

complex spiritual organism to the discernment of His Divine ends and to the furtherance of the uses of His kingdom, here and forever.

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

BY EDWARD F. ALLEN

Two years have now passed during which an experiment has been conducted in this journal in a department called "Book Reviews." Thus eight issues have brought a total of eight of these reviews. Our readers will have noted, of course, that these are not book reviews in the usual sense because the books reviewed for the most part were not ones recently published. Selection was based upon the fact that each book represented ideas or a philosophy that was thought to have some special appeal to those interested in Swedenborg's philosophy.

The single unifying principle connecting these short articles, therefore, has been the consideration of their relation to Swedenborg's philosophy by the several authors of these "reviews." While each of the authors discussed his book somewhat with the steering committee of this department, the final result was entirely the author's own, and the committee claims no credit for the good jobs done. However, the committee has had constantly in mind that there should be some unification in the scheduling of authors and their choices; and of course it entertains the constant hope that the results will be related as well as possible to Swedenborg's philosophy, and will therefore teach something new to our readers about that philosophy.

Our intention is not to repeat these articles but to examine the work so far done to see what unity there is in them. This examination ought to be useful in our future planning; it is hoped also that it will present a perspective to those who have read these several articles at widely separated periods in time over the last two years; and, finally, it is hoped that our authors themselves will feel the satisfaction of having contributed an integral and a useful part of a whole.

It has been said of philosophers that they are children of the age in which they live.

The authors of our reviews would not object, I suppose, to being called children of the age in which they live and think. They would, however, prefer to have some definite idea of what is meant by "the age in which they live." In addition to the environment resulting from scientific invention, crowded urban living, and shrinking distances in global communications that they have in common with all others living on this earth at this time, they have another environment that is in contrast in almost every way with that of their fellows. Our authors have things in the background of their environment that have led to beliefs peculiar to a new school of philosophy—beliefs that might even be intellectual convictions.

These beliefs include one that traces the history of religions back to a most ancient people—people who can truly be said to have been prehistoric. The religion of our authors does not represent for them the result of superstition and magical things. Rather does that religion represent for them a necessary development to meet the condition of man himself in these times. Although most ancient man could have more immediate relation to God because of his nature, man now must succeed in having a relation to God only through a mediate way. This is made possible for him through a new revelation.

Hugo Lj. Odhner discusses in *The Divine Allegory* the historical background of the Word, that is, the Old and New Testaments and the Writings. As is shown in the work itself, and discussed by our reviewer (1), this is not a work in theology but rather in history—and as such it is suitable for consideration in our pages because of its distinctive contribution to our philosophical and scientific attitude toward history. Accepting as we do the teachings of the Writings concerning the history of the churches from the Most Ancient Church through the Ancient, the Jewish and Christian Churches, to the New Church, we cannot have the same views that others have of this history. On the one hand, from our beginning we have never accepted the literal conclusions associated with the name of Bishop Usher; on the other hand, we have not been followers of the so-called objective methods of "higher criticism." However, Dr. Odhner and the author of our review have both pointed out the interest to us in archaeological studies that seem to establish the existence of various peoples on this earth many millions of years back in time. These studies "have established the general authenticity of the Bible account which had

previously been regarded as completely unreliable, and the result is a far more accurate picture of the times, incidents, and personalities described in the Old Testament." After referring to the problems relating to Biblical chronology our reviewer continues, within the spirit of our special interests in these pages, by saying, with reference to the new Revelation, that "the Writings, by means of a logical system of correspondences, unlock the hidden meaning contained in the biblical narrative, showing it to be a rational and harmonious description of man's spiritual life and regeneration, and inmostly of the Lord's life on earth and the glorification of His Human. . . . It is addressed to the general reader, but it can be fully appreciated only by those who are equipped with a knowledge of the Writings and whose minds are disposed to acknowledge in them a revelation of Divine Truth."

Another of our reviewers (2) agreed to consider a second work on the history of churches, that by George Frazer entitled *The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion*.

The outstanding single distinction between the philosophical and scientific approaches of Odhner in *The Divine Allegory* and Frazer in *The Golden Bough* is that in the former case revelation is accepted as the guide in the historical approach as well as the underlying cause of the churches following successive revelations; whereas in the latter case not only is revelation not admitted in the "objective" approach to history, it is not even given a prominent place in the establishment of churches themselves. In consequence of the last, our reviewer notes that "underlying Frazer's thesis concerning the advent of religion are two errors of even greater import. One is that God—or whatever name is assigned to deity—is capricious. The other is that the end of religion is, and ever was, to gain the personal ends of the believer. . . . Man created his gods in his own image; since he was selfish and willful, so became they." Again within the spirit of these pages, our reviewer says with reference to our position, denied by Frazer, that there exist "two worlds of creation, each obeying its own laws of constant regularity. Yet this, in one sense, was the goal of Swedenborg's preparatory works, which culminated in his study of the human mind as the soul's repository. The whole story of the spiritual forces impinging on man's mind, rendering it a free agent amid the rigorous necessities of nature, able with growing power to see the dual operation of the Divine for the sake of

eternal ends—such a story, not merely of human research and reason, is the story of science and religion in rational harmony—rational because Divinely given and humanly received.”

