

II.

The Eye of God: Dreams and Revelations in Revolutionary England

But yet I could wish that I had not so much to plead for the seasonableness of the Discourse, in an Age where Infidelity on the one hand, & Fanatical Enthusiasm on the other, seem to divide the greater part of the World; where some men look upon all Divine Revelations to be mere Dreams, others mistake their mere Dreams for Divine Revelations.

—J.A. Lowde, *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Dreams Mention'd in Scripture*, di. 6

For the Soul in *Dreams*, when the Body and sensual Powers of the outward elemental grossness are *asleep*, or *dead*... sees with an eternal Eye or Sight in the same measure like its Creator, whence it had its birth, and whose Image it beareth.

—Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Visions & Dreams*,
p. 219

Having examined different theories about the natural generation of dreams, we turn to consider how they intersected with belief in divine illumination, intellectual inspiration and different kinds of 'prophetic' insight. The last chapter distinguished between theories which aligned dreams with natural processes, and those which saw them as evidence that the mind could transcend the limits of the bodily senses in sleep. Individual theorists differed in the degree to which they saw these theories as exclusive or inclusive. Many were ready to believe in supernatural dreams, but saw them as miraculous in character. This meant that they could not be considered a natural or innate part of the soul's experience, but could be initiated only by the agency of a spirit or God himself. Theologians who insisted that divine and prophetic dreams were possible nonetheless found it necessary to defend this process in the language of rational philosophy, in order to distinguish true from false claims to inspiration, and rebuff any 'atheistic' suggestion that God did not work his power on nature.

A survey of England in the 1640s and 1650s shows growing interest in the capacity of individuals to receive inspiration through visions and dreams in both popular and intellectual contexts. Protestant dissidents had always shown

a tendency to turn toward private visionary experiences, which they believed represented the superior spiritual authority of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, dreams appeared as part of the discourse of Familists and antinomians, and also in the orthodox portraits that illustrated their deluded and demonic nature.¹ With the lapse of licensing controls in 1641 and the breakdown of Church governance over the course of the 1640s, many individuals were able to resort much more vocally to visionary spiritual experience in their religious professions. Dreams appear as divine guides or marks of corruption to the eyes of individual Presbyterians, independents and sectarians.² Both Carla Gerona and Katharine Hodgkin note their continuing importance in Quaker spirituality after the Restoration and in the American colonies.³ Reid Barbour and Janine Rivière emphasized the contrast English episcopalians drew between authorised writings and spaces of the Church which sacralised the imagination, and the distempered dreaming of their puritan and sectarian critics.⁴ Michael Heyd demonstrated that theologians employed the tools of medical and natural criticism to redefine expectations about the relationship between divine power and the natural world, supporting the censure of ‘vulgar’ prophets by dictating an attitude of scepticism toward contemporary incidences of the supernatural.⁵

My own approach to dreams in the context of prophetic knowledge will be to identify the primary intellectual sources for belief in the supernatural potential of dreams. As in the last chapter, I will identify how supernatural dreams were shown to be integrated with the sensory and mental powers of the soul. My analysis will draw on sources from several different genres, and they can be identified with different intellectual traditions. Several Protestant beliefs about dreams are traced back to the scholastic tradition of the medieval church, and compared with the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Jean Gerson. Occult dream theory is drawn from Everard’s translation of the Hermetic *Pymander*, Cornelius Agrippa’s *Occult Philosophy*, and the works of Jacob Boehme, principally the *Mysterium Magnum*. The distinctive dream theories available in these sources often go right to the heart of particular beliefs about man’s relationship to the divine, the nature of private and public knowledge, and what this implied about religious authority. The chapter is structured around major intellectual trends of the era in a partly chronological manner. It examines the relationship

¹ Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, p. 8–9; William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft so farre forth as it is reuealed in the Scriptures* (Cambridge, 1610), pp. 98–99; Freidrich Spanheim, *Englands vvarning by Germanies vvoe* (London, 1646), pp. 5–6, 11, 23–24.

² Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp. 73–103.

³ Katharine Hodgkin, ‘Dreaming Meanings: Some Early Modern Thoughts’, pp. 109–124; Gerona, *Night Journeys*, pp. 19–69.

⁴ Janine Rivière, ‘Visions of the Night’, pp. 109–138; Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture*, pp. 91–117.

⁵ Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable*; ‘The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth Century’, pp. 258–280.

between revelation and ministry in the writing of several prominent English protestant ministers, which contextualised theological discourses on the physiological mechanisms of prophecy. It observes how far popular Protestant culture ranged beyond their prescriptions, and how thinkers argued for the relevance of occult forms of prophecy with reference to astrology, to millennial ideology, the culture of Baconian experimental methodology, and mystical prophecy. The latter part of the chapter focuses on orthodox responses to the growth of radical prophetic claims in the 1640s and 1650s, including sceptical and materialist responses, and theological writings which were as sensitive to the perceived threat of educated atheism as to that of popular enthusiasm.

The focus on man's common spiritual senses contributed to a trend toward comparing waking visions, sleeping dreams, waking hallucinations and supernatural inspirations. As mental phenomena in a mimetic system of perception and cognition, dreams were on a spectrum of mental phenomena which enabled these categories to be contrasted or collapsed. For sceptics, calling hallucinations and figments a kind of 'waking dream' served the purpose of casting the value of contemporary 'visions' into doubt. My main argument, however, is that contrasts between sensory experiences of waking perceptions and the illusions of dreams are utilised repeatedly as a dialectical device for imagining the differences between waking, sleep and supernatural visions, from Gerson in the early fifteenth century to Tryon in 1689. The intent was to argue either for or against the existence of independent modes of sensory experience in natural and supernatural contexts. The question, as it was continually posed, demonstrates that an sensory and perceptual component to the spiritual discernment of dreams and visions had always been critical, and arguably took on even greater importance as different theorists confronted the 'scare' categories of enthusiasm, fideism and atheism, all of which represented potential threats to the vested authority of their theological formulas.

Religious Knowledge and the Limits of Nature

Central to the search for a new philosophical understanding of dreams was the question of how the authority of the senses, of reason, and of revelation—as the principal sources of knowledge in the Christian intellectual synthesis—should be ordered. In the seventeenth century, opinions were predicated on many competing visions of the scope of human perception and understanding and the shape and nature of the physical world. The laws that governed the relationship between the two, laws of ontological and epistemological necessity, and laws of ethical observance and moral prudence, had to be correctly discerned if they were to be obeyed. How could one trust the evidence of the senses, and particularly the eyes, in the case of visionary experiences like those of trances

and dreams? The centrality of revelation to the Christian faith meant that in a comprehensive metaphysics, conditions had to be theorised under which the testimony of the senses could be trusted in such circumstances. Almost as critical was developing an authoritative position on when apparent cases of divine inspiration were *not* to be trusted. Classical philosophy offered justifications for credulity or scepticism in the face of prophetic and inspired claims, and this was joined by influential medieval formulations, which continued to influence debate in this era. These critiques were balanced by an equally wide range of opinions about the circumstances and conditions under which prophecy was possible.⁶

In the Medieval Church, belief in the overlapping testimony of revelation and rational methods had been used to establish the authority of Scripture and of prophecy. In principle, this relationship continued in Reformation scholastic culture. Discourses on valid prophecy had traditionally sought to understand its extraordinary nature within the laws of God's creation. Like explanations of ordinary perceptions, cognitive processes, and the aberrations of dreams, these depended upon reasoning about the interactions between vital spiritual power and inanimate bodily matter, the meeting of two different kinds of substance, sometimes continuous with each other, sometimes opposed to each other. Whether genuine or false, extraordinary visions were explained as interruptions of man's normal cognitive state, whose physiological symptoms were in many ways comparable with those of sleep. The difference lay in the severity of the causes and the symptoms. When genuine, these were understood as 'abstractions'—a process whereby the mind became drawn in and fixated on supernatural perceptions. When visions were false they were defined as 'alienations'—states of hallucination caused by feverish imbalance in the imagination and the passions. Both represented extreme disjunction between the mind and the body, and the physiological mechanisms of sleep were invoked to explain the attendant phenomena of trance-like states, epileptic seizures and 'ecstatic' sleep. In 'abstraction', the occupation of the mind with divine essences represented an elevation above nature and a return to the divine 'nature' of the soul. In 'alienation', the mind was held in the grip of phantasms which obscured and distorted its intellectual powers, pushing it toward frenzied passions, carnal madness and animal irrationality.⁷

⁶ See Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, pp. 17–43; 'The Religious Background' pp. 396–400; Cocking, *Imagination: A Study*, pp. 1–68; Stuarck Clark, 'Afterword: Angels of Light and Images of Sanctity' in Clare Copeland and Jan Machielsen (eds), *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 281–285.

⁷ The concepts of abstraction and alienation and their relationship to the physiology of sleep are explored in a wide range of theological and philosophical texts, in the context of orthodox and occult theology, naturalistic scepticism and Reformed teachings on conscience and depravity. Concepts of abstraction are explored in the following authors and works: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Complete & Unabridged), trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province, Electronic Edition (Coyote

The similarity between these different states of abstraction and alienation, and their mutual display in physiological symptoms of sleep, trance and ecstasy, made the task of judging genuine prophecies problematic and even paradoxical from the standpoint of an observer. Aquinas defined many natural sources for ‘abstractions’ in addition to prophetic inspirations and the deceptive ‘alienations’ born of disease, madness and demonic artifice.⁸ ‘Prophetic’ movements in the soul, however, came ‘not from its own power, but from a power acting on it from above’.⁹ Within the context of these prophetic states, there were questions about the meaning and status of different kinds of vision. One of the most pertinent for this study related to the distinction between visions and dreams. Many writers—Peter of Celle, Jean Gerson, Thomas Nashe—used them in a binary fashion, contrasting divine ‘visions’ against the illusory ‘dreams’ of human fancy.¹⁰ Others, observing the role of sleep and trances in most inspired states, argued that they were either synonymous, or distinguished by the strength of the divine movement that acted on the soul.¹¹ Opposite states of ‘alienation’ associated with mental illness, where focus was on the catastrophic damage caused by overheated humours to bodily organs and the spiritual powers they mediated, had always been invoked by physicians

Canyon Press, 2010); William Perkins, *Lectures vpon the three first chapters of the Reuelation* (London, 1604); John Smith, *Select Discourses* (ed.) John Worthington (London, 1660); Moïse Amyraut, *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Dreams Mention'd in Scripture* (trans.) J.A. Lowde (London, 1676); and John Owen, *Pneumatologia* (London, 1676). Occult forms of abstraction, sometimes known as ‘Orphic’ modes of dreaming, are described in the *Divine Pymander* (trans.) John Everard (London, 1657); Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, (London, 1651); Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum* (London, 1654); and Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Dreams & Visions* (London, 1689). Discussions of the state and symptoms of alienation as form of moral, spiritual and physical disorder are drawn primarily from Richard Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621); Meric Casaubon, *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (London, 1654); Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (London, 1656); and Phillip Goodwin, *The Mystery of Dreames Historically Discoursed* (London, 1658) in his discussions of the ‘fleshly’ or ‘carnal’ mind, pp. 101—107.

