FOOTNOTES TO SWEDENBORG

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Alfred North Whitehead once wrote that philosophy is footnotes to Plato. While this has become something of an aphorism, it is not so well-known how he qualified this statement, for he identified the times in which Plato lived as belonging to "an intellectual tradition not yet stiffened by excessive systematization" (Whitehead 1978, 39).

This is a telling statement. There are periods of time that can often be identified by the degree to which they break with the restrictions of an age that is felt to be past its sell-by date, which in turn leads to the inception of new ideas and new thinking, such that their sudden appearance has the effect of breaking down the rigidity of traditional thought, and they force themselves into existence under the impulse of an entirely different head of steam.

It is more than coincidence that Emanuel Swedenborg proposed a similar idea with regard to the evolution of spiritual reality in terms of the five churches well-known to Swedenborg scholars (vastation, and its appearance in end-states etc.). In fact, he was himself living through such a period. It was an era that has become identified as the Enlightenment, and it is in the context of this background that Swedenborg the scientist became Swedenborg the mystic. Yet he is not two men. He is one person who evolved from one into the other. To many, this may seem something of an oddity, as if such a transformation can only be explained in terms of a "Road to Damascus" experience. With Paul this may well have been necessary as he moved from fundamentalist Jew to converted Christian. It would be a great disservice to Swedenborg to see his own change of state in these terms, since he never shared such fundamentalist views. He may have accidentally prepared himself with breathing exercises that were akin to what we might understand as Yogic practice but neither of these things, sudden illumination or the meditative state, are enough to explain the transformation that occurred.

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Yet in reading his pre-mystical writings, we can see how the seeds of transformation were already present in his attitude of mind, and in the philosophy that he had developed. It is this that set him apart from the mind-frame normally associated with Enlightenment thought.

The Enlightenment

A short article like this can hardly do justice to presenting a detailed overview of these times, but one thing that stands out clearly as Enlightenment thinking is the development of the experimental method in natural philosophy. This evolved into what we call science, and these times were its point of origin.

This is not the place to consider the conditions that gave rise to it, but one should be aware of the kind of excitement that must have animated this age. In its own time, as in any new era, there existed a feeling that this new methodology might possibly provide a means of explaining everything. This is something that is a prevalent concern in our own times in which thought is still largely enticed by the promise of a Theory Of Everything (as it has been labelled) which might possibly be derived from practices that stem directly from Enlightenment thinking, and which is still regarded as a sort of holy grail of science. This is understandable in the earlier period in which intellectual exuberance was at a high point. Yet we should know that all such attempts are bound to fail, even though it is an imperative of thought that the attempt should be made. For it is more often the case that such ideas, and the possibilities they aim to realize, blind us with their promises of total understanding, while much that does not fit such systems of thought is concealed from view and excluded from such vision. Such things are apparent only in initial stages and in end points.

Something of this can be felt in Kant's philosophy which is entirely concerned with plotting and mapping the boundaries of thought. Yet while this was essentially a philosophical investigation, nonetheless it is philosophy totally enamored by the successes of the experimental method.

Philosophy by its nature is not science. Its true business is to prevent the ossification of thought and turning it into dogma, whatever the qualities of thought might be. Yet such was the enticing power of the emerging

new thought, its successes and its rapid expansion and application into all areas of life, that it is clear that philosophy itself bowed under the pressure in the hope that it could achieve something similar in its own sphere, by applying the same methodology to its own concerns. In other words, philosophy was no longer to be an independent critical system, but an ambassador of science. This is something that is still very much the case today. How this applied to Kant, the spokesperson of the philosophy of Enlightenment thinking, will be considered in a moment.

Unlike his contemporaries, however, Swedenborg refused to bow to these pressures, and for good reason. It is not that he was not interested in science, but quite the reverse. He was one of the leading lights in many of its fields, versed in all the writings of the shakers and movers of that era. The fact is that Swedenborg lived out all the implications of Enlightenment thinking in his own life, in microcosmic form, and found them wanting, particularly with regard to their inherent claim that all of the nature of reality could be held in its thrall.

But it is no longer possible to look back and read the prevalent ideas of that time, because the very language that was being used was in the process of being altered to such an extent that our own language bears the hallmarks of those changes. The original meanings lost to us, we subsequently live in the intellectual atmosphere in which those original meanings are automatically deemed irrelevant, unrealistic or simply mythical in a derogatory sense. For instance, much of the reference to Swedenborg's early thought is derived here from his work *Psychological Transactions*. We might therefore approach this with some suspicion, that psychology had not yet been developed and little was known concerning the nature of mind. But this reflects our own prejudice acting on the assumption that the meaning of psychology is understood to be concerned with brain processes, cognitive behavior etc. For Swedenborg and his contemporaries, the meaning was quite different and more literal; psychology was the study of the soul, and in particular, the relationship of the soul to the body. The fact that this is no longer the case testifies to the success of the experimental method, and how it has subsequently invaded virtually every corner of thought, ousting the spiritual element in the process.

In our own time, no one dares to speak up for the soul for fear of ridicule. It is as if the matter is closed and irreproachable. So it is for us,

with our armory of modern concepts that have been purged of any soul-like references, but this was not the case in Swedenborg's time, and psychology reflected this concern. Indeed, it was a major philosophical issue. Our error is to assume the matter settled because we no longer think such concepts relevant. We assume that the body/mind problem is now better dealt with as the brain process/consciousness problem. This in itself testifies to the power of semantics and how our thought itself is limited by constructed definition. The devastating effect of this will become clear momentarily, but for now it is enough to note the guardian function of philosophy becoming seconded to the service of science.

Atheism is a relatively new phenomenon. It may have developed out of the philosophy of Descartes and Kant, and out of the science of Galileo and Newton, but none of these major thinkers were atheists. Far from it. Their ideas were driven by the intense desire to know how God constructed the world and the universe. This was the driving force, and in Swedenborg this was a motivation that drove him to the highest levels, and which made him aware of the shortcomings in the new sciences. At the same time, however, the interest in spiritual and theological matters was suffering a transmutation in conception as attempts were made to alter (and indeed, more often to exclude) any discussion of religion in rational terms, or to remove it completely from the agenda as simply beyond the scope of reason, and therefore ultimately irrational. It was the greater sensitivity in his own thought which perceived intuitively the restrictions that were being imposed on thought itself and this for entirely intellectual reasons. Clearly, what is meant by "intellectual" here is very different from what was understood to be the intellect of the time, and that of Kant in particular. Consequently, we find in Swedenborg a cautionary suspicion of Newtonianism because he could see in scientific thought exactly what he perceived in the thought of Leibniz and Christian Wolff, the development of systems of thought that conferred a parallelism between spiritual and natural concerns to the detriment of freedom of thought. It was the sacrifice of the latter that concerned him most, something we can barely understand given that our own systems of thought are now fully scientized. (Indeed, we can feel the presence of this heritage in this way, that whenever an assertion of any kind is made, the immediate reaction is inevitably "Can you prove it? Do you have any evidence for

such a view?") Why this was so will need to be considered a little later, given its central importance, but for now, it would be more useful to look at the more precise objections he laid at the door of the experimental method.

Swedenborg's objections

To begin with, Swedenborg was not interested in principles that acted to limit the range of thought. For instance, in Christian Wolff's explication of the body/mind problem, Swedenborg took exception to the fact that it spiralled inwardly to a point dependent on "occult" principles. What Swedenborg understood by this word was simply that such principles lay in obscurity and were unknown, and simply had to be accepted without any critical evaluation. This in itself further demonstrates how language has been acted on since his time, since "occult" ideas now have a very different connotation, but for Swedenborg such "occult" (that is, obscure) ideas were entirely unsatisfactory.

Swedenborg was not interested in the occult. He was interested in knowledge, and in knowing everything through the intellect. Consequently, when everybody else had bowed the knee to science and the newly formed laws of motion, Swedenborg obstinately challenged the base assumptions of these laws by remaining faithful to quite a different first principle, and for sound reasons.

