developments

When Driesch wrote his letter to H.J. Pos on 2 May 1935, the problem he raised has already been solved. Leiden University has appointed the neurologist and biologist Paul Dietz as a lecturer in parapsychology in 1932. Dietz accepted this post with a public lecture, held on 20 October 1932. The year after, W.H.C. Tenhaeff was appointed lecturer in parapsychology in Utrecht, where he eventually became a special professor in 1953.

In the first volumes of the *Tijdschrift voor Parapsychologie* that Dietz and Tenhaeff had founded, Dietz had suggested a new terminology for the phenomena. A terminology in which, as similar to Driesch, the prefix “para” is used consistently. Dietz introduced the terms “paragnosis” and “paragnost” and “parergy” and “parergast”, but not the term “paranormal” (he still names the phenomena as “supranormal”). The term “paranormal” was used for the first time in Dutch in Dietz’ published acceptance lecture for the lectureship in parapsychology at Leiden University. Thus, the term “paranormal” was used by Dietz and Driesch in the same year.⁴⁵⁷ Since then, the term has gradually become part of everyday speech. In the United States, thanks to Rhine, the term has acquired a slightly different meaning. Rhine understood parapsychology as an area that would only deal with experimentation, and not with fieldwork, meaning research into often-anecdotal spontaneous occurrences in everyday life. Furthermore, for Rhine, parapsychology focused only on certain phenomena (extrasensory perception and psychokinesis), and not research into indications for a continued existence after death.

Hans Driesch wanted to place life at the centre of science – not to reduce life to mechanical laws or to merely fickle coincidences. Because

he did not want to deny the achievements of mechanical thinking, the domain of that living existence was a "para"sphere. He hoped that continued research would lead to a process in which this matter could be turned inside out, and in which life would be placed at the centre of science and its mechanism at the periphery.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GABRIEL MARCEL AND THE ROOTEDNESS OF EXCEPTIONAL PHENOMENA IN EXISTENCE

RICO SNELLER

On this wonderful, cloudless Spring day I realized that the ideas of so-called occult science, which reason affects to rebel against, are really at the base of our most ordinary, most unquestioned experiences: experience through the senses, experience through the will, experience through the memory.

—Gabriel Marcel

Biography

Gabriel Honoré Marcel (1889-1973) was a French philosopher who, even before Sartre became influential, probably introduced existentialism to France. As a student he was influenced by Schelling⁴⁵⁸, on whom he wrote his MA thesis, and by Bergson, whose lectures he attended at the Collège de France and to whom he would later dedicate his *Journal métaphysique*. Born of a Jewish mother and a Christian father, he was raised in no particular religious tradition. In 1929 he converted to Christianity and became a Roman Catholic. He gave up teaching philosophy in the twenties and started a career in literature, mainly as a playwright. Although Marcel himself was mostly oriented towards his literary activities, it was primarily as a philosopher that he became popular. He was famous for his *Journal métaphysique*, first written during the war as diaries and only published in 1927, and for his Gifford lectures, later published under the title *Le mystère de l'être* (1951). Many saw Marcel as a Christian alternative to Sartre's atheistic existentialism. However, hardly any of Marcel's disciples seem to pay attention to his interest in, and experience with, the "paranormal". As opposed to most other philosophers discussed in this book (except for Schopenhauer and James), Marcel had close personal affinities with exceptional experiences. In his Frederic Myers memorial

lecture in 1955 he described “the influence of psychic phenomena on [his] philosophy”.⁴⁵⁹ Previous lectures in this series were given by e.g. Eugène Osty and J.B. Rhine.

In his 1955 lecture Marcel recounts his experiences during and even prior to the First World War. In 1910/11, in Switzerland, he met an English Major called Piercy, who conveyed to him his queer re-encounters with his deceased wife through a medium. These encounters, so Marcel told his audience, invigorated Piercy’s conviction that his wife was somehow still alive, so that ultimately he could dispense with the medium’s intercession. Piercy’s story so much influenced Marcel that he evocated it indirectly at the end of his play *l’Iconoclaste*, written in the beginning of the twenties (“We have wandered in the shadows of darkness, but now for a few seconds this past so full of errors and suffering appears to me in a light that cannot deceive. From all this confusion it seems that an order emerges. Oh, not a lesson, a harmony!”⁴⁶⁰) “This story”, Marcel says, “made a profound impression on me, but no doubt it appealed to the dramatist rather than the philosopher in me.”⁴⁶¹

During the First World War as a Red Cross servant Marcel was responsible for tracing missing soldiers. He met the English artist André Davids and his daughter, both of whom had a keen interest in parapsychology. They persuaded Marcel that he also possessed mediumistic gifts himself. He therefore tried an experiment with the planchette (a mediumistic tool for automatic writing), which at first led to results that were too ambiguous to be significant, but which later enigmatically enabled him to inform a war widow, a Mrs. Adolphe Reinach, about her missing husband’s true fate. Marcel honestly admitted that his own initial zest in response to the apparent gifts he found himself endowed with was soon met with their slow disintegration. However, as of June 1917 or so, he reassumed his planchette experiments. To his surprise he was prematurely informed about certain battle outcomes at the Italian front. Marcel consequently stopped the experiments for reasons of mental exhaustion, something he attributed to the doing of those very experiments themselves. He reassumed his planchette tests once more shortly after having recounted them to Bergson; without unambiguous results, though. What worried Bergson most, according to Marcel, was that precognition, were it a true possibility, would be incompatible with Bergson’s own theory of duration.⁴⁶² Nevertheless, both Bergson, and William James, whom Marcel also mentions in this context, are among the few philosophers to take parapsychological questions seriously and on whom he draws upon in his own philosophy.⁴⁶³

It is most striking that in his Myers lecture Marcel does not refer to his alleged ongoing contact with his own deceased wife, Jacqueline Boegner. We find evidence of this allegation in his private correspondence with the German-Swiss literary author Max Picard, who also had a Jewish background and who equally converted to Christianity later in his life, and who shared with Marcel a claim to certain paranormal gifts. In the entire Marcel-Picard correspondence one explicit occurrence of this subject was found. It is mentioned in 1957, one year after the abovementioned Frederic Myers memorial lecture, and on the occasion of the passing away of a good friend of Max Picard. Marcel tries to comfort him by saying: "I don't think that one can maintain this affirmation as to the absolute character of the other's death. I deeply believe that an immemorial and venerable experience would deny this affirmation: all bonds are not interrupted, all presence is not swallowed in this abyss."⁴⁶⁴ Upon Picard's reply that, despite his own mediumistic gifts, these encounters with the dead did not in the least comfort him, but rather frightened him, Marcel answered as follows: "You must know that I have *never* tried to create a mediumistic communication with my wife; she has even asked me *not* to do this, and I would have had a sentiment of profanation if I had ever tried to do such a thing. But I have the feeling that, if I had not been continuously and secretly assisted by her I would not have succeeded in all my activities and travels. I can only live if I am connected." [Marcel's Italics]⁴⁶⁵

This confidential remark relates to Jacqueline Boegner, whom Marcel married in 1919 and who died thirty years later. Things become all the more striking, if not weird, when re-reading the aforementioned play *l'Iconoclaste*, written shortly *after* Marcel's marrying and long *before* his wife's death and the epistolary exchange with Picard. This is because one of this play's main characters, Jacques, a remarried widower, also believes to be entertaining an ongoing contact with his deceased wife, even throughout his present marriage ("So then, it seemed to him that a sort of exchange developed between him and her. Yes, I have to say it was more than a feeling of intimacy it was also a real interaction.(...) At such moments he was almost happy, with a serene happiness that was very calm, (*Her voice trembles*) very pure, that I can still visualize.(...) It seems to me that he wanted it to always be there. But she didn't agree, at least what he believed to be her, because we don't actually know. Gradually that sort of presence became more and more rare, and he didn't understand why and so he became inconsolable and one day, she once again, shall I say, manifested herself to him? He reproached her for abandoning him, and she replied that that was not the kind of fidelity she wanted because it was an egotistical fidelity.(...) She then told him the real way for him to

prove that he still loved her, would be to not continue living as a widower, but to find a woman whom he would love, and who would be a mother for his children."⁴⁶⁶) Apart from the remarrying, it seems like Marcel has described his own life story in advance.

In another contribution, "Intersubjective Approaches to Survival", Marcel explicitly states that "[a]s to the evidence for survival, it seems to me that mere spiritistic experimentation is degrading and should be excluded. This does not mean, however, that we should exclude genuine communications from those close to us, and now dead, such as those between Marcelle de Jouvenel and her son Roland. Their authenticity seems manifested by beneficent spiritual consequences. Such communications should be the objects of thoroughly complete research, undertaken with open mind."⁴⁶⁷

Excluded by "Normal" Science

Marcel's philosophy developed from some important intuitions that he first explored in his *Journal métaphysique*, a treatise written during the First World War. This "journal" or diary has long been read as largely an elaboration on the notion of "existence" in a Kierkegaardian vein. In its introduction Marcel explains why he did not provide any affirmation about the structure of the world or of consciousness.⁴⁶⁸ All such claims, he states, are precisely put into question by an intimate consideration of *existence*. "Existence" and "objectivity" are two opposite notions. "Existence" is defined as follows: "[t]he very word "existence" designates in the most imperfect manner something which is in fact a certain climate – or more precisely, the zone of adherence to, let us not say the "real", but that which the spirit must acknowledge as truly insurmountable, as not susceptible of ever being transcended."⁴⁶⁹ This definition is not just in line with Kierkegaard's philosophy, but also with Maine de Biran's, Malebranche's, Pascal's and Augustine's (and, perhaps to a certain extent, even Descartes'), who are all philosophers of inwardness.

