

LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF SWEDENBORG'S PRINCIPIA

GEORGE DECHARMS

LECTURE IV.

THE DOCTRINES BY WHICH SWEDENBORG SOUGHT TO DISCOVER THE SOUL. THE NATURAL SUN, ITS ATMOSPHERES AND PLANETS.

Because Swedenborg recognized that the human soul was spiritual, possessing none of the attributes of material things, while nevertheless it was the cause of all the geometrical forms and mechanical forces of the natural body, he was convinced that there was a pathway of ascent from a knowledge of the body to a knowledge of the soul. He set out, therefore, to discover that path by means of certain new doctrines, to which he refers in the Prologue to the *Animal Kingdom*.

Since it is impossible to climb or leap from the organic, physical, and material world—I mean, the body—immediately to the soul, . . . it was necessary to lay down new ways by which I might be led to her, and thus gain access to her palace,—in other words, to discover, disengage, and bring forth, by the most intense application and study, certain new doctrines for my guidance, which are (as my plan shows) the doctrines of forms, of order and degrees, of series and society, of communication and influx, of correspondence and representation, and of modification. (AK 17)

Of these doctrines Dr. J. J. Garth Wilkinson says, in his introduction to the *Animal Kingdom*, page xvii, that they are “perpetually illustrated and elucidated throughout the *Animal Kingdom*, but never stated by Swedenborg in the form of pure science.” We take this to mean that they are never categorically defined. It is important, however, that we have a clear idea of what these doctrines are, and we shall describe them briefly from what Swedenborg says concerning them in various parts of his writings.

The Doctrine of Forms is based on geometry. The lowest form is said to be the *angular*, which is also called the terrestrial and the corporeal. The next higher is the *circular*, which is said to be the perpetual angular because the circle is composed theo-

retically of an infinite number of tiny angles. The form next higher is the *spiral*, which is perpetually circular because the circle does not close upon itself, but returns to a point somewhat removed from its point of origin, and thus produces a progression of circles such as we find in the thread of a screw. Beyond this lies the *vortical*, or perpetually spiral, which is produced by the spiral turning in upon itself, or bending round until the last circle joins the first. When this happens there is produced an orb flattened at the poles. The next higher form is the perpetually vortical, or *celestial*, beyond this is the perpetually celestial, or *spiritual* form, and beyond this is the *Infinite*. It is important to note that Swedenborg does not attempt to describe the forms higher than the vortical. The imagination cannot picture so complex a figure in terms of geometry. Yet Swedenborg holds that these transcendent forms must contain something analogous to geometry, because all the lower forms are derived from them, and the force that produces them also produces everything that follows in the process of Divine creation. In these higher forms lies the cause of all geometry and mechanics, and they must be related to these by analogy. We believe that here Swedenborg is trying to express spiritual form and spiritual motion, referred to in the Writings as the form of truth, or wisdom, and the activity of love. He is endeavoring to show that these spiritual qualities, while discretely different from the qualities of matter, are nevertheless related to them by analogy, or by correspondence.

The Doctrine of Order is based on the idea that superior forms also exert superior forces, and that a similar law determines the relation of any thing to its parts, and of each part to its constituents, and again of each constituent to the least units of which it is composed. From this law it follows that nature is the same in greatest and in least. The first natural point, for instance, produces the first finite, and this produces the second finite as a perfect replica of itself, save that it is very much larger, and moves with greatly decreased velocity. Because of this law, the second aura, revolving about the natural sun as its center, describes a vast vortex, flattened at the poles. So also the earth is in the shape of a globe flattened at the poles. And even the atom, when examined as to its interior structure, displays a form in some degree comparable to that of the entire solar system.

The Doctrine of Degrees is based on the idea that when a higher

form produces a lower one, the two are utterly distinct, being related to one another by contiguity, or by touch, but not by continuity. They are related as cause and effect, between which there is no continuous ratio. The lower form presents the higher as it were in an image, but under a different form. This might be illustrated by the way in which love or will produces thought, and from this facial expression, speech, or writing. Will is the producing cause in each case; but it stands forth to view, and its quality is made manifest under altogether different forms. Facial expression is entirely different from love, being nothing more than the ordering of the muscles of the face. Speech is only a vibration in the air, produced by the vocal cords and the tongue. Writing consists of marks made on some suitable material, to serve as symbols of thought. Because of this symbolic relationship of material forms to spiritual ideas and affections, the Writings declare that the universal nature is a theatre representative of the kingdom of heaven, although in quality it is utterly distinct from that kingdom.

