

Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction

Photo by Cheung Chun-fai

An Introduction to the
Critical Mysticism Implicit in
Kant's Philosophical System

Prof. Stephen Palmquist
Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University

Monday, 18 September 2017
4:30 – 6:30 pm
Room 220,
Fung King Hey Building

Delivered in English
All are welcome

Immanuel Kant is not generally known for his views on mysticism. This is largely because the comments on mysticism in his mature ("Critical") writings are mostly dismissive. However, the mystical writings of Emanuel Swedenborg played an off-neglected formative influence on Kant's discovery of the so-called "Copernican hypothesis". In his 1766 book, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seeer, Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, Kant first proposes the Critical hypothesis that the key task of metaphysics is to discern the formal conditions contributed by the human mind to anything that can be regarded as necessary and universal for us human beings. He reaches this conclusion through an assessment of Swedenborg's similar claims about the distinctive laws that he claimed govern the spirit world. The fact that Kant's Critical metaphysics arose directly out of a comparison between mysticism and metaphysics suggests that his well-known resolution in metaphysics should also have a precise application to mysticism. Taking up this suggestion, I argue that Kant's Critical System implicitly accomplishes the same two-sided goal for mysticism that it explicitly accomplishes for metaphysics. Kant sought not to destroy metaphysics but to identify the difference between false and genuine ("Critical") metaphysics. Likewise, his System provides a way of identifying the nature of genuine, "Critical mysticism" while at the same time warning against the tendency to interpret immediate experience in ways that can be morally injurious. In this talk, I sketch the main themes of my new monograph on this topic, entitled *Baring All in Reason's Light*, scheduled to be published in late 2017.

Enquiries
Tel: 39418524
Email: philosophy@hk.hk.edu.hk
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