It is not the task here to give a complete account of Marcel's philosophy as such, but only of his philosophical approach to exceptional phenomena. Therefore, we cannot overlook what is stated immediately after the above definition of the notion of "existence", in a phrase that enigmatically concludes the *Journal métaphysique*'s introduction: "I would wish that the reader see in this Journal the conjugated effect of certain apparently distinct powers of the spirit, firstly, to disorient our inward look, and next, to accommodate this inward look to new fields of

experience and mediation where it will perhaps be possible one day to recollect the elements of a mystic and, who knows, a wisdom (...).⁴⁷⁰

It should be noted that as late as 1953, when Marcel had already published his most important works, he implicitly repeats his early ideas from the *Journal métaphysique*, in a public lecture at the first international conference on parapsychology, organized in Utrecht. He emphasizes that experiences like telepathy, clairvoyance, foretelling the future etc. are “intimately related to life”.⁴⁷¹ What cannot be ignored when studying life as a whole, he adds, and what is ignored by regular science, is *affectivity*. That is the main reason, Marcel continues, why psychoanalysis, for example, is to be properly assessed, as in psychoanalysis “the essentially dramatic character of the facts is really maintained, and consequently what is unique to them, and what is not accessible to any experimentation.”⁴⁷²

Marcel, it seems, is greatly reticent in accepting experimentation as an ultimate test. As he therefore argues in the opening of his parapsychology conference lecture, we should not even try to compete with “normal” scientific procedures in psychical research. If we did, not only would our results be very meager, but the investigated phenomena would also lose their determinant properties. The nature of “paranormal” phenomena is such that they will be alienated from themselves if they are submitted to standard scientific “rigour”. Inherent to them is their meaningful character for the subject involved, and their consequent *existential* significance.⁴⁷³

Furthermore, “normal” science and its results are totally self-contained and self-supporting, because “normal” science has a tendency to “normalize” reality. Instead, “the normal should without doubt be understood as from the para-normal, and not inversely.”⁴⁷⁴ True, the context of this quotation seems to refer mainly to the field of psychology, in which, according to Marcel, normalcy should rather be interpreted *as from* the para-normal, i.e. the intimacy of existence, than the other way around (“What we call normal psychological reality apparently implies this same Psi reality”⁴⁷⁵). But it seems undeniable that this logic should be applied to any science, not just to psychology.

In a daring article written shortly after the Second World War, Marcel refutes a possible critique that claims that we should make metaphysics rely on highly disputable phenomena that are far from being universally accepted. “I would start by answering”, he says, “that we would first have to ask ourselves *why* they are not universally accepted: one would see that they are in reality *refused* and that the will to refuse with which they find themselves confronted produces fake arguments that always rely on postulates that one does not take the effort to explicate.”

In his Myers lecture from 1955, Marcel gives a telling quote from his own *Journal métaphysique* (entry of 2 April 1916) that remarkably anticipates the concluding words of Hans Driesch's inaugural address at the Society for Psychical Research (see the previous Chapter): "On this wonderful, cloudless Spring day I realized that the ideas of so-called occult science, which reason affects to rebel against, are really at the base of our most ordinary, most unquestioned experiences: experience through the senses, experience through the will, experience through the memory."⁴⁷⁶

The Problem of an Undivided Consciousness

The ultimate philosophical basis of Marcel's openness towards exceptional human experiences relies on his rejection of a substantialized *consciousness*. How does Marcel argue here? We return to the lectures Marcel presented at the first parapsychological conference in Utrecht (Netherlands) in 1953, "L'ambiguïté de la réalité psi" and "Réflexions sur les fondements de la psychométrie", both published in *La science et le paranormal*.⁴⁷⁷

Marcel's rejection of the notion of a transcendental consciousness, as can be found in Kant, is grounded on Kierkegaard's notion of "existence", a notion that has been taken up eagerly by Heidegger and Sartre. This notion, if sufficiently elucidated, could show that e.g. science and transcendental philosophy illegitimately hypostasize a *particular* modality of the human being in the world. Such a hypostasizing, Marcel continues, leads to a vicious circle, in that it leaves scientific consciousness itself inarticulate and obscure. It entails a conception of consciousness consisting of an illuminated and an opaque, unconscious sphere, as though consciousness were liable to subdivision. Marcel himself suggests that the idea of an individual consciousness existing in splendid isolation is erroneous. "Empirically or pragmatically speaking, he adds, "such a conception presents itself as almost inevitable; from a speculative point of view, however, it will not satisfy us. The philosophical importance of para-psychological facts largely consists in the fact that they oblige us to acknowledge that this conception is only a kind of arrangement, or a compromise, to which reality and its basis remain refractory."⁴⁷⁸ Instead of this monadism, which is prevailing in our culture, we had better conceive of some kind of inter-subjectivity.

Already in his article "De l'audace en métaphysique" dating from 1947, Marcel had termed this monadic conception of consciousness as "subjectivism", and he had emphasized that this subjectivism should be taken as an adversary that is to be combated mercilessly. This subjectivism

“attributes to consciousness the incomprehensible power to impose an in fact inexistent order upon formless matter, a matter that receives this order inasmuch as it does not possess enough essence to resist.”⁴⁷⁹ The root of this subjectivist conception, Marcel continues, is the Aristotelian dualism of form and matter. Preferable to such thinking, he concludes, is a thinking that understands itself in terms of “fertilisation” (*fecundation*). Such a thinking takes interaction far more seriously than the subjectivist conception of consciousness does.

Ambiguity of Psi-Phenomena

If the idea of an undivided consciousness is to be rejected altogether, to what results will that lead with respect to psi-phenomena? According to Marcel, they will never be unambiguous. Essential here is their irreducible ambiguity.

Object Reading

Let us briefly study the phenomena considered by Marcel throughout his oeuvre. To start with, there is the phenomenon of *object reading* (*psychométrie*). Marcel discusses it in a text entitled “Réflexions sur les fondements de la psychométrie”, dating back to 1953.⁴⁸⁰ We have come across this notion earlier, in the chapters on James and Driesch. Object reading is a paranormal phenomenon, according to Marcel. A telepathist sees or feels an object that belongs to someone else and from this receives impressions of this person. In the same manner Driesch interpreted recollection. Recollection, or the mind, is the capability to use something as material in order to relive or re-perceive something else. James, we have seen, suggests that people who know someone who has passed away, and who attend a séance, may consequently serve as a “psychometric” object that prompts in the medium a “will to personalize”. How should this be conceptualized?

Marcel departs here from the observation that the majority of things in the world surrounding us are not “objects” but rather a kind of extension of our own bodies, inasmuch as they are intrinsically meaningful to us. They first become “objects” in a scientific study of them. Marcel assumes that the “metagnomic” subject, i.e. the person capable of accessing a particular utensil’s owner through this utensil itself (e.g. a glove), “has provisionally so to say divested himself of what could be named his psychological apparatus. (...) [T]he metagnomic power seems to be indissolubly linked to this possibility of self-effacement and self-annihilation.”

“Is it not as if the metagnomic subject *became* to a certain degree this being to whom the glove belonged, and as if he entered with the help of this kind of breach in the *circulation* of the living system constituting this being.”⁴⁸¹ And in the *Journal métaphysique* we already read: “*The clairvoyant does not read in me, he remembers me in my stead.*”⁴⁸² This strange “circulation” entails that objects that are meaningful to a person are psychically “irrigated” (*irrigué*) by the presence of their owner, as if they were the natural “extension” of his being.

True, this explanation does not entail an exhaustive comprehension of object reading as such. Scientists would immediately ask how such a “metagnomic subject” could enter the circulation of anybody else’s living system at all, and how (s)he manages to annihilate his or her own self and make place for the other’s sphere of self. Instead of providing a subsequent explanation meeting the scientist’s particular demands, Marcel would rather point at his basic philosophical notion of “existence”. Existence can never be overrun by science, for it is science that needs to be reallocated in the primordial sphere of existence. Any further explanation would have to start there, and not in the realm of scientific “objectivism”.

In his lecture on object reading from 1953 Marcel refers to his earliest discussion of this subject in his *Journal métaphysique*, in the entry already dating back to 23 February 1919. In the self-quotation Marcel gives in his lecture, he suggests that the *memorized* object, e.g. my glove, may ultimately overrun the *original perception* of the object. In this case it would be very likely, Marcel continues, that the memorized object is gradually invested with the lived experience to which it belongs.⁴⁸³ Rather than give rise to a dualism between an experienced, and an “objective” or “objectified” object, this approach aims at a uniform conception of being, in which memories related to the object are *incorporated into* the perception of the object.

Telepathy

Marcel’s view of object reading and its basis in *existence* might be further elucidated by studying his approach of telepathy. A superficial reading of the *Journal métaphysique* might overlook that the diary entries constituting it are permeated by hypotheses on telepathy, clairvoyance, and other exceptional experiences. However, in his post-War article “De l’audace en métaphysique” Marcel emphasises that his *Journal* was meant to rehabilitate our sensorial system of perception, and to eliminate

misleading materialistic representations of it. Sensation should be freed from any attempt to offer a spatial picture of its operations.⁴⁸⁴

Again we find Marcel defending facts of consciousness that cannot be localized in space. When considering telepathy, he first considers a possible albeit “laborious” and artificial explanation. For one could indeed claim that telepathy rests upon a special “fluidic” thought transmission procedure; that this transmission entails “waves” divulged in all directions but captured only by fitting receptacles (i.e. metagnomic subjects) with a corresponding “wave length”; and that the fluidically transmitted message is converted by the receptacle into elements of consciousness. However, such a claim would fall prey to Occam’s razor, as it enhances more assumptions than are strictly needed for a satisfying explanation. Marcel’s own proposal here is that one subject’s thoughts are *immediately* exposed to someone else’s without even being properly “transmitted”. He compares this to spiritual contact between people. “After all it may well be that a given idea is not in its origin *my* idea, that it is in no way “private” and only becomes limited, self-attributed and localized at a secondary stage. This localization may be due to a sort of internal deficiency of the idea. After all an idea is no more capable of being *situated* than is a consciousness. I was on the point of saying that the less we situate ourselves the more we *are*, but I am not sure that it is true.”⁴⁸⁵

A second explanatory comment on telepathy Marcel makes is as anti-Kantian as can be. He proposes to divest phenomenalism of its authority, and to give priority to what he calls the “scene” (*la scène*) on which “phenomena” appear (to the point of being indistinguishable from this scene). This “scene” seems equivalent to the original “syntheses” of perception William James’ *radical* empiricism tries to advocate, i.e. an original constellation that can only *artificially* be dissolved in its components, such as “perceiving subject”, “perceived object”, “context of the perception”, etc. “Telepathy”, Marcel argues in his entry of 24 February 1919, “would be reduced to a minimum in a world in which thought proceeded by means of phenomena and in which in practice people themselves could be likened to phenomenal elements.”⁴⁸⁶

In a final comment Marcel connects telepathy to object reading. He speaks about a “spiritual halo” seen by certain clairvoyants, a halo surrounding the consultants. These halos contain impressions of those who are very close to the consultant, as though they were always present to him or her, even when they are physically “separated”. “[T]elepathy must be explained”, Marcel claims, “by the existence of connections which are analogous to the connections which allow the clairvoyant to see [*apercevoir*] around me beings who have played a part in my life.”⁴⁸⁷ This

brings us back to the key concept of “existence”, which refers to a category that transcends the subject-object divide and should rather be defined in terms of “scenes”.