Before stating what that principle was, it is necessary to underline the importance of the critical function of philosophy which has somehow lost its way today. It is extremely difficult to bring assumptions to task, especially when they have become so infolded in our systems of thought that to question them may appear to threaten the structures that are supported by them, especially today. But the importance of this function is still recognized, as can be seen in the following dialogue that took place between the late Sir Isaiah Berlin and Brian Magee in more recent times:

> Magee: What philosophers are trying to do in such investigations is to dig into the presupposition of our thinking*: to investigate, and bring to light, and make clear to us what the buried assumptions are which lie hidden in our*

> *basic terms, and which thereby get smuggled into our conclusions – and that means into our beliefs and our actions*. (Magee 1978, chap. 1; emphasis added)

Isaiah Berlin points out the difficulty of actually doing this:

> Berlin: But as a rule, even the most gifted among them [scientists] tend to be too deeply absorbed in their activity to be able to stand back and examine the assumptions on which their work and their beliefs are based. (Ibid.)

This interview took place more than thirty years ago, and it reads more like a warning to the future that we now inhabit rather than advice. It warns us of the dangers that are inherently present by the neglect of this critical function:

> Magee: It seems extraordinary that so many people who like to think of themselves as plain, down-to-earth, practical men should dismiss the critical examination of models as an unpractical activity. If you don't drag out into the light the presuppositions of your thinking you remain simply the prisoner of whatever the reigning orthodoxy in the matter at issue happens to be. Thus the model of your age, or the model of your day, becomes your cage without your even realizing it. (Ibid.)

In spite of that, the assumptions of science are not questioned and we *have* become prisoners of the reigning orthodoxy. Furthermore, we hardly realize that this has happened. Swedenborg, on the other hand, ever the philosopher in the true sense (as lover of wisdom) was acutely aware of these dangers, and as stated in the opening paragraphs, his era had not yet hardened into the dogmatic form, and so the assumptions which he challenged were open to inspection philosophically.

Swedenborg was aware that in the starting point of thought, the assumptions that define a beginning, if they contained not an inkling of an idea of the soul (which will not be defined here, since our own concepts of elan vital, life-force etc. do little to actually approach his meaning which is virtually lost to us) then the ensuing chain of reasoning could never reach

a point of conclusion that could identify it in reality in any relevant shape or form. (In fact, in his later, mystical writings, and particularly the *Arcana Coelestia*, Swedenborg is continually stressing the manner in which thought limits its range of perception by its adherence to false assumptions.) Yet even in his pre-mystical writings, Swedenborg recognized in the assumption of inertia from which the laws of motion were derived a strict limitation to thought. Inertia is effectively a dead state and reflects the operations of a method of reason which itself resembles this state until such time as a difference occurs and wakes it from its own inertial, mental condition.

The principle of inertia

It is crucial to emphasize this, for three hundred years of tradition have virtually filed this away as something assumed not to be in need of further clarification or discussion. The principle of inertia is *the* hallmark of a scientific perspective. It is what makes a scientific idea scientific. In itself it is a definition of a state of inactivity, yet it is one that is not to be found in a single square inch of the vast universe, but purely as an a priori condition of human reason (reflected in the form which governs virtually every experiment) something that Kant himself could not recognize as the underpinning establishing his mental framework structured by spatio-temporal categories in his philosophical work, but which he raises as an argument with which to criticize Swedenborg in *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, a title which deliberately intended to be denigrating:

> The dead matter that fills the universe is, according to its proper nature, in a self-same state of inertia and stability. (Kant 2002, 15)

Note here in this single statement Kant's own leaning towards a scientific principle (or more accurately a metaphysical assertion raised to the status of one) as a philosophical warrant. For "proper nature," we can read this as assumed to mean "real nature." Like everyone else concerned with the promulgation of Enlightenment views, reality is now to be viewed as exclusively inert, and all reality "solidity, extension and shape, and its manifestation . . . are based upon these grounds . . ." (Kant 2002, 15). We

hardly notice in our own time the manner in which the "proper nature" that Kant refers to is actually a usurpation designed to rid thought of what his times may have seen as esoteric contamination. Less than two hundred years earlier, quite another way of thinking was regarded as "proper study," as this quotation shows:

> I am of the opinion that . . . nothing could be fashioned more pleasing than an account from which we learn of the body and of the mind and furtherance of a certain divine power consisting of the harmony of both, in sum, of ourselves, *whom to know is man's proper study.* (Emphasis added. Cited in Edelstein 1962)

But given that Kant was a God-fearing man, he then begins a speculation on this ground alone concerning the nature of "immaterial beings," remaining unconvinced unless, like doubting Thomas, he gets irrefutable evidence that can demonstrate some kind of spiritual, inner activity that "animates itself and also the dead stuff of nature." In short, he does not listen to what Swedenborg has to say, but creates his own counterargument in order to dismiss it. It is a classic "straw man" argument. The absolute dependence of Kant's position on the inertia principle as the basis for his own philosophical schema spurs him to invent his own spiritist philosophy which he foists upon Swedenborg, one that bears no resemblance at all to anything Swedenborg said, purely to eclipse any chance of relevance he may have had:

> The appeal to immaterial principles is the refuge of lazy philosophy, and consequently the type of explanation in this style is to be avoided as much as possible, so that the causes of the world's phenomena that rest on the laws of motion of mere matter [i.e. based on inertia] and that are *uniquely and alone capable of comprehension* can be known in their full scope. (Kant 2002, 27; emphasis added)

Of course, the irony is that given this as the basis for any kind of spiritual reality, Swedenborg would have agreed with him, for this was not the basis for his own ideas. But what is embarrassing historically is that we can see that Swedenborg was a giant as a scientist, and listening to

Kant urging the cause of science as an attack on Swedenborg is a little like listening to a child attacking an Einstein. He is clearly out of his depth, and it is fortunate that Swedenborg was possessed of an integrity that was able to raise itself above such intellectually facile thinking. In fact, what we find in the philosophical writings of the early, pre-mystical thought of Swedenborg is a concern with just this principle of inertia, and therefore the whole foundation of Enlightenment thinking, including the principles that had inured themselves in Kant.

He states his view in *A Hieroglyphic Key* as follows:

> As long as motion endures so long does conatus endure; for conatus is the motive force of nature. But conatus alone is a dead force. ("Hieroglyphic Key" in Swedenborg 1984, 157)

This is a far cry from any notion of "immaterial beings." These days, the word "conatus" is completely unknown. Indeed, we are hardly aware of the fact that it was once as much a part of ordinary speech as its opposite (inertia) is in our own time and in our ordinary speech. Indeed, it was more familiar than most people can imagine. The dictionary defines conatus as "endeavour" or "effort," but the Oxford English Dictionary offers an interesting modern take on this: "A force, impulse or tendency simulating a human effort." One can see from this that our own thought regards conatus as a projection onto reality of a state found in ourselves, and not something found in nature. The post-modern position has long since identified the impossibility of a 'pure' objective thought, since all thought participates in the thought-about. And yet to talk of conatus as a simulation is to attack this relation as if the scientific view with its own principle of inertia is actually defining a state in nature and not a state of mind, as if science were somehow privy to a true view, independent of thought. Consequently, the implication of this definition of conatus can be expressed in this way: "How foolish of those thinkers of the past not to recognize this simple fact, that what they called conatus is in fact an anthropomorphism they have thrust onto nature, and to have expended so much energy in exploring reality possessed of an ingredient present only in their minds and not in the objects of reality." The irony is hidden

from us, and does not reveal our own habits of thought which have assumed something worse.

If now we search the dictionaries for a definition of inertia, they begin with a statement that is basically repeating Newton's principle: "that property of matter by virtue of which it continues in its existing state, whether of rest or of uniform motion in a straight line, unless that state is altered by external force."

Here we find the expression of our own assumed attitude, as though the principle of inertia were a true description of nature, devoid of any contamination by the projection of a human faculty. Or so it would seem. In fact, the human faculty is defined separately, as if the second definition were separate from the first. "2) Inactivity; disinclination to act; inertness; apathy." Indeed, the word "inert" is bifurcated so that we do not see any projection or simulation, so that on the one hand it has its common scientific connotations, while the second applies to persons and animals: "inactive; sluggish; not inclined for or capable of action. Also of mental faculties."

