

THE HUMAN MIND

A STUDY BY HUGO L.J. ODHNER

VII. THE RATIONAL, ITS CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINES AND ITS
SUPERCONSCIOUS DEGREES *

The philosophical works of Swedenborg confirm much that is said in his theological Writings as to the difference between human thinking and the imaginative and sensory powers of animals. "All things of human thought and speech are analytical" (AC 4658). Man can think analytically and see not only natural but spiritual truths (DLW 247). Even the higher animals cannot think analytically or "in successive order," but they comprehend instinctively and "simultaneously" the things belonging to their love (DLW 255). Animals have instinct, connate perception, and thence imagination (R. Ps. 30, 109, 113, 386).

But no knowing or understanding is possible to men except by means of sensations and experience, that is, by "the posterior way which is called 'analytic'" (R. Ps. 31). The objective of the rational mind is to see beyond appearances and to penetrate to truths themselves, advancing from effects to causes. The external of the natural is from the world of sensation and memory; "but the internal of the natural is made up of conclusions drawn *analytically* and *analogically* from these things. . . ." By these "the natural has communication with the rational and thus with the things of the spiritual world" (AC 4570).

"*Analysis*" means to unloose or solve, hence to extricate the truth from a mass of appearances. The rational must collect all the known data which seem to have a bearing on some question, separate irrelevant facts, and account for confusion factors. It must "evolve universals from the experience of singulars," and rise from phenomena to causes and principles (*Animal Kingdom* 7). This is the "inductive method of reasoning." Since our experience is always limited, such reasoning can never by itself attain to any absolute truth, but to a "theory" which may be upset or modified by a single fact that turns up to defy it. Yet with each new fact that is taken into account our mind becomes more confirmed, for the probability of error is thus constantly reduced.

* The concluding instalment of a series of seven papers.

Swedenborg never attributes any infallibility to the rational mind. He recognized that it was "never entirely purified from the fallacies of the senses . . . during its conjunction with the body." Its truths are only appearances of truth (AK 13). Still, man's thought must travel the long and arduous road of analysis or induction in order to rear its palace, not in the air, but on solid ground (AK 11). If we argue only by "*synthesis*" or by deduction—that is, by confirming preconceived assumptions—our human nature would lead us to set aside everything that is adverse. Swedenborg likens such a mode to a childish game (AK 7–10).

When criticizing the synthetic approach, Swedenborg has in mind the authoritarian attitude of the scholastics, who set up long arguments merely to confirm an opinion or dogma already taken for granted *a priori*. Such a method has been responsible for innumerable errors and insanities. But he admits that the synthetic way of reasoning *a priori* is allowable to angels, and that the Divine has revealed truths which men can then confirm. He also shows that when the intellect has been perfected, and after we have constructed principles or discovered laws by a careful analysis of the known facts, we can then use such philosophical doctrines—the fruit of analytic labors—to open the eyes of the understanding to a better evaluation of the fields of our experience. Such doctrines, says Swedenborg, enabled him to pass over from the study of the material organisms of the body and the brain to a knowledge of the "soul" or spirit, which is a spiritual and immaterial essence. The *Economy* and the *Animal Kingdom* were chiefly inductions, or analytic in form, and his own conclusions were there presented under the headings "Induction" or "Analysis"; but the *Rational Psychology* admittedly contains a synthetic application of principles (AK 14, 17, 19, 22, R. Ps., preface, R. Ps. 382).

Among these philosophic principles were the doctrines of Degrees and Series, of Forms, and of Eminent Analogy or Correspondence. Without such doctrines the analytic process would lead only to physical generalizations. But by the use of analogy and correspondence, Swedenborg could make inferences beyond sensual experience and could picture the qualities of the interior substances of the body; indeed, could describe the nature of the soul or spirit which, though devoid of extension, motion or parts, yet has something analogous thereto (AK 20, R. Ps. 498).