Confusingly, in his text “The epistemology of clairvoyance” Marcel in fact continues to discuss the phenomena previously termed as “object reading” or “telepathy” under the heading of “clairvoyance”. “[T]he [psychometric] object”, Marcel suggests, “can release to the clairvoyant the existential waves of the owner which were once that owner’s exclusive property. It will be as if the clairvoyant were somehow becoming this being to whom the object belonged”.⁴⁸⁸

Precognition

Obviously, the phenomena described here under different headings are all related. This becomes clear once more when studying Marcel’s ideas about prediction or foreseeing the future. Above we have seen that Marcel himself, apparently, was able to foretell a World War I battle’s outcome.

In the *Journal métaphysique*’s 11 December 1918 entry, it is suggested that precognition and prophesy presuppose that the perceived vision, future though it may seem, is in a way already there. However, it cannot be said *where*, for, as we have seen earlier, spatial categories do not apply here anymore.⁴⁸⁹ Already in the Journal’s beginning, in the 3 February 1914 entry, it is stated that we had perhaps best think in terms of an “absolute present”. The context of the latter idea debates the possibility of “conversion”; it is suggested that a conversion cannot be truly thought as to-come. It rather requires that it has always already taken place, in some eternal now.⁴⁹⁰

In Marcel’s play called *l’Horizon*, written in 1928, one year before his conversion to Catholicism, a highly remarkable phenomenon is described. The play’s protagonist visits, accompanied by his friend, a clairvoyant. The clairvoyant predicts to him his impending death by an accident. Unexpectedly, it is not he himself but his friend that is finally killed in a car accident. The clairvoyant, being correct in his precognition, had erred in the subject of the approaching death. In parapsychology this “error” is usually called “displacement”, in analogy to a similar phenomenon detected by Freud in dream life: *Verschiebung*. It was notably Whately Carington (1892-1947) who came up with “displacement” as an explanation for certain perplexing outcomes in card-guessing experiments: when the subject’s response matches the target for the *next* trial in the sequence.

In the preface to the re-edition of this play, Marcel notes that he would not have been able to write it if he had not attended several séances

presented by the clairvoyant Pascal Forthuny at the Parisian Institut Métapsychique, in 1927. He offers even a remarkable example of this person's precognitive skills.⁴⁹¹ Forthuny was a renowned clairvoyant and psychometrist in the twenties. Eugène Osty and Charles Richet describe some notorious experiments done with this man. Interestingly, in the preface that was written shortly before his own passing away, Marcel suggests that "a tight correlation exists between the mystery of time and the mystery of death".⁴⁹²

Spiritism and Survival of Death

Analogously to the phenomena discussed above, survival after death cannot be seen as an independent, isolated issue. For it presupposes a study of the mind-body relation, of the notions of "subject" and "object", of intersubjectivity, etc..

When Marcel discusses the problem of survival after death in a lecture in the 1950's, it is not for the first time, as we have already seen. For not only was Marcel reportedly able to locate war victims; in his correspondence with Max Picard he also claimed to have been in a continuous contact with his deceased wife himself. Should the latter be true (which following Marcel's own argument is something that can *never* be objectively stated), then he somehow described elements of his own future when writing his play *l'Iconoclaste*.

The reminder Marcel gives us in his lecture "Intersubjective approaches to survival" "that we can no longer begin with a substantialist concept of the soul" and that he "shall therefore speak of survival rather than immortality"⁴⁹³, will not surprise the reader of the *Journal métaphysique*. A question raised in his 22 February 1919 diary entry is whether we can "identify" a "spirit", and if so, how. The answer to this question is reminiscent of Marcel's anti-objectivism, for he seems to argue that only our beloved ones are susceptible of being recognised. "[O]nly love – by the recognition of a spiritual continuity – could *identify*; we would have to be in an order in which we said "It is *Thou*" and not "It is *he*"."⁴⁹⁴ Why? Because, as we read in the previous entry (11 February 1919), "being is only immanent for thought that loves, not for the judgment bearing on being."⁴⁹⁵ As if "objective" judgments cannot truly penetrate the judged object, and as if only love could. "[A] really coherent theory of survival cannot be carried out except in connection with a philosophy of love", Marcel states in his Myers lecture of 1955.⁴⁹⁶

Another thesis on survival we find where the *Journal* reminds us of Schelling's view of the continuity between spirit and body. Without

referring to the “subtle body”, as Schelling did in *Klara*, Marcel nonetheless assumes that death is not a complete *disincarnation*. For should a true survival of consciousness be possible (a possibility opened up by the apparent self-manifestation of “spirits”), forms of communication and of transmission between different consciousnesses are also requisite, and so are bodies. However, the concept of the “body” Marcel argues for is not “materialistic”, but rather phenomenological (similar to Sartre’s and Merleau-Ponty’s body concepts). “It is evident”, Marcel contends, “that I do not limit myself to *using* my body; there is a way in which I *am* my body, whatever that may mean.”⁴⁹⁷ In other words, my body is more than an object. It is intrinsically related to existence and so, to a *form* of consciousness.

In general, Marcel seems to exclude “mere spiritistic experimentation”, as it is “degrading”. On the contrary, “genuine communications from those close to us” should be allowed for, as Marcel tells us in his lecture “Intersubjective approaches to survival”. As an example he refers to Marcelle de Jouvenel who claimed to have maintained an on-going contact with her deceased son Roland.⁴⁹⁸ He could have also referred to Jean Prieur⁴⁹⁹ (an author studying paranormal phenomena and spiritism), as well as to his own communication with his wife who had died in 1948.

Being as Mystery

As opposed to Driesch, in whom exceptional phenomena came into the picture as a result of his biological experiments and subsequent theorising, in Marcel these phenomena seem to be a starting point for his philosophy. Therefore, we will end this chapter by highlighting some key concepts in Marcel’s overall approach of human existence, assuming that his own exceptional experiences have largely fuelled his philosophical ideas. We will subsequently discuss the notions of “mystery”, “existence”, and “consciousness”.

The most important term in Marcel’s entire work, apart from “existence”, is perhaps “mystery” (*mystère*). This notion is frequently sided with its opposite, “problem” (*problème*). Among many other places, we find an adequate definition in one of Marcel’s Gifford’s lectures later published as *Le mystère de l’être*: “A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I myself am involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as *a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity.*”⁵⁰⁰

This quote explicitly states what we have seen earlier in the definition of “existence”: as opposed to a “problem”, which resembles an “object”, a “mystery” is more like what has previously been called a “scene”. A mystery evades any subject-object divide by preceding it. As examples of “mysterious” phenomena Marcel mentions anything that cannot be objectified, e.g. the unity of body and soul, evil, human encounters, freedom, love, hope, etc. Ultimately, presence itself is a mystery. The section in which the above quoted passage occurs is entitled “La présence comme mystère” (presence as a mystery).

Interestingly, mystery does not belong to the dimension of the “unknowable” (which is only the limit of the “problematic”); it is rather susceptible of a *réflexion à la seconde puissance*, a *recueillement*, or a *réflexion récupératrice*: an “in-gathering”, or “recollection”.⁵⁰¹ For a mystery never presents itself in a present perception. As opposed to a mystery, a “problem” is that which is objectified. Being a subject matter of desire and fear it is to be relegated to the sphere of the functional: technology. Problems belong to the dimension of “having” rather than of “being”. Problems and mysteries are mutually exclusive: if “problematised”, a mystery loses its quality of its being-mystery.⁵⁰² The very act of turning something into a problem opens up the very subject-object split constituting Modernity. In contradistinction, the experience of “mystery”, which is intrinsically overwhelming, overcomes this split. Ultimately, Being itself is a mystery, for it is that which continues, despite experiences of dissolution. Cf.: “Being is that which does not frustrate our expectation; there is being from the moment at which our expectation is fulfilled – I mean the expectation in which we wholly participate. (...) To be, here, means to survive the test [of life], to survive progressive dissolution. To deny being is to claim that nothing can survive the test. (...) To deny being, then, is to posit deception as universal by right. (...) Hence, in a word, for me being is defined as that which does not allow itself to be dissolved by the dialectics of experience (experience as it reflects itself).”⁵⁰³

Let us examine to what extent these philosophical conceptions of Being itself are in line with Marcel’s views on exceptional human experiences. It would not be too far-fetched, for example, to take “death” as an attempt to negate life. Such an attempt would be in vain, according to Marcel’s approach of Being itself as a mystery in the passage just quoted above. It is therefore more logical, within this line of thinking, to opt to speak about “survival” rather than about death. Marcel’s first confrontations with (possible) survival, as we have seen, took place in World War I, when whilst serving as a Red Cross officer he managed to

provide “information” about missing soldiers. It therefore seems that the quotes in which it is stated that Being itself does not deceive are not alien to such experiences.

