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SCHREBER'S ECSTASIES, OR WHO EVER LISTENED  
TO SCHREBER?

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Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,

Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre. Thomas Gray

*The Bard, xii*

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this  
ecstasy, is success in life. Walter Horatio Pater.

*The Renaissance, Conclusion*

O we can wait no longer,

We take to ship, O soul,

Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,

Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail,

Amid the wafting winds (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to  
me, O soul,)

Caroling free, singing our song of God,

Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration. Walt Whitman.

*Passage to India, 8*

That noble and most sovereign reason,

Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh:

That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth,

Blasted with ecstasy. William Shakespeare

*Hamlet, III.i.*

Paul Schreber (1842-1911) left a mark on the intellectual history of Europe (Santner, 1998; Stingelin, 2000) with his immortal Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken. The correct translation is: reflections of a nervous patient, but the English mistranslation by Macalpine and Hunter as Memoirs of My Nervous Illness (1903; henceforth abbreviated as S) has died hard. But Schreber was at heart a Dichter, a poet, with a tendency to philosophize. Let me emphasize: memoirs in the title are not synonym for memories, although Schreber was into remembering and recollecting a great deal, but in the now obsolete sense of learned treatise, as in 18th century French: mémoires à servir.

Professionally Schreber was miscast as Richter, judge, and more so when in 1893 he rose to the position of President of a Zivilsenat at the Superior Court of Appeals of the Kingdom of Saxony. Paradoxically wrecked by his own success, he lived through a personal odyssey of fall and redemption during which he experienced a number of various ecstasies. As expressed by Pater, he considered his ecstatic experiences far more important to him than his whole legal career. Like Gray, he understood the power of poetry to rise above earthly power that declared him legally insane, reducing him to the legal level of a seven year old child and to imprisonment in an asylum for life. That is why he used the by then obsolete legal term, not a schizophrenic neologism, *Seelenmord*, to proclaim that he had been a victim of a *Justizmord*, a judicial murder, perpetrated on an innocent victim by the conjoined power of psychiatry and the law, as expressed in the usually omitted subtitle of his book: under what premises can a person considered insane be held in a mental hospital against his declared will. And like Whitman, he sailed on the wings of ecstasy to explore God and to wrestle with God. Since in the quotation from

Shakespeare ecstasy means insanity, let us examine some poetical and pathological definitions of ecstasy and their relation to emotional illness.

### **The meanings of ecstasy**

The Greek word ecstasy has two fundamental meanings. Literally 'ecstasy' means to stand or to be out of place; metaphorically it means to be psychologically out of place, to be displaced or transported from the ordinary place of living and working to a place of astonishment, rapture, and trance. When applied to mystical experiences it refers to a state of the mind as if set free from the body to contemplate a supernatural or religious phenomenon or object. But invoking the supernatural immediately creates an abyss between vision through the eyes and visions of the mind. For what did St. John of the Cross mean when he had a vision of the Virgin? What did Joan of Arc mean when she said she spoke with Archangel Michael? Did they really see and hear what they say they saw and heard or did they merely imagine, or dream, or hallucinate their visions and voices?

When referring to a state of mind it means giving oneself over to an overpowering emotion, or exaltation, in which the mind is transfixed upon, or fascinated by, some idea or some intense feeling, in a state implying a transient suspension of normal psychological functions of perception, ratiocination, and goal directedness. In a looser sense one may speak of the ecstasies of mirth and joy as against those of grief and fear.

Where there are emotions there is flow of energy, a concept as scientifically elusive as the feelings and the emotions themselves. For whereas it is easy to demonstrate

and measure kinetic and heat energy, it has not been possible to either show or measure the energy of sexuality: Wilhelm Reich tried, and look where it got him (Lothane, 1999). Can you measure pleasure? No, you can only feel it and compare it to memories of past pleasures. Can you demonstrate the energy of a desire? No, but you can attest to the intensity of the awareness of desire, whether it occurs in the waking state or in the dreams of sleep. The scientific criterion of measurement and quantification leaves us in the lurch as far as ecstasy is concerned. By dint of convention, we can and usually do refer to something universally sharable in the common emotional experiences of mankind, such as pleasure and pain, or mirth and mourning, and we call such extrapolations into other minds as feats of intuition, identification, sympathy, and empathy. But we are forever unable to know how and what the other really feels, we can only share in the other's experience by evocation through gesture, word, and tone, producing in us a vicarious participation in the other's experience or ecstasy by the images evoked in us (Lothane, 1981, 1984, 1994). We also attribute such sharing to emotional contagion, or induction of emotion.

Paul Schreber referred to both kinds of ecstasy, the religious and the emotional, and it was the religious kind that got him in trouble with the powers that be, whose two pillars, Professor Flechsig representing official science in Leipzig and Asylum Director Weber representing forensic authority in Dresden, who a priori defined Schreber not only as infirm but as insane. Had he only opened himself to the emotional ecstasies of grief and despair, Schreber would have been classified, in keeping with his self-diagnosis, as merely suffering from a mood disorder, i.e., a nerve disorder, or Nervenkrankheit, thus merely temporarily infirm and capable of being restored to his previous normal state. But

as he chose to allow himself to be transported into the realm of the supernatural and the religious and to tell about it, when he chose to speak of his divine visions and divine miracles in Flammenworte, or words of fire, he landed himself in serious trouble: he was diagnosed as suffering from Geisteskrankheit, i.e., insanity, with far reaching forensic consequences. But his insanity was harmless: he never hit or killed anybody, he never seriously tried to kill himself. He fled from work and marriage because he could not handle it any longer. He screamed and roared and bellowed and scared his wife. But above all, like Salman Rushdie and other heretics, he spoke words that irritated his audience: the psychiatrists and their helpers. His symptoms were unacceptable speeches (Lothane, 2000).

### **Of seeing and hearing, of visions and voices**

The notion of vision and miracle, as staples of the supernatural, draw our immediate attention. We have already noted that ‘vision’ is used to refer to the normal processes of seeing things and people in the world to ‘seeing’ objects and persons not usually seen. It is not as immediately evident that ‘miracle’ derives from the basic Latin word mirari, to look, as in the Spanish mirar, from which there is only a short hop to admirar, look in wonderment, consider the thing or person seen as wondrous and wonderful, or marvelous, and the same idea is expressed the German wunderbar and wundervoll and the French merveilleux. However, as with ‘vision’, these words are used in two very different contexts. For example, such nature phenomena as the rain forest, or even the more mundane temperate forest, are naturally wonderful, with their ecstasy of colors, sounds and scents; but they would be described as marvelous, not as miraculous. The latter

adjective is reserved for something that astonishes and surprises us as being unexpectedly beyond nature, as being supernatural. Naturally, winged horses and chariots do not fly in the skies, the sun does not stop at midday, men do not walk upon water, and flesh blisters when it comes in contact with intense heat. Physical objects behave in accordance with natural laws. It is only when we claim to see a miracle of a painted Virgin Mary weeping with real tears, or when we hear the sun talk to us in a human voice, when we enter the realm of the miraculous, either as mystics or as madmen.