In the absence of philosophical sensitivities to such assumptions, it is clear that we have become quite incapable of "seeing" that this distinction is artificially produced since we have become so inured to it ourselves that we assume the assumption of the principle of inertia actually describes a real situation in nature, when in fact it is no more or less real than conatus, as considered in modern parlance. This is regarded as a projection while inertia is assumed to be a non-projection, and it is hidden as a latent idea in every single concept of science into which it is inevitably smuggled. Yet it is always an assumption and not a fact, an a priori condition and not a contingent reality. It would be more honest if one found the following definition: *Inertia – the state of inactivity simulating the sluggishness and lack of motivation in human states of reason.* It is the effect of this principle that came into being with the Enlightenment, and the dangers of assuming it as an independent reality were quite obvious to Swedenborg. "Conatus alone is a dead force" (Swedenborg 1984, 157).

What was understood by the word "force" is not at all like our understanding, since ours is constructed around the acceptance of Newtonianism. This acceptance was not only of a scientific nature, but actually required a redefinition of language in order to make it acceptable,

so that common terms could be stripped of their meaning and replaced with specialized meanings which were to enter the common vocabulary, and thereby force them into acceptability. In *Principles of Natural Philosophy*, Newton writes:

> Hitherto I have laid down the definitions of such words as are less known, and explained the sense in which I would have them to be understood in the following discourse. I do not define time, space, place, and motion, as being well known at all. Only I must observe that the vulgar conceive those quantities under no other notions but from the relation they bear to sensible objects. And thence arise certain prejudices for the removing of which it will be convenient to distinguish them into absolute and relative, true and apparent, mathematical and common. (Newton 1947, 6)[1]

The fact that science was plagued by the notion of absolutes is suggestive to us today that perhaps this specialization of meaning had gone too far. Common meanings were divested of their content, and this in turn stripped out conatus from nature. One can understand how this happened. The common notion of force, the conception found in the "vulgar" which we now take as anthropomorphism, was replaced with an agent of change that acts externally upon an inertial mass. The natural ambiguities of language which reflected the multifunctional aspects of nature become "purified" to reflect the desire to see everything in terms of neutrality. This may be a useful way to conduct scientific enquiry, but as a fundamental "theory of everything" it has been disastrous. Swedenborg is quite clearly not describing an anthropomorphic reality when he says that conatus is a dead force; rather he is saying that there is a motivation in nature that in itself impels being into becoming in an inevitable manner that is will-like (as in our own will (as a felt state) and determination) but which is not will, but conatus. In effect, his is a defence of process philosophy, while Newton's is a philosophy of things moved by brute force. His is a world of tenden-

[1] Also cited in A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. The quotation can be found at www.bun.kyoto-u.ac.jp/~suchii/Nscholium.html

cies, inclinations, predispositions and impulses. Interestingly, these words are all reemerging once again as part of the fabric of reality as can be seen in the later quotation from Werner Heisenberg. This in itself is significant, since the developments in quantum mechanics ran in tandem with an awareness of the severe restrictions imposed by Newtonianism, and inertia by its informing presence. (Perhaps this is the irony, that later scientific developments fall more on the side of Swedenborg than Kant.)

Swedenborg recognized the lack of determination (or inclination, or tendency) that typified the inertial state, and indeed when he refers to inertia he actually calls it "indeterminate." We may think of this word as "unpredictable" when in fact it is more literal than that, and suggests the inability of nature to determine its direction, or randomly causal for want of a better phrase. Yet again, one can see here the prevalence of the notion of 'appetition' as expressed through Leibniz' monadology, in which it becomes defined as a principle of action rather than of 'thingness'. Nor was this notion of appetition separate from perception since a change of view invited a state of change in appetition. And this idea stretches backwards in time further than Aristotle. Yet all this is quite literally swept away for no sound reason other than the youthful exuberance of a new way of seeing for which such a view was nothing more than a hindrance rather than a falsity. Even so, Swedenborg was quite aware of these changes and their dangers and shows the limitations of such thinking. He recognizes the lack of impulse inertia represents, as well as the implications to a more inclusive way of perceiving reality. Notice how he relates the implications of inertia to a mind-state:

> The force of inertia and passive force is the principle of gravity and the cause of rest in the substances of the world.
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> Sluggishness and indifference is the principle of indetermination and the cause of inaction in the human body.[2] (Swedenborg 1984, 165, 166)

[2]While it may not be clear why the first statement is a criticism rather than a statement of fact, by reversing the statement so that the principle of gravity becomes the key phrase, Swedenborg is asserting something that is yet to see the light of day in our own times, which is that gravity is not a force but a logical conclusion. But this will have to wait another occasion for deeper investigation. At the moment, the concern is with the principle of inertia as the emphatic point.

What should be noticed here is something more significant to understanding Swedenborg's later development. As the state of mind, so also the experience of nature. Those times were already cognizant of the hermetic idea of 'as above, so below' in an intelligible non-polarized form. Newton's equivalent was to change all this and became a one-dimensional bowdlerization of this: as above (the movement of the planets) so below (the falling of the apple). While Newton never made the claim, others since have asserted that the mathematical description of this relation was a fundamental explanation. In fact, Kant claims as much in the same *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, concluding the previous quotation ". . . based upon all these grounds, permit a physical explanation that is at the same time mathematical, and together they are called mechanical" (Kant 2002, 27). (The inheritance of this is felt in the present time with the interminable regularity with which we are told that the true language of reality is mathematics. What is yet to see the light of day is the alternative and the counterpoint, which is that the physics of imagination is to be found in the poetic and in correspondential types of perception.) But Swedenborg was not convinced. Even though he was no mystic at this time, he saw, and intensely desired to see what it was within ourselves that corresponded with what he saw without. Clearly, he saw the correspondence (or rather, the lack of it) between the inertia principle and the inactive states of the human mind:

> In the animal kingdom [the soul's kingdom—the body], there is nothing that corresponds to the force of inertia except sluggishness, otherwise it would be torpor, cold or death; but the subject here is correspondence with the living animal. (Swedenborg 1984, 166)

It is life, and the meaning of life, that Swedenborg sees reflected in nature, and he sees this reflection opposed by inertia, in which he recognizes the pale reflection of the dead state. By such a state, the indeterminate is essentially a term referring to a functionless event, and not to be confused with the indeterminacy of the quantum realm. The dead force of conatus is at least a force, however it is described, (appetition, perception, principle of action, impulse etc.), but inertia is a dead state, and all action is forced externally. And it is because of this that Swedenborg sees the threat to a third order of correspondence. For he always sees something of the

rational mind acting as go-between, a correspondential connector between the material world and the spiritual world. Consequently, while nature is possessed of a conatus, so man is possessed of will, so the spiritual is possessed of a providential nature, and it is this nature that is totally disconnected and cut off by the inertia principle. Newtonian thinking, in which below and above are connected through a purely ground-based state, cannot afterwards extend beyond the ground. But the conatus-base is not constrained by such limitations and extends such a correspondence to a third level. Having discussed the deathlike state and its correspondence to the inertia principle, he then writes of the third state of correspondence to the spiritual:

> One of the classes may be wanting, owing to there being no corresponding representative, as in the present case; for in things divine there is nothing corresponding to sluggishness, inertia, gravity, rest, indetermination, inaction*; for properties that rather pertain to death, are not predicable of pure and veriest life*. (Ibid., 166; emphasis added)

Let this summary emphasize how crucially important these implications are for us today. Inertia is to death as conatus is to life. What we have called the age of Enlightenment has infused every concept we think with, with the assumption of the inertia principle. And to this day, despite the call of philosophy, it remains unchallenged as scientific concepts have infiltrated ordinary language. "Enlightenment" thinking and the age of Enlightenment is a phrase that has been coined by parties whose own well-being or progress has arisen as a result of adopting its assumptions uncritically. It is still taught in this way, and thereby instills in the young the same principles. To rewrite history differently, from the point of view in which conatus is seen as more comprehensive a perspective, this same period of time could quite easily be termed the age of disenchantment.

Perhaps this word is not quite right. Enchantment implies a sense of childish wonder, though this should not be excluded. Conatus, given its implications, is an empowering concept, while inertia disempowers. Consequently, the Enlightenment is from another perspective the age of disempowerment.