We will now also briefly reconsider Marcel’s discussion of “existence”, keeping in mind this time what has been said about the paranormal. In continuity with Kierkegaard’s thinking, if not in paving the way for Heidegger’s, Marcel defends a metaphysics that dispenses with a clear-cut ontology. General statements about the structure of the universe are to be put into question by virtue of an existential approach to being. From the viewpoint of our own existence, nothing definitive can be claimed about being itself *apart* from this existence: “Existence cannot, properly speaking, either be posited or conceived, perhaps not even known, it can only be recognized, as a field that one explores. (...) Existence (...): the zone of adherence to, let us not say the “real”, but that which the spirit must acknowledge as truly insurmountable, as not susceptible of ever being transcended.”⁵⁰⁴ So, “existence” refers to an indissoluble link to what cannot be transgressed, i.e. “mystery”; “existence” and “mystery” are mutually implicative: “the universal is necessarily the relative”.⁵⁰⁵

Moreover, in order to be what it is, existence presupposes individuality, historicity, and contingency. “Individuality” realises itself through being exposed to mystery, e.g. in faith, which transcends “transcendental consciousness”.⁵⁰⁶ Individuality, in turn, requires inwardness.⁵⁰⁷

If (1) mystery and existence are mutually implicative, and if (2) mystery entails the overwhelming, the overcoming of the subject-object split, it would be easy to infer that (3) existence might entail (albeit not necessarily) exceptional human experiences. However, if (1) “normal” and “paranormal” mysteries cannot be properly distinguished, as we have seen, and if (2) it is proper to mysteries to dissolve set boundaries (e.g. of “subjectivity” or “consciousness”), it does not seem unreasonable to assume that (3) the “paranormal” is always close at hand. “We already know, at least, that the unverifiable is far from arbitrary, that, on the contrary, it is the source of every rule and the principle of any order whatsoever.”⁵⁰⁸

Let us therefore take a look at a third general philosophical topic addressed by Marcel that is important for the assessment of exceptional experiences: consciousness.

We have seen likewise that Marcel rejects the notion of consciousness as a solipsistic human faculty. “Kant’s transcendental ego [*Le moi transcendental*, sic!] is something chimerical or, at best, a convenient fiction; for when I think of this transcendental ego, and however careful I am to describe it as a pure subject, I am nevertheless, *by thinking of it,*

treating it as an object.”⁵⁰⁹ Marcel rejects this idea of a rational organisation of experience as an unacceptable dualism. Reason, he believes, only becomes what it is in and through experience, in other words, through existence: “I believe that we must reject this dualism absolutely. However true the idea of a reason that organizes experience may be it has at least the disadvantage of appearing invincibly dualistic. (...) We need to admit that thought (reason) does not constitute itself as thought for itself save in the measure in which it is realized in experience.”⁵¹⁰ The idea of “transcendental consciousness”, on the contrary, is solely dialectical. It is deprived of any existential quality; it can only produce hypotheses.⁵¹¹

Again, we see how Marcel’s philosophical conceptions are strongly related to his concern for exceptional human experiences. Object reading, telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. can never be accounted for on the basis of a transcendental consciousness. It would be easy to show that the idea of a transcendental consciousness, as for example with Kant, excludes exceptional human experiences *from the outset*. We have seen in the chapter on Kant how Kant’s transcendental philosophy can at least partially be explained as an attempt to *exclude* Swedenborgian visions. By resituating human consciousness in existence, as Marcel endeavours to do, opens up horizons that cannot be neglected if one aims at giving a fuller account of consciousness, and consequently, of any so-called *facts* of consciousness.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DERRIDA AND TELEPATHY

RICO SNELLER

It is difficult to imagine that non-telepathy is possible.
—Jacques Derrida

There are only few who would spontaneously relate the work of the thinker Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) to telepathy. Experts might know that he wrote a text with the title “Télépathie”⁵¹² in 1981, but this text has rarely been read. Originally, it was part of a series of letters titled “Envois” in *La carte postale. De Nietzsche à Freud et au-delà* that were published earlier, in 1980. Through a remarkable twist of fate, it never ended up in this work, and was therefore published separately. In a footnote to “Télépathie”, Derrida compares it to writings by Freud on telepathy, which were written as lectures but were never been presented as such.⁵¹³

Derrida and Freud

Jacques Derrida’s name is connected to the critique of metaphysics, remarkable literary readings with reflections on the relation between law and justice, with societal engagement (support of Czech-Slovak students during the Communist period, support of the liberation of Nelson Mandela, anti-globalisation, support of asylum-seekers without rights, Vice-President and co-founder of the International Parliament of Writers, etcetera), with the improvement of French education in philosophy, with many artistic experiments (such as film, architecture, the Louvre-exhibition, and photography). Anglo-Saxon critics accuse him of having used vague concepts; he would, as they claim, blur or even erase the distinction between philosophy and literature. Admirers, on the other hand, praise him for those very same reasons. In any case, Derrida is controversial. His body of work gives rise to many different interpretations. Also in relation to religious or spiritually oriented readers,

who refer to Derrida's connection with Judaism. But when Avital Ronell (his colleague and friend) suggested meditation to Derrida just before his death, he said that the only meditations he knew were those of Descartes and Husserl.⁵¹⁴

Although it was only in the nineties that some referred to a connection between Derrida's oeuvre and Eastern spirituality⁵¹⁵ (a connection that has been heavily disputed by others), as far as we know, no one has ever linked Derrida to parapsychology. Derrida's work does, however, provide the potential for this connection to be made.

A first reading of the text "Télépathie" leaves the reader who questions whether Derrida believed in telepathy disappointed. The text consists of a number of fictive letters, written in Oxford between July 9 and 15. Derrida's text itself elaborates on Freud's difficult relation with telepathy. The letters themselves, out of which the text of "Télépathie" is constructed, seem to represent a dream: they contain many white lines and offsets, so that sometimes paragraphs do not follow one another in a smooth manner. Sometimes, the word "probably" is added to the date on top of the letter (*entre le 10 et le 12 juillet (probablement)*): as if the author doesn't remember when exactly the letter was written. The letter format itself, which implies the combination of sender and receiver over a certain distance, is yet another figure that connects the form and content of the text.

The fact that Derrida does not, just like Freud, express himself clearly about the phenomenon of telepathy ("does it exist or does it not exist") and that his position concerning this phenomenon remains unknown, might be deliberate: this is the only manner in which the readers will not freeze in a *definite* judgement, but will keep this judgement moving. That is how both Freud and Derrida keep telepathy outside the domain of knowledge. Our relationship to the telepathic, Derrida says in concurrence with Freud, is not one that belongs to the genre of "knowing" or "not knowing". This is an interesting issue: It might be impossible in principle to objectify the phenomenon "telepathy" with a reflexive consciousness. Rather, it calls for a consciousness that itself moves. We will return to this later. "[Y]ou will discover nothing from me as regards the «enigma of telepathy»", is what is argued in the letter of July 13, 1979. "Not because I want to keep it hidden from you, but because I do not want to make a decision here."

Freud's Prudence

Some background to Derrida's "Télépathie" is required in order to be able to understand the text. During his life, Freud experienced a turning point in

his attitude regarding this phenomenon. This took place around 1926, in a letter to his later biographer, the psychoanalyst Ernest Jones. As Derrida mentions, this is also the year in which the British author Galsworthy completed his famous *Forsyte Saga*. The name "Forsyth" plays a role in one of the few seemingly "telepathic" experiences that Freud himself reported. It is the name of an English patient who came from London and had just arrived in Vienna. Freud let him take his place in the waiting room as he himself was still occupied with another patient. At that very moment, this other patient remembered how his young girlfriend used to call him Dr. Vorsicht. Freud, who mentions this episode in his text "Traum und Okkultismus"⁵¹⁶, was astonished by this strange coincidence. To Derrida's surprise, Freud neglects to name the most obvious one that relates to telepathy: *prévue*, "to see ahead", "to see before" (cf. *foresight*, *Voraussicht*, *Vorsicht*).⁵¹⁷

As mentioned earlier, Freud has written some texts about telepathy. These texts were originally written as lectures, but they have never been presented as such. Derrida notices this act of possible unconscious repression. Nandor Fodor, author of a fine book titled *Freud, Jung and Occultism*, seems to not have noticed this.⁵¹⁸

Which texts address this issue? First, there is the already mentioned "Traum und Okkultismus" from 1922. We also find it in "Psychoanalyse und Telepathie" from 1921⁵¹⁹ and "Traum und Telepathie" from 1922.⁵²⁰ In all these texts, Freud assumes a prudent and mostly sceptical attitude regarding the phenomenon. It seems more important to him, as Derrida remarks, that his theory of dreams remains plausible, rather than give the phenomenon of telepathy full consideration.⁵²¹ He reduces the telepathic data which some of his patients report to hidden desires and distorted memory. Where the telepathic dream is at stake, Freud is extra cautious. It is not dependent on a telepathic stimulus.⁵²² Moreover, Freud, with his hesitant attitude, stands in between two more radical trends within psychoanalysis. The first is represented by the already mentioned E. Jones, who is exceptionally sceptical and who advises Freud, in the already mentioned letter from 1926, to see his cautious acceptance of telepathy as a private matter, not unlike the fact that he is Jewish and that he smokes cigars. Ferenczi represents the second and more open trend.

Writing as an Extension of Consciousness

Derrida not only attempts to make plausible that telepathy is the weak spot of psychoanalysis and Freudian dream theory. He also connects telepathy to his own thought about "writing" as an extension of consciousness. It

will become clear that Derrida himself, despite his indirect manner of communication, is closer to telepathy than any other modern philosopher. It is difficult to imagine, says Derrida at a certain moment, “that nontelepathy is possible”.⁵²³ What does he mean with this?

First we will elaborate on writing or script (*écriture*) as an extension of consciousness. Derrida suggests something similar in his first longer text on Freud from 1966: “Freud et la scène de l’écriture”.⁵²⁴ In this text, he shows that for Freud, the metaphor of writing is indispensable in order to explain the functioning of consciousness – which means for Freud, just as already for Augustine first and foremost the function of *memory*. To be able to remember something is interpreted by Freud as a “resistance”: perception data that find a way from outside into consciousness, experience an original “resistance”, in the form of a kind of “grid” (*grille*), or, formulated in a more modern way, a neuronal “network”. This grid or network offers a certain amount of resistance to impressions from outside, and takes a shape that is the result of impression and resistance. In this manner, the unconscious and the conscious are brought about.