Miracle is related to another word derived from mirari: mirage, or illusion. Is then seeing a weeping painting a true miracle or just a mirage, due to a peculiar physical effect, like the mirage in the desert? Or is the peculiar sense-perception created by a special physiological effect, such as a metabolic condition of the body, or a psychological effect of the mind and emotions, such that a particular mirage, or illusion, easily changes into a mirage-belief, or a delusion? And through a remarkable coincidence, the words miracle and admiration belong to the family of words that also contains the word 'smile,' whereas illusion and delusion are derived from ludere, to play and to laugh.

But we need not go far to find visions: they occur to everyone every night in the form of kaleidoscopic scenarios, in three-D and in Technicolor, at times accompanied by speeches, in darkness, during sleep, with eyes shut, thus in no way perceiving anything out there. These experiences called dreams are not perceptions but hallucinations (Lothane, 1982). But whereas they are considered harmless when limited to the nocturnal conditions of sleep, their occurrence as diurnal events, in wakefulness and with the eyes wide open, has produced in mankind, more so in modern times than ever before, a spectrum of responses ranging from amazement to awe-stricken terror. At times the

psychiatrists have appeared more terrified by hallucinations than their patients, as in the case of Schreber.

Just imagine the expression on Flechsig's face when Schreber knocked on his door in early March of 1894 to tell him excitedly about his visions, the morning after: Herr Professor, last night I had my "very first vision in which God, if I may express it so, revealed Himself to me" (S:footnote #103). And imagine further Flechsig's "professorial arrogance" (S:113) and the dishonesty in dealing with him, which the patient keenly perceived. We can only surmise what recommendation Flechsig sent up to the Ministry of Justice behind Schreber's judging from the result, for around that time an announcement appeared in the newspaper that Schreber's post at the Oberlandesgericht had been filled by another judge (Devreese, quoted in Ver Eecke, 1995). From there on Schreber's fate was doubly sealed: by the prognosis of incurability and the declaration of mental incompetency.

The major clinical fact of the case was that by March or April of 1894, as the psychotic process unraveled, the presenting clinical picture first observed in November of 1893 -- the agitated and suicidal depression with intractable sleeplessness -- now underwent a "supernatural" switch, a major development that has eluded most Schreber commentators but one (Lothane, 1989): come March 1894, the depression was transformed into cosmic delusions and ecstatic hallucinations, the prose of a humdrum tale of failure turned into poetry and prophecy in the manner of the Bible and Goethe (Lothane, 1998a).

What are the preconditions of prophecy and pathology? "I spoke to the prophets," says the Lord, "it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables"

(Hosea, 12:16). And in the same book the people of Israel respond: “The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad” and the prophet replies: “because of your iniquity and great hatred” (Hosea, 9:7). We can echo the Israelites and ask: Are supernatural phenomena and supernatural delusions one and the same thing? Are heavenly visions and prophecies genuine phenomena or are they merely epiphenomena of a superheated brain, in an altered metabolic state, e.g., a state of delirium? Are they elemental, not further explainable ordinary manifestations of a dark Africa called madness, as taught by Karl Jaspers? Or are they intelligible and interpretable psychic formations as claimed by Sigmund Freud? From clinical experience we know that descent into psychosis creates those preconditions that weaken a person’s contact with reality, suspend goal-directed pursuits, undo the critical functions and repressing forces of the mind, promote introversion and facilitate the emergence of repressed strivings and dream images, in a state of altered consciousness called trance, rapture, or ecstasy. The question is how to differentiate one product from the other. The answers that came from protagonist Schreber and antagonist Weber are illuminating.

Schreber argued before the court and against his psychiatrists, including the authority of the day, the great Kraepelin, that his hallucinations were not a mark of insanity, Geisteskrankheit, with its dire forensic implications for his life and fate, but a result of his Nervenkrankheit, a disease of the nerves, a neural disease. Was not Flechsig originally a famous neuroanatomist turned nerve-specialist (Nervenarzt), a common name for psychiatrist in Germany? Weren’t “asylums for the mentally ill,” such as Flechsig’s University Hospital, at first officially designated as an Irrenklinik [lunatic asylum], “called in the basic language ‘God’s Nerve-Institutes’” (S:25)? Were not mental



disorders declared by Flechsig to be brain disorders? This was not mere verbal acrobatics on Schreber's part. In addition, he put forward his own theory of causation, as he explains:

“I will try to describe more closely the auditory and visual impression I receive as “voices,” “visions”, etc. But I wish to stress again as in other places ... that I do not object in the least to considering a morbidly excited nervous system a necessary condition for the development of all such phenomena. Human beings who are fortunate enough to enjoy healthy nerves cannot (as a rule anyway: [added in footnote #112:] as a possible exception I would instance the cases of vision-like experiences related in the Bible) have “illusions,” “hallucinations,” “visions”, or whatever expression one wants to use for these phenomena; it would therefore certainly be desirable if all human beings remained free from such experiences; they would then subjectively feel very much better. But this does not imply that the events resulting from a diseased nervous system are altogether unfounded in objective external reality or have to be regarded as nervous excitations lacking all external cause. I can therefore not share Kraepelin's astonishment which he expresses repeatedly that the “voices” [reference omitted] etc., seem to have a far greater power of conviction for hallucinated patients than “anything said by those around them. A person with sound nerves is, so to speak, mentally blind compared with him who receives supernatural impressions by virtue of his diseased nerves; he is therefore as little likely to persuade the visionary of the unreality of his visions as a person who can see will be persuaded

by a really blind person that there are no colours, that blue is not blue, red not red, etc.” (S:307--308).

Schreber makes an important observation: in altered metabolic states, such as delirium induced by fever or drugs, people are more prone to see images than under normal conditions. He would have conceded this also happens in trance induced by psychosis, were he not concerned that people like himself and classified as psychotics, even when harmless as he was, were all too easily locked up for life. Not having read Freud, he could not say that his visions had psychic reality for him. “I am and, for as long as I can remember,” writes Aldous Huxley in connection with his LSD experiment, “have been a poor visualizer. Words, even the pregnant words of poets, do not evoke pictures in my mind. ... Only when I have a high temperature do my mental images come to independent life” (1954:15). But are these images revelations or mad ravings? Let us leave this question hanging for a while yet, but let us not repudiate Schreber’s argument that merely to dismiss such visions as pathological, rather than to give them their due, would be required by anyone who lays claim to scientific impartiality.