⁸ Natural abstractions and the rapturous passions that sometimes accompanied them are explored in Aquinas, *Summa*, I.I, Q.12, Art. 11, Q.86, Art. 4; II.II, Q. 173, Art. 3., Q.175, Art. 2. Sleep gave space for minor impressions from the stars to reach the soul abstracted from the body, though they could not foretell the future in the way imagined by astrologers. When the body was weak almost to the point of death, the soul would begin to separate from the body and experience divine dreams. In prayer, the soul could be driven into a rapturous state in contemplation of God.

⁹ *Ibid.*, II.II, Q. 173, Art. 3.

¹⁰ Thus for Nashe, divine dreams were ‘rather visions than Dreames, extraordinarily sent from heauen to foreshew the translation of Monarchies’—*The Terrors of the Night*, di. 15. Peter of Celle, *The Letters of Peter of Celle*, p. 579; Jean Gerson, ‘Distinguishing True from False Revelations’ in *Early Works* (trans.) Brian McGuire (New York, 1998), p. 338.

¹¹ Since a waking vision precipitated a trance or sleep anyway, Smith judged that the difference ‘seems rather to lie in Circumstantialis then in any thing Essential’—*Select Discourses*, p. 181. Aquinas claimed that more power was required to wrench the perceptions of the soul from waking objects to divine ones, so waking visions were of a higher power and status to divine dreams. Q.174, Art. 1. Aquinas stated it was not merely an ecstasy but a ‘rapture’ – the mind of the soul was ‘taken up’, forcibly withdrawn from the senses it naturally tended toward and fixed on objects ‘beyond’. Q.175, Art. 2.

and theologians to marginalise the claims of prophetic claimants. Over the course of the seventeenth century this would become an influential mode of cultural critique in England.

By making prophecy a subject of technical definition, medieval scholastics like Thomas Aquinas and Jean Gerson sought criteria which could be used to create a rationale for what was popularly known as the 'discernment of spirits'. Aquinas' *Summa* dealt with prophecy as a 'gratuitous grace' in his analysis of the workings of the human soul. He defined prophetic phenomena in their various degrees and manifestations, and principally by the nature and scope of their objects, the means by which these objects were conveyed or mediated, and their effects upon the cognitive faculties.¹² Within these categories, Aquinas introduced many influential concepts. Analysis of how prophecy was conveyed perpetuated Patristic sources which classified the different ways God manifested himself to humanity in nature, either to the bodily senses, the imagination, or in 'naked' intellectual essence.¹³ There was the principle that different degrees of prophecy were distinguished according to the involvement, absence or relative strength of the imaginative faculty, placing the faculty at the heart of prophetic passions.¹⁴ It was said that divine knowledge was necessarily broader in scope than natural and demonic knowledge, because it encompassed contingent and providential truth, and because it was infallible.¹⁵

Gerson's writings were more influential when it came to applying and justifying the practice of discernment in the medieval and Counter-Reformation Church, which gave its personnel authority to arbitrate on the sanctity of people, places and objects. He dedicated as many words to defining the character of a suitable prophet as he did to defining inspiration itself.¹⁶ He defended the idea that

¹² Aquinas, *Summa*, II.II, Q. 174, esp. Art.2, Q 174, esp. Art. 1—3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Q.174, Art.1 The principle source of this classification was Augustine, but Aquinas also used a taxonomy of St. Isidore, which he absorbed into his own categories of the cognitive powers. See Clark, 'Angels of Light and Images of Sanctity', pp. 281—285.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Q.174, Art. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, Q.174, Art. 1, 3. Aquinas described a hierarchy of 'lesser' inspirations which merely inspired actions, moving upward to the revelation of truths within the order of nature, and ultimately to revelation of supernatural truth, providence and essence, above the order of nature. He also defined three different modes of prophecy—by foreknowledge, providence and denunciation—which had different relationships to the future, different purposes, and different senses of fulfilment. Denunciative told of cause and effect—if this, then this—and could be changed, especially by redemptive action, such as in the case of Jonah's prophecy to Ninevah. Providential was knowledge of the will of God and unchangeable. Foreknowing was to foresee the willed actions of human beings. The speculative and fallible knowledge given by demons in false oracles was defined in Q.57, Art. 3.

¹⁶ For discussion of the practise of discernment in the Catholic Church, see Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (London, 2003); Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*; Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, 1996); Katrina Olds, 'The Ambiguity of the Holy:

prophetic knowledge was reliably known by appealing to the common-sense certainty by which one distinguished waking from sleeping experiences, in spite of the fact dreamers often do not recognize they are asleep.¹⁷ The difference was that the experience of wakefulness was 'stronger and more vivid'.¹⁸ Knowledge of the divine was derived from an intuitive and tangible sense: 'a person through a certain intimate taste and experimental illumination senses a difference between true revelation and deceptive illusions'.¹⁹ In the same way, men were able to perceive when they had awoken from self-deception into 'the light-filled and brilliant day of humility'.²⁰ Paramount importance was invested in possessing the virtues of humility, discretion, patience and charity. A prophet would display 'discretion' in submission to worthy authority, and living in accordance with established rules for holy living. Only on this basis could he legitimately discern prophetic impressions in conformity with the truth. Gerson placed considerable stock in the idea that prophets did not seek their vocation, but would rather have shunned it: they were forced to adopt the mantle out of duty, and against their preference for humility.²¹

Prophecy in Protestant Thought

English Protestant writers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century had different goals from medieval scholastic writers. Typically Protestant theological writing found its audience in the lay community and the ministers who were expected to evangelize their congregations.²² The scholastics provided technical definitions whose formulations continued to accord with many elements of Protestant doctrine, and writers like Aquinas continued to exercise great influence over ideas about superstition, demonic powers and prophetic knowledge. However, Protestants tended to contrast extraordinary inspiration negatively against the free access afforded to Revelation by vernacular reading and Church teaching. This meant that conformity to a pattern of morality, doctrine and Church authority was stressed. The principle that the prophet was a man of good character, confirmed in his vocation by miraculous signs, was often invoked.²³ The idea of guidance by an 'intimate

Authenticating Relics in Seventeenth-Century Spain' in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 135-184.

¹⁷ Gerson, 'On Distinguishing True from False Revelations', pp. 334—364, esp. 351—352.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 334—364.

²² Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 6—2, 188—370. 553—588; John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603—1689* (New York, 1998), pp. 190—192; Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England*, pp. 331—375.

²³ William Perkins, *M. Perkins, his Exhortation to repentance, out of Zephaniah* (London, 1605), pp. 58—59. '[A]nd if God himselfe was so carefull to satisfie his Church in those dayes of the

taste' of the soul was often omitted, doubtless with some awareness of the dangerous precedents of Anabaptism and antinomianism. Lay engagement with dreams and prophecies was discouraged, and it was affirmed only insofar as it supported the authority of the ministers to practice it. Protestant ministry sought to repudiate the present authority of inspiration much more directly than their Catholic counterparts, who merely sought to arbitrate upon it. Popular access to Scripture was constantly stressed as abrogating the need for popular manifestations of prophecy, which was portrayed as a feature of Christianity's spiritual and historical infancy rather than its present institutional and scriptural maturity.²⁴

Prophetic experience was stressed as an 'extraordinary' means of divine communication, defined against the 'ordinary' means by which God taught usually taught truth to the soul. 'Ordinarie', wrote Perkins, was 'when Christ teacheth men by the word preached, and by his spirit'.²⁵ 'Ordinary' were also those methods instituted and inculcated by the ministry—reading, preaching and study of the Word, participation in the congregational and sacramental community, the spiritual experiences of repentance, conversion and assurance—and available to all in the life of the Church.²⁶ This was guaranteed by the presence of the Holy Spirit, an indwelling 'spirit of revelation' by which the elect came to know God. 'Extraordinary' means were to be understood as gratuitous gifts, which God bestowed particularly and providentially upon certain individuals. In 1657 the clergyman Robert Sanderson noted the sources of revelation before Scripture:

God revealed himself and his will frequently in old times, especially before the sealing of the Scripture-Canon in sundry manners: as by Visions, Prophecies,

vocation of his prophet, surely the church in these daies hath much more cause to doubt in such cases, and to require many and extraordinary signes, afore it acknowledge any such extraordinary calling'.

²⁴ For discussions of dreams in Protestant theological and homiletic literature, see William Perkins, *An exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (Cambridge, 1595), pp. 221–222 for types of dreams; *The Damned Art of Witchcraft*, pp. 92–104 for nature as prognostications; *The combat betweene Christ and the Diuell displayed* (London, 1606), p.37 for their identification with demonic visions; *M. Perkins, his Exhortation to repentance, out of Zephaniah*, pp. 14–15, 57–59 for the censure of heretical revelations. See also Richard Greenham, *The workes of the reuerend and faithfull seruant of Iesus Christ M. Richard Greenham* (London, 1612), pp. 10, 216–235; James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie* (London, 1645), pp. 117, 121, 150; Robert Sanderson, *Fourteen Sermons Heretofore Preached* (London, 1657), pp. 324–325; Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (London, 1673), pp. 407, and see 521–522 for associations with the sin of adultery. The literature is representative of authors from across the spectrum of Reformed Protestantism, from evangelical puritans to episcopal churchmen and nonconformists.

²⁵ Perkins, *A commentarie or exposition, vpon the fiue first chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge, 1604), p. 36. See pp. 37–39 on the nature of the prophetic office.

²⁶ Perkins, *Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 36–39; *Lectures vpon the three first chapters of the Reuelation* (London, 1604), pp. 73–74, 115; Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603–1689*, pp. 194, 197–201; Spurr, *The Restoration Church*, pp. 279–375; Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism*, p. 553–566.