The result of the impression and resistance is called “trace” by Derrida. Furthermore, he states that consciousness can only hold on to data when there is a difference between the diverse “breaches” (*frayages*). If this weren’t the case, consciousness would be paralyzed and incapable of performing its functions. After all, it is impossible for consciousness to absorb or interpret all impressions in an equal manner. Some (background) impressions are doomed to live a marginal existence, while others enter in a much stronger way. It is for a reason that we speak of the “impression” that events make on us. “It is the difference between breaches which is the true origin of memory, and thus of the psyche. (...) Trace as memory is (...) the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches. (...) [P]sychic life is (...) the difference within the exertion of forces.”⁵²⁵ In order to illustrate the fact that Derrida’s use of the terms of “breaches”, “grid” etcetera affirms his own thinking, and not only that of Freud, we refer to a passage of the *chora*, or the “place” in which the demiurge makes an imprint of the Ideas (*Timaeus*), also referred to as “sieve” (*plokannon*).⁵²⁶

The “breaches” process that results in what we call consciousness is for Freud reason to introduce the metaphor of “script”. Perhaps Freud didn’t intend anything more than the application of a clarifying metaphor. But for Derrida, who follows Freud thoroughly, it is reason to *reconsider* the relation between consciousness and reality. Furthermore, Derrida feels inclined to address some implications of the script metaphor, such as the impossibility to receive a pure, first impression of a phenomenon.

In fact, speaking about the “metaphor” of script in the description of consciousness is inadequate, states Derrida. It is rather the other way around; we can understand script in its common meaning as a metaphor of this original psychic script. After all, there is no *ultimate* code in the light of which one can read the “letters” (read: breaches), neither the letters in the actual sense, neither those of the alphabet (their manner of notation seems accidental), nor the external inscriptions that provide consciousness with content. In his dream theory, Freud had acknowledged this: there is no universal dream dictionary that is able to translate dream elements. “The dreamer invents his own grammar.”⁵²⁷ That Freud, as Derrida shows, is not always consistent does not matter.

The distinction between *quality* and *quantity* would have to be broken down for Freud, and the same goes for the distinction between *sign* and *meaning*. The contents of consciousness, those in a state of being awake as well as those in a state of sleep (the dream), never have an unambiguous, objective meaning as their foundation. “The absence of an exhaustive and absolutely infallible code means that in psychic writing, which thus prefigures the meaning of writing in general, the difference between signifier and signified is never radical. (...) And the possibility of translation (...) is nevertheless in principle and by definition limited.”⁵²⁸ With this Freudian position, Derrida indirectly objects to, as it seems to us, the Jungian understanding of archetypes, which are external to consciousness, for two reasons: 1) a universal dream dictionary does not exist; 2) there is no clear distinction between consciousness and the outside world.

The thought of such an idiomatic, untranslatable dimension that is outside of all possibility of meaning is unheard of. Derrida finds it in Freud but radicalizes it in its entirety. It is like the meaningless phase zero of language. “It is when that which is written is deceased as a sign signal that it is born as language; for then it says what is, thereby referring only to itself, a sign without signification, a game or pure functioning, since it ceased to be utilized as natural, biological, or technical information.”⁵²⁹

What does this have to do with script as the extension of consciousness? This phrase is rather Jungian than Freudian. It refers to the strange phenomenon of synchronicity: the meaningful coinciding of events without causal connection. Famous is Jung’s example of a scarab that flies into a room, “coincidentally” at the same moment when a patient tells him about a dream about a scarab. This synchronicity suggests that the outside world and the inner world, reality and consciousness are extensions of one another and therefore not distinct. A requirement for this however, is that the “law of causality”, i.e., the main law of the outside world, is understood

as no longer being fully decisive (a requirement that Schopenhauer was already aware of). It would only be in the case of this law being unconditionally valid that the synchronic event would be a mere coincidence. In the chapter about Schopenhauer, we have seen that Schopenhauer leaves the law of causality intact, but that he does allow for cross-connections between seemingly independent causal chains: a chain of events that leads to a dream about a scarab, and a chain that leads to a scarab flying into a room, just at the very moment that the dreamer recounts her dream (as Jung remembers). In this, Schopenhauer sees an ultimately precise *harmonia praestabilita*. We will return to the experience of synchronicity at the end of this chapter.

If script is an extension of consciousness, a clear distinction between our thinking and the outside world is no longer possible. Indeed, *here* as well as *there*, the rule of script counts. This rule consists of the idea that something can only manifest itself by conquering an original resistance, by finding a path against this resistance and leaving traces in the process. “[W]hat we are describing here as the labor of writing erases the transcendental distinction between the origin of the world and Being-in-the-world. Erases it while producing it”.⁵³⁰

It would lead us too far to elaborate on a fascinating age-old echo of this thought in the Kabbalah. Here, we find the notion that God creates the world out of letters, and that a meticulous study of the Torah comes down to a profound study of creation itself. In this, God’s creative breath of life is still noticeable. Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel have done a lot of research into Kabbalistic letter and language mysticism. In the work of Walter Benjamin, mostly in his texts “Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen” and “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” a contemporary reinterpretation of this mysticism can be found. Already in 1958, David Bakan published a book in which he attempted to explain the relation between Freud and Kabbalah: *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*. Something similar has been attempted concerning the thought of Derrida more recently.⁵³¹

We will summarize the line of thought (script as an extension of consciousness) thus far with a remark that Derrida makes about a passage in Freud, but applies to himself as well. Freud’s demonstration of a “non-transcriptive script”, which means a strictly idiomatic, meaningless writing, according to Derrida, teaches us the following: 1) that we should not “immobiliz[e] or freez[e] energy within a naive metaphoric of place”, nor 2) “abandon[], but [rather] rethink[] the space or topology of this writing.”⁵³² The energy that is spoken of here is a *psychic* energy that moves between the conscious and the unconscious. It is impossible to

locate this energy (in *the* conscious or *the* unconscious). The unconscious and the conscious are both the product of an “originary” functioning, that can only be considered “afterwards”. It is impossible to isolate them and to view them independently of one another.

It is difficult to overestimate the radicality of this thinking. Derrida actually claims that consciousness does not have a fixed location and is therefore not “personal”. Despite the major differences that exist, to us it does not seem incorrect to refer to medieval Neoplatonism and Neoaristotelianism: philosophical currents that do something similar by letting the individual consciousness dissolve in a greater consciousness. Whereas we note that the major difference is that for Derrida, there is no such thing as a *total* consciousness.

Telepathy and Seeing the Future

In the text “Télépathie”, written by Derrida ten years after “Freud et la scène de l’écriture” Derrida admits that it has always been difficult to get used to the idea of the possibility of non-telepathy. He states thus: (we quote from the letter of July 10, 1979):

Always difficult to imagine that one can think something to oneself [*à part soi*], deep down inside, without being surprised by the other, without the other being immediately informed, as easily as if he or she had a giant screen inside, at the time of the talkies, with remote control [*télécommande*] for changing channels and fiddling with the colours, the speech dubbed with large letters in order to avoid any misunderstanding. (...) Difficult to imagine a theory of what they still call the unconscious without a theory of telepathy.⁵³³

It is appealing to interpret this statement in the light of contemporary thinking about the *theory of mind*: the so-called capacity that people possess that enables them to have empathy with the perspective of the other. However, this statement does not testify a lack of empathy with the perspective of another, a lack that could be increased by an absolutization of the perspective of one’s own. We understand this statement as a confession of a genius consciousness. It cannot be copied by a random other. It is a “spiritual” statement, and the testament of a sort of consciousness for which its own inner experiences are so overwhelming and necessary that they *need* to be reflected by and recognized in the reality of the outside world.⁵³⁴ It is probable that only the genius or the artist Derrida is able to repeat this. Or is it the case that a more general human intuition is cut off from its access to “telepathic” possibilities? The

response that with that, philosophy would only be geared towards the genius intuition, instead of the daily, common sense level, is not decisive. After all, it is impossible to give a single example of even the smallest contribution that common sense has ever made to philosophy.

“[W]e are written only as we write, by the agency within us which always already keeps watch over perception, be it internal or external. The «subject» of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a system of relations between strata: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world.”⁵³⁵

What are the consequences of this resonance between inside and outside for Derrida's view on telepathy itself? Rather than simply accepting or rejecting telepathy as a possible source of knowledge, Derrida expands the notion of telepathy. It remains uncertain whether he still understands telepathy as the classical transmission of information, or whether he undermines this understanding of the term. Only to foresee or to predict something is not enough, states Derrida. One would have to consider whether the prediction itself as such does *not simultaneously realize what it announces*. He then applies this thought directly to his own writing:

The apocalypse takes place at the moment when I write this, but a present of this type keeps a telepathic or premonitory affinity with itself (it senses itself at a distance and warns itself of itself) that loses me on the way and makes me scared. I have always trembled before what I know in this way, it is also what scares the others and through which I disturb them as well, I send them to sleep sometimes. I suffer from it.⁵³⁶

And further:

[H]ow are (...) clairvoyants, mediums, able to form part of what they declare, predict, or say they foresee even though, participating in the thing, they also provoke it, let themselves at least be provoked to the provocation of it?⁵³⁷

The term “Apocalypse” puts telepathy straight away in a serious framework: that which is predicted or foreseen is frightening. In parapsychology, terms such as “crisis telepathy” or “crisis paragnosis” are used. But there seems to be a difference: Derrida speaks about the telepathic prediction that realizes itself, as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The announcement triggers the announced. The Apocalypse exists, according to Derrida, precisely in its announcement.

“[T]he prophecy return[s] to itself from the future of its own to-come [*à-venir*].”⁵³⁸ This complicated formula ultimately means, we find, that the

future “takes place” in the present by *arriving in it in a futural sense*. In other words: the present is unlocked by a futural dimension, which is located in the present *as future*. The past mirrors the future because it opens itself to it. The expression of “coming and going” might clarify matters. The past moves, gives place to a coming and going that forms a water rapid of the present. The present makes consciousness move, a *stream of consciousness* can be brought about that reminds us of a moment of creative, ethical or philosophical inspiration.