But this is the paradox. What we understand by empowerment is precisely that which is and has been provided by Enlightenment methodology. In other words, the form of reality is precisely the opposite in terms of meaning from that which is provided by a different base. That is the price we have had to pay for the so-called advantages of science. Given its presence in all forms of thought both as a methodology and in terms of the inheritance of terms of meaning, ours is an age that represents the culmination of a perspective which is more properly defined as the metaphysics of inertia. The lack of philosophical presence persuades us that the reality we inhabit is far from metaphysical, and based entirely on structures of evidence. No amount of evidence ever establishes an assumption, but can be used to bolster confidence in it. Given the retreat of conatus, that confidence becomes an overwhelming pressure, and it is what is meant by stating that the lack of critical evaluation transmutes our models into cages, cages that we currently occupy.

Simultaneity always exists between assumptions adopted as a priori truths and the contingent facts that they are designed to encounter. Yet however persuasive they may be, they never actually make contact and intertwine. What is called evidence or proof becomes a means of bringing these two parallel lines closer together, and it sometimes happens that they become so close that they resemble a single line. That is the point when the assumptions become treated as established truths and the system built on it as possessed of universal scope. It is the scope which then invites the possibility that there is no more to reality than what such assumptions reveal, particularly when we rest satisfied with them. In Swedenborg's view however, the lines remain ever parallel, since what he calls conatus pertains to nature while the impulse in man is defined in terms of will and desire. These remain parallel as correspondences and thereby generate the resonance which intuits the third strand in terms of a providential spirituality. It is this harmony between these three strands that represent the enlightened view, while all three collapse into one in the Enlightenment view. It is for this reason that the great debates of the day were concerned with the nature of harmony, and why preestablished harmony, such as the clockwork Newtonian universe, became restrictive and disharmonic. The price of that disharmony is the erosion of fundamental freedom.

The devastating effect of this perspective may not yet be clear to those unfamiliar with philosophical terminology. There is another way of putting it. In looking at Swedenborg's perspective of a triple line system, one should see that far from any single line being causally connected to another, the correspondential form of relationship is actually a resonance—when one line is vibrating, the others are aroused sympathetically, as long as they are not touched—that is to say, as long as one does not try to prove them. (What a different take this gives to the whole meaning of faith!) However, the rational program has so thoroughly convinced itself and the modern world that its principles are sound and in no need of philosophical criticism, it has foisted upon us the belief that those strings have been "touched." The effect of such touching (given the assumed mantle of supremacy that is bestowed upon the principle of inertia) is to render the vibration muted and stilled, so that what comes out of the processing method of scientific enquiry exactly matches expectations. The raw data becomes colored by the principles that in turn continually confirm the belief. It is a vicious circle with no escape. The compass needle leads us, but once touched, we are lost. Hence it presses on with its version of a reciprocal program, utterly convinced by its own method of enquiry while excluding everything else—and that means conatus. Who needs it, since reality is "really" mostly dead and not resonant? This explains why Swedenborg is still largely misunderstood and why religion is made inconsequential.

It is this range, the notion of the contingent possibilities of a theory of everything that Swedenborg opposed, for he foresaw that what was meant by "everything" actually excluded any spiritual reference point. In more recent times, Alfred North Whitehead called this the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" in which the partial view is taken to represent the whole. Interestingly enough, Whitehead's views, by reemphasizing the subjective element, come incredibly close to Swedenborg's in many places. He perceived that "the things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal" (Whitehead 1978, 40). The use of this word "participation" is almost the same as Swedenborg's use of the word "correspondence" in his early writings. Furthermore, there is a strong resemblance between conatus and what Whitehead called the "lure for feeling" and "subjective aim" which informs all of reality and not simply its mental

pole. Unfortunately process philosophy, because it is naturally critical of science which is opposed to all reference to such "lures of feeling," tends to be marginalized as a significant line of philosophy, even though its pedigree is far longer than the roots of science, and indeed includes them. Whitehead, like Swedenborg, is remembered more fore his collaboration with Bertrand Russell on *Principia Mathematica* than for his original work in process philosophy, just as Swedenborg is thought of as the author of *Heaven and Hell* and little else. Yet quite clearly Whitehead attempts to re-instil interest in the forgotten principles that stem from the conatus-view, whose departure from the intellectual scene Swedenborg warns against.

This does not exhaust the thought of the pre-mystical Swedenborg by any means, but it is enough to suggest two things. Firstly, Swedenborg's life represents in miniature the whole of Enlightenment thinking and its subsequent development, to the point where it exhausts itself as such and takes up a different direction in order to rationalize the bigger picture; but here the word "rationalize" is used in its original sense of ratios, in which parallel orders are seen to resonate. Consequently, while his mystical writings represent a sea-change, they are nonetheless a natural progression given his philosophical temperament which refused to settle for anything less. That is not to say that he cast aside his scientific interests, nor that they were illusory or false; rather, he perceived that the form science was taking was restrictive to the development of the human psyche by its emphasis on inertia, and the concepts it subsequently informed. The tripartite correspondential structure in Swedenborg's thought was reduced to two in Enlightenment thinking, to be treated as a single line of enquiry today. This in turn has had many consequences in every field of thought, just a few of which will be briefly discussed here.

Consequence—disbelief in the spiritual

It is almost a cliché to say that belief in any kind of spirituality is regarded with some suspicion since there is virtually nothing in it that can be proved. Yet this is virtually stating the obvious since the notion of proof, given that it appears to feed a single-mindedness, (the one-liner, non-resonating view) excludes such concerns from the outset. This is the weakness of spirituality from the modern rational position, and yet that is

entirely its strength. If there were evidence, it would be to reduce spirituality to a natural phenomenon, since that is the function of evidence, to indicate the proximity of the sensory to the assumption of inertia. It would make of religion nothing more than a tribal necessity, and this is in fact the conclusion of those studies that have attempted to explain religion. They effectively explain it away. The irony is that such attempts never reveal their own assumptions, which are similar articles of faith, because as Isaiah Berlin stated, they are too deeply absorbed in their activity to be able to stand back and examine the assumptions on which their work and their beliefs are based. They believe them in the same way that the religious believe their own articles of faith, though for different reasons. That is what is meant by the phrase "metaphysics of inertia" as a definition of science. But these latter have more in common with a blind faith than the kind of faith found in Swedenborg.

Danger to freedom of thought

Earlier, it was stated that Swedenborg foresaw the danger of this line of enquiry to freedom of thought, so perhaps something should be said about this. In recent times, a major line of philosophical enquiry (at least, those not concerned with in-house semantics) concerned the precedence of ontology over existentialism and vice versa. In the case of Sartre for instance, by giving precedence to existentialism, he is forced into the conclusion that man is condemned to freedom. Swedenborg took a different line of approach, and gave precedence to neither. Rather, he saw them as intimately dependent and reciprocal, in contradistinction to philosophers like Spinoza who equated essence and existence. For Swedenborg, such was their reciprocal relationship that his conclusion is quite the reverse of Sartre. Man is not condemned to freedom, but is free to condemn himself. This ultimately became woven into his exegesis of the Bible and became a major theme in the text. Man is never condemned either by God or others, but rather he condemns himself. Sartre's notion, on the other hand, is too obscure to mean anything that can be applied, and shows how such thinking is itself far more occult than religion. But this is hardly surprising. The breed of the infinite in Sartre is totally unlike

anything in Swedenborg, and shares only the use of a word which attempts to overlay and therefore rid us of the older meaning. In effect, Sartre's position is single stranded. This is virtually the opening statement in *Being and Nothingness*:

> In the first place we certainly thus get rid of that dualism which in the existent opposes interior to exterior. (Sartre 2000, xxi)

How is this "thus" removed? By the same reductive process that is to be found in science, yet not acknowledged as such by Sartre in the very first line of *Being and Nothingness* which subsequently shapes the rest as the founding principle:

> Modern thought has realised considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it. Its aim was to overcome a certain number of dualisms which have embarrassed philosophy and to replace them by the monism of the phenomenon.