Extacies, Oracles, and other supernatural means, and namely, and among the rest, by Dreams.²⁷

Protestant theologians defined the historical revelations of the Scriptures conventionally as 'ecstasies' and 'trances' physiologically similar to sleep, in which 'onely the mind and soule [are] working': a state again reminiscent of dreaming.²⁸ The effect of the supernatural motion of the holy spirit on the mind was to 'draw it from fellowship with the bodie and all the senses, to haue fellowship with God, that so the spirit of God may enlighten it with light and knowledge of things which are to reuealed to it'.²⁹ Such passions were extraordinary because they functioned 'aboue the order of nature.'³⁰

Despite their supernatural and experiential nature, it was nonetheless considered a carnal error to mistake these extraordinary gifts for superior expressions of God's truth. Richard Greenham explained that 'the Lord taught his people by visions and by dreames', and by demonstration of miracles, 'when the Law was written, because the Gospel was not yet reuealed'.³¹ In Scripture, the Christian received the whole pattern of truth, disclosed in the life of Christ. Its testimony was public, its status as an objective source of revelation secured by a continuous history of witnesses, and a community of enlightened interpreters. All of this distinguished it from from the vagaries of the individual imagination, and the partial nature of inspired mediation. '[W]e are to be greatly thankfull to God, for that he hath not left vs to doubtfull dreames,' Greenham wrote, 'but hath giuen vs the certaintie of the word written.'³² In light of the wholeness and sufficiency of the Scriptural revelation, the need for extraordinary mediation of truth was abated, its use supplanted. Protestant authors were concerned to define the legitimate nature of a spirit of prophecy and prophesying in the Church, positively identified with the traditions of Scripture, but wholly at odds with 'new' and false revelations. Through its roots in the Word, the daily religious life of the church was suffused with the prophetic, manifesting itself in the pious zeal which defined 'enthusiasm' in its untainted sense, and in the individual's witness to the work of God's saving grace in his own life, the testimony of which was known as a 'prophesying'.³³ Divines found it necessary to defend the legitimate place that godly zeal retained at the core of their theology in an era haunted by the spectre of heretical 'enthusiasms'. Since visions, dreams and 'extraordinary manifestations of the will and power of God' had ceased to be of 'ordinary and familiar use',

²⁷ Sanderson, *Fourteen Sermons*, p. 324.

²⁸ Perkins, *Lectures vpon the three first chapters of the Reuelation*, p. 72.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³¹ Greenham, *The Workes*, p. 228.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³³ Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith*, pp. 75–76.

said Sanderson, the believer 'ought rather to suspect delusion in them, than to expect direction from them'.³⁴ Inverting the correct order between Scripture and ecstatic experience was an entrance on the road to heresy, repeatedly exemplified in Protestant writings who linked them to the beliefs of the German Anabaptists and the events of the Peasant War of 1525.³⁵

Protestant authorities attempted to control the phenomena of prophecy through a particular way of reading scripture. This position, however, was not supported unequivocally by Protestant clergy, nor in the popular religious culture of England. To begin with, the censure of dream and visions as extraordinary paths to revelation did not fully encapsulate the contingent and particular nature of many of God's providential interventions. The prophetic could be part of the particular working of providence and the fulfillment of Scriptural promises, a judgment upon the moral decline of society, or the failings of the clergy.³⁶ Robert Sanderson said that God could elect to use extraordinary means, 'in the want of the ordinary means of the Word, Sacraments, and Ministry', for 'the present necessities of his Church', or 'for some other just cause perhaps unknown to us'.³⁷ Contradiction persisted in the wider religious culture, where providential dreams could be found prominently featured in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.³⁸ If dreams could not be seen as ordinary methods of illumination, neither did all believe they could be dismissed in contemporary times. Many assented to the idea that dreams remained within the powers and offices of angels as they administered the divine will to the elect.³⁹ The many different spheres in which God intervened made it difficult to produce definitive statements on what constituted the bounds and limits of the

³⁴ Sanderson, *Fourteen Sermons*, p. 324.

³⁵ Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable*, pp. 11–19.

³⁶ Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England*, pp. 203–218; Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, pp. 1–58.

³⁷ Sanderson, *Fourteen Sermons*, p. 324.

³⁸ John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments* (1563 ed.) Bk. 3, p. 452-453: 'By these and suche lyke prophecies it is euident to vnderstand, the tyme not to be farre of, whan God of his determinat prouidence was disposed to reforme and to restore his churche.' Also Bk. 3, p. 485, and 1583 Ed., Bk. 12, p.2098. Nevertheless, the *Acts* strongly condemned 'Monkische dreames' – see (1583 ed.), Bk. 3, p. 175: 'For what cannot either the idle vanitie of mans head, or the deception of the lying spirite worke by man: in foreshewing such earthly euentes as happen commonly in this present world? But here is a difference to be vnderstood betwene these earthly dreames, speaking of earthly things, and matters of humaine superstition, & betwene other spiritual reuelations sent by God touching spirituall matters of the Church, pertayning to mans saluation.' [online editions at www.johnfoxe.org, accessed 07 Feb 2013].

³⁹ See Thomas Heywood, *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels* (London, 1635), p. 197–200, 221–226, 463; Henry Lawrence, *An history of angells being a theologicall treatise of our communion and warre with them* (London, 1649), pp.13, 35–38; Joseph Hall, *The Invisible World* (London, 1659), p. 43; Benjamin Camfield, *A theological discourse of angels and their ministries* (London, 1678), pp. 61, 87, 89–91, 96, 157; Amyraut, *Divine Dreams Mention'd in Scripture*, pp. 119–132; Raymond, *Milton's Angels*, pp. 351–354; Cameron, 'Angels, Demons, and Everything in Between', pp. 33–39; Sangha, 'Incorporeal Substances', pp. 274–276.

'prophetic'. Summing up this paradox, Sanderson said that 'He hath prescribed us, but he hath not limited himself'.⁴⁰

Of equal and sometimes greater importance in defining attitudes toward contemporary prophecy were the cultural drives toward spiritual reformation and the cult of millennialism, which had their ideological roots in the heart of the Reformation itself. Luther's decision to frame the break from Rome as a prelude to the apocalypse tied the movement to enduring millennial and eschatological traditions in the popular history of Christianity. This tradition maintained its hold on the Protestant imagination even though every one of the primary confessional communities had rejected doctrines including explicit millennial beliefs.⁴¹ Theologians seeking to suppress their significance claimed that verses like Joel 2:28 ('Their young men shall see visions and their old men shall dream dreams') had already been fulfilled when they were preached in the time of the Apostles. However, others read these passages as immediate to the apocalyptic rather than the apostolic age.⁴² Also close to the heart of the Reformation was the rejection of corrupt modes of religion on the basis of an illuminated reading of Scripture, which proved the seed for strong separatist and 'anti-formalist' tendencies within Protestant societies, as individuals and groups developed divergent readings of scripture and its ethical demands. This led to a long history of dissent and schism over spiritual and theological matters in England as elsewhere—from the early church separatist, Anabaptist and brownist movements to the divisions from 1640 between a core of Presbyterians, Congregationalists and independents believers, and a diverse fringe of antinomian, sectarian and nonconformist groups—and to a growing demand for political recognition of liberty for religious conscience.⁴³

Eschatology and the fissiparous nature of Protestant spirituality were not the only legacies of the Reformation that proved disruptive to religious discipline. Criticism of the religious authority of the Catholic Church was often joined to criticism of the scholastic institutions which adapted philosophical beliefs to its doctrines. While Protestant theologians were often deeply indebted to

⁴⁰ Sanderson, *Fourteen Sermons*, p. 324.

⁴¹ Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, pp. 13–97; Jue, 'Puritan Millennialism in Old and New England', pp. 259–268; Cunningham and Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, pp. 19–91.

⁴² Richard Greenham provides the orthodox reading: 'The plaine meaning then of this place is, that whereas God did in the old time reueale his will vnto some by visions and by dreames, now al sorts of men young and old, man and maide shall be instructed in the knowledge of God more plentifully and more perfittly.' Greenham, *The Workes*, p. 229. For the millennial interpretation of Joel 2:28, see Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, p. 89 and Robert Maton, *Christs personall reigne on earth, one thousand yeares with his saints* (London, 1652), pp. 24–25; Comenius, *A Generall Table of Europe*, p. 185.

⁴³ John Morrill, 'The Puritan Revolution', in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, pp. 67–88; Como, 'Radical Puritanism, c. 1558-1660', pp. 241–258; Como, *Blown By The Spirit*; Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge*; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*.

scholastic thought, many other Protestants were influenced by cultures of intellectual iconoclasm which repudiated the Aristotelian synthesis of the scholastics on moral, technical or ideological grounds. They looked instead to the writings, methods and alleged discoveries of alternative authorities, including the Renaissance Neoplatonist philosophers, mystical, occult and kabbalist writers like Agrippa, Robert Fludd and Boehme, the medical revolutionaries Paracelsus and Van Helmont, and the inductivist experimental programme of Francis Bacon.⁴⁴ All of these offered alternative philosophical visions which were expected to reveal how God's creation truly worked, and by implication, produce knowledge of instrumental value to the work of moral and spiritual reform, the restoration of human stewardship over nature, and the accomplishment of God's providential plan for mankind. These ideas challenged the religious attitude that human reason and arts were unable to penetrate the mystery of nature, and that it was presumptuous for them to attempt to do so. It opened up the possibility that moral virtue in the pursuit of knowledge presented an alternative route to revealing truths that reflected the nature of God and his plans for the world.⁴⁵

Philosophical eclecticism meant that beliefs about the potential to use human arts of observation and technical crafts to interrogate the natural world were open to individuals of diverse religious and intellectual commitments. It crossed Catholic and Protestant intellectual culture, and created an intimate connection between the study of natural wonders, eschatological belief and polemical propaganda, especially in Lutheran Germany. No less important a figure than Philip Melancthon believed that the soul possessed a natural prophetic instinct that expressed itself in dreams, and this was, as we shall examine next, a central claim of the principal sources of occult philosophy of the time.⁴⁶ This tradition penetrated from the Continent, where J.H. Alsted's interests in the occult informed his influential work as a millenialist, and into England, inspiring the similar scholarly enterprises of Joseph Mede. It was also in England that a generation of Protestant thought was influenced by Bacon's inductivist approach to philosophy, which encouraged them to treat claims about occult powers and properties experimentally rather than dogmatically.⁴⁷ Occult ideas could inspire or feed the ideas of religious dissidents and self-proclaimed prophets, both prior to and in the midst of the revolutionary era.⁴⁸ This experimental culture dictated that a range of ancient beliefs about the soul's ability to discern prophetic knowledge by a native and occult power became a matter of individual belief and judgment.

⁴⁴ Menn, 'The Intellectual Setting', pp. 33—86

⁴⁵ Harrison, *The Rise of Natural Science; The Fall of Man; Webster, The Great Instauration*.

⁴⁶ Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, pp. 13—58; 96—97.

⁴⁷ Popkin, *The Third Force*, pp. 90—119.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp. 73—104, 185—226.