The Doctrine of Series and Society teaches that all things come forth in a specific series looking to the attainment of a particular end or purpose; and that in each such series there is produced a peculiar relationship of all things to the end proposed. To illustrate: A solar system is a series arising from the sun as a center and a producing cause. The series includes the second aura, and all the planets and satellites that are borne on its current in their respective orbits around the sun. All these circling bodies have a special relationship to the sun, and to one another, which sets them apart from other solar systems, as a distinct society.

So also the human body is a series arising from the soul, which orders all things in its kingdom, creating organs, tissues, and viscera in abundant variety, all of which are brought into harmonious relationship such that together they constitute a perfect unity. In a similar way, every organ of the body has a series of its own, as the brain, the heart, the eye, etc. Each is formed of innumerable parts, brought together for the purpose of performing a specific use. Every such organ, together with all its parts, constitutes a harmonious society. Again, the growth of any plant or animal from a seed produces a distinct series and a particular society.

Here we would note the teaching that the use exists prior to

the organ, and that the organ is created by the use, and for the sake of it. This makes it clear that the doctrine of reception, (which is that the Divine operates the same everywhere, and that variety arises from the fact that this universal activity is differently received, according to the form of the receiving vessel) cannot be the same as the doctrine of creation. The use exists before the organ. It exists in the mind of God, and the Divine Creator must proceed with foresight, with specific intent, in minute adaptation to the particular requirements of the use that is to be performed, in order to create a suitable organ.

The Doctrine of Influx concerns the mode by which higher forces touch, move, animate, and govern lower forms. This influence is effected by contiguity, not by continuity. Nevertheless it is perpetual, operating from moment to moment. If it should be withdrawn for a single instant, the lower form would be dissipated. Thus Divine life flows into the entire universe. The forces of the spiritual world flow into the natural world. The soul flows into the body, creating, sustaining, renewing, constantly. For this reason, preservation is perpetual creation.

The Doctrine of Correspondence and Representation teaches that lower forms, being produced from higher ones, must of necessity be their counterpart, and present an image of them as it were in a mirror. The forms of the human body re-present the forms of the soul, symbolically, in the only way possible on a lower plane or degree. God is Divinely Human because He is infinite love and infinite wisdom, and these, together are the essential human. Because of this, God can be conceived of, or pictured adequately, in no other than the human form and shape. The soul or spirit of man is nothing but his love and his wisdom combined, and when these take ultimate form and are presented to view, either in the spiritual or in the natural world, they can take on no other than the human form and shape. For the same reason, the universal heaven can be rightly thought of only as a Grand Man; every society of heaven can be thought of only as a man; the Church on earth, in the sight of the Lord is as a single man; and all human organizations, great or small, rightly conceived, are men.

Finally, *the Doctrine of Modifications* is based on the idea that all effects are produced by motion, by tremulations, by changes of state. There must be organs, and these must be moved, either in whole or in part, if uses are to be performed. Note here the

tremulation of the vocal cords in speaking or singing; the tremulation of the ear-drum which produces hearing; the tremulation of nerve endings that produce the sense of touch. By analogy, we must conceive of tremulations in the interiors of the brain, and mind, as the cause of thoughts, perceptions and affections. The teaching is that there is no such things as a faculty without an organ; and there is no faculty apart from motion or activity, whether it be the mechanical motion of material organs, or the activity of love which animates the spiritual organs of the mind.

All these doctrines were designed to show the way of ascent from the body to the mind and soul, from the natural world to the spiritual world, and ultimately from the sensual thought of the natural man to the true perception of God. They were intended to afford a ladder, the successive rungs of which were natural ideas, derived from geometry and mechanics, from which spiritual ideas of love and wisdom might be acquired, if only the mind were elevated into something of the spiritual light. Let us point out that, if this were not true; if there were no understandable relation between things material, and things spiritual; if there were not a way of access to things Divine and heavenly from the sensations of the body, then no one could ever attain to a knowledge of God, of heaven, or of the life after death. There could be no Divine revelation, because the Word can only be given in terms of man's physical experience. Literally, the Word is written concerning times, places, and persons. In outward appearance it is merely a record of past events. If there were no relation, no correspondence between these natural word-pictures and the realities of the spirit, then the Word would have no deeper meaning, and could yield for man's instruction no Divine wisdom.