It is an embarrassment to philosophy because this view, part of the fabric of science, had been extremely successful in its own domain. And now Sartre wishes to do the same for philosophy by adopting a Heideggerian stance, and this includes the reemphasis that conatus is an illusion:

> Force, for example, is not a metaphysical conatus of an unknown kind which hides behind its effects . . . ; it is the totality of these effects. (Sartre 2000, xxi)

Yet while he is clearly taking the scientific line, nonetheless he must reject the scientific principle to give the appearance of a separate identity:

> The paradox is not that there are "self-activated" existences but that there is no other kind. What is truly unthinkable is passive existence; that is, existence which perpetuates itself without having the force either to produce itself or preserve itself. *From this point of view there is nothing more incomprehensible than the principle of inertia.* (Sartre 2000, xxxii; emphasis added)

Here is the appearance of an agreement, that inertia is illogical. Therefore he rejects it. But then he also rejects the opposite pole of conatus, and denies any kind of meaning to an internal/external duologue except as an expression in which any one thing can be seen in an infinite number of ways. His true target is consciousness itself, and he wishes to imbue it with godlike characteristics but call them by another name: ". . . consciousness is a plenum of existence, and this determination of itself by itself is an essential characteristic" (Sartre 2000, xxxi). Here is the problem for Sartre—his idea belongs to no category that can be identified, his "consciousness" inhabits a vacuum, and so the work is aptly titled. Freedom becomes an obscurity because it cannot emerge from such a view, and thereby carries within itself a sense of its own lack of place which is its own condemnation.

Comparing this view with that of Swedenborg, one finds there a unique existentialism that was always bound to be the opposite of this. The love of wisdom, the usual translation of the word "philosophy" became in Swedenborg's hands a concern with love *and* wisdom. Consciousness is always an object arising for Sartre. For Swedenborg it is an emergence that appears through the sense of lack derived from a simultaneous reciprocity between ontology and existentialism (or more properly, love and wisdom), and not through the dominance of one over the other. The fact that this is the major theme of the Bible is no coincidence. (Jacob taking precedence over Esau, Cain killing Abel, Leah preceding Rachel, Jesus Barabbas selected over Jesus Christ etc.). This in turn raises many questions about the nature of appearances that Sartre claims to have solved, yet he leaves them intact while Swedenborg reveals their true upside-down nature. The appearance of the vengeful God makes way for a merciful God, hidden by the appearances we are subject to; but this in itself is significant, and points to further ironies that reflect the form of current notions of understanding, particularly when they apply themselves to exegesis.

The eternal and temporal

Swedenborg's overriding preoccupation was the relationship between the eternal and the temporal. So much so, in fact, that he plotted the boundaries of rational thought in a way that Kant could not, and showed how that edge actually acted as a footstool for the spiritual. The two do not intertwine, yet they relate, and the manner of that relation becomes part of the overall thematic structure of the Bible. We might now think of these as oil and water, but for Swedenborg they presented an intricate correspondence, neither of which vied with the other for some kind of rational supremacy. To create an artificial barrier between them was to build a wall and force a distinction, as though one were made to become relevant only after death, if at all. That may be part of the current view, but this was offensive to Swedenborg:

> But they who do not seek to be more learned than their senses, proscribe such knowledges, and strive to forbid and prevent the philosopher from approaching their altars and hearths, being desirous that penetration shall go no further than is allowed by the testimony and arbitrament, as it were, of the senses. ("Harmony between Soul and Body" in Swedenborg 1984, 25)

And again a little later:

> And lest the eager mind break through the fence or climb over it, the system lays down the principle that all things are carried on apart from any interdependence; and it entirely takes away any connection between the soul and body. (Ibid., 33)

It is significant that he refers to himself here as the "philosopher" for that he was. His concerns were the more traditional ideas of philosophy in its original meaning as the love of wisdom. As just stated, it is not wisdom objectified, but rather the two elements of love and wisdom seen together in a dialectical relation. Consequently, he was able to discern the dangers of adhering to assumptions that did not acknowledge this relationship.

Nor did this all disappear when Swedenborg entered the period in his life for which he is more well-known. The *Arcana Coelestia* never stops warning the reader of the danger of adopting assumptions.

> These [that their eyes are opened] are their basic assumptions which they confirm in a multitude of ways by means of sensory evidence and of facts which they have at their command . . . for when people cling to the assumptions they have adopted and of which they are persuaded, they make everything favour and support them. (*AC* 570)

But perhaps most telling of all in this later work is the awareness that a different state of mind is needed to understand spiritual matters, and that if this is not understood, it becomes the source of literalism:

> Anybody confirming false assumptions first of all adopts an assumption and then refuses to withdraw from it or to retract the smallest detail. Instead he scrapes together and piles up confirmatory material wherever he can, doing so even from the Word, till at length his self-persuasion renders him incapable any more of seeing the truth. (*AC* 589)

Seeing the truth was the whole point, and part of that truth was to acknowledge a relationship between the spiritual and the natural. Consequently, when Swedenborg begins his exegesis, it is always this relationship that is uppermost, which he longed to know from his earliest years, and which became part of the structure of his later period. To cite one example, most people will be familiar with the story of Genesis, and that the serpent tempted Eve. In most minds, the serpent is still conceived as a representation of the devil, and this image has become firmly embedded in the traditional mythology; but in Swedenborg's mind it becomes symbolic in a much richer way:

> The serpent is here used to mean *man's sensory knowledge* in which he trusts . . . Consequently, reasonings based on sensory evidence concerning mysteries of faith [the most ancient people] called serpent-poisonings, and those who reasoned in that way they called serpents . . . (*AC* 194, 195; emphasis added)

This emphasis on reasoning as opposed to some demonic power, changes the nature of the Bible entirely. Consequently, one finds in his exegesis a structure that intimately concerns the status and the role of natural life, and how it relates to spiritual life. Egypt is no longer merely a country but representative of factual knowledge, while Assyria or Asshur becomes the rational concept-forming capacity that is allied to that knowledge. The exodus from Egypt then becomes representative of the desire for the formation of something spiritual which cannot take place in the natural, especially when factual knowledge gives access to nothing but itself, forcing it to find a place of its own. But this is necessitated because the form of knowledge Egypt represents had become fully dogmatized by this time, and made room for nothing in its structure other than its own brand of knowledge. This mention of the ideas in his later work serves more than merely to show the transition of the early to the late thought of Swedenborg. There is something interesting about this interpretation—it points the finger at the modern world. Egypt as factual knowledge resistant to anything but its own forms of thought, and averse to spirituality—this might well be an accurate description of the modern world. The serpent as sensory based thinking, the piling up of confirmatory evidence in support of itself, it is uncanny that a book as old as the Bible should paint a portrait so accurately describing the current state of affairs. More than that, not being capable of seeing the truth renders these things invisible because it is not possible to approach spiritual concerns with natural concepts alone. The effect of trying to do so leads to literalism.

This, too, is part of the overall structure of the Bible, and can be exemplified with an illustration that is becoming well-known. In his book *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins cites an episode from Genesis which represents in his eyes the misanthropic nature of religion. The particular episode concerns the men of Sodom who descend on Lot and who insist that he bring out his visitors so that they might "know" them. The visitors were spiritual beings, and Lot refuses them access and offers his daughters instead. Ultimately they attempt to force their way in, and the angels come out and these men are blinded, in spite of which they continue to grope for the door. Dawkins' exegesis focuses on the perverted nature of the men of Sodom, and complains that Lot would rather offer his daughters then let these angels be despoiled by them. This is, of course, a literalist reading,

for this is all that is available to the sight and the comprehension of one that is himself an avowed atheist with an intense aversion to all things spiritual. What this passage is communicating is exactly the dangers of exposing spirituality to the ridicule of such natural ways of knowing. The offer of the daughters was an attempt by Lot to show that this was the proper direction for their natural ways of knowing, and not appropriate for understanding the spiritual form of knowing. Consequently, when they insist and force an entry, they are not so much attacked as subjecting themselves to more than their minds can handle and they become blinded. And still they persist in trying to gain entry; it is an example of what is meant by being free to condemn oneself, for here these men are blinded by their own actions, despite all warnings. And it is this reading that Dawkins is unable to perceive since it is beyond the range of his own understanding, which is forever rooted in the inertia based metaphysic of science. But from his own point of view, his reading reflects his own wisdom, which in the inverted nature of things that deny any spirituality becomes a form of ignorance in a more balanced view. In effect, his knowledge is a form of protection that prevents him from being blinded by too much light. (In spite of that, he makes it his avowed aim to create a civilization of science in which religion plays no part. That, essentially, was the situation in Sodom!)