The Sources of Occult Dream Theory

Spiritualist ideology, eschatological culture and philosophical innovation came together to define a broad space in Protestant culture for faith in the 'progressive' nature of divine revelation.⁴⁹ These millennial, anti-formalist and reforming attitudes were potent ideological forces in England's tumultuous mid-century, contributing to disruptive social and political practices, and actively seeking to change the institutional basis and character of intellectual knowledge. The divisions between different philosophers and thinkers was often drawn over the degree to which one particular component of knowledge – inspiration, experience, scripture, logical or 'speculative' reason – was perceived to be the arbitrating force. This is often defined as the search for 'first principles' in religious and philosophical knowledge.⁵⁰ Claims about the soul's capacity to access prophetic knowledge were often made in this context, and the physiological and categorical importance of dreaming was implicated. The association of dreaming with the state of sleep, of abstraction from the body, and of innate and shared spiritual capacities formed part of a powerful network of ideas that included divine inspiration and visions. In this section we will examine four influential sources of occult ideas about the soul: the Bible, Hermetic texts, Agrippa's occult Neoplatonism, and Jacob Boehme's mystical writing. We will also examine a number of thinkers who drew upon or responded to these sources, including the Congregationalist minister William Bridge, the Quaker George Whitehead (1637–1724), the spiritual reformer Jan Amos Comenius, the humanist and Baconian polymath John Beale, and the mystical theosophists Thomas Tryon, Jane Lead (1624–1704), and Francis Lee (1661–1719).

The Bible itself was a principal site for conflict over the status and authority of claims to inspired knowledge, whether centered on the spiritual instincts of believers or the legitimacy of occult metaphysics. The argument over the role of inspiration in religious conscience cut right to the heart of the sectarian crisis in England, and is illustrated by the arguments of William Bridge for strict scripturalism as the arbiter of religious experience, and the critique of his position by the Quaker author William Whitehead.⁵¹ In *Scripture-Light the Most Sure Light* (1656), Bridge produced an inventory of the most popularly understood sources of human knowledge in his day, listing revelations and visions, natural and supernatural dreams, spiritual impressions, the conscience, divine providence, Christian experience, humane reason and judicial astrology.

⁴⁹ See Como, 'Radical Puritanism, c. 1558-1660', p. 248 for this definition.

⁵⁰ Harrison, *The Fall of Man*, p. 5. See also pp. 89–138.

⁵¹ See William Bridge, *Scripture-light the most sure light* (London, 1656) and George Whitehead, *The law and light within the most sure rule or light* (London, 1662).

He asserted the superiority of Scripture over all of these. Revelations and dreams were judged a lower kind of knowledge because their sensual nature promoted 'carnal' certainty, and were therefore suited to men of weak faith.⁵² In a response to Bridge's book, the Quaker William Whitehead contended the elevation of Scripture over prophetic gifts was illogical, not only because the Scripture was brought into the world by revelation, but because it contradicted the higher spiritual authority of the Apostles, who were inspired by visions, dreams and the Holy Spirit.⁵³ Bridge and Whitehead represent the extreme ideological poles of the religious crisis in England. On the one hand, Quakers like Whitehead were the first to assert the complete primacy of spiritual illumination over the authority of Scripture. Equally, however, Bridge's scripturalism was of an extreme cast which rejected the role of human instincts and experience in discerning spiritual truth, which had been endorsed by medieval scholars like Gerson as a means of attaining certainty. Ultimately, doctrinal commitments forced Bridge to admit that God's providence might impose a duty to obey a supernatural injunction from God in a dream, but this admission was couched in a strong rhetoric which demanded such things should be rejected under anything less than extreme compunction. He was particularly suspicious of the argument from 'spiritual taste' and experience.⁵⁴ Such hostility was fuelled by the escalating doubts over both experiential and rational means of discernment, fuelled by increasing disenchantment with the perceived chaos and fecundity of popular religious dissent, confessional fracture and fear of demonic influence over politics and society.

Interpretations of the Bible and its relationship to the rest of human history also formed a central point of contention in advocating for or against 'occult' forms of knowledge. The occult tradition cast magic as the epitome of both theological and philosophical wisdom, and seized on clues in Scripture to attribute the skills of the magician to God's most honoured patriarchs and prophets. A host of hermetic texts, as well as apocryphal 'lost' or 'forbidden' scriptures credited humanity's knowledge of philosophy, arts and magic to divine revelations and contact with angels during the lives of godly men like Adam, Abraham, Enoch, Moses and Solomon.⁵⁵ Biblical figures were usually credited as having invented or trained in the occult knowledge practised by the ancient civilisations of Egypt and Chaldea. Moses, Agrippa claimed, was 'learned in all the knowledge of the

⁵² Bridge, *Scripture-light the most sure*, pp. 14–15.

⁵³ Whitehead, *The law and light within*, pp. 4–6.

⁵⁴ 'Then what an uncertainty wil here be, that your whol Salvation shall hang upon, and be ruled by your own Tast[e]' — Bridge, *Scripture-light the most sure*, pp.17–18; see also 25–27 on spiritual impressions, and 30–33 for the superiority of scripture over experience and human reason.

⁵⁵ Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London* (Oxford, 2005) pp. 55–56, 190–199; Ariel Hessayon, 'Og King of Bashan, Enoch and the Books of Enoch: Extra-Canonical Texts and Interpretations of Genesis 6:1-4 in Ariel Hessayon and Nicholas Keene (eds), *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 5–40.

Caldeans and Aegyptians'.⁵⁶ The Elizabethan astrologer Thomas Hill observed from the historian Trogus that Joseph 'first founde out this laudable Arte of the interpretation of dreames, although Philo attribute this inue[n]tio[n] vnto Abraha[m] his great gra[n]dfather'.⁵⁷ Richard Saunders, an occult physician and astrologer of the mid-century, presented the prophet Daniel as an expert diviner who 'perfectly knew all the Sciences of the Chaldeans'. He observed the Pharaoh's temperament, affections, desires and actions, to discover the meaning of the his dreams 'by his liesure, study, sobriety, and solitude', and employed 'Geomantic figures, and arts'. He joined these efforts with knowledge garnered from 'the secret Theurgick Revelations (for without them a man can do nothing)'.⁵⁸

Such claims were vigorously denied by orthodox theologians, who instead presented key episodes of the Bible as refuting occult magic and rebuking its practitioners. Interpretations of Biblical history had always been central to the attempt of various Protestant scholars to ostracise illicit species of religious practice, from Patristic works that condemned pagan religion and defined rival sects as heretical, to seventeenth-century writings against Anabaptism. These works associated pagan religion, divination and magic with Satanic conspiracy, and confounded old and new religious beliefs as manifestations of the same heresies.⁵⁹ In these histories or *heresiographies*, dreams were commonly associated with pagan oracles and heretical prophets, and identified as demonic inspirations. In the same way that Protestant theologians divided up the unfolding of God's grace and truth into chronological epochs—the age of the law, the age of spirit and the age of the Word—so was there a parallel representation of Satan's war against truth. Phillip Goodwin's *Mystery of Dreams* recounted these epochs, as the time of ancient idols and oracles which competed with Israel, and after Christ's passion, the emergence of heretical movements with the explicit aim of perverting Christian religion. Satan's methods always represented a corruption and inversion of divine institutes, and this was also the case in the order of prophecy. William Perkins explained:

God hath reuealed his will to the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, by familiar conference, by dreams, by inspiration, by Trances: In the same maner, Satan hath his Diuinors, and Soothsayers, his Pythonisses, his Cassandras, his Sibylles,

⁵⁶ Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*, p. 524.

⁵⁷ Thomas Hill, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, di. 3. Trogus himself wrote that Joseph 'made himself master of the arts of magic', was 'eminently skilled in prodigies' and 'the first to establish the science of interpreting dreams' — Marcus Junianus Justinus, 'Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus' (trans.) Rev. John Selby Watson (London, 1853) [<http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/justin/english/trans36.html>, accessed online 08 Feb 2013].

⁵⁸ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie*, pp. 31-34.

⁵⁹ Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (London, 1993), pp.1-15; Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law*, pp. 1—62.

to whome he maketh knowne things to come, by familiar presence, by dreames, &c.⁶⁰

The Anabaptists 'had their curious conceits of reuelation, partly in dreames', and the elders of the Familist sect were confirmed in their status by 'strong Illusions, both waking and sleeping in visions and dreames'.⁶¹

Mainstream theologians also identified magicians with evil counsellors and with anti-prophets. Exegetical works that interpreted the stories of Joseph and Daniel refuted the role of the occult in their ability to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and the Pharaohs: their interpretations were not divined by them but revealed by God. The views of several commentators were summarised by Andrew Willet in his annotations on these biblical episodes in the *Hexapla in Genesin* (1605, 1633) and *Hexapla in Danielem* (1610). The claim that Joseph and Daniel learned Chaldean arts during their education at Babylon or Cabbalism was denied. The divine prophet was contrasted with the wise men and astrologers in the courts of Nebuchadnezzar and the Pharaohs, who were accused of defiling themselves by seeking knowledge of the future from the dead, and hence being deceived by evil spirits. In confrontation with magicians, God's prophets threw the division between sacred and profane knowledge into sharp relief, as in the contest between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians who turned their rods into serpents by magical deceit. In the New Testament, Simon Magus was identified as the 'arch-heresiarch', and was accused in some texts of seducing his followers by using magic to create deceitful dreams.⁶²

The Bible was the site of contested interpretations about the role of occult ideas in history, but most of these had their origins in the many different sources of ancient philosophy available to readers of the early modern period. Theories of natural and occult prophecy were available in many venerated writers of Greek and Roman descent. Even Aristotle and Plato had writings which could support belief in occult divination, though this required ignoring or dismissing the plain scepticism and even contempt they displayed toward claims of inspired knowledge. As we saw in the last chapter, belief in the prophetic powers of divination and inspired dreams were clear and evident in other classical

⁶⁰ Perkins, *The Damned Art of Witchcraft*, di. 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

⁶² Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum* (London, 1633) and *Hexapla in Danielem* (Cambridge, 1610). For the nature of Daniel's learning see *Danielem*, pp. 22, and the nature of the wise men 40–41. The figure of Daniel was particularly dangerous, because his observance of strict asceticism and food taboos could easily be interpreted as part of common occult or contemplative disciplines. Willet argued that Daniel's asceticism was to be understood solely through the Pauline doctrines of Corinthians 8:10, as an attempt to protect his conscience and his testimony. See *Danielem*, pp. 24–40. Not only did scripture refute the arts of magicians, but Willet went on to claim that 'most of the heretics were magicians', from Simon Magus to Menander, Marcious, and the corrupt Roman pope, Gregory VIII. See *Danielem*, p. 24.

sources however. The Elizabethan astrologer Thomas Hill observed that divination was expansively studied and held in 'great price and estimatio[n]' by almost every kind of worthy and private individual, in the civilisations of the Romans, Grecians, Arabians, Chaldeans and Egyptians, who directed their 'wayghty affaires' by the judgment of soothsayers and wise men. In revolutionary England, these ancient beliefs could be accessed through translations of the Hermetica, a collection of texts from late antiquity which blended Neoplatonic philosophy with ritual magic and alchemy, and through Agrippa's work, which popularized the lore of Renaissance Neoplatonism and students of natural magic.⁶³