It is in this spirit that Schreber defends himself against the strictly organic model of Kraepelin and of Asylum Director Weber, who argued to the court as follows:

Considered scientifically, ... the appellant’s mental illness ... clearly belongs to a well known and well characterized form, ... paranoia, ... certainly not a usual commonplace one, just as little as the patient himself is the usual average individual. [B]ut on the whole in the formation and systematization of the

delusional ideas, the disease will show the same character as that of another person whose range of ideas does not rise above the most trivial events of daily life. ... Paranoia is a distinctly chronic illness ... and after the stormy symptoms have run their course the slowly progressive course starts ... and delusions, frequently in connection with hallucinations and false memories, ... soon become fixed into a persistent, uncorrected and unassailable delusional system (Weber, S:456-457). ... It can hardly be denied that some cases of paranoia never reach the orbit of medical experience, but remain outside it, recognized perhaps only by their closest associates, and lead the ordinary life of a citizen without any marked disturbance (458). ... [It is not that] ... the medical expert [i.e., Weber] and the Judge saw in his “belief in miracles” and the complex ideas around them only the basis for the assumption of mental illness, **and that this** cannot be so, as very many people believe in miracles without anybody thinking or declaring them mentally ill. What is usually called belief in miracles, the naive theoretical belief intentionally or unintentionally exempted from every criticism, that through His almighty will God sometimes causes events beyond or even against the laws of nature, does not apply in the present case. His ideas, as the appellant himself repeatedly stated and as their content clearly shows, do not emanate from a pious child’s belief, but are contrary to his earlier opinions and undoubtedly due to pathological processes of the brain; they are evidenced by disturbances of common sensation and hallucinations and so belong to a category very different from the harmless “belief in miracles.” It cannot be expected that the appellant will gain the insight that these hallucinatory events (in the widest sense the

muscular sensations described by the patient belong to the also) are entire subjective; his expositions (reference omitted) are aimed particularly at showing that his hallucinations are something very special, and at vindicating them by finding a basis in reality for them. It is their characteristic that they are taken for factual and real and have the same acuity as other sensations. ... it only remains to add briefly that in hallucinations [due to] the inner abnormal state of excitation of the apperceiving brain apparatus ... the hallucinating person does not apperceive the world, but himself, i.e., events in his own central nervous system (Weber, S:460-461).

Clearly, Schreber's and Weber's of looking at individual experience, as well as their discourse about it, are separated by an unbridgeable gulf. Furthermore, Schreber's conception is functional and dynamic, Weber's is anatomical and static, let alone narrow-minded. Furthermore, his rhetoric of "scientific" is a thin disguise of his long-standing and now weakening politics, to keep Schreber incarcerated because of his odd ideas and beliefs.

On the other hand, if Weber's cerebral organicism be accepted at face value, and if one agrees with Spinoza that God means nature, one might well conclude that Schreber is not merely spouting grandiose and paranoid ideas but espouse a theory that God does indeed reside in the brain's apperceiving apparatus, thus making perception of both natural and supernatural possible. What is sorely missing from Weber's account is the cultural, social, and ethical context for claiming truth and validity for visions, whether ancient or modern.

Such a cultural, social, and ethical perspective has been suggested by the French Catholic psychiatrist and doctor of letters Pierre Quercy (1930) in his analysis of the Carmelite nun St. Theresa of Avila (1515--1582). Her spiritual life was filled with extraordinary happenings: ecstasies, visions, and chronic depressive and hysterical symptoms: paralysis, catalepsy, sleep walking, anesthesia, fainting. She was also busy as a founder of convents and a reformed order called the Barefoot or Discalced Carmelites and later canonized by the Catholic Church as a saint. She wrote many religious and mystical tracts that are considered classics. She had visions of the blessed, of the living and dying, of angels and demons, of the Virgin, of Jesus Christ, of the Trinity, of various objects such as crosses, rings, flowers, a dove, a saber, blood. Were her visions merely manifestations of her hysteria, including her repressed sexuality? Or were they genuine God-sent visions?

The crux of the question is the meaning of the phrase “to touch, hear or see God”: are there people who can so perceive God, directly, or are they merely speaking in metaphors animated by faith and love, by complex emotional surges, and by all kinds of mirages, illusions and imaginings. It might be helpful to invoke St. Theresa contemporary, her student and later confessor, the monk St. John of the Cross (1542--1591), who, perhaps under the influence of Theresa herself, divides visions into three kinds: ordinary or sensory, of the world around us; supersensory or imaginary, that can be either of divine and diabolical inspiration; intellectual, i.e., spiritual, or without images. Consider some of his words taken from Stanzas of the Soul:

1. Oh, living flame of love That tenderly woundest my soul in its deepest centre,

Since thou art no longer oppressive, perfect me now, if it be thy will,

Break the web of this sweet encounter.

2. Oh, sweet burn! Oh, delectable wound! Oh, soft hand! Oh, delicate touch,

That savours of eternal life and pays every debt.

In slaying, thou hast changed death into life.

3. Oh lamps of fire, In whose splendors the deep caverns of sense which were dark and

blind

With strange brightness Give heat and light together to their Beloved! (Complete

Works, 1946:18).

Quercy resolves the problem by a declaration: St. Theresa's imaginative visions are neither the run of the mill sensory or psychological hallucinations (Lothane, 1982): "Ce sont les hallucinations thérésiennes [these hallucinations are all St. Theresa's]" (Quercy:290).

Let us declare with equal force: Schreber's are also no ordinary hallucinations: ce sont les hallucinations Schreberiennes, and like in her case, his visions came in three varieties: sensory, imaginary, and intellectual.

St. Theresa had one important advantage over Schreber: her visions were supported by a community of like-minded people who shared her experiences, while Schreber was a lonely voice in the Sonnenstein wilderness. It was only posthumously that Schreber was able to find some credence for his claim:

[Heretofore] I used to consider it possible and indeed advisable to exclude every discussion of my supposed hallucinations and delusions from the points at issue in

the cases, the purpose of which is contesting my tutelage; I could not ignore the fear .... that the attention of the Court would be diverted from the decisive and only question in their competence, namely, whether I possess the capacity for reasonable action in practical life. More recently, however, I have not been able to ignore the fact that it would be impossible for me to do so without a certain appreciation of my so-called delusions or my religious beliefs and not only on the formal side of their logical sequence and orderly arrangement, but to a certain degree also regarding the question whether it is within the bounds of possibility that my delusional system, as one is pleased to call it, is founded on some truth. I have to make the attempt as regards other people, the judges in particular, not really to convert them to my miraculous belief -- naturally I could do this at present to a very moderate degree -- but at least to furnish the general impression that the experiences and considerations laid down in my "Memoirs" cannot simply be regarded as a quantité négligeable, as an empty fantasy of muddled head ... I will mention a number of points [which] although they cannot exactly prove the reality of the state miracles, will I hope at least make the so far credible that one will hesitate to condemn the whole presentation as pure nonsense from the start but rather admit that the scientific world could make them the starting point of further researches (Schreber, 1901; S:412; emphasis Schreber's).