In discussing the *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, by Etienne Gilson, our reviewer (3) comes to general conclusions regarding the importance of the philosophy of the Greeks to our understanding of Swedenborg's philosophy, and also of the importance of the development of the Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages to our understanding of the language of philosophy used by Swedenborg. However, the particular point that our reviewer seems most interested in, in his discussion of this work, has relation to the effort of the Christian philosophers of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries to come to a rational understanding of God, of His creation, of the spiritual world, of the human soul and mind, of truth and good, etc. This effort to attain a rational understanding always has in the background the demands of certitude, and during the centuries discussed various philosophers made use of every discipline known to man both in metaphysics and physics. And yet in some cases the Christian philosopher was known to discard all this effort, as in the case of John of Jandun, for example, who says: “And even though the soul is matter, it nevertheless remains an act in which corporeal matter does not participate: and all these attributes of the soul belong to it really, simply and absolutely, according to our faith. I also believe that the immaterial soul can suffer from a corporeal fire and be united with the body after death on the order of God the Creator. I am not prepared to demonstrate all this, but I think these things must be believed by simple faith, as well as many others that must be believed without demonstrative reason solely on the authority of the Holy Scripture and miracles. Furthermore, that is why our faith is meritorious, for the doctrines teach that there is no merit in believing what reason can demonstrate.”

It was altogether proper that this series should contain a review of a book on Swedenborg's life. Although Cyriel Sigstedt's *The Swedenborg Epic* had already received notice in these pages (see April 1953) a more recent consideration of the work in *The Review of Religion* by Dr. Ernst Benz led our reviewer (4) to write some remarks both on the review and the *Epic* itself.

Dr. Benz speaks highly of the biography and credits it with having taken full advantage not only of the researches that led to

the *Tafel Documents* but also of that more recent research that is associated with the Academy of the New Church. However, he also has this to say about the biographical style of the *Epic*: "But exactly in this method there lies a limitation of viewpoint. The historical character of Swedenborg, in its uniqueness and singularity, is lifted entirely out of the context of history, and herein the dogmatic New Church interpretation is apparent. Exactly that which is problematical for the reader of today is set forth as self-evident, i.e., that Swedenborg is the only man who, by reason of a special grace, from a definite point of time in his life kept an open view into the spiritual world and reported its secrets as an authentic witness, on the basis of seeing and hearing, and, on the basis of this personal observation, revealed the true sense of the Word of God."

Our reviewer says: "As to the scientific and philosophical works, he studies these in order better to understand how the Lord in His providence prepared a man to receive the Revelation of the Second Coming. We can learn much from Swedenborg's attitude and approach to science. The fact that Swedenborg did foreshadow certain scientific discoveries is of great interest to us and should not be belittled. But these do nothing toward proving the truths of the Theological Writings. The Writings must be judged on their own merits."

In considering *The Nature of Physical Theory*, by P. W. Bridgeman, our reviewer (5) discusses two related modern philosophies: operationalism and positivism. Our reviewer's general idea is expressed as follows: "The failure, or refusal, to recognize any degree of the mind higher than the lowest degree of the rational is the root of a great many currently fashionable philosophies, the most spectacular of which is the one which goes under the name Logical Positivism. For convenience, we will use the term Positivism to designate those philosophies which do not recognize any higher degrees than the lowest of the rational."

Our reviewer's particular concern is with "meaning." With respect to the operational view of "meaning" he says: "Specifically, the *meaning* of any statement whatever is to be identified with the set of operations by means of which the statement or its negative can be verified. If no such operations exist, the statement is neither true nor false, but *meaningless*. Thus the positivists reject all absolutes (such as Truth) and universals (such as the Forms of

Plato), since these concepts clearly have no operational significance."

Unsolved problems in mathematics are thus meaningless because no operations can be defined. "Why, then," asks our reviewer, "do responsible mathematicians, some of them positivists, spend most of their time on meaningless questions? The positivist may reply that the problem will acquire meaning if it is solved, or that when he calls a question meaningless he does not imply that it is unworthy of consideration. But if this is so, then all the knotty philosophical problems the positivist has so neatly disposed of by calling meaningless come back to plague him."

Our reviewer (6) who discusses *Man the Chemical Machine*, by Ernest Borek, uses the materialistic propaganda of this book as an example of "logical inconsistency which is surprisingly common among naturalists, namely, the conviction that the philosophical assumptions of naturalism or materialism are consistent with, and a proper part of, the objective detachment of the scientist, whereas the assumptions of other schools of philosophy, such as dualism, are absolutely inconsistent with scientific objectivity." The statement from Dr. Borek's book is quoted: "There are some scientists who at the end of their career enumerate all that is still unknown and, perhaps, unknowable. On the basis of the enormous gaps in our knowledge they exhort us to faith. Ignorance of natural phenomena is an unsteady pillar for the edifice of faith. It is an ephemeral stanchion at best. The mystery of yesterday is the commonplace of today: the unknown of now will be explored tomorrow. Three hundred years ago the mechanism of fire was just as baffling as the workings of the human mind still are today . . . should men have been exhorted to faith in those days on the basis of the mystic wonder of a fire?"