In a Hermetic text like the *Pymander*, the soul was not simply related to God by virtue of his identity as a created being, but was derived originally from his essence as an 'emanated' being. It was directly dependent upon him for his vitalizing power and the actuation of the mind. Thought was a product of participation, whereby the light of knowledge was mediated to man through the ethereal essences of the universe—the super-subtle celestial spirits described in the last chapter—which moved together with the divine mind as the *anima mundi* or 'Soul of the World'.⁶⁴ This meant the soul possessed a natural connection to the divine: but in divinatory and magical practise, it was also the basis for creating instrumental knowledge. By drawing connections between the natural world and the higher metaphysical orders of the heavens, and beyond them the hierarchies of spirits, occult philosophers were confident that these relations could be reliably mapped, and used not only to calculate and interpret, but to manipulate cause and effect. The magus or magician acted in the role of a natural prophet when he practised the divinatory arts, and in the role of a priest when he practised the theurgic rites and ceremonial magic of the kind described in the third book of Agrippa's *Occult Philosophy*.⁶⁵

In the *Pymander*, the ethereal imagination appears to be a dynamic power and essence through which soul, the body and the divine could interact in different ways according to their dispositions: the absence of mind and imagination was seen in sleep, the presence of the intellect in divinatory dreams, and the return of the intellect to the divine in divinations and revelations that revealed God's essence. Sleep itself was explained as the consequence of the withdrawal of this actuating power from the soul: 'for manytimes the Minde [of God] fl[i]es away from the Soul, and in that hour the Soul neither seeth nor heareth, but is like an

⁶³ Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, pp. 1–90; Cocking, *Imagination: A Study*, pp. 69–88; Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, pp. 101–110; D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demoniac Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (London, 1958), pp. 291–301; 36–5, 85–106. See a comparison of the influence of Neoplatonic thought on Bonaventure to the Aristotelianism of Aquinas in Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition*, pp. 291–301.

⁶⁴ 'Trismegistus', *Divine Pymander*, pp. 68–69.

⁶⁵ Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*, pp. 1–5.

unreasonable thing'.⁶⁶ God was always discernable in patterns of the natural world through divination while waking, or by spiritual perceptions in sleep: 'For with this living wight alone is God familiar; in the night by dreams, in the day by Symbols or Signes'.⁶⁷ It was also claimed that a prepared soul could experience union with God while the body slept:

[The Divine Mind] shining stedfastly upon, and round about the whole Minde, it enlighteneth all the Soul; and loosing it from the Bodily Senses and Motions, it draweth it from the Body, and changeth it wholly into the Essence of God.⁶⁸

Agrippa described both terrestrial, celestial and spiritual origins for preternatural dreams.⁶⁹ Terrestrial causes included absorbing phantasms imprinted on the air by violent acts, resulting in clairvoyant dreams, or the projection of mental images through vapours and virtues, or through the air over long distances, transmitted by a special power of the imagination. They could also be manipulated or induced by the virtues of certain stones, or by unguents which infused particular phantasms into the imagination.⁷⁰ The forms of dreams, like other imaginations, could be forcibly impressed into physical forms by passionate arousal. A 'vehement cogitation', Agrippa explained, would 'picture out' its figure in the imagination, and the blood would impress that figure on the bodily members that it nourished. By such dreams, men had grown horns in the night or been transformed from boys to men. The body also possessed an occult power to influence other bodies through its motions and the corporeal vapours they stirred.⁷¹ Celestial dreams were caused when rays from astrological bodies transmitted their species through the air, impressing themselves in the imagination. The sensitivity of souls to these virtues was enhanced if either the soul or the influence of the stars themselves moved his spirits into a 'fury' or 'ecstasy', in which the transformation of melancholic spirits into a refined, fiery substance powerfully attracted intellectual virtues, usually associated with Saturn.⁷² Higher spiritual inspirations took a variety of forms. First, melancholic frenzies also had the power to attract spirits that 'possessed' the mind or came to reside within its sphere. Second, the cultivation of religious virtues, and ascetic and ritual purifications, all prepared the mind for higher inspirations dictated by the stars. Third, the soul itself could transcend its own powers of understanding and merge with the higher intelligences in the divine hierarchy. In this state, divine knowledge would be

⁶⁶ Trismegistus', *Divine Pymander*, p. 69.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶⁹ Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*; Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic*, p.117—134; Copenhaver, 'Astrology and Magic', pp. 264—266.

⁷⁰ Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*, pp. 14—16, 29, 91.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142—143, 144—145, 323—324.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 131—133.

mediated directly to the mind, and from the mind into the imagination, rather than vice-versa. The soul achieved its highest potential, and became a perfect image of the divine – capable of working miracles and expounding prophecy.⁷³

The belief that union was achieved between the soul and God when imbalance and discord in the powers of the body and mind were overcome was common to most occult systems. It was through subordinating the unruly and corrupt energies of the body to the power of the soul that one became receptive to and synergistic with the movements of nature. When synergy between the soul and God was fully realized, its inner divinity was fully actualised and it became an extension of the divine mind itself. The same principles can be found in Jacob Boehme's writings. The central claim of Behmenism was that all things must undergo differentiation and conflict in order to achieve a higher state of perfection, and that this was played out through productive movements of the soul's desires and thoughts in the ethereal forms of the imagination.⁷⁴ In the *Mysterium Magnum*, the nature of the prophetic spirit was explained in terms of a spiritual struggle between carnal and spiritual desires, which gradually brought the will into subordination to the divine will. The result was alignment between the mind, the spirit and the natural world. Like Agrippa, Boehme spoke of the 'divine figure', or original power that lay within the soul, and through which it was connected to or 'grounded' in the divine once regenerated.⁷⁵ Divine vision required that 'Mans will resteth in God' so that the soul would see 'with Gods Eyes from its most inward Ground'.⁷⁶ The elision of the will would unite the soul to God through its inner divine principle, making it a conduit through which divine forms would model themselves in the imagination. This was manifested as a radical transformation of the soul's consciousness, demonstrated in the example of the prophet, whose words projected an aspect of the providential mind. The figure in each prophetic soul was 'a limit wherein a Time is included, or an Age Comprehended', giving him authority to speak God's will as 'the Mouth of that Kingdome or Dominion'.⁷⁷

Mystical and illuminist ideas appealed to religious radicals because of their focus on inner transformation rather than outward religious forms as the means toward salvation. They were egalitarian inasmuch as they bypassed the

⁷³ Ibid. For dreams as divinations caused by stars and spirits see pp. 131–134, on how the soul becomes a worker of miracles p. 357, spirits and the dreams they inspire pp. 410–411, preparing oneself for divine oracles pp. 447–449, on prophetic dreams pp. 511–512, ritual and occult preparation pp. 514–515, virtues of abstinence and purity pp. 522–526, and on obtaining oracles through prayer pp. 538–539.

⁷⁴ Boehme, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 25–31; Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography*, pp. 102–114; Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, pp. 106–107.

⁷⁵ Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, pp. 502–504.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 503, also 501, 504–505.

⁷⁷ Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, pp. 503–504.

official machinery of religion, and emphasized moral self-knowledge rather than institutionalised learning as the gateway to spiritual truth. They were powerful sources of inspiration for radical thinkers not just during the revolution, but in the puritan underground prior to 1640, and after the Restoration in 1660.⁷⁸ Both mysticism and natural magic fostered a view in which there was continuity between man's ultimate destiny and his natural scope, his place in the universe: the soul of a prophet represented a higher degree of spiritual, moral and intellectual development, and the actualization of its divine potential expressed itself through the revelations of visions and dreams. Though mysticism and occultism emphasised the ability of the soul to achieve unity with the abstract and immaterial world through the independent operation of thought, a power intrinsic to its own nature, the gnostic and mystery traditions which sprung from it ultimately embraced a path to enlightenment in which the soul learned through a dialogue between the imperfect and perfect essences inherent in the world of nature and of spiritual beings. The intrinsic potential of the soul was discovered not in an autonomous ascent to truth, but instead through a dialogue with spirits and angels which communicated and in some sense embodied those truths. While the magician interacted with the world by experimenting with magical instruments, the Behmenist illuminist meditated on the shape of the soul and on ministering spirits to change his desires and perceptions. The ultimate expression of the organic principle was that all forms of knowledge flowed from God, and that knowledge itself was synonymous with divine consciousness. Union flowed not from the understanding of the intellect, but in a shared form or essence deep within the soul. Its nature was expressed not as intellectual knowledge, but based instead on purity of inclination and instinct which was thought to align the will and the desire of the soul with the divine.

The Critique of Supernatural Discernment

One did not have to be a natural magician or a Behmenist to believe in the supernatural power of dreams. Neoplatonists of the Italian Renaissance who may have been better than Agrippa at protecting their outward reputation as pious Christians, men like Ficino and Cardano, wrote variously about the powers of dreams and visions. Melancthon, as we have said, believed they could be prognostic. Religious thinkers who subscribed to more conventional

⁷⁸ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp. 107—181.

creeds and forms of piety in England were familiar with the Hermetic texts and writings by Boehme in the mid-seventeenth century. If we have identified a broad selection of clergymen who probably espoused a form of spiritual vitalism to support their arguments about the sinful nature of dreams, Philip Goodwin remains unique among them for supporting his point with a reference to the first century thaumaturge Iamblichus. John Beale, to whom we turn later, drew on the *Pymander* amongst other classical sources. These writings, part and parcel of the culture of radical and prophetic religion in revolutionary England, can be contrasted with reactionary works which contested their physiological and metaphysical claims. Where occultists saw divine ecstasies and inspired sleep, more conservative English theologians and materialist philosophers would diagnose bodily dysfunction, passionate distemper and mental disturbance. This triggered an intense discussion over the nature of man's spiritual and body senses, and subjected old arguments about the possibility of rational and spiritual discernment in supernatural visions and dreams to renewed scrutiny.