The importance of *analogy* is readily seen. The simple actually

“see better by means of comparisons than by deductions formed analytically from the Word and at the same time from reason” (TCR 131, cp. AC 4570: 2). The Lord taught by parables. The Writings employ comparisons to illustrate spiritual truths. The rational mind seeks out correspondent ideas from the memory and the imagination to suggest its abstract principles, and in metaphors and representations the truth thus finds a resting-place. The qualities of natural things, natural laws and situations, have their parallels in the spiritual realm.

To exemplify the use of analogical reasoning, Swedenborg wrote the little work called *A Hieroglyphic Key*, in which he showed how a natural law can be transformed into a moral truth and this into a spiritual truth, and vice versa. And it was so that his mind was prepared to receive the doctrine of correspondences in the full form in which this is presented in his theological works.

The rational mind spontaneously recognizes analogies. It sees relations, similarities, opposites. It senses harmonies and incongruities; one of its earliest gifts to man is a sense of humor. But its chief delight is to see things as a whole—to perceive a unity of purpose, a universality of law, an identity of method. It rejoices when it discerns some common plan within creation. It notes a constant recurrence of similar patterns in nature. It sees the life of man imaged in the growth of a tree or in the four seasons. Our mortal language is steeped in similitudes, and we think in parables and analogies.

But analogical thinking can lead us far astray unless we have recourse to the concept of *discrete degrees*, take account of essential differences, and inquire into causes. Real causes are seen only from the acknowledgment of discrete degrees. The cause of speech is not in the tongue, but in the thought that seeks its correspondent form and expression in human words. Causes are spiritual. One cannot judge of causes “from an induction continuous with effects” (DLW 119, 185).

Here we see a marked difference between the way the inductive and analogical methods are employed in the service of natural science, and the way they are employed for the development of the rational mind. Induction from the data of sense experience must not stop after finding the instrumental cause, but must go on to unfold the efficient cause which is spiritual, and the final cause—or purpose—which is within the spiritual. And this induction is

aided by the use of "eminent analogies" or by the doctrine of correspondences.

Before the realization of spiritual causes the rational mind becomes humbled. For it sees that while it can conclude the existence of a spiritual cause, it cannot perceive the nature of the spiritual except by the help of *abstractions*. Swedenborg thus states that the mind must be withdrawn "from the senses, from the lusts of the body, from the enticements and cares of the world." It must be separated from pride and self-love and elevated by a love of truth and a regard for the glory of God (AK 12).

The theological works of Swedenborg show more definitely what must be "abstracted" from the thought to make interior or rational thinking possible. The thought must rise above notions of *self*, of *person*, of *time*, of *space*, and of *matter*. Behind all the errors of reasoning which every textbook on logic seeks to systematize and refute, lies the unconscious urge of our "proprium" (or *self*) to defend its self-interest and its self-satisfaction against any truth which threatens to disturb it. Where personal advantage is at stake, we are apt to build up a logic-proof compartment in the mind. For our "proprium," with its unanalyzed desires and self-conscious embarrassments, makes us reluctant to face all the facts. We think from fear, anger or suspicion, jump to conclusions, draw unwarranted meanings out of a set of facts or circumstances.

But our natural affections do not always concern ourselves. We are biassed by friends and kinsmen, by favorite authorities, by social and racial prejudices. We think from *person* rather than from abstract justice.

And we are children of our age. *Time* and temporary circumstances must be abstracted from our minds if we are to see eternal truths. Thought from time dominates men in this world. The sense of urgency tempts us to accept what is expedient instead of what is right. Impatience refuses to analyze, accepts unripened ideas born of sudden enthusiasms and untutored emotions; and thus our thought rushes carelessly into premature decisions and judgments from mere appearances.

Along with time, *space* imposes straight-jackets on our thought. Truly rational ideas must transcend the bounds of space. The concepts of justice, virtue, liberty and law, apply beyond the borders of our own country and our own earth! The rational deals not in

quantities or sizes, or dimensions, but in qualities, relative states, laws, causes, uses and ends.