In the immediate context, it does not become clear what Derrida himself is thinking of when he speaks about the unleashing of the announced. In any case, it is not about a fulfilment or realization. Freud speaks somewhere of an alleged dream which he would have had, of which the signs have not yet come true (*sich haben eingetroffen*). Derrida remarks that *sich eintreffen* is translated into French as *se réaliser*; in English however, it is translated into *to come true*. This, he says, is something entirely different. Something can become true (*s'avérer*) without realizing itself. What is crucial for the dream in order to be a telepathic dream, according to Derrida, is not that the dream is fulfilled but that it arrives. “An annunciation can be accomplished, something can happen without for all that being realized. An event can take place that is not real. (...) It signals toward some event that no idea of «reality» helps us think.”⁵³⁹ A different name, so it seems, would be the entirely new, unheard, or the other: something that telepathically arrives without realizing itself.

Derrida offers a different clarification concerning the addressed or the recipient (*destinataire*) of the announcement. The addressed is brought into existence as the recipient through the address itself. There is not an addressed already there before I turn towards him or her; the addressing generates the addressed, brings it to life. “The addressee, he or she, would let her/himself be produced by the letter, from [*depuis*] its program, and, he or she, the addressor as well.”⁵⁴⁰ This Derridian insight is not only a logical deduction (“every sender turns towards a person who automatically becomes the addressed”), but assumes a certain experience. After all, this is about a telepathic experience, in which something occurs. “And not to reply is not to receive.”⁵⁴¹ To respond is to receive, to answer, and to allow entrance. We can think of the interpretation of dreaming as discussed in the Talmud. Let us read some statements from the classical work about this from Alexander Kristianpoller:

(Each dream has its interpretation.) There is no dream without interpretation. *Sifrê Num. § 119 ed. Friedmann 39b.*

(Only after its interpretation a dream is realized.) R. Hisda said: A

dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that is not read. *Berakot 55b*

(A dream is realized according to its interpretation.) [*ib.*]

(One could even prevent an evil dream interpretation by a good one.)

Berakot 56b

(Even an interpretation of an invented dream is realized.) *Jer. Ma'aser Seni IV 6 (55c). Threni I 1.*⁵⁴²

Here, we also see how the announcement is inextricably linked to what is being announced. In any case, for Derrida, this is about an exceptional experience that brings about an apocalyptic fright. Not only for the sender of the message, but also for the receivers. We might be able to imagine a situation in which a stationmaster comes to notify travellers that the expected train will not arrive; the confusion that is generated, people asking for alternative possibilities to get to their destination, the commotion around the stationmaster, the sudden “community of shared interests”, etcetera, might – on the level of experience – be compared to the telepathically announced event.

Concerning Derrida’s own work, we might be able to think about its destabilizing effects on the static patterns and paradigms within *prevailing* thought and reasoning. In this case, the statement about the announcement that generates what it announces would relate to Derrida’s own work as well. We repeat: it is not a matter of isolating some announced event from the announced words. The announcement itself invokes the announced. It “lands” or “descends”, so to say.

Telepathic Contact

Often, telepathy is perceived as a phenomenon of consciousness, and not as something material. Within this context, it is remarkable that Derrida speaks of the significance of *touch* in relation to telepathy.

Yes, touch, I sometimes think that thought, before «seeing» or «hearing», touches, puts its paws on it, or that seeing and hearing come back to touch at a distance—a very old thought, but it takes some archaic to get to the archaic.⁵⁴³

What does this mean? It seems as if Derrida intends to challenge the distinctness of sense. As if consciousness first and foremost is an openness, which, before it sees, smells, and the like, touches or searches. This idea is affirmed in another text by Derrida that was written much later, *le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*.⁵⁴⁴ Here, he makes a curious connection between the verbs *penser* (to think) and *peser* (to weigh). It is not only impossible to think an original difference between “body”, “to think” and

“language” in the process or in the duration in which they take place.⁵⁴⁵ It is also impossible to make a clear distinction between the “subject” and the “object” of touch. Even the notion of “touching” is meaningless before the touched (thing or person) has been determined.⁵⁴⁶

The touch unites touching, and the he or she who touches, in one and the same event. Only from that point onwards can the differentiation between the senses and a subject-object distinction take place. The intended touch only relates with difficulty to what we call “knowing”, “science” or “knowledge”: “is tact (tact that would know how to touch without touching, a contact without contact) knowledge or knowhow? Isn’t this an impossible knowledge or a thinking of impossible knowledge?”⁵⁴⁷

It is of the greatest importance to place a statement like this on the *experiential level*. If not, it becomes sterile. Derrida is interested in putting a certain knowing into words, a knowing regarding something that cannot be known. The act of “knowing” itself fulfils a paradox: it confuses the knowing consciousness. The “object” of science penetrates consciousness in such a manner that it becomes indistinguishable from this consciousness itself. Perhaps the word “unrest” or “suspicion” could provide a determination of the state of consciousness that this “knowing” brings about.

The “Object” of Telepathic Consciousness. Synchronicity.

“[N]ot everything is addressee in an addressee, one part only, which compromises with the rest.”⁵⁴⁸ This statement, in the letter from July 9, 1979, can be interpreted as a clarification of the telepathic announcement that we discussed earlier. This announcement, as we saw, does not announce an event distinct from the announcement. The announcement itself *fulfils* what it announces. Derrida interprets this, with a reference to the theorists of the “speech acts” (Searle, Austin), as a “performative causality”. This stands for the functioning and the effects, seen and unforeseen, of language. This (telepathic) functioning resembles the functioning of the unconscious. “[W]ith the telepathic transfer, one could not be sure of being able to cut (...) or to isolate the lines.”⁵⁴⁹

At the time that Derrida wrote this, in the letter of July 12, 1979, wireless phone connections were not available yet; we all know the phenomenon of lines that are still open by accident, or that signals from other phone connections are received. And then we do not even speak of the digital traffic on the Internet. This circumstance only affirms something more general: telepathic transmission of data not only takes place from one localised consciousness to another localised consciousness. It cannot be avoided that other consciousnesses receive information that

was not intended for them. The data transmission has a material carrier, which generates its own textual effects that cannot be contained. It is for a reason that the text “Télépathie” is in a letter format. And it is for a reason – as remarked by Derrida – that the telepathic material or the documentation on which Freud bases himself in his writings on telepathy, is derived from letters (from former patients) and never from messages by word of mouth. Written signs have a “material structure” that cannot be reduced to a transmitted message. They have their own dynamic structure. Not only Kabbalists like Abulafia knew this, but also the fathers of modern French poetry (Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Baudelaire). That is why it is never possible to completely avoid confusion in communication. Language can have effects that are unforeseen or unintended and that can surpass the scope of the speaker or writer. Abulafia attempted to follow this functioning of language through meditation, and he based his Kabbalistic method of reading of texts on it.⁵⁵⁰

“[N]ot everything is addressee in an addressee”, we read. First of all, this means that language has its own dynamic structure, beyond the intentions of the speaker or author. It also means something else. “[A] telepathic message may not coincide with the event in time (understand: the time of consciousness, or even of the ego, which is also the time naïvely believed to be «objective» and, as he says, «astronomical», in accordance with an old science), that does not disqualify it in its telepathic power [*vertu*].”⁵⁵¹ In this, telepathy and the functioning of the unconscious coincide. If consciousness, as Freud describes it, is based on skips and obstacles, there is no reason to assume that event and telepathic insight would have to take place at the very same moment.

Perhaps, this is the most insightful example of what Derrida calls the meaningful coinciding of singular related events without being in a causal relationship. This also means that these events do not necessarily have to be causally related; it is a case of coinciding information transmission, but the origin of the different transmissions can vary in time.

Although, as far as we know, Derrida never uses Jung’s term “synchronicity”, his work is full of synchronicities. He finds synchronistic events in almost every text he writes. In “Télépathie”, for example, it is the aforementioned issue concerning the *Forsythe Saga* and the completion of this work in the same year that changed Freud’s opinion about telepathy (as is revealed in his letter to Jones). Another example in “Télépathie” is the arrangement that Derrida notices in Freud’s collected works of the text “Das Medusenhaupt” just after an anecdotal note at the end of the preceding text “Psychoanalyse und Telepathie”. Here, Freud refers to a statement by the guardian of the Dionysus basilica, in order to illustrate

the uncertainty about telepathy. This guardian would have said *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*, when the patron saint Dionysus, after being beheaded, picked up his head and took it with him for a stroll. *Das Weitere findet sich*, thus says Freud, concluding the anecdote and his text.

A third example in "Télépathie" concerns the remarkable fact that during the publishing process of the book *La carte postale*, Derrida's texts that were supposed to form the basis of "Télépathie" repeatedly went missing. This seems similar to what happened to Freud, when his writings on telepathy, intended as lecture material, were never delivered publicly.⁵⁵²

There are many other examples of synchronicity in other works by Derrida. What is important for us here is to show that the experience of synchronicity is a telepathic experience *par excellence*. In this, form and content coincide, the text inaugurates the announced content, consciousness and its object cannot be distinguished, and there is a kind of knowledge that is not reducible to science: a "knowing of the impossible".

In the letter from July 13, 1979, Derrida draws an important conclusion from Freud's analysis of dreams, which is meaningful in this context. The psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams eliminates the difference between the dream and the dreamed event, according to Derrida. (After all, it is essential to this interpretation that the dream contains the fulfilment of a wish). Now, Derrida says, Freud cannot have any objections in principle to telepathy. The phenomenon of telepathy does not stop for the silently accepted opinions regarding "subject", "I", "perception", etcetera. It dissolves the distinction between individuality and supra-individuality.⁵⁵³

Conclusion

To summarize: the state of consciousness that lies ahead is one that is not fundamentally surprised about correspondence between inner and outer sensations, that does not make a radical distinction between dream and reality, that assumes the subject and object are connected, that assumes speaking and writing as being concerned about their effects, and that contains a radical susceptibility to what arrives. "I am going to reread everything trying out the keys one after the other, but I am afraid of not finding (or of finding) all alone, of no longer having the time. Will you give me your hand?"

No more time to lose, *ho gar kairos eggus*, Telepathy comes upon us, *tempus enim prope est.*⁵⁵⁴ [The indentation is Derrida's, the Greek and Latin quote are from the *Revelation of John*].