The anti-enthusiastic writings by several theologians in the revolutionary period are familiar to most historians, their importance established by Michael Heyd in providing a philosophical and medical basis to the new code of 'reasonable' and 'civil' religious sensibility in the post-Reformation period. Meric Casaubon and Henry More applied the tools of natural scepticism to support and further rationalize the orthodox doctrine that prophetic inspiration was wholly supplanted by Biblical scholarship and pastoral ministry. They focused their efforts on describing in detail how human ignorance led to extraordinary natural effects being mistaken for divine power in the eyes of observers. The identification of deceptive trances and fits with bodily diseases had a long history in medical literature, and in the seventeenth century it had entered popular consciousness particularly through the work of Richard Burton, who identified these disorders with the morbid nature of the human imagination and its manifestation in many forms of corrupt religion, including pagan, Roman, enthusiastic and overzealous puritanism.⁷⁹ Casaubon used his own dreams as an example of how mental hallucinations could affect the passions and body in an identical way to external agents, and so could not be called proof of the divine.⁸⁰ More stated that the causes of natural ecstasy were the same as those of sleep, but 'more intense and excessive'. Because the mind was totally deprived of outward sense, the phantasms impelled by the body's inward passion and fancy appeared 'at least as strong and vigorous as it is at any time in beholding things awake'. Being so strong, they sealed the memory with equal power to waking vision – and consequently, the enthusiast awoke

⁷⁹ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, pp. 714–736.

⁸⁰ Casaubon, *Concerning Enthusiasme*, pp. 84–85.

from his trance or fit and took 'his dreams for True Histories and real Transactions'.⁸¹

The sceptical treatises of Casaubon and More were robust defences of the received orthodox position on the contemporary status of prophecy in Protestant religion and in English society. At the same time, their rhetoric displays a hard-line drift which, not unlike Bridge's dogmatic scripturalism, could be read as challenging other assumptions of the theological tradition, specifically those claiming that accurate spiritual discernment relied on intuitive sense. A number of theologians continued to embrace the medieval formulas of the scholastics through the turbulent atmosphere of the revolution and the Post-Reformation, and principally those supporting the intuitive sense of the rational soul. In response to the depth and pace of intellectual change, some of those scholars invested in defending the balance between the articles of reason and faith they saw embodied in Patristic and ancient learning. Some continued to articulate the principles of scholastic discernment. Others, like the Cambridge Platonists, founded their arguments on antiquity and continuity, but consciously sought to re-invigorate rational theology by appealing to certain principles of Platonist theology, such as the idea that the reasonable soul possessed innate principles of knowledge, on which spiritual perceptions and instincts could be reliably founded.

An example of this from the time of the revolution is John Smith's *Select Discourses*, published in 1660, but written prior to his death in 1650. His discussion of prophecy was a crucial part of his argument about the relationship between human and divine knowledge. He struck a distinctive position in arguing for the practical and experiential nature of truth, elevating the rational senses as the source of moral illumination, but rejected grounding religious certainties on theological dogmas. Just as Smith argued that the mind's innate divinity secured his ability to discern God in nature and in human action, he argued that it secured man's ability to receive knowledge through imaginative visions.⁸² Though he affirmed the orthodox doctrine of the cessation of prophecy, he argued for the theoretical importance of a rational understanding of prophecy to establish divine vision as the authoritative source of scripture. Like Jean Gerson, Smith high-lighted the hyper-sensual nature of supernatural visions, which allowed a prophet to discern their divine origins. As man's morality relied on intuition of the good, Smith argued that the prophet's certainty in the divine origin of his dreams was founded on the tangible and

⁸¹ More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, pp. 25—27.

⁸² Smith, *Select Discourses*, pp. 169—175. Quoting p. 170: 'And as our Sensations carry the notions of Material things to our Understandings which before were unacquainted with them; so there is some Analogical way whereby the knowledge of Divine Truth may also be revealed to us.'

affective qualities of the inspiration.⁸³ Confidence in divine inspirations of all degrees was self-consciously validated by the integrity of the Christian spirit, whereas the false prophet was not authentic to his own nature and senses, practicing deception on others and himself. The critical corollary of Smith's theory was that if visions and dreams could be self-evidently divine in their origins, natural and demonic dreams were readily known to be false. Contrary to the 'evidences and energies' of the divine dream, their symbolic matter tended 'to nourish immorality and prophaneness,' and in their sensuous quality they were 'more dilute and languid.'⁸⁴ In both its sensory and its mystical ends, this difference was tangible.

The French theologian Moise Amyraut, and the English Calvinist John Owen, shared the opinion with Smith that there was some 'ineffable' assurance present in divine dreams. This seemed to consist either in the concrete tangibility of the visionary experience, as well as some kind of indefinable but definite knowledge communicated to the soul. In a similar pattern to Smith's work, the theologian John Owen sought to describe the efficient action of the Holy Spirit in divine revelations, as distinct from and 'obnoxious' to human delusions in his *Pneumatologia*.⁸⁵ Owen wrote that men could have knowledge in three ways—by testimony of sense, by impressions in the imagination, and by pure acts of understanding—and that God communicated in all these ways by audible voices, in dreams and visions, and enlightenment of the understanding. Enlightenment of the mind, however, was a necessary component of all revelations, because it afforded 'infallible assurance'.⁸⁶ He wrote that the Holy Spirit prepared the prophets by the 'Elevation of their *Intellectual Faculties*, their Minds and Understandings', and impressed them so effectually that 'they understood not but that they also made use of their *visive* [imaginative] *Faculty*', and thereby 'confirmed their *memories* to retain them'.⁸⁷

Amyraut's *Divine Dreams Mention'd in Scripture* was written in France, probably in 1659, but translated and published in England at the later date of 1676. The book defended a similarly traditional thesis that divine dreams were knowable by carefully separating their causes into the natural, demonic and divine, and discerning their purpose as vain, providential or prophetic. The biblical prophets and saints were able to derive certainty from dreams because of the clarity, potency and supernatural nature of their composition, which impressed the mind more vividly than waking perceptions.⁸⁸ Discussing the role of dreams

⁸³ Ibid., 201–203.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 203–208.

⁸⁵ Owen, *Pneumatologia*, pp. 97–120, quoted from p. 106.

⁸⁶ Owen, *Pneumatologia*, p. 106.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 103, 107.

⁸⁸ Amyraut, *Divine Dreams Mention'd in Scripture*, pp. 53–100.

in the Old Testament dispensation, Amyraut contrasted the ‘infancy of reason’ in those times to the ‘surety’ of reason in the present. Historical inspirations were required to overcome ignorance and the barbarism of human custom, to impel men to holy action, and also formed a part of open supernatural warfare between God and idolatrous gods. The revelation of the gospel, he claimed, gave a divine foundation to human reason, so that Christian ministry performed all of these functions more effectively than direct inspirations.⁸⁹

When compared to the work of Smith, Owen and Amyraut, it is significant that Casaubon considered it impossible to discern the difference between outward and inward causes of dreams, and that More claimed that hallucinations were so violent that they impressed the mind with force ‘at least as strong and vigorous as it is at any time in beholding things awake.’⁹⁰ This seemed to refute the idea that hallucinations could be evidently recognised as ephemeral, as Smith and Amyraut claimed. This potential contradiction between Smith and More may be more apparent than real, however, a matter of contextual nuance. More certainly believed that supernatural dreams could bring intellectual inspiration—he claimed to have received such dreams himself, and wrote poetry that invoked Platonic dream transports.⁹¹ His view that enthusiasts were helplessly deranged did not preclude that an illuminated soul might still legitimately discern between true and false dreams. After all, Gerson’s original analogy pointed out that the carnal dreamer, like the dreamer, was deluded until he awoke. We might also observe that Smith and More advanced similar arguments about the criteria for discerning genuine prophets. However, whereas Smith’s analysis was retrospective, More seemed to suggest that his criteria could be applied in the present. There was clearly a place for persons of melancholic disposition and of supernatural insight in More’s vision of the Church, as long as they conformed themselves to the religious life of the Church, and his intellectual work was ruled to some degree by the canons of Christian knowledge.⁹² Inspired reason, he claimed, worked ‘in Succession, or by peece-meal’, unlike the distempered and fanciful visions of alchemists, Paracelsians, and theosophists.⁹³

Experimental Philosophy and Prophetic Dreams

Defences of orthodox theology took place in the context of dramatic changes in the practice and content of natural philosophy. Theologians sought to preserve

⁸⁹ Ibid., *Scripture*, pp. 39–53, 101–116.

⁹⁰ More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, p. 27.

⁹¹ Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts*, p. 108–109.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 58–59.

⁹³ More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, p. 55.

what they saw as the fundamental truths about the relationship between religion and philosophical knowledge, even as the latter was in a state of radical disruption. This was a priority for the re-established Church, which sought to exert its authority against the radical individuality and destabilising eschatological expectations that pervaded the era of revolution and the protectorate. The Restoration religious settlement was characterised by a code of religious conformity that emphasized 'reasonable' and 'civilised' religious discourse, in which the treatment of occult or eschatological ideas was suppressed or hidden from view. For a number of thinkers, this was a significant transition, and a limitation on their intellectual and spiritual horizons. Until 1660, puritan eschatology and Baconian ideology had been intimately joined in the ideology of many individuals in pursuit of philosophical reform and spiritual renewal.

John Beale was a respected member of a constellation of thinkers organized through the coordinating influence of Samuel Hartlib, a philosophical 'intelligencer' who believed in the power of political and educational reform, and was committed to maintaining a network of correspondence and a culture of open intellectual exchange.⁹⁴ The members of this association used Baconian principles to steer a middle way between the extremes of mystical theosophy and mechanistic materialism, while borrowing ideas from each. Their outlook was grounded in the apocalyptic and millennial thinking of the 'puritan revolution', but they were also committed to religious toleration and the promotion of practical ethical concerns over factional dogma.⁹⁵ Beale is notable for his passionate interest in occult and prophetic phenomena, to which his correspondence and manuscript papers bear witness. Beale believed that supernatural inspiration was a credible field of enquiry for a Bible-centric philosopher, and a potential means toward recovering higher spiritual knowledge. His letters were rich with speculations about the benefits to be drawn from communication with angels, advancing the arts of memory, the understanding of prophetic dreams, and the experience of divine inspiration. The skill of the patriarchs in observing, discerning and interpreting dreams—*inferred from Biblical passages and rumoured by legend*—convinced him of their necessary place in Christian knowledge. He wrote to Hartlib that "There may be more learnt in our reste & sleepe, & praeparations of sanctity pertaining

⁹⁴ Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, pp. 90–119. On the Hartlib Circle see Webster, *The Great Instauration*, pp. 1–88; Mark Greengrass, 'Hartlib, Samuel (c.1600–1662)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12500>, accessed 28 Jan 2012].

