LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF SWEDENBORG'S *PRINCIPIA*

LECTURE VI.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RETURN KINGDOM

The final end of creation is that there may be a heaven from the human race. Only man can consciously receive the Lord's love and wisdom, acknowledge their source, and so return them to Him from whom they came. Only if love is returned can there be conjunction; and that man may be conjoined with Him by faith and love is the supreme end and purpose of the Divine Providence. For this reason, the Divine proceeding, at rest in the seemingly dead substances of the mineral kingdom at the surface of the earth (as by means of successive atmospheres the infinite life is stepped down or rendered less active) is not really the last, or ultimate of creation, as is frequently said in the Writings. It is rather the middle point, the point at which the material has been provided, and the ground has been laid, but at which the final goal has by no means been reached. Concerning this we read:

The universal end, the end of all things in creation, is that there may be an eternal conjunction of the Creator with the created universe; and this is not possible unless there be subjects in which His Divine may be as in Itself, thus in which it may dwell and abide. In order that these subjects may be the dwellings and mansions of Himself, they must be recipients of His love and wisdom as of themselves; thus they must be those who shall elevate themselves to the Creator as of themselves, and shall conjoin themselves with Him: without this reciprocity no conjunction is possible. These subjects are men, who are able to elevate and conjoin themselves as of themselves. That men are such subjects, and that they are recipients of the Divine as of themselves, has been pointed out above many times. Through this conjunction, the Lord is present in every work created by Himself. For all has been created finally for the sake of man. Wherefore the uses of all things which are created, ascend by degrees from the last things to man, and through man to God the Creator from whom they are . . .

Creation proceeds continually to this last or ultimate end by these three things, which are end, cause, and effect, because these three are in the Lord the Creator . . . Hence it is evident that the created universe, in its general progression to its ultimate end, is relatively the middle end. For out of the ground, by the Lord the Creator, forms of uses are continually raised in their order up to man, who as to his body is also from the ground. He, man, is next elevated by the reception of love and wisdom from the Lord; and that he may receive love and wisdom all means are provided; and he has been

made so that he can receive, if only he will. From what has now been said it may be seen, though as yet merely in a general manner, that the end of creation exists in the last things, or ultimates; which end is, that all things may return to the Creator, and that conjunction may exist. (DLW 170–172)

From the substances at rest at the surface of the earth, therefore, there must be a return kingdom of the Divine Proceeding. It was with this in view that the Divine proceeded in the first place. This purpose was present, and the means for its accomplishment were provided, at every stage of the descent. It was in order that this return might be made that all the successive atmospheres were endowed with active forces, creative forces, and formative forces. These forces, as we have pointed out, were the means whereby, as soon as suitable materials had been provided, the Lord could produce living organisms. The necessary materials for the production of seeds, and for the building of bodies, had to be provided progressively. From the mineral kingdom alone, only the grossest materials could be provided—materials capable of clothing only the lowest forms of vegetable life: algae floating in the water, and later mosses, ferns and grasses, shrubs of many kinds, and at last trees, each in turn by its life process so refining the materials of the mineral kingdom as to provide clothing for the seeds and the bodies of the next higher forms of life. The forces that laid hold upon these materials, formed from them the clothing of seeds, and acting through the seeds, actually caused plants to grow out of the earth, were already present in the ether, in which were to be found the potential souls of all forms of the vegetable kingdom, from the simplest to the most complex.

At last, the life process of plants gave off into the atmosphere materials so far refined that they could be caught up in the gyre of the higher atmosphere called the magnetic aura. Here were the active, creative, and formative forces capable of producing the seeds of animals, and from the seeds their bodies. Here again, the required materials could be brought into being only by degrees. Creation had to begin from simple uni-cellular animals, and progress by stages to more complex organisms, through worms, fish, reptiles, birds, vertebrates, mammals, to primates, which, in outward form and structure more nearly resemble man. Only when both the vegetable and the animal kingdoms had been developed could there be produced materials—similar perhaps to what the Writings call the "finest things of nature"—which could be

caught up in the gyre of the universal aura, and formed into the covering of human seed, through which human bodies could be built. Here again, only the simplest and most primitive men could at first be created, and only through long centuries of human development, over many generations, could they be endowed with perpetually greater ability and opportunity for the reception of Divine love and wisdom.