This author has also admitted these matters to be so. In addition, the Court saw through Weber's arguments and sided with Schreber's view on the matter: "it is possible that ... whatever one may think of his belief in miracles, no one is entitled to see in it a mental

defect which makes plaintiff require State care. One does not usually and without further reason declare the adherents of spiritualism [e.g., table rappers, believers in clairvoyance and telepathy, Z. L.] mentally ill and put them under a guardian, although their way of looking at things supernaturally is also neither shared nor comprehended by the vast majority of their fellow men” (Judgment of the Royal Superior Country Court Dresden, S:481).

### **Of marvels and miracles**

We speak unabashedly of the marvels of modern science and technology, e.g., the brain and the computer, and we speak of miracles to describe of unusual or unexpected successes in curing illness. “No doubt,” Freud is quick to note, “it is an essential attribute of God to perform miracles; but a physician performs miracles too; he effects miraculous cures, as his enthusiastic clients proclaim” (1911:52). We thus tend to speak unceremoniously of ‘miracles’ occurring both in the natural and supernatural orders of the world. But while Freud thought that Schreber’s “miracles” were “incredible, absurd, and to some extent positively silly” (1911:52), this was not Schreber’s opinion. In fact, as I argued contra Freud, for Schreber his fantastic/hallucinatory/delusional miracles were bearers of deep religious truths and mystical insights (Lothane, 1993, 1998b, Lothane, in press-a) and a vehicle for a serious moral debate with God (Lothane, 1992a).

In the opening two cosmological-religious chapters of the Memoirs, filled with fantastic and delusional scenarios, the first of which is entitled “God and Immortality,” Paul Schreber speaks of the entire Order of the World as a “wundervoller Aufbau” and “eine wundervolle Organisation,” which Macalpine and Hunter mistranslate as



“miraculous” structure and organization, slanting the expression in the direction of the delusional. Here the correct translation should have been “marvelous,” for in these quotations the adjective “marvelous” still refers to marvels of nature, perhaps in conscious imitation of his father Moritz’s title of an 1859 biológico- anthropological monograph: Anthropos: Der Wunderbau des menschlichen Organismus, sein Leben und seine Gesundheitsgesetze: ein allgemein fassliches Gesamtbild der menschlichen Natur für Lehrer, Schüler sowie für Jedermann, der nach gründlicher Bildung und körperlich geistiger Gesundheit strebt, that can be translated as follows: “Man, or the marvelous structure of the human organism, its life and its health laws: a generally intelligible overview of human nature for teachers, students and everyone who aspires to a thorough education and bodily and mental health.” It should be emphasized that it was his father’s writings, and not Flechsig’s numerous tracts on neuroanatomy, that would have been Paul Schreber’s source of knowledge about the brain and its nerves.

Even as these opening chapters are filled with scenarios that are highly fantastic, and some are so fantastic as to earn the characterization of frankly delusional, Schreber’s speech, even when his references remain obscure, cannot be characterized as schizophrenic, in the sense used by Bleuler, for his definitions are precise and expressed with a pithiness rarely seen today. I hold that among other things, Schreber wrote his book in the style of magical realism, not unlike Salman Rushdie, for one. Thus Schreber makes a distinction between the usual state of affairs: “God left the world which He had created and the organic life upon it (plants, animals, human beings) to their own devices ... [and] as a rule did not interfere directly in the fate of peoples or individuals, ... in accordance with the Order of the World,” as compared to times when “a particularly

fervent prayer might in a special case induce God to give help by intervening with a miracle or to shape the fate of whole nations (in war, etc) by means of miracles. He was also able to get into contact (“to form nerve contact with them”) with highly gifted people (poets, etc), in order to bless them (particularly in dreams) with some fertilizing thoughts and ideas about the beyond” (Schreber:10-11; hence abbreviated as S). Perhaps he was like one of the poets when God sent him that dream of how nice it would be to feel what a woman feels in intercourse. Otherwise, “such nerve contact [with God] was not allowed to be the rule, because .... the nerves of living human beings particularly when in a state of high grade excitation, have such power of attraction for God’s nerves that He would not be able to free Himself from them again, and would thus endanger his own existence” (S:11). Note Schreber speaking of God’s nerves and human nerves that derives from the first definitions in Chapter one: “the human soul is contained in the nerves of the body” and “God to start with is only nerve, not body, and akin therefore to human soul. But unlike the human body, ... the nerves of God are infinite and eternal. They possess the same qualities as human nerves but to a degree surpassing all understanding. They have in particular the faculty of transforming themselves into all things of the created world; and in this capacity they are called rays; and herein lies the essence of divine creation” (S:6, 8). Note the equation nerves = rays = soul and an affinity between God as the cosmic soul of the world and the individual soul, the basis of reciprocal nervous influxes, influences and inspirations from God and man and between God and man. While Schreber’s terminology is fanciful and idiosyncratic, the ideas expressed hark back to ancient Gnostic and cabalistic theories of creation and to and pantheistic conceptions of divine and human soul and the notion of the flow of nervous energy (interchangeable with

soul energy) as suggested by the theories of animal magnetism propounded by Franz Anton Mesmer from the mid-18th to the early 19th century (Lothane, 1993; Lothane, 1998).

Such a miracle of a direct divine influence did indeed happen to Schreber as a result of his illness that threw him into a state of high grade excitation. Toward the end of chapter two, entitled “Crisis in God’s realms? Soul murder,” Macalpine and Hunter have Paul Schreber remark on the “marvellous [wunderbaren] concatenation of events,” at a time when the proper translation should be “miraculous,” seeing that in conditions that were not according to the Order of the World, an extraordinary “clash of interests ... arose in [his] case because of supposed soul murder” (S:31). Through this miraculous concatenation, Schreber, an innocent man, became a victim of double soul murder, also called by the synonym “soul theft,” or “surrender of a soul to another person,” both cosmic and conspiratorial, in the following manner.

“Since the beginning of my contact with God (mid-March 1894),” defines Schreber, “the crisis that broke upon the realms of God was caused by somebody having committed soul murder; at first Flechsig was named as the instigator of soul murder” (S:23). As Satan in the Book of Job and in Goethe’s Faust, God, at the instigation of soul-murderer Flechsig, “God Himself must have been or be in a precarious position, [he] could be enticed to a kind of conspiracy against human beings who are fundamentally innocent” (S:29-30). Indeed, God, who severely tested the innocent man Schreber by means of the fantasied soul murder, was in reality aided and abetted by unnamed co-conspirators: his boss Judge Werner at the Ministry of Justice, his wife Sabine, acting hand in hand with psychiatrists Flechsig and Weber and the courts (Lothane, 1992a).