⁹⁵ Richard Yeo, 'Memory and Empirical Information: Samuel Hartlib, John Beale and Robert Boyle' in Charles Wolfe and Ofer Gal (eds), *The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge: Embodied Empiricism in Early Modern Science* (New York, 2010), pp. 185–210.

to the depths of true wisdom, charitable arts, & practical knowledge, than by any other long studies humane arts, or voluminous bookes.⁹⁶

Beale was in good company. Hartlib assisted his research, passing along a copy of Philip Goodwin's *Mystery of Dreames* after its publication in 1658.⁹⁷ Beale shared his speculations with other Hartlib correspondents, including Viscountess Ranelagh (1615–1691), and his writings were praised by the Moravian educational reformer Johannes Comenius.⁹⁸ The intellectual freedom of the movement and the era gave him great latitude to express startlingly heterodox opinions, even using popular hearsay about local cunning-women to suggest that white magic might be lawful and scripturally supported—an idea he was comfortable airing to John Worthington, the Cambridge fellow who acted as executor to the papers of both the aforementioned John Smith and to Samuel Hartlib upon his death in 1662.⁹⁹ It is not a surprise, therefore, to find that his studies of dreams took in occult texts, and engaged with ancient prophetic traditions. Beale indicated to Hartlib that his study of dreams was motivated primarily by past experiences of dreams which had given him accurate prognostications, and more immediately, a definitive religious experience in which Beale claimed that the Lord had revealed to him that 'there were in these dayes such as might justly bee called Holy (yea & prophetique) Inspirations.'¹⁰⁰

The scholarly portion of his studies produced a manuscript perhaps intended for publication but ultimately never published, *A Severe Enquiry After the Patriarchicall & Propheticall Arte Of Interpreting Dreams*.¹⁰¹ In this manuscript he adopted an experimental approach to dream theories. This approach argued that Scripture and 'Constant Experience' should be the principal guides, as well as 'Vncorrupted Antiquity', which Beale, an educated Humanist, considered part of the common treasury of reliable testimony, the fruits of philosophical experience.¹⁰² He afforded particular respect to the poet Virgil as an ancient

⁹⁶ John Beale to Samuel Hartlib, 28 May 1657, 25/5/2—3 in HP.

⁹⁷ See British Library, MS Add 4299, 87r.

⁹⁸ See John Beale to Samuel Hartlib, 28 May 1657, 25/5/1a—12b in HP.; Samuel Hartlib to John Pell, 4 February 1658, British Library Add. MSS 4279 Fol. 49a—b as recorded in HP; also Johannes Comenius to Samuel Hartlib(?) (14 December 1657), Translation of 7/111/4a—5b. (trans.) W.J. Hitchens in HP. See 4b for Comenius' response to Beale's writings.

⁹⁹ John Beale to John Worthington (12 June 1658), The James Marshal and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Document 2, as referenced in HP.

¹⁰⁰ John Beale to Samuel Hartlib (28 November 1659), HP, 60/1/2—3.

¹⁰¹ John Beale, 'Treatise on the Art of Interpreting Dreams' (Undated), 25/19/1—28, in HP.

¹⁰² Beale, 'Interpreting Dreams', 25/19/1

prophet and Christian progenitor.¹⁰³ This led to an eclectic approach in which Scripture was the first arbitrator, his classical authors venerable and wise theorists, while contemporary testimony offered reliable and confirmatory data. The manuscript had two main parts. In the first, the dream typology of Macrobius was tested against ideas from the *Pymander*, biblical verses, passages from Virgil and stories from Beale's own life.¹⁰⁴ The second part sought to construct a rationale for the practice of interpreting dreams, defending divination as a philosophical art that studied the subtleties of nature and perception, and seeking to carve out a role for it in religious practice that was distinct from superstition and sectarian heresies.¹⁰⁵

Beale's organization of his material around the observation of scripture, his attention to multiple classical sources, and his own peculiar infusion of experimental religious experience distinguish his writings from the formulas of most theologians and occult writers. Beale understood that in order to promote the study of dreams, he had to directly confront their status as a form of superstitious idolatry. The second part showed particular sensitivity toward the status of dream observance as superstition, which he countered with an argument that dream observance was a duty for obedient Christians, a distinction between lawful and unlawful practices, and an appeal to the distinction between learned and vulgar methods and goals. The emphasis on Christian duty echoed the argument of Philip Goodwin's *Mystery*, which we shall examine in the next chapter. Beale's attitude toward the role of dreams in religious experience was part of a liberal perception of God's providential movements in human affairs, which were greatly latitudinarian in character. Just as he credited Virgil and the ancient sibyls with inspired insight, he confessed to Worthington a belief that heathen and pagan prophets alike were often genuinely inspired by God in the present.¹⁰⁶ His commitment to Baconian experimental values was married to a great circumspection when it came to making judgments of the divine. He responded negatively to Casaubon and More's naturalistic critiques of contemporary prophets, suggesting that neither natural measures nor humane reason could be applied to discern the truth or falsity of divine inspirations.

¹⁰³ On Beale's humanist education and respect for Virgil see Michael Leslie, 'The Spiritual Husbandry of John Beale' in Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (eds), *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land* (Leicester, 1992), esp. pp. 166–168.

¹⁰⁴ HP, 25/19/1a–8b.

¹⁰⁵ HP, 25/19/9a–19b.

¹⁰⁶ John Beale to John Worthington, 12 June 1658 in HP, from The James Marshal and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Document 2: 'I am soe far from their opinion who deny[altered], that the best of Christians have any inspirations in these dayes, that I doubt not but God hath his true Prophets, divinely inspired, at this time, amongst Turkes, lewes, & gentiles.'

it is imperfectly required sec. 54 That Prophetically informations should be confined to the Test of Reason agreeable to common notions or the evidence [?] <of> outward sense, or else a clearer & distinct deduction from these... If the Spirit of man by natural frame can transcend the use of Organs, must [dionian?] prophesy submit to the Test of Organical conduct & <to> reason deduced from those pipes?¹⁰⁷

Observing natural causes could not disprove the involvement of divine power or faculties above those of ordinary perception. This was an argument that showed similarities to the logic we have seen elsewhere in debates over the discernment of dreams: by claiming that divine perceptions could not be subsumed under natural senses, Beale implicitly turned judgment over to some other ineffable spiritual sense, which he evidently discerned as guiding his own powerfully numinous experiences.

Beale's personal and scholarly engagement with dreams can be productively compared with that of Johannes Comenius. Comenius was a major figure in the promotion of educational reform in Europe, and his interest in learning was linked to larger ambitions to discover means by which human knowledge could be better organized to comprehend the divine order, a goal which he expressed as *pansophia* or 'universal wisdom'. He corresponded and collaborated with members of the Hartlib circle and patronized Hartlib's unsuccessful attempt to create an international centre for philosophical advancement in England with the support of parliament.¹⁰⁸ Comenius' ideas were pedagogic and didactic, and he considered their principles to be fundamental for moral and spiritual renewal throughout Christian society. He argued that philosophy could be 'reformed and perfected' if it was reduced and thereby harmonised to a hierarchy of knowledge that combined experimental knowledge of the senses, the deductive power of reason, and finally the understanding of revealed and prophetic knowledge. The rule of philosophical knowledge would be the degree of unity between these three. If these powers were used in order—'we begin with sense, and end in revelation'—then men would have 'both *Evidence* and also *Certainty*, and *Emendation*'.¹⁰⁹ Comenius believed that this would bring intuitive clarity to philosophy, so that it could be arbitrated by this rule:

*If any thing be not sufficiently deduced from Sense, Reason, and Scripture; If any thing cohere not harmoniously enough with the rest; If any thing be not evident enough with its own perspicuity, let it be taken as not said at all.*¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ John Beale to Samuel Hartlib, 28 May 1657, 25/5/ 10b, 11a—b in HP.

¹⁰⁸ Mark Greengrass, 'Comenius, Johannes Amos (1592–1670)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/67104, accessed 8 Nov 2013].

¹⁰⁹ Comenius, *Natural Philosophy Reformed by Divine Light*, di. 8.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

His manifesto for pansophic reform, *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica* or *Consultatio*, began with 'Universal Awakening' (*Panegersia*), an address to the international community of learning, and set out in five parts the fundamentals of his vision for pansophic, educational and linguistic reform. Comenius linked this universal reform to a personal experience of spiritual inspiration, using the language of sleep and dreams:

My mind must be alert, my heart must awaken, and my senses must combine to banish sleep. Then this great work will not be delayed. The thoughts of the night will pass into the light of day, and dreams will become realities.¹¹¹

Such words were more than metaphor or rhetoric for Comenius, who called on God to witness that he had been '*fearfully afflicted for many years, not knowing what to do with the increasing light derived from my secret instincts*', that the holy spirit compelled him, '*and attracts and prompts me irresistibly*'.¹¹²

Comenius was also a supporter of several self-proclaimed prophets, to whom he became a patron and an advocate in Europe, publishing records of their prophetic visions and dreams. This advocacy required him to defend their authenticity, and to argue that their status as prophets and the divine origins of their visions was as certain a fact as his own philosophical methods demanded. Contrary to what he saw as the majority opinion, and the new wave of sceptical attitudes, he advanced the view that such prophets should be heard by a process of spiritual discernment, ministerial examination and ultimately judged by God's own providential work.¹¹³ Though he refuted the scholastic philosophy, Comenius' own methods for establishing the legitimacy of prophets drew upon many arguments found in Gerson and other theological writers. He sought to demonstrate how three European prophets, Christopher Kotterus, Mikuláš Drábík and Christina Poniatowska, had proven claims to speak for God. He listed upwards of sixteen signs or marks by which their prophetic vocation could be discerned. These included: the mutual agreement in the universal purpose and scope of their message; that together they represented all the ages, genders and estates of man; the manner of their revelations in apparitions and dreams; the progressive nature of their revelations, which revealed things by increments; their authentic use of symbolic types and figures used to understand Scripture; the fact they were compelled to preach despite threat of persecution and death; their humility in first resisting their calling; their ability

¹¹¹ Comenius, *Panegersia, or, Universal Awakening*, trans. A.M.O. Dobbie (Shipston-on-Stour, 1990), p. 3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Johannes Comenius, *A Generall Table of Europe* (London, 1670). See the call to the princes of Europe for reform and the protection of prophets from religious authorities pp. 210–227; accounts of examinations of contemporary prophets and defence of positive discernment pp. 176–199.

to confound the scepticism of 'Divines, Physicians, Politicians and States-men, and intire Universities, Consistories, Synods'; their perfect memory of their revelations; and their miraculous escapes, healings, and even, in one case, resurrection from death, to which Comenius was witness.¹¹⁴ He invested great significance in the idea that divine revelation was progressive, working gradually through the reform and renewal of God's chosen instruments. For this reason, the fact that all three prophets received their final visions in a dream was of great mystical import. This symbolized 'that although all may seem to be but a dream, even to the Godly; yet it shall conclude in a real work and effect; that the world by seeing may see.'¹¹⁵