The need for such a progressive development in each kingdom, and from one kingdom to the one next higher, is the basis for what modern scientists call "evolution." Such a progression may be confirmed by innumerable facts of observation, and by archeological discoveries. But these facts cannot be rationally understood without some knowledge of the immediate presence of the Divine Creator. Only the Lord, from infinite love and wisdom, could possibly produce these marvels. To claim that they are the result of pure accident, that they are produced by mechanical forces acting without purpose, and without intelligence, is to explain nothing. It leaves one with the picture of a world that has no meaning, a world that had no beginning, and that is progressing toward no conceivable goal. However, when we know that the Divine Creator brought down His love and His wisdom, step by step, degree by degree, atmosphere by atmosphere, in an unbroken chain of connection, even to the substances at rest on the surface of the earth; when we realize that living forces of love and wisdom are present in all the atmospheres, creating living organisms, from the lowest to the highest; then we can begin to understand how so-called "evolution" took place. It is no longer regarded as an inexplicable accident, but as a process ordered by supreme intelligence, for the attainment of a goal of Divine love which is foreseen, and provided by the Creator.

According to Swedenborg's philosophy, man, the most perfect form of organic life, is a microcosm, or little world. He is a least replica of the entire universe. The Lord must be immediately present with him. There must be a medium of connection between him and the Creator, similar to that which exists between the Creator and the whole universe. In the macrocosm, the bond of connection is provided by a series of atmospheres; but in the microcosm, it is provided by a series of bloods.

From the universal aura, by means of what are called the "purest substances of nature," there is compounded a "blood" or "fluid"

which is called the "spirituous fluid." From this is formed the "simple fiber," the first substance, and the universal unit of the human form. This is the inmost of every living cell of which the brain and body are composed. It is the inmost receptacle of life inflowing from the Lord, and in it the Lord is immediately present with creative power, that is, with the active, creative, and formative forces inherent in the universal aura. By the addition of successively heavier, grosser, and more restrictive coverings, all the tissues of brain and body are formed—the "simple cortex" which is the internal structure of the cortical cells, the cortex itself, the nervous system, the heart and lungs together with the vascular system, and from these all the organs and viscera, even down to the cartilages, the bones, and the hair. From the "spirituous fluid" there is produced the "animal spirit" which animates the nerves, and from this the "red blood" which nourishes and continually rebuilds all the tissues of the body.

Such is the general plan of Swedenborg's anatomical and physiological works. We merely mention it here to show that it is founded on his *Principia.* It can be understood only in the light of what he says concerning the successive atmospheres, and how these provide a medium of communication between God and creation. Only from the *Principia* can we learn the source and origin of the human soul, and grasp some idea of how God Himself is immediately present in the soul, and how from it He can create the marvellous mechanism of the body and the brain.

Concerning the human soul we read in the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom:*

> From the anatomy of the animal body we clearly perceive that a certain most pure fluid glances through the subtlest fibers, remote from even the acutest sense. . . . That it reigns universally in the whole and in every part of its own limited universe, or body. . . . Wherefore, if the soul of the body is to be the subject of inquiry, and the communication between the soul and the body is to be investigated, we must first examine this fluid, and ascertain whether it agrees with our predicates. But as this fluid lies so deeply in nature, no thought can enter into it, except by the doctrine of series and degrees joined to experience; nor can it be described, except by recourse to a mathematical philosophy of universals. (219)
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> Yet this does not prevent us from perceiving, solely by the intuitive faculty of the mind, that such a fluid, although it be the first substance of the body, nevertheless derives its being from a still higher substance, and proximately from those things in the universe on which the principles of natural things are impressed by the Deity, and in which, at the same time, the most perfect

forces of nature are involved. Hence that it is the form of forms in the body, and the formative substance that draws the thread from the first living point, and continues it afterwards to the last point of life; and so connects one thing with another, and so conserves and governs it afterwards, that all things mutually follow each other, and the posterior refer themselves to the prior, and the whole with the parts, the universal with the singulars, by a wonderful subordination and coordination, refers itself to its prime form and substance, upon which all things depend, and by which, and for which, each thing exists in its own distinctive manner. (226)