The dual soul murder, human and divine, that caused him considerable nervousness compounded the already existing stress caused by the return of his first illness and a repeated failure in life: his collapse on the new job as judge presiding of a Civilsenat in the capital Dresden, just six weeks after it started. After Schreber became excited, hallucinating and delusional, he transformed his prosaic personal disaster into a the high poetry of a cataclysm of cosmic proportions: as a result of his nervousness, “for about two years I believed [he] had to assume and was forced by [his] experiences to assume, that if God were permanently tied to [his] person, all creation on earth would have to perish” (S:31). In addition, and especially during the traumatic “early part of [his] stay at Sonnestein” (S:147), following his banishment from Flechsig’s University Hospital to the public madhouse, God plagued Schreber with all kinds of divine miracles, a euphemism for divinely caused maladies, copiously described in Chapter 11 entitled “Bodily integrity damaged by miracles.” These miracles of damage or destruction caused to organs by “impure rays” (also called “searing” rays) were always temporary and completely undone by “pure rays,” also called “blessing” rays, thus not dangerous in themselves, just fanciful descriptions of suffering from varieties of “very painful conditions” (S:149; footnote #48).

It is of utmost importance to note that it is in this context that Schreber first mentions a central interest of his, the “sensation of voluptuousness” (“Wollustgefühl, S:153): one of the “miracles which were enacted against me” (S:147) was targeted at his seminal cord, “against which very painful miracles were directed, with the particular purpose of suppressing the sensation of voluptuousness arising in my body” (S:153). The full meaning of voluptuousness, i.e., luxuriating in any sensual or sensuous pleasure, but

most prominently sexual pleasure, should be noted. Clearly, the above is a miracle in reverse, a euphemistic and sarcastic usage not unlike saying blessed when we mean cursed, as this blessed city traffic. Paul Schreber may perhaps be alluding, via a persecutory delusion, to conflict over and rebellion against his father's or his society's anti-sexual prejudice, or to his wife's frigidity; or, perhaps, to the sexual deprivation and the cruelties imposed upon him by the God-like decrees of his psychiatrists, who condemned him to nearly nine years of incarceration.

Whether the idea to test Schreber was part of God's grand cosmic scheme is debatable, it is beyond doubt that the poor devil was subjected to many forms of unwelcome stimulation. For example, while in Flechsig's asylum he was yanked out of his sleep to be hauled off to an isolation cell and there a fight in the billiard room in which he was overcome by burly attendants merely clad in a night shirt; and there was "a period during which I was continually kept in bed" (S:88). What role did that play in causing nightly pollutions? What did years of keeping a man his age completely sex-starved contribute to being assailed by voluptuous sensations? Also, he was exposed to unbearable barrages of stimulation by the agitated and screaming madmen in the asylum, in the dark ages of psychiatry without tranquilizers, a suffering common in the snake pit that was Sonnenstein, where, in addition, rough attendants who had the run of the place inflicted on him such indignities as "having his ears boxed," his cigars and writing materials doled out in niggardly fashion, and being moved almost nightly "from his own bedroom to sleep in the cells fitted out for demented" (S:147), for two and a half years running. When he was finally out of the asylum and beyond the reach of judge and jailer, in a preface he wrote for his book in 1903, Schreber used the term soul murder

retroactively to brand Flechsig's professional conduct as medical malpractice, thus avoiding being sued by Flechsig for libel.

In the end, luckily for God and His creation, "even in such an extraordinary case the Order of the World carries its own remedies for healing the wounds inflicted upon it; the remedy is Eternity" (S:31). Schreber was lucky, too, for he found a resolution to his problem before he died. After four years in the asylum he woke up from his long religious dream ecstasy, won his trial, left the asylum and lived happily with his wife and adopted daughter until his final and terminal psychotic journey, from 1907 till his death in 1911.

Schreber claimed for himself the status of a genuine Geisterseher, a seer, a mystic. But how do you certify a true prophet, mystic, or visionary, and the visions they attest to? What are the criteria by which St. Theresa of Avila is declared to be the genuine product and Schreber the fake?

### **Of ecstasies human and divine**

In the first two chapters Schreber treats of pleasures human and divine. The latter is defined by Schreber thus: "souls completely cleansed by the process of purification ascended to heaven and so gained the state of Blessedness [only Seligkeit, in the original, Z. L.]. This [blessedness, omitted by in the translation by Macalpine & Hunter] consisted [in a state of, omitted by M. & H.] of uninterrupted enjoyment combined with the contemplation of God" (S:16; emphasis Schreber's).

This topic mightily preoccupies Freud (1911) in the first section of his essay that made Schreber immortal and he quotes copiously from Schreber's "theologico-psychological system" (1911:21) as set forth in the aforementioned first two chapters of

the Memoirs, freely mixing Schreber's words (without even bothering to put quotations marks around them), with his own. A central focus for Freud is expressed in Schreber's sentence: "souls that have passed through the process of purification enter into the enjoyment of a state of bliss" (1911:23). Now 'bliss' and 'blessedness' are good synonyms for ecstasy sensual and spiritual and are used in the latter sense in religious texts. It does not come as a surprise to find Freud immediately add this gloss on "bliss" in his footnote: "this consists essentially in a feeling of voluptuousness [Wollustgefühl, S:153, Z.L.] (see below)" (1911:23). (By the way, the quotes from Schreber in his 1911 essay are in the 1925 translation of the Strachey's, thus different from Macalpine & Hunter.)

In order to give a good account of earthly delights of sensual pleasure Schreber invokes another divinely inspired poet, "Richard Wagner, as if with some insight into these things, [who] makes Tannhäuser say [in the opening scene of the opera, in the cave of Venus, where the tragic hero seeks to flee the enticing Sirens and the amorous entreaties of Venus, Z. L.] in the ecstasy of love [Schreber's words are: im höchsten Genuss der Liebeswonne: at the height of enjoyment of love's bliss, Z. L.]: "Alas your love overwhelms me; perpetual enjoyment is only for Gods, I as a mortal am subject to change"(S:17, footnote #10). According to the libretto, Tannhäuser begins by saying to Venus: "Praises to love! Its radiant wonders fire me,/ Love is the joy, the power which fills my days! .../Only the gods such happiness can render, /Only your grace could bless a mortal man." And now the words quoted by Schreber: "But man should not win such a guerdon, / And I am tired, tired of its burden./The gods can live in endless bliss [in the

original: “wenn stets ein Gott geniessen kann], / No mortal man can suffer this”

(translation from Wagner’s (1845) libretto; emphasis Schreber’s). (S:17, footnote #10).