That Swedenborg knew this, even before his spiritual eyes were opened; and that he was trying to discover and convey some idea of these deeper things, he openly declares.

We are not forbidden to approach the Divine sanctuary by the path of comparison; for since it is He for whom we exist, and whose we are to be, and with whom we are conjoined by love, so in order that we may understand His attributes, He has willed that we should understand them through nature; consequently through signs, by the help of which the principles of our minds are formed. There is nothing more usual, even in the Holy Scriptures, than a comparison of the Deity with the sun; of His life with light; of His wisdom with the distinctions of light; of His operation with its rays; and the ascription of clearness to the human intellect, according

to the degree of its elevation; and of shade, darkness, and thick darkness, according to its degree of privation. Therefore let us go on in the path of comparison, remembering always that although comparison illustrates, yet it does not teach the nature of that with which the comparison is made. (2 Econ. 254)

The more any one is perfected in judgment, and the better he discerns the distinction of things, the more clearly will he perceive, that there is an order of things, that there are degrees of order, and that it is by these alone he can progress, and this step by step, from the lowest sphere to the highest, or from the outermost to the innermost. For as often as nature ascends away from external phenomena, or betakes herself inwards, she seems to have separated from us, and to have left us altogether in the dark as to what direction she has taken; we have need therefore, of some science to serve as our guide in tracing out her steps,—to arrange all things into series,—to distinguish these series into degrees, and to contemplate the order of each thing in the order of the whole. The science which does this I call the *Doctrine of Series and Degrees, or the Doctrine of Order*; a science which it was necessary to premise to enable us to follow closely in the steps of nature; since to attempt without it to approach and visit her in her sublime abode, would be to attempt to climb heaven by the tower of Babel; for the highest step must be approached by the intermediate. They who know nothing of this ladder of nature, when they have made their leap, and think they are standing on the summit, are little aware that they are lying flat upon the earth, and will be found at last by their friends, after they have searched the globe for them, in some obscure cavern; for instance, in some occult position, of the nature of which they themselves, and the wisest of men, are equally ignorant. (2 Econ. 210)

It is on the basis of these, and of many other similar statements, that we have concluded that Swedenborg, when he describes the first natural point, the first finite, and second finite, and the first aura, had in mind those superior degrees of the Divine proceeding which transcend the realm of external phenomena, and was striving to lift the mind to the contemplation of those more interior qualities which he ascribes to the spiritual sun, and to the atmospheres which proximately proceeded from it. At least, he is obviously thinking of them as active and relatively living, in contrast to the third and fourth finites which he describes as being produced by compression rather than by composition, and as hard, and stubbornly resistant. It appears to me that in Swedenborg's mind, nature, strictly speaking, began with the creation of these hard substances, and that of them all material things are made.

That Swedenborg believed in the existence of a spiritual, or moral sun, he clearly stated. If my interpretation of his deeper

thought is correct, it would follow that the spiritual sun must first be created, and the natural sun from it. That is why we would identify the first natural point with the spiritual sun, and the first and second finites as the first and second proceeding from that sun, which, in the Writings are called the two radiant belts which make that sun visible to the angels. If this be true, then the first aura must be regarded as a spiritual aura, for only what is spiritual can proceed from the spiritual sun. Yet, according to the *Principia* the first aura was the medium in which the natural sun was formed. We have already described the process by which the first and second finites active, existing in the interstices between the bullae of the first aura, produced an expanding area that pressed against the surrounding bullae. By this pressure the bullae nearest the surface of this expanding space were broken down, the actives within them being released, while the passive shell was crushed into a hard and resisting substance, called third finites. These, lacking any inherent activity, were excited into local motion so intense that they became incandescent gases, whence comes the heat and the light of the natural sun. Whence comes also the mechanical energy present in every atom of matter, and from this all the mechanical forces of nature, by which atoms are gathered together, and molded into all the innumerable geometric figures of the material world.

This formation of the natural sun is described in terms of pure mechanics and geometry; but if we acknowledge that a God of love is the real, nay the actual creator of the universe, may we not perceive that back of the mechanism is the Divine purpose of infinite love, and the foresight of infinite wisdom? Can we not think of this pressure by which matter is created, as the impulse of the Divine will to produce fixed ultimates, from which to build a material world in which human beings might live, and from which they might be lifted up into the eternal habitations of an angelic heaven? Surely every man-made invention, every machine produced to meet a need or a desire that is foreseen by man, comes into being as the result of a love that presses resolutely to the achievement of its purpose. If this seems fantastic, how else can we understand the teaching of the Writings concerning the creation of the universe by God?

