

# THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

---

VOL. LXIX

APRIL-JUNE, 1966

No. 2

---

## THE QUESTION OF DUALISM\*

HUGO L.J. ODHNER

The relation of soul and body has been a perennial problem in philosophy. But it is relatively seldom that Swedenborg's philosophical premises in that regard have been taken up by professional philosophers. Yet in 1949, *Theoria*, a Swedish journal of Philosophy and Psychology, devoted fifteen pages to a discussion by Harald Morin of Swedenborg's *Intercourse of Soul and Body*, published in 1769.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Morin points out that in Swedenborg's earlier works the philosophical problem of dualism is virtually by-passed, and the soul is conceived as a kind of rarified body. This is evident especially in the Notes on Wolff's *Psychologia Empirica* and in *The Infinite* (1734). And if the soul is physical, there is of course no difficulty in conceiving of an interaction of soul and body. This Doctor Morin, following Doctor Martin Lamm,<sup>2</sup> classes as a monistic and materialistic concept.

But when he comes to the theological Writings of Swedenborg, and especially the work *Intercourse of Soul and Body* (1769), Doctor Morin finds that many phases of Swedenborg's doctrine present nature as a dead shell and the body as a mere covering of the soul, and teach that there is no physical influx or any actual influence of any kind exerted by the body upon the spirit or soul, which is a spiritual substance prior to the material body. (ISB 1, 11, 18, 19)

Noting these clear indications that Swedenborg rejects the physical influx of many scholastics in favor of a spiritual influx from the soul into the body, Dr. Morin still endeavors to class

<sup>1</sup> *Theoria*, vol. xv, 1949, parts 1-111, pp. 205-219. I am indebted to the Rev. Kurt Nemitz for a translation of this article from the German. (HLO)

<sup>2</sup> Doctor Lamm's scholarly work *Swedenborg* (1915) was described in *New Church Life*, 1927, pages 586-602.

Swedenborg as a monist. He discounts the claim of Dr. Hans Schlieper<sup>3</sup> that Swedenborg went back to the dualism of Descartes. (p. 213) Instead he sides with Dr. Lamm in suggesting that Swedenborg's position had shifted from a materialistic monism to a "spiritualistic monism." (p. 210) If the body is but a covering or organ of the soul, the two, he thinks, are virtually one; which would spiritualize the universe and make the body only an ultimate reflection of the spirit.<sup>4</sup> Thus Swedenborg's system would be a form of idealism. For Dr. Morin apparently cannot conceive how otherwise the natural reality would be derived from the spiritual.

But Dr. Morin has failed to take into account the doctrine of discrete degrees, and has misunderstood Swedenborg's concept of matter. The material world is created by God from the spiritual or non-material as a medium. (Canons, God iv. 7, 10) But although it originates from the spiritual, (TCR 79:7; 280:8) matter is deprived of spiritual attributes; even as the finite, although created or produced from the Divine substance, has nothing of Divinity. (DLW 283, 52, 55) In this Swedenborg differs from Descartes, who derived the natural from God by a direct creation; as indeed did Swedenborg in his *Principia*, although even there the "conatus" which is the only real thing within "the first natural point" is conceivable as a spiritual intermediate between the Infinite and the forms of nature.

The material universe is conceivable only in terms of space, time, motion, measurable energy. And the only real or essential thing within motion is "conatus," which is the ultimate spiritual creative force and cause that continually maintains the natural as such, or that forms matter. (AC 5173, 8911, 9293)

The fact that "nothing in nature exists except from the spiritual and *by means of it*," and that "the essence *from* which nature exists is the spiritual" (AE 1206), does not give to nature a spiritual essence or spiritual qualities. A lower discrete degree does not acquire its new qualities by a "creation from nothing," but by a deprivation of superior qualities. Nature is nature because of its negative or privative qualities. The natural cannot be regarded as spiritual although it can receive an influx of the spiritual, and is indeed continually formed by a spiritual cause.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Schlieper, "Swedenborgs System der Naturphilosophie," Berlin 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lamm, *Swedenborg*, Stockholm 1915, p. 49.

From these teachings about the differences between the spiritual and the material, Dr. Morin is reluctantly compelled to admit that Swedenborg seems to have postulated that "all reality is not of a spiritual nature." (p. 208) But he dismisses the matter by saying that we encounter in Swedenborg a monistic picture of the world which "does not wholly preclude a dualistic tendency," (!) (p. 213, 218)

It seems strange that Dr. Morin does not take account of the passages in the Writings which not only stress the dualism of spirit and matter, but also approve of the theory of spiritual influx as the position of Descartes.<sup>5</sup> But the historians of philosophy unfortunately either interpret Descartes' somewhat obscure statements as supporting the theory of interaction (which implies the idea of what Swedenborg calls physical influx), or they assume that Descartes himself cherished an idea of occasionalism—an expediency to which his followers resorted to explain the *appearance* that soul and body influenced each other.

That neither interaction nor occasionalism accorded with Descartes' real meaning is clear from his own words<sup>6</sup> as well as from the theological Writings of Swedenborg.<sup>7</sup> It is true that Swedenborg seems to make no distinction between the theory of spiritual influx and that of occasional causes. But his usage of the latter term rests on the fact that changes in the brain are the *occasions* for the formation by the soul of ideas in the mind.

So far as we know, Descartes never stated that the spiritual could not affect the natural. He held that while the spiritual was utterly different from the natural, it could yet direct the "animal spirits" and thus cause action in the body. (The animal spirits were conceived as the subtlest parts of the blood and likened to particles of flame or a very subtle air.)

The dualistic teachings which Dr. Morin found so challenging in Swedenborg are of fundamental importance in any attempt to grasp the nature of both man and nature. A more complete analysis of Swedenborg's relation to Descartes and the Occasionalists was published in the *NEW PHILOSOPHY* for April-June 1959, pages 33-43, where references are given.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ISB 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Passions of the Soul*, IV, V, XLI, XLIII, XXXIV.

<sup>7</sup> *E.g.* ISB 19.