While Macalpine’s and Hunter’s word ecstasy serves our purpose, ‘bliss’ is better than ‘enjoyment’ to depict earthly delights, because it works better as a foil to the ‘blessedness’ of the souls. Since enjoyment can also mean simply use, it misses the strong meaning of the German word Wonne, usually also rendered as bliss, but pointing to a high degree of sensual delight. The opening of the opera pointedly portrays the sexual exuberance of the goddess of love and the scruples and inhibitions of earthling Tannhäuser and the hero’s constant conflict, characteristic of Western civilization, between love sacred and profane, between the naturalness as against the religiously defined sinfulness of sexual love and sexual happiness, between heavenly blessedness and earthly bliss. And yet, the two kinds of ecstasy retain a common affinity: the mystics have often described religious transports in orgasmic terms, voluptuaries have often crowed about their lusts as divine.

As already suggested, and judging by the quotations from Schreber he selected, Freud is in full agreement with Wagner:

I will now turn to another subject, which is closely related to the God, namely, this state of Bliss. This is also spoken of by Schreber as “the life beyond” to which the human soul is raised after death by the process of purification. He describes it as a state of uninterrupted enjoyment, bound up with the contemplation of God. This is not very original: ... the coincidence between the state of bliss and voluptuousness is expressed in plainer language. ... Thus, for instance: “The nature of the nerves of God, is such that the state of bliss ... is



accompanied by a very intense sensation of voluptuousness, even though it does not consist exclusively of it” (51). And again: “Voluptuousness may be regarded as a fragment of the state of bliss given in advance, as it were, to men and other living creatures” (281). So the state of heavenly bliss is to be understood as being in its essence an intensified continuation of sensual pleasure upon earth! (Freud, 1911:29; the numbers in Freud’s brackets refer to the original page numbers in Schreber).

Freud’s exclamation mark reveals a kinship and identification with Schreber because like Schreber, he championed a libertarian attitude toward the varieties of the sexual experience and sexual pleasure (Lothane, 1992b, Lothane, in press-b). Unlike Schreber, he refused to grant legitimacy and autonomy to religious experience and as the rationalist that he was, he reduced them to sexuality, as he says in the continuation of the aforementioned “below”:

This surprising sexualization of the state of heavenly bliss suggests the possibility that Schreber’s concept of the state of bliss is derived from a condensation of the two principal meanings of the German word “selig” -- namely, ‘dead’ and ‘sensually happy’ [quoting in his footnote the word ‘selig’ from the famous “La ci darem la mano” duet in Mozart’s Don Giovanni]. But this instance of sexualization will also give us occasion to examine the patient’s general attitude to the erotic side of life and questions of sexual indulgence. For we psychoanalysts have hitherto supported the view that the roots of every nervous

and mental disorder are chiefly to be found in the patient's sexual life. ... Schreber himself speaks again and again as though he shared our prejudice. He is constantly talking in the same breath of 'nervous disorder' and erotic lapses, as though the two things were inseparable. [In the footnote to the above Freud quotes Schreber's seminal words]: "Thus it seems probable that by a "Prince of Hell" the souls meant the uncanny Power that was able to develop in a sense hostile to God as a result of moral depravity among men or of a general state of excessive nervous excitement following upon over-civilization. (163)" (Freud, 1911:30).

Indeed, Schreber speaks of many "erotic lapses", not just sexual ones, but also of the pleasures of peeing and shitting (words included in Webster's Third New International Dictionary that still excludes f\*\*k because it is legally obscene and thus not fit to print), an innocent delight in childhood but derogated in adulthood. And who better than Freud (1905) showed how such dams of repression are set up as a result of over-civilization, and who better than Freud, before Otto Gross and well before Wilhelm Reich, inveighed against societal hypocrisy in matters of the body and its erotic needs (Freud, 1908a). As if he were rewriting his own thoughts on anal eroticism (Freud, 1908b), Freud relishes reproducing Schreber's disquisition on shit at some length:

"Although it will necessitate my touching upon an unsavoury subject, I must devote a few more words to the question that I have just quoted ("Why don't you sh--?") on account of the typical character of the whole business. The need for evacuation, like all else that has to do with my body, is evoked by a miracle. It is

brought about by my faeces being forced forwards (and sometimes backwards again) in my intestines; and if, owing to there having already been an evacuation, enough material is not present, then such small remains as there may still be of the contents of my intestines are smeared over my anal orifice. This occurrence is a miracle performed by the upper God, and it is repeated several dozens of times at the least every day. It is associated with an idea which is utterly incomprehensible to human beings and can only be accounted for by God's complete ignorance of living man as an organism. According to this idea "sh---ing" is in a certain sense the final act; that is to say, when once the urge to "sh-- has been miracled up, the aim of destroying the understanding is achieved and a final withdrawal of the rays becomes possible. To get to the bottom of the origin of this idea, we must suppose, as it seems to me, that there is a misapprehension in connection with the symbolic meaning of the act of evacuation, a notion, in fact, that any one who has been in such a relation as I have been with divine rays is to some extent entitled to sh-- upon the whole world.

But now what follows reveals the full perfidy of the policy that has been pursued toward me. Almost every time the need for evacuation was miracled up in me, some other person in my vicinity was sent (by having his nerves stimulated for the purpose) to the lavatory, in order to prevent my evacuating. This is a phenomenon which I have observed for years and upon such countless occasions - - thousands of them -- and with such regularity, as to exclude any possibility of its being attributable to chance. And thereupon comes the question: "Why don't you sh--?" to which the brilliant repartee is made that I am "so stupid or something".

The pen well-nigh shrinks from recording so monumental a piece of absurdity as that God, blinded by His ignorance of human nature, can positively go to such lengths as to suppose that there can exist a man too stupid to do what every animal can do -- to stupid to be able to sh-- . When, upon the occasion of such an urge, I actually succeed in evacuating, and use a pail for that purpose -- the process is always accompanied by the generation of an exceedingly strong feeling of spiritual voluptuousness. For the relief from the pressure caused by the presence of faeces in the intestine produces a sense of intense well-being in the nerves of voluptuousness; and the same is equally true of making water. For this reason, even down to the present day, while I am passing stool or making water, all the rays [= God, Z. L., "voices proceed from God, that is, from the divine rays," Freud:26] are always without exception united; for this very reason, whenever I address myself to these natural functions, an attempt is invariably made, though as a rule in vain, to miracle backwards the urge to pass stool and to make water. (225-7.)" [added by Freud in his footnote]: This confession to a pleasure in the excretory processes, which have learnt to recognize as one of the auto-erotic components of infantile sexuality, may be compared with the remarks made by little Hans in my "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy" (1909b). (Freud, 1911:26-27).