The units of the natural sun, however, are extremely various in form and structure. They constitute the source and origin of all

the atomic substances of which the earth consists. This would appear to be demonstrated by the process of spectrum analysis. As we have said, they exist in the form of gases at the surface of the sun. But as this crust of incandescent gas thickens, and is impelled into rapid motion around the sun, it is at last broken in places, and masses of fiery substance are thrown off, still in the form of gas. As they recede from the sun they cool, and solidify; and each finds its appropriate orbit. Thus are formed the planets, the satellites, and the asteroids of our solar system. Prior to this, however, there is formed at the surface of the sun the bullae of the second aura, which consist of an active center of second finites enclosed in a shell, or covering of third finites. As these bullae multiply, they form a sphere, round about the sun, extending to a vast distance, and moving in a vortex with the sun as a center. Swedenborg postulates that the planets are borne round the sun on the current of this vortex. Such is the second, or the magnetic aura of the *Principia*; its least units or bullae are said to be minute replicas of the sun, conveying its heat and its light to all the objects within the solar system. Concerning this aura we read:

In the heaven or finite universe there may be innumerable vortices of this kind, if there be innumerable active centers; or there may be as many vortices as there are suns or stars. (*Principia*, Part III, Chapter 1, p. 232)

One vortex with its active center constitutes one heaven of itself or one mundane system; that several vortices with their centers form together a certain sphere; that a sphere consisting of many vortices of the same kind has its own proper figure, and the figure of every sphere its own proper axis. (*Principia*, Part III, Chapter 1, p. 233)

We take this to mean that from many suns, each having its own family of planets, there may be formed a galaxy, and that galaxies are ordered in definite relation to one another. It is further said that throughout innumerable galaxies there may be an indefinite variety of living things, because creation is continuous and the universe is constantly expanding in response to the infinite love of the Creator. Thus:

Hence may arise new heavens one after the other; in these heavens new vortices and mundane systems; in these vortices and systems, new planets; around the planets, new satellites; and in this manner, at the will of the Deity, new creations may arise in endless succession. Hence how many myriads of heavens may there not be! (*Principia*, Part III, Chapter 2, p. 240)

Nevertheless, in every mundane system, the principles of geometry continue to be similar; as also nature and mechanism, as to first principles and motive forces; and that the diversity consists only in the diversity of the series, in respect to degrees, ratios, and figures. (*Principia*, Part III, Chapter 2, pp. 245-246)

Nature, consequently, cannot be modified in one world in the same way in which she is in the other; nor are the entities in one world capable of being modified in the same manner with those of another. Mechanism presents itself under different conditions; because ratios, moments, and degrees are different: all objects have a different configuration, and thus analysis exhausts all its proportions. In other worlds the air and ether, if there be anything similar to them, do not experience the like tremulations; the organs of sight and hearing are also affected by them in a different manner; nor perhaps are our organs capable of receiving the undulations of their elements, because they are not constituted in accordance with their mechanism and motions. The animals of this world might there, perhaps, be deprived of the use of their senses. Machines of every kind might there be constructed by different rules and by a different application of mechanical powers. (*Principia*, Part III, Chapter 2, p. 246)

From these observations we may be led to conceive, how great is the extent of our ignorance. Every one measures the degree of his wisdom by his knowledge of those things which have fallen within his own sphere. The limit of his own information he considers to be the limit of all that is attainable; for of what lies beyond his own sphere, he has no idea. . . . Could he, however, compare that which he knows with that which he does not know, how contracted would appear his knowledge, how oblivious of himself he would be! . . . There is not a particle in our globe, with the thousandth part of whose nature we are acquainted. (*Principia*, Part III, Chapter 2, p. 247)

WHOSE UNIVERSE?

A REVIEW BY WILLIAM R. KINTNER

THE VIEW FROM A DISTANT STAR. By Harlow Shapley. (New York: Basic Books, 1963.)

This delightfully written book presents the views of America's leading cosmologist as to the nature of the universe and man's place in it. It is my intention to review this work in the light of Swedenborgian philosophy.

It was my pleasure to meet the distinguished author, Harlow Shapley, when both of us were participants in a discussion group held at the Aspen Institute in Colorado. Shapley has devoted his