Our reviewer (7) who discusses *Science and Humanism*, by Erwin Schrödinger, succeeds in reemphasizing ideas discussed by other authors in our series. For example, there is the quotation from Schrödinger that the "scope, aim and value [of natural science] is the same as that of any other branch of human knowledge. Nay, none of them alone, only the union of all of them has any scope or value at all . . . scientists have prided themselves on knowing their own small field and have denounced as dilettantist the curiosity that aims at the synthesis of all knowledge, but there are signs of opposition to this attitude in the last fifty years." A

distinctive contribution of this review is a discussion by the writer of the relation of free will to determinism in physics. Some have seized upon indeterminism in physics as a means of reestablishing a belief in free will. But the error in this case is as bad as that which denied free will in a deterministic universe. Our reviewer says that "in the end Schrödinger concluded that perhaps after all, physical determinism is quite a suitable correlate to mental free will—better at least than physical haphazard."

While, from the title, the review of *The Scientific Adventure*, by Herbert Dingle, would seem to be concerned with science, as our reviewer points out, the book "is primarily an exposition of a philosophical point of view. . . . The goal of philosophy, as Professor Dingle says, is to organize the whole of experience into a rationally connected system." Our reviewer (8) recognizes that "'the whole of experience' is a very large order." Yet this ideal of organizing "the whole of experience" is the objective of philosophy, however remote its attainment may be. Dingle is no stranger to readers of this journal—nor is the philosophy of Swedenborg unknown to him (see "Swedenborg as a Physical Scientist," Herbert Dingle, *NEW PHILOSOPHY*, July 1938).

Our reviewer's main point deals with the effort of the scientific philosophy of Dingle to reduce the whole of experience into a rationally connected system which makes use only of experience and reason. Our reviewer says: "The viewpoint in question, as indicated above, seems to be more adequate than any other known one to the needs of natural science. But Professor Dingle, we think, fails to make a proper distinction between the various kinds of experience. Such a distinction is of course difficult, and a hasty attempt to make one can quickly lead to a confusion of discrete degrees. Swedenborg, however, succeeds in making the distinction through his recognition of the three degrees of the human mind: natural, spiritual, celestial."

Thus our reviewers have, within the limitations of language and the space allotted to them, indicated the influences upon them of "the age in which they live." However, their critiques have reflected a unity of their special knowledges, in their interest in history, in their regard for the syntheses of knowledge, in their acceptance of the philosophical doctrines of Swedenborg—for example of degrees. What is especially noticeable with all our authors is the demand they make for a rational understanding of both

science and religion. Humility naturally prevents any claim to a rational understanding of all things by the individual. Yet there is the recognition that it is the task of philosophy to consider just such an integration as a worthwhile and a necessary task.

Unless we understand "the age in which we live" in the very special sense of having to do with the present stage in the history of the New Church thought, it could not be said of our reviewers that they are children of their age. However modest our individual contributions to New Church philosophy may be, it is our ideal that these contributions will rise above the mere influences of our own period; and that it will be to some extent true in each case, as Windelband says of those who contribute to the history of philosophy, that "only through the thinking of individual *personalities*, who, though rooted ever so deeply with their thoughts in the logical connection and prevalent ideas of a historical period, always add a particular element by their own individuality and conduct of life."

It has been a source of joy to have taken part in this experiment in making manifest the talents of our writers all but one of whom are new contributors to our pages. And it is hoped that this experiment will act as a stimulus to further studies not only by these writers but by others as well. The distinctive tasks that may be undertaken by the NEW PHILOSOPHY are many indeed. The possibilities of New Church philosophy have hardly been realized. Those who have studied its contrasts with other philosophies are few in number, but only they can really understand its importance.

1. *The Divine Allegory*, by Hugo Ljungberg Odhner, THE NEW PHILOSOPHY, July 1955—George deCharms
2. *The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion*, by Sir James George Frazer, *ibid.*, July 1954—E. Bruce Glenn
3. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, by Etienne Gilson, *ibid.*, Oct. 1955—Eldric S. Klein
4. *The Swedenborg Epic*, by Cyriel O. Sigstedt, *ibid.*, Jan. 1955—Morna Hyatt
5. *The Nature of Physical Theory*, by P. W. Bridgman, *ibid.*, Oct. 1955—Joel Pitcairn
6. *Man, the Chemical Machine*, by Ernest Borek, *ibid.*, Jan. 1954—Charles S. Cole
7. *Science and Humanism*, by Erwin Schrödinger, *ibid.*, April 1954—Morna Hyatt
8. *The Scientific Adventure*, by Herbert Dingle, *ibid.*, Oct. 1954—Joel Pitcairn

NOTE: The order above is that in which the writers are discussed, not the order of publication.