The ideas that form our "interior natural memory" and serve the rational as objects for its interior speculations, are called "immaterial ideas"; for they are not mental images of material objects, but abstractions (R. Ps. 144, AC 6814, 4408, 10551e, SD 3258). The notion of *matter* is therefore to be "abstracted" from rational thoughts. We are not to confuse the real things of life with the material things and the material values of this passing world. Especially are we to take care lest we deny substance to spiritual things. For the reason we must abstract the notion of *matter* from spiritual things, is to obtain a truer concept of the spiritual substance of the eternal world.

But the question arises: Can a man think abstractly—apart from space, time, person, etc.? The answer is given in the Writings. It is true that man's conscious thought in this world cannot be totally divorced from natural ideas of time and space, which are present "in almost everything" of his thought (AC 3387, cf CL 328:2). These ideas of time and space serve as a foundation for all his thinking and give a basic continuity to other ideas. Yet his thoughts are limited and confined in proportion as they derive from such natural concepts (HH 169). We are entreated not to confuse our ideas with time and space when trying to understand spiritual things. Such abstraction is possible when a man thinks "interiorly in the rational" by "the removal of quantities from qualities" (DP 51, D. Wis. vii. 5:3).

The naive or casual thinker feels deprived of all reality if he withdraws his thought from spaces and times. Yet even the natural man can think abstractly if he pleases, and he can thus see that things beyond space and time do exist even though he cannot see their quality (HH 169, DP 46). Men who immerse their thought into sensual and corporeal delights gradually lose their rational insight. But every man can have his rational raised into a spiritual light as long as his perverse sensual will is held in check; and thus he can, if he will, see and acknowledge spiritual and celestial truths, and receive a new love from the Lord—a new field of motivations, affections, and perceptions which spring from charity and love to the Lord.

In his philosophical as well as in his theological works, Swedenborg emphasizes that it is in the rational mind that man's eternal

character is shaped by a free selective choice. The rational is the man himself. It is there that "the human" begins, and from it his whole personality is by degrees integrated and unified. But the Writings reveal that this can be accomplished finally only after death.

Conclusion

This series of articles on The Human Mind must now be concluded by a brief reference to that realm of the mind which only Divine revelation can rightly describe. Beyond the vanishing-point of consciousness there lie, within the mind, depths unknown, whence flow the directing currents which make us function rationally and from an inner freedom. In recent times some natural explanation has been sought for many mysterious activities not easily catalogued: religious faith and conscience, mystical and hypnotic states, subconscious intellection, telepathy, dreams and visions, and "automatic writing." Various efforts on the part of "psychoanalysts" have tended to lump all man's hidden motivations and faculties together into a common pool of primitive instincts which somehow organize themselves—with fear as a taskmaster—into rationalized or symbolic forms of expression which disguise their crudities with the art and charm that make them acceptable to society. The error, here, does not lie in the observation that man's sub-conscious and unexplored will is by heredity corporeal and bestial and that it seeks to draw the reason to its defense. The error lies in assuming that the rational stems from man's subconscious jungle-instincts, and in ignoring the soul and the spiritual world and the existence of discrete *super-sensible* levels in man's mental make-up. The Writings clearly explain how the changing states of these profound regions of the mind are due to the influences of spirits and angels, to which man's mind is constantly exposed in his unperceived spiritual environment.

A man on earth is aware of the thought that takes place in his rational mind. This mind is indeed perfected gradually—being "opened to the first degree by civil truths, to the second degree by moral truths, and to the third degree by spiritual truths" and by living according to these truths from a spiritual affection for them (HH 468). He accepts these truths consciously and makes a conscious effort to guide his life by them. But just as the contents of his natural memory and his will remain "sub-conscious" and dormant except so far as they enter into the thread of his thought, so

there are vast regions of the mind *within the rational* which are "superconscious" or above his notice. The residuary results of his life of choice and meditation are stored up as a spontaneous "nature" or disposition in the interior degrees of his mind, beyond his scrutiny. These interior degrees—of which doctrine alone can testify—are "opened" or furnished during man's life on earth, and are potentially present at birth; but they are entered into consciously only after death (DLW 237, 252).