That this spirituous fluid, or soul, is not regarded by Swedenborg as a natural or material substance, but that it is spiritual in nature and quality is clearly taught as follows:

Before we conclude this subject, we must consider the question, whether the soul is to be called *material* or *immaterial*. We have often said above, that in regard to substance the soul is a fluid, nay, a most absolute fluid; produced by the aura of the universe; enclosed in fibers; the matter by which, from which, and for which, the body exists; the supereminent organ . . . nothing here occurs but appears to be fairly comprehended under the term matter. But, pray, what is *matter?* If it be defined as extension endued with inertia, then the soul is not material; for inertia, the source of gravity, enters the posterior sphere simply by composition, and by the addition of a number of things that, through changes in the state of active entities have become inert and gravitating. . . . The first aura of the world is not matter in this sense; for neither gravity nor levity can be predicated of it; but on the contrary, active force, the origin of gravity and levity in terrestrial bodies, which do not of themselves regard any common center, unless there be an acting, causing, directing force. (EAK Vol. II, No. 311)

All this merely leads up to and introduces the subject of Swedenborg's physiological and psychological works, which subject we cannot undertake to pursue in the present series of lectures. We would merely point out, that, having traced the operations of the human soul through its obvious effects—in the physical body with all its numerous organs, and in the brain, with its nervous system that reaches to all parts of the body—Swedenborg is at last equipped with the knowledge necessary for the exploration of the soul itself, and its influx and operation into the body by means of the mind. He sets out, therefore, to show, in the work entitled *Rational Psychology,* "what the soul is, what is its intercourse with the body, and what its state in the body and after the life of the body." (Preface, p. 5) This is a remarkable work, and it contains a great deal that is of immense value to the psychologist who is seeking to understand the mechanism of the human mind. But

Swedenborg ends it with the confession that he has not solved the ultimate problem.

There is yet an infinity of other means which enter into this series of ends, either mediately or immediately, to wit, in respect to things mundane and corporeal, and in respect to things spiritual. In respect to things *corporeal*, in that men may be (fed and) covered or clothed. Therefore the whole globe and even tiny worms supply clothing, as also food, both being necessary if man is to live in the body. Therefore both are provided. In respect to things *mundane*, that the citizen may live, such as wealth and possessions, besides an infinitude of other things which are in the world; also sciences, etc. In respect to things *spiritual*, in that the nature of heaven is revealed, the nature of the will, how (God) is to be adored, and by what means the state of the soul is to be perfected so as to be a member of heaven, and this in such a way that its liberty is not injured but that it can turn to God. (*Rational Psychology* 560)

Because Swedenborg had traversed the whole gamut of nature, from outmosts to inmosts, and yet admittedly had not discovered the ultimate secret of the soul, he next turned to the study of the Word, and thereby was at last prepared for intromission into the spiritual world, and for his true mission as the servant of the Lord in His Second Coming. Toward this goal the Lord had been leading him secretly throughout his entire life; and all his studies in science and in philosophy had been a necessary preparation for it. Surely some knowledge of his philosophy must be of value to those also who receive the spiritual truth of the Heavenly Doctrine, and who seek to understand its relation to the wonderful phenomena of the material world.

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

Change and Permanence. Is there motion within the primordial substance? This question arose among the early Greeks. The names of Heraclitus and Parmenides respectively are preserved as representatives of those who believe that there is such a motion and those who do not.

The question for them is not so much how the change takes place but whether there is any change at all. For Heraclitus change is ultimate and permanence a mere sensory appearance. For Parmenides, the permanent is fundamental and change a mere appearance. For these philosophers, the problem of substance is relegated to a secondary position. (*A History of Philosophy*, Thilly and Wood, p. 17.)