But literalism has a pernicious form. In his autobiography *The Islamist*, Ed Husain recounts his life as a fundamentalist who reformed and became a true Muslim, rooted in the traditions of love and empathy which are its true hallmarks. What is interesting in this transformation is the subsequent awareness that such fundamentalism as he had known could only grow out of a literalist interpretation, and then only for selected passages that could be used to bolster fundamentalism. Exactly the same is true for the Bible as for the Koran. One should therefore note that in any religious tradition, if that tradition reverts into some kind of fundamentalism, the holy books from which they say they are derived actually close themselves down, and will not allow themselves to be used in this way.

Summary

To summarize: it should be emphasized that these criticisms arise as a result of the loss of conatus as a viable conception in the mental apparatus, coupled with the collapse of correspondential levels of awareness into a single form that favors the interests of an inertia-based manner of perception. This may sound like an academic analysis, but it should be recognized that nothing has yet been said concerning the nature of this word, and its relationship to other levels. The reason for this is because it is the loss of structure in terms of these levels that has been the main focus, and not the nature of the conatus in itself. However, it is clear that it has something to do with a principle of action, and that action is tied to an older principle of appetition and perception. This word, "appetition" does, however, give some indication, although somewhat crude (given the non-awareness of parallels). Appetite is an extremely sensual word, but it should not be limited to that domain, as if that is its whole meaning. Rather, it should also imply some sense of lack, in that hunger and desire are evoked by it. Therefore, one should surmise some sense of "something more."

But since this meaning is somewhat suppressed by the metaphysics of inertia which could not possibly recognize it (seeing all changes from the point of view of external forces), that does not mean that it goes away. On the contrary, when it combines with inertia, the effect is devastating, although in a single view it is regarded as normal. The sense of something more, and the desire for it, gives rise to the notion of achieving a sense of completion (by removing the sense of lack). In our current times, one can see that economics itself is driven by the dream of an inertial state that nonetheless provides excess, and is built into the whole principle of interest rates. Since that sense is by its nature insatiable, no point is ever reached that can be described as "enough." And yet this is the whole basis of the capitalist enterprise. But in a view that reverberates with correspondences, what is overlooked is the fact that the Bible itself is a drama taking place in the land of acquisitions (the meaning of Canaan), and that the trading of wares is a highly symbolic form of another kind of exchange program that it represents. It is when that other is closed down that we are

left bereft with nothing but appetite and no real way to sate it. I make these few remarks to point at the relevance of what Swedenborg is saying with respect to the economic problems currently faced by the "consumer" society. But in terms of that modernity, it hardly needs a Swedenborg to explain the meaning of the switching off of the internal sense, in order to understand these lines from Leviticus which automatically leave us bereft and insatiable, though alienated:

> If you do not obey me . . . and you break my covenant . . . you shall sow your seed in vain . . . and though you eat, you shall not be satisfied. (Leviticus 26: 26)

Besides exegesis, this is merely to state the effect of Enlightenment thinking on the modern world. But there is yet one more irony that should be mentioned. The major problem facing science today is known as the quantum gravity problem, which has arisen as a result of an incoherence that is not allowing a theory of everything to emerge. It amounts to a disharmony between the very small scale view of reality that is the concern of quantum theory and the very large scale which is relativity. The irony lies in the fact that Newtonian thinking does not apply at the small scale with any usefulness, and that other kinds of ideas had to be developed to cope with the different types of behavior. These new methodologies were largely statistical, but one should not assume too much from this in terms of random behavior. Werner, one of the founders of quantum theory, put it this way:

> Probability in mathematics or in statistical mechanics means a statement about our degree of knowledge of the actual situation. In throwing dice, we do not know the fine details of the motion of our hands which determine the fall of the dice and therefore we say that the probability for throwing a special number is just one in six. The probability wave . . . meant more than that; it meant a tendency for something. (Heisenberg 1990, 15)

This idea of tendency, or propensity as Karl Popper called it, has far more in common with conatus than it does with inertia. In fact, Mach's

principle which speaks of a universal connectivity between any one thing and all other things, has best been described in terms of matter "somehow knowing." Yet despite these suggestions, the terms used that search for a resolution to the quantum gravity problem ignore these similarities and continue along the usual lines of inertia. It is as if there is an intuited awareness that such an idea might open the door to animism, and there is no knowing where this would end. This in turn (while woefully brief as an overview) suggests that the motivation that drives the modern world made its selection a long time ago, during the Enlightenment, (or Endarkenment as it has also been called). It made a conscious decision to reject all views that leaned towards conatus and adopted only those that could be acted on by inertia. And it is this predisposition that still hangs on as a prejudice in the present.

The effect of this is still playing itself out, and perhaps it is better to end here by summarizing this effect in a phrase coined by Oswald Spengler. There is no doubt that the world has changed entirely with the influence of science, but depending on one's point of view, that alteration is what Spengler called "devastatingly trivial." This triviality has little to do with the material gains that science has brought, but rather that it is brought at a high cost philosophically and spiritually.

Or it may be that it is a storm in the process of blowing itself out. (The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete: Genesis 15:16!) In any event, the more integrated view represented by Swedenborg may still emerge. Perhaps, therefore, one should see the present shape of things in the same terms as suggested by Whitehead with regard to Plato. In terms of a more recent time, one could consider that the modern era, and the philosophies that inform it, are footnotes to Swedenborg.

POSTSCRIPT

Alfred North Whitehead wrote *Process And Reality* in the late 1920s while in America. In some ways this is significant since it was a long way from the philosophical interests that were developing in Europe which resulted in logical positivism and the subsequent obsession with language. His own concerns, however, were clearly "old school" from a

European perspective, yet the scope of his ideas far surpassed anything logical positivism could attain to.

There are many reasons why this book would be of interest to Swedenborg readers, for while Whitehead suffers from the same academic and political marginalization, his concerns are a remarkable retrieval to the world of ideas that are latently contained in Swedenborg. It is that retrieval process that made it necessary for Whitehead to stipulate new definitions for old words by infusing his ideas with a novel form of subjectivism that avoided the tedium and the clichés of the narrow views being presented by post-modernism. In effect, Whitehead champions the cause of the will as a necessary constituent in a more expansive view of reality. It is inevitable that such a view required the inclusion of deity in some form, which was a radical step in those times.

If, as he writes, the prime function of a proposition is to be a lure for feeling, we should not assume that the "feeling" is a mere feeling. For instance:

> Each actual entity is conceived as an act of experience arising out of data. It is a process of "feeling" the many data, so as to absorb them in the unity of one individual "satisfaction". Here "feeling" is the term used for the basic generic operation of passing from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the actual entity in question. (Whitehead 1978, 40)

What is referred to as an "actual entity" is not stipulated or exemplified, and it is this that is its strength. One might imagine it to be a description of what we assume to be a "living thing" like ourselves, yet further reading shows that Whitehead is intending to apply it as a generalization that describes just about everything—rocks and stones, growing things as well as apparently inert things—they are all processes that are imbued with "feeling," so this is clearly not mere "subjectivist" human emotion. In fact, what is meant by this feeling state is very close to the meaning of "affection" as it is used by Swedenborg. Whitehead subsequently calls it "subjective aim" and it is this that is expressed as intent or purposive impulse in the process of being to becoming. The becoming state is subsequently discussed in terms of endurance, and here we can see

the clear parallel with Swedenborg's "coming-into-being" and "maintained-in-being."