Here we can only refer—as suggestions for future study—to a few topics under which the Writings describe these interiors of the mind.

1. *The Interior Memory.* This is man's "book of life," in which all his experiences, whether consciously noticed or not, are digested, evaluated, and arranged by the rational mind according to its dominant love (AC 2474, SD 2594). This memory is ordered not in sequences of time or space but in the order of states. It absorbs and retains all spiritual experiences with perfect recollection. A truth which becomes a spontaneous part of a man's life "vanishes from his external memory and passes into his internal memory" or is "elevated" into his rational. The cognitions (*cognitiva*) in the rational are not patent before man but are "imperceptible while he lives in the body"; as are also the things which belong to his faculty of thinking and to his spiritual affections (AC 3108, 3020, AE 790:8).

2. *Supersensible Thought.* As every man has a spiritual mind as well as a natural mind, "it cannot be but that both minds think"; but because the spiritual mind "lies hid in the natural mind or lives above it, man is wholly unaware of what he thinks in that mind" (AC 5614:3, AE 625:5, 527:4, 790:8). For the ideas of the internal man are "intellectual ideas which are devoid of objects such as are in the material world" (AC 10237, 4104:2).

3. *Immortal Degrees.* After death, the mind is the spirit-man. "The interiors which do not die" are distinguished into the following degrees: The sensual, the natural, and the spiritual-natural—which combine to form the spirit's external; the spiritual of the celestial—which is intermediate; the celestial-spiritual, the celestial, and the inmost—which together constitute the internal of the spirit. The character of the spirit depends on that degree which dominates (SD 4627).

The “sensual” of the earthly mind thus becomes the body of the spirit. It contains the “corporeal memory” in a quiescent state. The “natural,” which is the plane of man’s imaginative faculty, becomes the interior sight and sensory of the spirit. The “spiritual-natural” degree of man seems to serve as the interior memory of the spirit, and contains not scientific but truths or rational appearances (AC 5212, 3404). It therefore answers in general to man’s rational mind with its memory of abstractions. The next three degrees mentioned in the *Spiritual Diary* (no. 4627) seem to be the three degrees which the angels of the respective heavens use for their conscious thinking. And the “inmost” (which “lacks a name”) is the unconscious soul of the angel—the “human internal” itself which “receives influx immediately from God” and is not affected even by angelic influences (Infl. 8, AC 1999).

It is through this “inmost” soul of man—which is omnipresent in both mind and body—that the Creator builds the successive degrees of the mind or spirit and through these the correspondent structures of the natural body. This same soul operates secretly in the body and governs its spontaneous processes of growth and nutrition, preparing the intricate structures of the brain as a specialized throne for itself. Even as man’s own conscious part in the government of the body is relatively small, so the operations of the mind are mostly outside of man’s control (DP 180:6, 120). By consciously choosing evil and confirming it by falsity, man can indeed pervert his mind and separate it in part from his “human internal,” and thus nullify for himself the purpose of his creation. But this separation is never absolute, but is only a dissent on the part of the external of his rational. Even evil men and evil spirits are immortal and retain their human form and their faculty to think rationally should they wish to do so. After death, their mental powers would normally increase; and this was perceived by Swedenborg in his writing of the *Rational Psychology*, where he states that the evil soul also has a “spiritual intelligence”—an intuition of universals—even though he lacks “wisdom” or goodness (R. Ps. 423, 526, 527).

The human mind is created to become a receptacle of love and wisdom from the Lord. It is the holy means whereby the Creator can give of His Divine love to others outside of Himself, and conjoin mankind to Himself. To acknowledge this is the first thing of human wisdom. For only so can we dedicate this marvelous and

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

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

BY EDWARD F. ALLEN

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

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

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

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