Beale and Comenius are exemplary figures of the experimental and reforming tradition in seventeenth-century religion and philosophy, which contributed a powerful vision of how the progress and advancement of knowledge could lead to spiritual enlightenment for Christendom. They shared a conception with their orthodox brethren that human knowledge could be consolidated only through harmony between human sense and divine revelation. What set them at odds with orthodoxy were their eschatological beliefs, which contradicted the doctrine of the cessation of miracles and extraordinary prophecy. This suggested that divine inspiration had a role to play in advancing human knowledge in the present. For Beale and Comenius, the experiential qualities of divine dreams were not theoretical constructs or artifacts of biblical history, but lived realities which Christians had a duty to observe and understand. They actively criticized those who let scepticism rule their attitude toward supernatural phenomena. 'Behold the Atheistical age!' lamented Comenius:

who think God reveals nothing now unto men. All humble and sober observance of extraordinary Signs, Dreams, Extasies, prophetick Inspirations, Angelical Apparitions, Prodigies in the Heavens, &c. (As Comets, New Stars, Suns, unusual Tempests, Sights of Armies fighting in the Air, Sounds of Drums and Trumpets, &c.) passes for foolish superstition or fancy.¹¹⁶

Orthodox theologians and 'philosophical enthusiasts' like Comenius and Beale both claimed that there were tangible differences between natural and supernatural experiences, but they disagreed fundamentally on whether prophecy still occurred, and how the evidence of experience and reason should be applied in the present. If some theologians like More did acknowledge a role for inspiration beyond the vulgar errors of enthusiasm, the grounds for this were much narrower. Beale called it an 'atheistical' mistake that God's actions in nature could be tested in the crude style of a medical case history, as

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188—205.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Casaubon and More did, claiming that efforts should be focused on discerning a scriptural and moral basis for God's truth in such cases. Materialist critiques were a category error: they could not produce any definitive judgment on whether God's power was involved in any natural disturbance of the mind, and that spiritual judgments were of a different order and nature. The notion of the material and the spiritual as different modal categories of experience was here invoked to question the confidence with which these theologians established the difference between natural and divine ecstasies.

Mystical and Illuminist Appeals to the Spiritual Senses

The idea that relying on merely human perceptions would blind critics to spiritual truth appeared in other writings that defended spiritual vision as a reality, both prior to and following the Restoration. They were intimately connected to the marginal status of such beliefs and the individuals who announced them. Boehme's work in particular shows signs of being shaped by the experience of hostile rhetoric, moral opprobrium and outright ridicule. He integrated his experiences of ostracism and exile into his account of the Christian's spiritual progress, turning the biblical story of Joseph into an allegory of contemporary religious learning.¹¹⁷ The jealous brothers who conspired to murder Joseph for telling his dreams represented the corrupt authority and privilege of Christian schools and universities, the professors of religious learning who 'shutt up the Conscience'.¹¹⁸ Boehme identified this learned culture with the Tower of Babel, a symbol of the confused 'Opinions and conceits in Mens Minds' which issued forth as 'sensual' tongues and languages, the discourses of corrupt and deceitful authority.¹¹⁹ The speakers of these languages, Boehme said, 'understand not the power of God in Gods children, in the the simplicity of Joseph, but call him a Dreamer, an expounder of Signes, a Scismatick, and phantastical fellow, an Enthusiast, a Foole, &c.'¹²⁰

The idea that corrupt and worldly orders of knowledge marginalised the spiritual initiate recurred in the works of mystical thinkers and individual prophets after the Restoration. Thomas Tryon's Behmenist-inspired dream-work rejected the doctrine of cessation on the basis that divine spirits were immutable and unchanging in their nature and relations. It was therefore 'against the Principles of God in nature' to support the 'vulgar' opinion that dreams and visions had ceased, or that 'any such Chasm or interruption between superiours and inferiours, in the state of created beings' would be

¹¹⁷ Boehme, *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 20–24.

¹¹⁸ Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, p. 467–468.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, here at p. 468 and also at pp. 509–510.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

permitted.¹²¹ To explain why so many in the present disbelieved in divine dreams, he explained that while supernatural impressions felt 'real and essential to the Spirit', and thus in the world of dreams, when the soul was awake and dominated by its bodily senses, all of these impressions seemed like 'a Romance or Illusion' because of the 'vast gulf' between the corporeal and the incorporeal senses, and because corrupt humanity had '*Eclipsed* those glorious Intell[e]ctual *Beams* planted in his nature by the *Father of Lights*'.¹²² Virtuous action, spiritual meditation, and disciplined abstinence in food, sex and temperance of the passions were necessary to subjugate the body to the soul and restore its capacity to communicate with divine spirits and achieve union with God.¹²³ In the 1690s, members of the Philadelphian Society espoused similarly Behmenist beliefs, claiming that they interacted with spirits by virtue of restored spiritual senses. Francis Lee, who edited the visionary journals of Jane Lead, claimed that 'Spiritual Things are spiritually discerned, felt and received' by 'Internal Sensation'.¹²⁴ Lead claimed that the carnal body 'must be silenced, and shut up' whenever the soul 'would hold a Communion, or spiritual Conference with the Kingly Shepherd'.¹²⁵ She made a familiar appeal to the idea that her spiritual perceptions were confirmed by human and scriptural evidence, since by her own 'Experiment' she advised visionary converts that they would 'be sealed, or have this Witness-Seal, that shall agree with the Record in Heaven, and the Scripture-Record Here upon the Earth'.¹²⁶

These arguments about the self-referential nature of spiritual sensations represented another approach to the comparison between visual-sense and dream-sense, which Gerson, Smith and Amyraut used to affirm a sensory and rational basis to the discernment of prophetic passions. They questioned the materialist supposition that natural causes could be invoked to discredit spiritual experiences. This criticism aimed at the sceptical basis of the anti-enthusiastic sentiment which increasingly came to govern public attitudes toward religious and philosophical knowledge in the later seventeenth century. Not only did many experimental philosophers maintain private beliefs that

¹²¹ Tryon, *Dreams & Visions*, p. 207.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67, 1–2.

¹²³ It is a famous commonplace that Tryon is one of the earliest explicit advocates of a vegetarian diet. Tryon believed that meat was inherently corrupting because to consume it, man had to commit acts of violence which were bestial, and a sacrilege against divine nature. Tryon looked back to the patriarchs to validate his wider prescription of an ascetic lifestyle, claiming that their bodily purity was responsible for their spiritual discipline - so great that their command over their bodies was equal to the control of spirits over nature - their physical longevity, and the clarity of their spiritual senses, which resulted in divine visions at night. See Tryon, *Dreams & Visions*, on virtues of temperance pp. 227–240, dietary prescriptions and effects 241–248.

¹²⁴ Jane Lead, *A fountain of gardens watered by the rivers of divine pleasure* (London, 1696), p. 504–505.

¹²⁵ Jane Lead, *The Enochian walks with God found out by a spiritual-traveller* (London, 1694), p. 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

there was evidence for the existence of occult forces and effects, but those who embraced prophetic and theosophical beliefs often appealed to criteria which echoed traditional theological formulas to argue for the certainty of their spiritual perceptions.

Conclusions

Chapter two has related the changes in seventeenth-century metaphysics and epistemology to debates over the sources of authoritative religious knowledge, in which arguments about the ontological nature of the soul and its epistemological powers formed a central foundation. It argues that these debates challenged the centrality of religious institutions to questions about the immediate sources of religious knowledge. In the case of Protestantism, this was a challenge to the Scripturalist and sacramental basis of authority in the Church. Millennial expectations shared amongst both Protestant reformers and sectarians promoted faith in the immediate relevance of supernatural inspiration and instances of prophecy. Disruption of religious controls resulted in a proliferation of innovative attempts to establish the certainty of knowledge in new theories of physics and natural law. In response to this, some religious leaders like William Bridge reacted by insisting on even more thoroughgoing scripturalism, and resistance to a reliance on individual senses and experiences which were marginal to the institutional pattern of devotion. Other thinkers were quicker to adapt to the changing conditions, and remained open to intellectual change while seeking to secure what they saw as the 'fundamentals' of religious belief. This allowed them to engage with Cartesianism and other philosophical innovations, and to utilise various naturalistic and sceptical tools to attack the credentials of radicals, sectarians and nonconformists. At the same time, they were able to defend elements of traditional doctrine, or to frame alternative metaphysical theories against the dangerous elements of the new philosophies. As this suggests, the role played by the mechanical philosophy in these debates was mostly that of provocateur. English proponents of materialism never denied the existence of miracles or revelations, but their dramatic re-envisioning of God's role in nature invited accusations of atheism and an implicit attack on providence.

Against this backdrop, beliefs about the origins of dreams formed a powerful element in discourses about the legitimate context of prophecy and its contemporary relevance. If the first chapter suggested that dreams formed part of a discourse about defending the symbiosis of spirit and matter in the world, in this context they were crucial for articulating the argument that the effects of these spiritual forces could be discerned and sensed by the soul, an idea which was necessary for both orthodox and occult philosophies. In the former case, it was necessary to explain the role of dreams in the lives of the Patriarchs,

Prophets and Apostles, who were able to act upon them with certainty during their lifetimes. In the case of the occultists, experience of the divine in visions, dreams and other spiritual impulses formed the heart of a personal religious quest. For astrologers and natural magicians, access to the divine was demonstrated by an ability to procure divine visions and dreams through manipulation of occult nature, astrological calculation and ritual magic. Illuminists, mystics and theosophists eschewed these instrumental routes to knowledge, but engaged with occult theories of representation, symbolism and mystical languages through the medium of visionary experience and writing. They interpreted the process of perceiving, elaborating and constructing these systems of thought as a personal spiritual transformation. Dreams also fell under the purview of those experimental philosophers who set out to test occult hypothesis and submit them to their public methods of enquiry and observation. Like the mystics, they were likely to eschew the trappings of ritual magic, and ostensibly sought the scriptural underpinnings of these arts, whose presence in pagan religion and vulgar superstition were viewed as debased echoes of a divine truth.

All of these positions, against the materialists, defended the ability to sense spiritual forces and discern these from the merely natural. Theologians in the 1650s in particular dealt with the ambivalence generated by such claims in the context of enthusiastic excesses. Hobbes and Casaubon, from different positions, both challenged the idea that supernatural forces could be normally sensed in nature. Henry More appeared to agree, though his position on legitimate inspiration subtly accords with the traditional views expressed by his compatriot John Smith, and those of John Owen and Moise Amyraut. John Beale, as an experimental philosopher with enthusiastic sympathies, feared that the sceptical position of Casaubon and More, as much as the materialism of Descartes and Hobbes, was a concession too far toward an 'athiestic' conception of nature in which the soul lacked spiritual perceptions. The only barrier to applying standards of discernment to modern religious experience was the doctrine that prophecy had ceased, and the influence of anti-enthusiastic scepticism on public opinion. The result was that theologians concerned about the influence of sceptical attitudes found it necessary to defend the rationality of such formulas within the context of the biblical past, while disclaiming their relevance to present religious experience.