In both cases, the underlying consideration is the interest in how variety, or novelty arise, and in both cases, it is necessary to see this in terms of a participation with the non-temporal. This is a topic worthy of its own article, but suffice it to say that what Swedenborg calls "influx" Whitehead calls an "ingression," whose function is identical:

> An eternal object can be described only in terms of its potentiality for "ingression" into the becoming of actual entities. (Ibid., 23)

In fact, Whitehead calls God "an organ of novelty, aiming at intensification." This retrieval process, of the inclusion of the emotive in the totality, brings with it the awareness of the limitations of the scientific view, which Whitehead calls the "scalar" way of seeing. Read this as the quantitative obsession, then the inclusion of the emotive element is called the "vector." In terms of the current discussion, this led Whitehead to the following conclusion:

> The dominance of the scalar physical quantity inertia, in the Newtonian physics, obscured the recognition of the truth that all fundamental physical quantities are vector and not scalar. (Ibid., 177)

The vector is the emotive element without which there would be no existence of any kind, and given the fact that this is controlled by "subjective aim" (affection) and "ingression" (influx) one can begin to perceive a more modern context by which to understand Swedenborg's concern with the principle of inertia, ". . . owing to there being no corresponding representative" (Swedenborg 1984, 166).

But here is an interesting note on the intellectual pedigree; Whitehead had read much of Henri Bergson's work, the coiner of the phrase "elan vital," but this phrase itself began life early in Bergson's work as a replacement of inertia by a different perception of force. (Bergson, incidentally, was a close friend of William James for some time, a noted Swedenborgian.)

This brief foray into Whitehead hopefully dispels any notion that these statements and ideas are spurred by a kind of anti-science position.

What should be rising to the surface is that the questioning of inertia is not the questioning of science or established scientific fact, but of a metaphysical principle that colors (or makes black and white) the facts as they emerge and are absorbed into a scalar form of concept. It is for this reason that science is here called the metaphysics of inertia. This was a philosophical position introduced to deliberately sweep away any emotive vector elements, the real consequences of which are only now in full swing. On this point, Whitehead states the case better than I:

> It has been a defect in the modern philosophies that they throw no light whatever on any scientific principles. Science should investigate particular species and metaphysics should investigate the generic notions under which those specific principles should fall. Yet, modern realisms have had nothing to say about scientific principles; and modern idealisms have merely contributed the unhelpful suggestion that the phenomenal world is one of the inferior avocations of the Absolute. (Whitehead 1978, 116)

Yet in spite of these remarks, very few attempts have been made to seriously challenge what has become the autocracy of science. In fact, such attempts tend to be denigrated and are sidelined by weight of the louder voices representing that autocracy. When we look into the philosophies that have been making their mark, few make any meaningful reference to the non-temporal, while others have been foisted upon us in the name of philosophy when they are clearly anything but. One such thinker that comes to mind is Daniel Dennett who, in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* reveals himself enamored unashamedly with science when he stated that Darwinianism was a universal acid that practically dissolved every idea in its path. One hears much of the evils of blind faith, yet being blinded by science is here expressed as a virtue. Indeed, he has published material on the science of religion which quite clearly reduces spirituality to a form of social anthropology, and it is this kind of unphilosophical thought that is currently passing for philosophy, and selling very well.

More seriously, given that the notion of will, or subjective aim, is an attempt to reintegrate the emotive as an end-oriented presence in the fabric of reality, we should be cautious, indeed, suspicious, of the excesses that are passing themselves off as science, when in fact they are essentially

attempts to save the assumption. The notion of parallel universes comes to mind, for these have been postulated on the back of the anthropic principle which has a distinct odor of purposive presence. Parallel universes exist to maintain belief in the idea of a universe arising from random, blind forces that are not end-oriented. The idea is then neatly slotted into "science-at-the-cutting-edge," sold on the glossy presentations underscored by many "respectable" writers on science in books and magazines and clever graphics on the screen, yet they have not the slightest puff of realism about them. Even so, there are scientists hard at work trying to contact their other "selves" in parallel worlds, and are generously funded to do so. It is a hopeful metaphysics of the worst sort.

The reason for stating these matters in such harsh terms is to emphasize the very real and stark reality we are currently facing with respect to the problems of expressing any kind of "spiritual" statement in the modern world. This is not to suggest that there is no awareness of such things. On the contrary, the bookshelves are bursting with ideas that lean in different ways in a spiritual direction. Very few, however, are able to deal with the kinds of issues that are spoken of here simply because the vocabulary that could engage across different fields of enquiry is absent. But this is admittedly a very broad generalization, as well as not entirely true. Daniel Dennett writes very clearly about his concerns, but equally there are writers and thinkers just as accessible in the opposite direction. The difference is that while an atheistic account of things is regularly widely advertised, often making newspaper headlines, it is clear that these in turn pander to an assumed zeitgeist that feeds off headlines identifying all fundamentalist/literalist views as the causes behind many modern ills (while disabling their own identity as purely rationalistic/scientistic, thereby maintaining a power base, equally as pernicious).

The use of the word "scientistic" as opposed to "scientific" is deliberately chosen, for in recent times the scientific view is one that has steadily advanced towards an exclusive view. Indeed, it is only in terms of this idea that the claims made here are anti-scientific, since this exclusivity is denied. Strangely enough, exactly the same charge could be laid against Jacob Needleman who in his book, *A Sense of Cosmos*, makes virtually the same claim:

> The universe of scientism is a world devoid of consciousness and purposefulness. And the various sciences describe the laws that govern reality when we see it in this limited way. (Needleman 2003, 137)

Interestingly enough, what Whitehead called the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (not the easiest of concepts to grasp in the specialized language of his philosophical thought) and what Swedenborg saw in the blind and passive acceptance of assumptions which ultimately restrict perspective, Needleman rephrases in a more modern vernacular that is far more accessible:

> . . . the laws of mechanism (in the modern sense of the word) are just as valid and rigorous as the laws of consciousness. Error enters only when we indiscriminately assume there are no other levels than the one we see. (Ibid., 137)

Jacob Needleman's book is a compelling account of the insidious manner in which science has become the dominant player with respect to what is to count as knowledge, by invading virtually every field of enquiry in our culture and stamping it with its own watermark. What does not bear it is discarded. This is not the place to review this book, which in large part cannot be faulted for the spirit of enquiry that informs and shapes it. But from the perspective of the current article, it is possessed of many insights that are wonderfully ironic, and these testify to the genuine "felt" concerns that motivate him.

Consider the following opening three remarks:

> But really to know how life does things it is necessary to know why life does things. And this cannot be known without the joining together within ourselves of feeling, instinct and thought.

> . . . the heart, the power of profound feeling, is absolutely necessary in order . . . to know the good that is an objective—yes, objective, attribute of the real world—out there.

> . . . we need to rediscover how to join the attention of the heart to the powers of the mind and the perceptions of the senses. (Ibid., xi)

Swedenborg readers will know the overriding concern in Swedenborg with the question of the relation between the soul and body, the feeling state and the thinking state, which ultimately became a subtle distinction between will and understanding, and which provided the key to an even more subtle view of the relations between the spiritual, rational and natural layers of existence, subsequently found inscribed in the structure of the bible. Indeed, Needleman himself is well aware of the current vacuum that simply ignores the spiritual and fudges the rational to depict all reality in purely natural terms. But it is the hunger that grows out of this awareness that leads to the deeper sense of the vacuity of our current perceptions, and it is in terms of that sensitivity that we should read Needleman's thoughts as they begin to centre on exactly the same concerns as Swedenborg's, yet apparently unaware of them. His reference to "will" is one of many striking examples:

> I take this to be the objective basis of the idea that the development of man must involve the development of will. (Ibid., 96)

There is something puzzling here, however. Consider the range of references in Needleman's book and we find ourselves in ancient Egypt at one end, and then working through Hinduism, Buddhism and Sufism, with references to Moses Maimonides and Vesalius right through to Gurdjieff and Ouspensky in more recent times, to name just a few. Every one of his references is used to good effect in underlining the issues that Needleman is discussing, suggesting a sweep of relevance that extends over the whole of history. Yet given that his concerns mirror themselves in Swedenborg's, it is a mystery why there is no reference to him. Perhaps this speaks of the success of the process of marginalization that has been deliberately effected over time. Keeping this in mind, consider the following:

> . . . Avicenna wished to remind his readers and himself that teachings which are meant to awaken the spirit cannot be mixed and diluted with formulations intended for pragmatic and theoretical applications. (Ibid., 41)