Not since Rabelais have such peans been sung to the physical and spiritual ecstasies of provided by the boyau rectum. The text becomes more comprehensible if we substitute marvel for miracle. Either way, the language of miracles is Schreber's way to speak of

matters instinctual and unconscious. Not since Freud, has anal eroticism been so well described, as if Schreber fully shared Freud's prejudice. Indeed, Freud's anal triad of "orderly, parsimonious and obstinate" fairly applies to Schreber's character: it is his fight with his wife over money that catapulted him into a chain reaction that included a hostile reaction from his boss at the Ministry of Justice and his mentally incompetency status, at the cost of personal and civil liberties lost for years (Lothane, 1992a). By the way, in the end it was Karl Abraham, not Freud, who fully realized the symbolic meaning of shitting as aggression: of shitting on the whole world. But Schreber understood that perfectly, when he says that "any one who has been in such a relation as I have been with divine rays is to some extent entitled to sh-- upon the whole world." If we substitute "divine rays = God" as a code word for the powers that be, i.e., doctors acting as gods and the legal power of the courts to incarcerate an innocent man, if we read the above paragraphs as a parody of those power relations, then we can understand Schreber's wish to want to shit on the whole world, in the same symbolic manner as we can read Jung's famous dream of shitting on the Cologne cathedral. But at that time Freud had a blind spot concerning aggression: indeed, in the case history of Little Hans (1909) Freud ridiculed Adler's 1908 paper "The aggressive drive in life and neurosis" (1909: 140—141).

But Freud contradicted himself: for whereas he sought to explain Schreber's adult experiences by links to infantile oedipal libidinal-instinctual conflicts, he still managed to invoke aggression when he traced Schreber's "mixture of reverence and rebelliousness in his attitude toward [God]" (1911:29) to the "perfectly familiar ... infantile attitude of boys toward their father -- it is composed of the same mixture of reverent submission and

mutinous insubordination that we have found in Schreber's relation to God, and is the unmistakable prototype of that relation... [which] explains [Schreber's] bitter scorn shown for such a physician [i.e., his father] ... by declaring that he understands nothing about living men and only knows how to deal with corpses" (1911:52). Freud missed the fact that the last time Moritz Schreber had anything to do with corpses is when he studied anatomy as a medical student. The physician who dealt with corpses was Flechsig: he miraculously cured Schreber's first depressive bout of 1884--1885, earning the encomiums of Schreber husband and wife: "I was eventually cured and therefore I had at that time no reason to be other than most grateful to Professor Flechsig: I gave this special expression by a subsequent visit and in my opinion an adequate honorarium. My wife felt even more sincere gratitude and worshipped Professor Flechsig who has restored her husband to her; for this reason she kept his picture on her desk for many years" (S:35-36). Flechsig was a different man in 1893--1894: this time all he wanted was to get Schreber's brain at autopsy, to make the definitive diagnosis, and to add the formalin-preserved specimen to the brain museum next to his office. And that is why Schreber poured derision and scorn on his doctor as "little Flechsig" (S:154, 158; Weber, S:383).

What is more pregnant is Freud's awareness that Paul Schreber's seliger (= of blessed memory) father Moritz brought his son up both anally and genitally repressed (or was it his mother Pauline?), as shown in the quotation that follows:

Before his illness Senatspräsident Schreber had been a man of strict morals: "Few people," he declares, and I see no reason to doubt his assertion, "can have been brought up upon such strict moral principles as I was, and few people, all through

their lives, can have exercised (especially in sexual matter) a self-restraint conforming so closely to those principles as I may say of myself that I have done”([S:]281). After the severe spiritual struggle, of which the phenomena of his illness were the outward sign, his attitude toward the erotic side of life was altered. He had come to see that the cultivation of voluptuousness was incumbent upon him as a duty, and that it was only by discharging this duty that he could end the grave conflict that had broken out within him -- or, as he thought, about him. Voluptuousness, so the voices assured him, had become “God-fearing” and he could only regret that he was not able to devote himself to its cultivation the whole day long (285)”. [And Freud quotes further in the footnote: “This attraction [of the nerves of God to him] however, lost its terrors for the nerves in question, if, and in so far as, upon entering my body, they encountered a feeling of spiritual voluptuousness in which they themselves shared. For, if this happened , they found an equivalent or approximately equivalent substitute in my body for the state of heavenly bliss which they had lost, and which consisted in a kind of voluptuous enjoyment” (179-80) (Freud, 1911:31).

Since he is a genius, Freud’s errors are preferable to truths of lesser minds: it is amazing how many dynamic themes Freud was able to encompass or hint at in his essay. But his omissions are also significant. For his eloquence about Schreber’s unresolved transference to dead father and older brother, he missed that it was Guido Weber (1837-1914) who was a more natural candidate for such a transference than Paul Flechsig (1847-1929), and yet it remarkable that the paranoiac Schreber did not pour any scorn on Weber,

who was hostile to Schreber until he was forced to yield to the better judgment of the court that finally gave Schreber his freedom. As could be expected, Weber reacted to these outpourings with extreme bourgeois revulsion. It was Weber who hounded Schreber in the real sense, by actively opposing his release from Sonnenstein in his reports to the court and by having this to say against the publication of the Memoirs:

It is understandable that the patient felt the urge to describe the history of his latter years, to lay down his observations and sufferings in writing and to them before those who have in this or that matter a lawful interest in the shape of his fate. But the patient harbours the urgent desire to have his "Memoirs" (as presented here) printed and made available to the widest circles and he is therefore negotiating with a publisher -- until now of course without success. When one looks at the content of his writings, and takes into consideration the abundance of indiscretions relating to himself and others contained in them, the unembarrassed detailing of the doubtful and aesthetically impossible situations and events, and the use of most offensive and vulgar words, etc., one finds it quite incomprehensible that a man otherwise tactful and of fine feeling could propose an action which would compromise him so severely in the eyes of the public, were not his whole attitude pathological, and he unable to see things in their proper perspective, and if the tremendous over-valuation of his own person caused by lack of insight into his illness had not clouded his appreciation of the limitations imposed on man by society (Weber, S:402). The appellant's oft repeated firm intention of publishing his "Memoirs" must also be regarded as pathologically



determined and lacking sensible consideration. ... His efforts to get his Memoirs published [can] be regarded as a harmful action [i.e., one still requiring a legal guardian] (Weber, S:469)

Martin Stingelin (2000) and myself are in agreement here. Luckily, the judges on the court of appeals were more far-sighted than Weber and saved an immortal book from being lost forever.

As I have argued repeatedly (Lothane, in press – a), Freud made a serious error in narrowly interpreting Schreber's conflicts as caused by covert and overt homosexual desires rather than, as I tried to do, to listen to Schreber on his terms, to consider all his libidinal manifestations in an attempt to understand as much as possible the full scope of the repressed erotic side of Schreber's life and how the repression came undone as a result of the psychotic process that lays the repressed bare and presents a most telling spectacle of the return of the repressed. In Schreber's case, as I have argued, it is his heterosexual conflicts, his sexual habits accumulated over a life time, and his identifications with woman, with their unknowable roots in childhood, that returned as a result of the facilitating processes of psychosis, at first to hound him and eventually to heal him.