NOTES

- ¹ Sidgwick 1882.
- ² Gurney 1887, 227 ff.
- ³ Broad 1953, Broad 1962.
- ⁴ Price 1940, Price 1947, Price 1951, Price 1960, Dilley 1995.
- ⁵ Radin & Nelson 1989; Radin 2006, 156-157.
- ⁶ Sherwood & Roe 2003, Schmidt, Schneider, Utts, Walach 2004.
- ⁷ Schmidt 2012.
- ⁸ Schmidt 2012, Wackermann, Seiter, Keibel, Walach, 2003, 60-64.
- ⁹ Utts 1991.
- ¹⁰ Radin 2006.
- ¹¹ Pauli 1953; Jordan 1951, Margeneau 1981; Bierman, Van Dongen & Gerding 1992; Stapp 2007; Bierman 2008.
- ¹² Yasua 2008.
- ¹³ Kant 1766, 2:353 (paragraph:numbers).
- ¹⁴ Kant 1766, 2:318.
- ¹⁵ Kant 1766, 2:321.
- ¹⁶ Kant 1766, 2:322.
- ¹⁷ Kant 1766, 2:328.
- ¹⁸ Kant 1766, 2:323.
- ¹⁹ Kant 1766, 2:327.
- ²⁰ Kant 1766, 2:329.
- ²¹ Kant 1766, 2:339.
- ²² Kant 1766, 2:341.
- ²³ Kant 1766, 2:341.
- ²⁴ Kant 1766, 2:333.
- ²⁵ Kant 1766, 2:339-340.
- ²⁶ Kant 1766, 2:340.
- ²⁷ Kant 1766, 2:342.
- ²⁸ Kant 1766, 2:342-347.
- ²⁹ Kant 1766, 2:347.
- ³⁰ Kant 1766, 2:348.
- ³¹ Kant 1766, 2:348.
- ³² Kant 1766, 2:351.
- ³³ Kant 1766, 2:351.
- ³⁴ Kant 1766, 2:352.
- ³⁵ Kant 1766, 2:333.
- ³⁶ Kant 1766, 2:354.
- ³⁷ Broad 1969, 150-5; Gerding 1993, paragraph 5.4; Haraldsson & Gerding 2010.

- ³⁸ Kant 1763, 10:43-48.
³⁹ Kant 1763, 10:43-44.
⁴⁰ Kant 1763, 10:44.
⁴¹ Broad 1969, 20.
⁴² Kant 1763, 10:47.
⁴³ Kant 1763, 10:45.
⁴⁴ Kant 1763, 10:46.
⁴⁵ Kant 1766, 2:355, 356.
⁴⁶ Kant 1766, 2:354.
⁴⁷ Kant 1766, 2:367.
⁴⁸ Kant 1766, 2:355, 356.
⁴⁹ Kant 1763, 10:46.
⁵⁰ Kant 1766, 2:333.
⁵¹ Kant 1763, 10:45.
⁵² Kant 1766, 2:317, 318.
⁵³ Kant 1766, 2:354.
⁵⁴ Kant 1766, 2:360.
⁵⁵ Kant 1766, 2:318.
⁵⁶ Kant 1766, 2:360.
⁵⁷ Kant 1766, 2:366.
⁵⁸ Kant 1766, 2:366.
⁵⁹ Kant 1766, 2:368.
⁶⁰ Kant 1766, 2:351-352.
⁶¹ Kant 1766, 2:318.
⁶² Kant 1766, 2:317, 318.
⁶³ Kant 1766, 2:351.
⁶⁴ Kant 1766, 2:367.
⁶⁵ Kant 1766, 2:371, 372.
⁶⁶ Kant 1766, 2:350.
⁶⁷ Kant 1766, 2:373.
⁶⁸ Kant 1781, B 160.
⁶⁹ Kant 1781, A 341-347, B 399-427.
⁷⁰ Kant 1781, A 51, B 75.
⁷¹ Kant 1781, Introduction I-VII.
⁷² Kant 1781, B XVI; Duintjer 1966, 102-113; Gerding 1993, 69-71.
⁷³ Kant 1781, A XIV.
⁷⁴ Kant 1781, A VIII, B XXXV.
⁷⁵ Duintjer 1966, 76-80, 83-6; Jaspers 1975 50-51.
⁷⁶ Kant 1781, B 197.
⁷⁷ Kant 1781, B 270.
⁷⁸ Kant 1781, A 218, B 266.
⁷⁹ Kant 1781, A 222-3, B 270, Duintjer 1988, 133-34.
⁸⁰ Kant 1781, A 711, B 739.
⁸¹ Kant 1781, A 769, B 797.
⁸² Kant 1766, 2:371-372.

- ⁸³ Kant 1781, A 770, 771; B 798, 799.
- ⁸⁴ Kant 1781, A 772, 773; B 800, 801.
- ⁸⁵ Vasiliev 1963/1976, 14-25.
- ⁸⁶ Sinclair or. 1930, *passim*.
- ⁸⁷ Kant 1781, A 199, B 244; A 203, B 248-249.
- ⁸⁸ Walsh 1975, 150-151.
- ⁸⁹ Kant 1781, B 294, 295. See also Kant 1766, 2:368.
- ⁹⁰ McClenon et al. 2003.
- ⁹¹ Hanegraaff 2001, 30-32; Hanegraaff 2005, 249; Hanegraaff 2012, 3, 355-379.
- ⁹² Cardeña et al. 2001, 18 & *passim*, Bauer 2003.
- ⁹³ Cf. Tilliette, 1970, 562 n.27.
- ⁹⁴ Cf. Challiol-Gillet, 1998, 176 ; Huch, 1951, 593. Also cf., however, Lukács, 1955, 155.
- ⁹⁵ Schelling 2002, 28 /2009, 84. Also cf. Schelling 1997, 52.
- ⁹⁶ Schelling 2002, 28 / 2009, 84.
- ⁹⁷ Cf. Tilliette 1970, 557 n.14.
- ⁹⁸ Cf. Schelling 2002, 13 / 2009, 53.
- ⁹⁹ Cf. Klages 1981, 339. Also cf. Gehrts 1989, 9-78.
- ¹⁰⁰ Schelling 2002, 49ff. / 2009, 124.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ib.* 33ff / 91ff.
- ¹⁰² *Ib.* 37 / 99.
- ¹⁰³ *Id.* 40f. /104f. Cf. Van Dongen and Gerding 1993; Poortman 1954.
- ¹⁰⁴ Schelling 2002, 40 / 2009, 105.
- ¹⁰⁵ Challiol-Gillet, 174. Schelling 2002, 75 / 2009, 177.
- ¹⁰⁶ Schelling 2002, 32 / 2009, 87f.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Id.* 2002, 32 / 2009, 88.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Id.* 2002, 48 / 2009, 122.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Id.* 2002, 49 / 2009, 123.
- ¹¹⁰ Cf. Bataille, 1961.
- ¹¹¹ Schelling 2002, 57f. / 2009, 141.
- ¹¹² *Id.*, 2002, 57 / 2009, 139.
- ¹¹³ *Id.*, 2002, 57 / 2009, 140.
- ¹¹⁴ Cf. Heinrich 1962; Poortman, 1958.
- ¹¹⁵ Schelling 2002, 26f. / 2009, 80f.
- ¹¹⁶ *Id.* 2002, 25 / 2009, 76.
- ¹¹⁷ *Id.* 2002, 26 / 2009, 79.
- ¹¹⁸ *Id.* 2002, 28/ 2009, 84.
- ¹¹⁹ Cf. Xavier Tilliette, 562 n.27.
- ¹²⁰ Schopenhauer 1851b, 229.
- ¹²¹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 254.
- ¹²² Schopenhauer 1851b, 268.
- ¹²³ Safranski 1990, 51.
- ¹²⁴ Safranski 1990, 51.
- ¹²⁵ Brakel Buys 1960, Nagel 2010.
- ¹²⁶ Schopenhauer 1851b, 272.

- ¹²⁷ Vijselaar 2001, 64.
- ¹²⁸ Vijselaar 2001, 62.
- ¹²⁹ Tenhaeff 1980, 24.
- ¹³⁰ Ellenberger 1970, 53-69.
- ¹³¹ Ellenberger 1970, 65, 66.
- ¹³² Vijselaar 2001, 80.
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- ¹³⁴ Schopenhauer 1836, 327.
- ¹³⁵ Schopenhauer 1851b, 234-242, 297-305.
- ¹³⁶ Ellenberger 1970, 77, 78, 102, 112, 116, 117.
- ¹³⁷ Vijselaar 2001, 177-183.
- ¹³⁸ Schopenhauer 1836, 326.
- ¹³⁹ Schopenhauer 1836, 326.
- ¹⁴⁰ Schopenhauer 1818, 3.
- ¹⁴¹ Schopenhauer 1844, 3, Schopenhauer 1951c, 270, 271.
- ¹⁴² Schopenhauer 1818, 8-35.
- ¹⁴³ Schopenhauer 1818, 34.
- ¹⁴⁴ Schopenhauer 1818, 102, 103.
- ¹⁴⁵ Schopenhauer 1813, 169.
- ¹⁴⁶ Schopenhauer 1813, 166.
- ¹⁴⁷ Vandenabeele 2010, 21-39.
- ¹⁴⁸ Schopenhauer 1818, 198.
- ¹⁴⁹ Vandenabeele 2010, 26, 27.
- ¹⁵⁰ Schopenhauer 1818, 410.
- ¹⁵¹ Schopenhauer 1851a, 201.
- ¹⁵² Schopenhauer 1851a, 203.
- ¹⁵³ Schopenhauer 1841, 63.
- ¹⁵⁴ Schopenhauer 1851b, 252.
- ¹⁵⁵ Schopenhauer 1851b, 241.
- ¹⁵⁶ Schopenhauer 1851b, 254, 255.
- ¹⁵⁷ Schopenhauer 1851b, 248, 249.
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- ¹⁶⁰ Schopenhauer 1851b, 276.
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- ¹⁶² Schopenhauer 1851b, 279, 304.
- ¹⁶³ Schopenhauer 1851b, 305.
- ¹⁶⁴ Schopenhauer 1851b, 305.
- ¹⁶⁵ Schopenhauer 1851b, 274, 295.
- ¹⁶⁶ Kant 1766, § 341.
- ¹⁶⁷ Sherwood & Roe 2003.
- ¹⁶⁸ Palmer 2003, Radin 2006.
- ¹⁶⁹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 268, 269.
- ¹⁷⁰ Schopenhauer 1851b, 260, 261.
- ¹⁷¹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 279.