Here one finds the same attitude found in Swedenborg, that the spiritual cannot be approached by natural means alone, which is already reflected upon in the episode described earlier concerning Lot. Secondly, it is a core idea in Swedenborg that the physical sun is in itself, as a source of heat (treated as symbolic of both good and evil) symbolic of a different order of sun in the spiritual realm. This image is constantly referred to in his work. Yet it is quite clear that an intuition within Needleman himself craves just this kind of idea:

> . . . the objective symbolism of the sun as a source not only of perceptible light and force, but of illumination and life corresponding to a central fire within man himself which, were he to come in touch with it, would gradually transform him. (Ibid., 35)

Thirdly, the presence of such imagery in Swedenborg's work is based on what he called the law of correspondences—that every created thing is representative of something reflected in the structure of the relations of all the different aspects of being and existence, a structure that affiliates a dual spiritual nature (celestial/spiritual) with a rational/natural nature. This, too, is part of an intuited lack that Needleman recognizes

> . . . the law of analogy—which has also been called "the Great and Merciful Law of Analogy"—is more than a mere metaphysical construct. It is a guide to the experience of myself. (Ibid., 62)

When he makes an assertion like "Go to a place where the 'light-pollution' of man-made cities is lessened," while this may sound like metaphor on the surface, one can feel Needleman reaching for that law of analogy that is more than this. It is ironic, therefore, to find that the word "city," as expounded by Swedenborg, is representative of a body of doctrines. The destruction of cities, or their creation, always represents a

certain type of doctrine in the bible, and this is a meaning that is constantly maintained. Given also the detailed representative of every single animal in the bible, from fish and camels to whales, rams, goats, sheep etc. and how they link in a coherent manner to the structural form just mentioned, it is almost certain that this is what Needleman is seeking when he writes:

> I have long been intrigued by the idea that living creatures are symbols. (Ibid., 75)

Swedenborg wrote much on the five churches, referring to the Very Ancient Church and the Ancient Church as the first two (represented by Adam and Noah). The character of the first is described in terms that link understanding and will in such a way that they provide a type of direct access to God, while the latter church saw their subsequent corruption and evolution into conscience, in which will and understanding become separated in order to effect a new dispensation so that the connection with God is not entirely lost. On that point also, Needleman intuits that it must have been so once:

> Perhaps there were once peoples who learned directly from nature as from a sacred teaching . . . (Ibid., 79)

Needleman has all but outlined the Swedenborg position, except it is in the form of the lack of its presence in our thought today. As a result, this lack presents itself in traditional, restricted exegesis which even Needleman can hardly escape:

> In "sin", man sells himself short, as is illustrated in the biblical story of Esau, who forfeited his birthright because of an empty stomach. (Ibid., 46)

There are views which either expand or contract our perspectives, and this view clearly owes something to the traditional reading that is barely able to lift itself from the literal reading. This in itself is no fault, for it is written in a way that requires the literal as a first base. But to see what it conceals, one needs the help of a more extensive symbology which also carries a dynamic of action rather than a static display. In this episode, for

instance, a point has been reached in which the natural understanding represented by Jacob must take precedence here over the heart in order to establish a certain order of doctrines. It is this that Esau, as representative of the heart, yearns for at this point, and is also the reason why such doctrines must take precedence for the time being. In fact, the whole scene is a depiction of the constant process of evolution that is seeking the right relation between the will and the understanding. Up to Jacob, this has been depicted in a sort of reverse order in which the divine, the rational and the natural are represented by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In this instance, this apparent usurpation is resolved later when Jacob and Esau meet again in an intricately orchestrated encounter that rebalances the whole order, and the relation between soul and body, heart and mind, appears to be resolved. (Note also the dramatic form in the bible, which so long ago was discussing the very issue that defined the key debate of existentialism in twentieth century philosophy: which comes first, ontology (Esau) or existentialism (Jacob)? Unlike the modern pastiche, the human/natural element is seen within the context of a structure of spiritual *and* natural levels.)

As stated, and this requires emphasis, there is no real fault here in Needleman's conclusions, since it demonstrates the need for just the kind of symbolic structure he calls for, a structure already present in Swedenborg's thought and which is yet to see the light of day. In fact, to push the point even closer to home, a key idea in Swedenborg is concerned with the proprium. This is akin to the notion of a kind of self often translated as ego, though its meaning stems from the will rather than the understanding, and has more to do with selfish attractions. Even so, it is very close to what Needleman identifies as the core reason for our restricted perspectives which settle for so little, but which appear so grand:

> . . . with egos inflated, by fervently pursuing this sort of science we will merely become ever more willing and ardent accomplices in the process of the physical and psychological "miniaturisation" of man on earth. (Ibid., 70)

Bearing in mind the resonant nature of correspondences (the law of analogy) mentioned earlier, it should be clear by now that what is required

are ideas that are capable of challenging the authority of science by demonstrating the weaknesses still carried in their assumptions, and this Swedenborg has begun for us with the conatus approach as a preferred state to inertia. In this way, the microcosmic form becomes the proper reflection of the larger scale as its reevaluation reveals that reality has more in common with how we "feel" it than think it to be. Yet in the absence of such an application, the microcosm (what Swedenborg refers to as a little heaven) collapses into a merely poetic expression, and this too is something that Needleman highlights.

> Perhaps we are too ready to manufacture replacements for the conceptions of modern physics. How, instead, to look at the laws of physics themselves in a new way—so that they begin to "reverberate" with meaning? I do not think that an idea such as the microcosm gains its power by thrusting aside the laws of physics and drawing us toward the contents of the mind. (Ibid., 101)

He is quite right. What are needed are ideas that gain their strength through the intellectual side. For instance, although he finds it necessary to accept the theory of relativity as it is found, this is a view of reality that is an interesting case in point that could be remodelled without too much difficulty. The problem at the moment is that the emphasis on the translatable inertial reference frame and the concept of space-time itself do not reveal their allegiance to Newtonian thinking, so that the theory itself, while often cited as an advance on it, actually advances by incorporating it. In other words, as things stand, it is virtually impossible to determine whether certain key ideas in modern science are reifications rather than realities. It is hardly possible to see this, and Needleman says so, but at least he is aware of the direction from which such criticism should come:

> . . . for real ideas to be an influence against the rule of inner automatism, their expression must not only appeal to the nascent, hidden intelligence, but must also specifically interrupt the habitual associative processes of thought and ordinary egoistic emotion. (Ibid.)

But perhaps the most poignant statement of all is this:

> But to glimpse such high possibilities in ourselves it is necessary to have a system of cosmology, a metaphysics that communicates the existence in reality of these levels. (Ibid.)

This is the whole turning point. As things stand there exists an aversion to even consider such possibilities of such an intensity that what we find at this point in time is a superficial conception of a relation between heart and mind, such that its current shape serves the powers of both camps in an independent form, as though neither has any connection to the other. (My own words!)

Why "Footnotes to Swedenborg"? It seems from Needleman's book, and indeed from the fact that it has actually been bought by many people, that the kind of lack that Needleman identifies is not isolated to a handful of us. Perhaps we can feel the sound of them already echoing in the empty places in the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, of course, we must wait till the "wickedness of the Amorites"[3] (Genesis 15: 16) reaches its peak, for it is only by going as far as we can with established thinking that we reach that point of want where we say to ourselves, "surely there must be more to reality than this?" The secret is not to be fooled by the next big thing that parodies a paradigm shift when it is no more than a cosmetic change of order, the same cards dealt out in a different sequence. The last word should be Needleman's:

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[3] With regard to "the wickedness of the Amorites," it is instructive to see how the later Swedenborg wrote of this phrase in *Arcana Coelestia*, and how it relates so easily to his attitudes in his earlier career, particularly with regard to the notion of freedom that was central to both periods: "But what is meant in the internal sense by the fact that the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet consummated, is an arcanum. For the state of the case with the evil in the other life is that they are not punished until their evils have reached their height, and this both in general and in particular. For such is the equilibrium in the other life that evil punishes itself, that is to say those who are evil run into the punishment of their evil, but only when it has reached its height. Every evil has its limit that varies in each individual case, beyond which it is not allowable to pass. When an evil person passes beyond this limit he precipitates himself into the penalty, and this is so in every particular" (*AC* 1857:2).

. . . it may only be a new turn of the wheel of our bondage to the isolated intellect. (Ibid., 92) ❑

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