**In conclusion: of the ethics of ecstasies private and public**

It was Freud's great achievement to have built a bridge, a continuum, between the abnormal and the normal, between the pathology of psychosis and the regressions

engendered by various dynamisms, or mechanisms, not the least of them being the regression in the psychoanalytic situation that facilitates the emergence of dreams, images, emotions, and memories that are not accessible during ordinary waking conditions (Lothane, 1981; Lothane, 1984, Lothane, 1994). One might fairly argue that ecstasy, i.e., a trance-like state combined with intense emotional excitement, as a common denominator of behavior in individuals and groups under the sway of any of the following conditions and states: deprivation (e.g., fasting, isolation chambers), drives (sexual and aggressive), dream state (altered mental state, including hypnosis), drugs, delirium (altered bodily state, e.g., fever), and demos (i.e., people, or crowd intoxication, or as Huxley put it, herd intoxication). In all these conditions and states people may experience, or believe they experience, visions, revelations, miracles, prophecies, and the like.

Do visions merely reveal the state of the mind or body of the visionary, or do they show us something out there, or, to use Taine's expressions, are these hallucinations vraies, in the added sense of truth hallucinations, i.e., perceptions of something out there? The question might be considered as scientific or religious, depending on the beliefs of the questioner, but we may not avoid Freud's insight that obsessions and their close relative, delusions, are a sort of private religion, and religion is a form of shared delusion. Aldous Huxley (1954) chose the path of the impartial, naturalistic observer:

Like the earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas ... Like the giraffe and the duckbilled platypus, the creatures inhabiting these remoter regions of the mind are exceedingly improbable. Nevertheless they exist, they are

facts of observation; and as such they cannot be ignored by anyone who is honestly trying to understand the world in which he lives. ... It is difficult, it is all but impossible, to speak of mental events except in similes drawn from the more familiar universe of material things. If I have made use of geographical and zoological metaphors, it is not wantonly, out of mere addiction to picturesque language. It is because such metaphors express very forcibly the essential otherness of the mind's far continents, the complete autonomy and self-sufficiency of their inhabitants ... at the antipodes of everyday consciousness, [in] the world of visionary experience" (1954:83-85).

Schreber argued similarly: "To make myself at least somewhat comprehensible I shall have to speak much in images and similes, which may at times perhaps be only approximately correct; for the only way a human being can make supernatural matters, which in their essence must always remain incomprehensible, understandable to a certain degree is by comparing them with known facts of human experience. Where intellectual understanding ends, the domain of belief begins; man must reconcile himself to the fact that things exist which are true although he cannot understand them" (S:2). With these words Schreber harks back to Kant's *Ding an sich* and such like. And even as there is much in Schreber's text that is psychotic, we cannot deny him the cogency of some of his deeper philosophical and spiritual insights.

Some people might still find Huxley not as impartial as he claims to be but borrowing respectable and emotionally-loaded labels to conceal preconceived opinions; and we might still want to apply the Scotch verdict about visions as perceptions of

something out there: non liquet, not proved. On the other hand, we would not quarrel with the power of the intellectual visions of the mystics and thinkers Huxley (1944) grouped under the aegis of perennial philosophy. Let us quote only one of those quoted by Huxley, mystical thinker Meister Eckhart, whose ideas may be seen in Paul Schreber's fancies about God's Grundsprache, i.e., ground or basic language:

To gauge the soul we must gauge it with God, for the Ground of God and Ground of the Soul are one and the same.

The knower and the known are one. Simple people imagine that they should see God, as if he stood there and they here. This is not so. God and I, were are one in knowledge. (1944:12).

Thou must love God as not-God, not-spirit, not-person, not-image, but as He is, a sheer, pure absolute One, sundered from all two-ness, and in whom we must eternally sink from nothingness to nothingness. (1944:32).

Here is a Schreber moment, mixing the fantastic and the spiritual:

The reader may have gained some idea of what I wish to express with the term “the distant God. One must not think of God as a being limited in space by the confines of a body like a human being, but one has to think of Him as Many in One or One in Many. These are not unfounded figments of my brain, but I have definite factual evidence for all these assumptions (that is to say for the expression “a distant God”), for instance at the time when the genuine basic language

[Grundsprache] was current, every anterior leader of rays used to speak of the divine rays of the representatives of the Divinity of his trains as “I Who am distant.” (S:197, footnote #83).

There was one more gnawing concern that caused Dr. Weber sleepless nights: that such beliefs are inherently dangerous to a well-run (bourgeois) society. Dr. Weber’s apprehensions came only twelve years before the First World War and twenty one years before the ascension of Hitler to power, in a country that came under the sway of beliefs far more irrational and crowd ecstasies far more dangerous than the miracles and visions that inhabited the brain of Paul Schreber (Lothane, 1997).

Canetti was dead wrong and unethical when he plagiarized Arnold Zweig in order to aver that Schreber’s delusions were a prelude to the paranoia of Nazi ideology, politics, and criminal behavior (Lothane, 1992a, 1995, 1996). The Nazis made Adolf Hitler into a false God, or idol, and the delusional parts of his Mein Kampf into their Bible: theirs was an idolatry enthroned as a state religion, in imitation of the other perverters of Hegel’s philosophy, the fascism of Mussolini, and the communism of Lenin and Stalin. And this context it is essential to recall the orgiastic mass ecstasies orchestrated by the genius of Nazi mass propaganda in those fabled Nuremberg rallies (Lothane, 1997), as captured in the films Leni von Riefenstahl.

In agreement with Huxley (1977) I submit that Schreber advocated a personal, mystical contemplative religion as against official Evangelical Lutheranism in which he was raised. The difference between the two religions is fundamental:

The religion of direct experience of the divine has been regarded as the privilege of very few people. I personally don't think this is necessary true at all. I think that practically everyone is capable of immediate experience, provided he sets about it in the right way. We have simply taken for granted that the mystics represent a very small minority among a huge majority who must be content with the religion of creeds and symbols and sacred books and liturgies and organizations.

Belief is a matter of very great importance. It has power for the believer himself and permits the believing person to exercise power over others. It does in a sense move mountains. Belief, like any other source or power, can be used for both evil and good, and just as well for evil as for good. We have seen in our very own time the terrifying spectacle of Hitler very nearly conquering the entire world through the power of belief in something which was not only manifestly untrue but profoundly evil.

This tremendous fact of belief, which is so constantly cultivated within the symbol-manipulating religions, is essentially ambivalent. The consequence is that religion as a system of beliefs has always been an ambivalent force. It give birth simultaneously to humility and to what the medieval poets called the 'proud prelate', the ecclesiastical tyrant. It gives birth to the highest form of art and to the lowest form of superstition, It lights the fires of charity, and it also lights the fires of the Inquisition and the fire that burned Servetus in the Geneva of Calvin. (1977:204-205).

Is mankind ready to listen to Schreber and learn from the lessons of Schreber and the likes of him?

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