- ¹⁷² Tenhaeff 1973, 263-307.
- ¹⁷³ Schopenhauer 1851b, 265, 268.
- ¹⁷⁴ Schopenhauer 1851b, 264.
- ¹⁷⁵ Schopenhauer 1841, 331, 1851b, 308.
- ¹⁷⁶ Schopenhauer 1851b, 265, 300, Schopenhauer 1841, 331, 332.
- ¹⁷⁷ Schopenhauer 1841, 332, 337, 339, 340.
- ¹⁷⁸ Schopenhauer 1851a, 212.
- ¹⁷⁹ Schopenhauer 1841, 342, 346.
- ¹⁸⁰ Jung 1952, 840, 841.
- ¹⁸¹ Schopenhauer 1841, 343, 344, Schopenhauer 1851b, 293.
- ¹⁸² Schopenhauer 1841, 357.
- ¹⁸³ Schopenhauer 1841, 331.
- ¹⁸⁴ Schopenhauer 1841, 338.
- ¹⁸⁵ Schopenhauer 1841, 337-339.
- ¹⁸⁶ Schopenhauer 1841, 337, 338, Schopenhauer 1851b, 263-264, 299-303.
- ¹⁸⁷ Schopenhauer 1841, 340, 437, Schopenhauer 1851b, 264, 265.
- ¹⁸⁸ Schopenhauer 1841, 356, 357.
- ¹⁸⁹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 265, 272.
- ¹⁹⁰ Schopenhauer 1841, 326.
- ¹⁹¹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 301 (266-267), Schopenhauer 1841, 331 (345, 357).
- ¹⁹² Driesch 1936, Bender 1961, Kropf 2000, Cartwright 2010.
- ¹⁹³ Safranski 1991, Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (on 14-02-2011).
- ¹⁹⁴ Hanegraaff 1998.
- ¹⁹⁵ Schopenhauer 1851b, 268.
- ¹⁹⁶ Schopenhauer 1836, 335.
- ¹⁹⁷ Van Kuiken 2004, Morone & Greco 2007.
- ¹⁹⁸ Schopenhauer 1836, 336.
- ¹⁹⁹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 268, 269.
- ²⁰⁰ Schopenhauer 1851a, 202.
- ²⁰¹ Schopenhauer 1851a, 203.
- ²⁰² Jung 1952, § 828-830.
- ²⁰³ Jung 1952, § 843.
- ²⁰⁴ Schopenhauer 1851a, 215.
- ²⁰⁵ Schopenhauer 1851a, 216-219.
- ²⁰⁶ Schopenhauer 1851a, 218, 219.
- ²⁰⁷ Schopenhauer 1851a, 219-222.
- ²⁰⁸ Schopenhauer 1851a, 221.
- ²⁰⁹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 273, 281, 284-285.
- ²¹⁰ Schopenhauer 1851b, 277.
- ²¹¹ Schopenhauer 1851b, 278-289.
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- ²¹⁴ Schopenhauer 1851b, 294.
- ²¹⁵ Schopenhauer 1851b, 289, 290.
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- ²¹⁷ Schopenhauer 1851b, 287.
²¹⁸ Schopenhauer 1851b, 267, 281, 295.
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²²² James 1909a, 330.
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²²⁷ James 1897, XII.
²²⁸ James 1897, XI.
²²⁹ James 1902, 160-161.
²³⁰ Perry 1935 I, 323.
²³¹ James 1902, 94 ff., James 1911b, 227 ff.
²³² Myers 1986, 41.
²³³ Spiegelberg 1994, 67, 112, 113, Edie 1987, 34.
²³⁴ Passmore 1966, 434, Goodman 2002, 3.
²³⁵ James 1911a, 51.
²³⁶ James 1911a, 51.
²³⁷ James 1892, 461.
²³⁸ James 1897, XIII.
²³⁹ James 1902, 388.
²⁴⁰ James 1897, 294 ff.
²⁴¹ James 1890, 396.
²⁴² James 1890, 96.
²⁴³ James 1897, 314.
²⁴⁴ Perry 1935 II, 163.
²⁴⁵ Perry 1935 II, 164.
²⁴⁶ James 1897, XIV.
²⁴⁷ James 1897, 299.
²⁴⁸ James 1909a, 330.
²⁴⁹ Perry 1935 II, 326.
²⁵⁰ James 1896, 5-6, James 1897, 319-320.
²⁵¹ James 1986, 131-133, Van Dongen 1999, 131.
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²⁵³ James 1896, 6, James 1897, 319-320.
²⁵⁴ James 1897, 324.
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301 Taylor 1996, 147.
302 James 1920, 406 ff.
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³¹⁰ James 1909a, 35.
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³²⁸ Taylor 1996, 146, Perry 1935 II 122.
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³³¹ James 1911b, 174, 175.
³³² James 1911b, 197.
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³³⁴ James 1911b, 179, 180.
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439 Driesch 1908, 192.
440 Driesch 1908, 147.
441 Driesch 1921, 557.

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- ⁴⁴⁶ Driesch 1935a. Also cf. Driesch, 1926, 137ff.
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- ⁴⁵⁷ Dietz 1932, 24.
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- ⁴⁷¹ Marcel 1955, 214.
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- ⁴⁷⁶ Marcel 1956, 13, Marcel 1935f. (1927), 129f.
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- ⁴⁸⁴ Marcel 1947, 239.

- ⁴⁸⁵ Marcel 1935f. (1927), 135, entry 9 February 1917, 'Note sur la télépathie' (trans. 135). Also cf. id., 302, entry 3 May 1923 (trans. 312), and Marcel 197, 223.
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- ⁴⁹³ Marcel 1957, 12.
- ⁴⁹⁴ Marcel 1935f. (1927), 162 (trans. 163), Marcel 1957, V.
- ⁴⁹⁵ Marcel 1935f. (1927), 161 (trans. 162).
- ⁴⁹⁶ Marcel 1956, 19.
- ⁴⁹⁷ *Ib.*, 236. Also cf. 247 and 243, Marcel, 1955, 14, and Marcel, 1957, 13.
- ⁴⁹⁸ Marcel, 1957, 13.
- ⁴⁹⁹ Cf. Marcel 1972, 5-9.
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- ⁵⁰¹ Cf. Marcel 1968, 46f.
- ⁵⁰² Cf. Marcel 1951, 68.
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- ⁵⁰⁹ Marcel 1951, 68 (trans. 67).
- ⁵¹⁰ Marcel 1935f. (1927), 75 (trans. 74f.).
- ⁵¹¹ Marcel 1935f. 261 (trans. 269).
- ⁵¹² Derrida 1987.
- ⁵¹³ Derrida 1987, 237 n.1 (trans. 423). Also see Royle 2001, 361-370, id., 1995, 61-84. Sartiliot 1989, Royle 1991.
- ⁵¹⁴ Peeters 2010, 645.
- ⁵¹⁵ See for example Coward 1992.
- ⁵¹⁶ Freud 1999, XV, 32-61.
- ⁵¹⁷ Derrida 1987, 269 (trans. 259f.)
- ⁵¹⁸ Fodor 1971.
- ⁵¹⁹ Freud 1999, XVII, 27-48.
- ⁵²⁰ Freud 1999, XIII, 165-191.
- ⁵²¹ Derrida 1987, 256 (trans. 246).
- ⁵²² Fodor 1971, 133.
- ⁵²³ Derrida 1987, 247 (trans. 236f.).
- ⁵²⁴ Derrida 1967, 293-340 (trans. 246-291).
- ⁵²⁵ Derrida 1967, 299 (trans. 252f.).
- ⁵²⁶ Derrida 1987, 502.
- ⁵²⁷ Derrida 1967, 310 (trans. 262).

- ⁵²⁸ Derrida 1967, 311 (trans. 263).
⁵²⁹ Derrida 1967, 23 (trans. 13).
⁵³⁰ Derrida 1967, 315 (trans. 267).
⁵³¹ Cf. Wolfson 2002, 506. Cf. S. Wolosky 300, 301, Idel 2003, 140, 143; Idel 2002, 77ff., 105, 124ff., Sneller 2008, 31-47.
⁵³² Derrida 1967, 315 (trans. 267).
⁵³³ Derrida 1987, 247f. (trans. 237).
⁵³⁴ Derrida 1967, 22f. (trans. 11f.).
⁵³⁵ Derrida 1967, 335 and passim (trans. 285).
⁵³⁶ Derrida 1987, 239 (trans. 227).
⁵³⁷ *Ib.* 244 (trans. 233).
⁵³⁸ *Ib.* 239 (trans. 227).
⁵³⁹ *Ib.* 258 (trans. 248).
⁵⁴⁰ *Ib.* 239 (trans. 228).
⁵⁴¹ *Ib.* 245 (trans. 234).
⁵⁴² Kristianpoller 2006, 135-138 (our translation).
⁵⁴³ Derrida 1987, 247 (trans. 236; slightly modified).
⁵⁴⁴ Derrida 2000, 230f. (trans. 203f.)
⁵⁴⁵ *Ib.* 113 (trans. 96).
⁵⁴⁶ *Ib.* 84 (trans. 68f).
⁵⁴⁷ Derrida 2000, 83 (trans. 68).
⁵⁴⁸ Derrida 1987, 241 (trans. 230).
⁵⁴⁹ Derrida 1987, 253 (trans. 242).
⁵⁵⁰ Cf. Idel 1989.
⁵⁵¹ Derrida 1987, 265 (trans. 255f.).
⁵⁵² Derrida 1987, 244, 253 and 237 n.1 (trans. 233, 243, 423, n.1).
⁵⁵³ Also cf. Derrida, 1967, 337 and 321 (trans. 287 and 273).
⁵⁵⁴ Derrida 1987, 270 (trans. 261).

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