

## THE HUMAN SOUL

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Swedenborg opens his treatment by commenting on the difficulties encountered in attempting to discover the true nature of the soul. One of the chief difficulties is that man wishes to attain the highest realms of thought directly from the lowest, without recourse to the intermediate degrees. For this reason he felt it necessary to formulate a "Doctrine of Series and Degrees" and a "Mathematical Philosophy of Universals." These sciences he developed by studying anatomy and by scientific observation and study. Swedenborg writes ". . . I am strongly persuaded that the essence and nature of the soul, its influx into the body, and the reciprocal action of the body, can never be demonstrated without these doctrines, combined with a knowledge of anatomy, pathology, and psychology; nay, even of physics, and especially of the auras of the world; and that, unless our labors take this direction, and thus mount from phenomena, we shall in every new age have to build new systems which in their turn will tumble to the ground, without possibility of being rebuilt. This, and no other, is the reason that, with diligent study and intense application, I have investigated the anatomy of the body, and principally the human, so far as it is known from experience. . . . But thus far I have felt bound to venture, for I have resolved, cost what it may, to trace out the nature of the human soul. He therefore who desires the end, ought also to desire the means" (EAK Part 11, Chap. 111, nos. 213 and 214). With this background, and with these thoughts in mind, he then embarked on his quest for the knowledge of the soul. His treatment is divided into twelve parts which I will now summarize:

1. There is a most pure fluid that forms and flashes through the most subtle fibres in the body. There is nothing in the animal body that does not confirm the existence of this fluid, therefore we must admit the actuality of its presence and its power whenever we see its effects. The body is called a kingdom on account of this fluid which reigns universally in its limited kingdom. This fluid

\* A Summary of the chapter entitled "The Human Soul" in the *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*.

is the formative substance of the body and continually nourishes, repairs, and modifies it.

There is nothing in nature which is not a series and in a series ; and in the series of bloods, this most subtle fluid is in the third degree above the red blood and enters into it as its determining principle.

2. The mind has an intuitive faculty that enables us to perceive that although this fluid is the first principle of the body, yet it derives its existence from a prior substance upon which God has impressed the principles of natural things. This prior substance is the first aura, called the celestial aura. In relation to the celestial aura this purest fluid is the substance which is formed from it, but in respect to the body it is the formative substance. It is enclosed in the body and operates through fibres to produce the action of the muscles. It can be modified just like the auras, and is conceived in the cortical substance of the brain as in a womb. Large volumes of this purest fluid can be seen under a microscope, but the parts that constitute it cannot. Since the parts that constitute this fluid are the result of the determinations of the first aura, therefore the powers of that aura are transferred to it as its offspring ; and it is the form of forms in the animal kingdom, acting in its kingdom as the universal aura acts in the macrocosm. In forming the body it does not form it at once, but successively forms, first the individual substances of the cortex of the brain, then the cortex, then the brain, then the spinal marrow, then the heart, and finally the lungs. From this series of successive developments we see that in the germ there is, as yet, no actual image of the future body, but rather a formative force or substance upon which the whole body depends and for which it exists.

3. This supereminent blood which is derived from the first aura cannot be said to have life, for the auras do not manifest life but only force and motion. Nor does it feel, perceive, understand, or look to ends. The auras belong to nature, which in itself is dead. Nature serves life as an instrumental cause, promoting the ends which arise from the will of an intelligent Being who governs nature suitably to His desired ends. We must acknowledge an intelligence governing and forming the mechanism of the universe and the animal kingdom. For, as Swedenborg says : "Who can be so great an idiot as to expect anything so accurate from chance? As well might we believe that stones and timbers come together by

chance into the form of a house" (no. 237). The intelligent Being who is the author of the universe is God, the Fountain of life and wisdom, for whom and from whom all things exist.

4. The life and intelligence of God can flow only into those substances which are accommodated both to the beginning of motion and to the reception of life. By a thorough study of nature we may observe that the natural sun is the beginning of motion in the universe, and that it operates by means of mediating auras, producing its effects in the ultimate objects of the world. When we consider the spirituous fluid as being accommodated to the beginning of motion, we observe that the sun acts into the spirituous fluid by means of the first aura, and by the operation of successive auras the sun is able to achieve its physical effects in the lower degrees of the animal kingdom. But the spirituous fluid is also most exquisitely adapted for the reception of life from God because it is the first and purest organ of the body. In dealing with this point Swedenborg says: "On account of the influx of this life, which is the principal cause in the animate kingdom, this purest fluid, which is the instrumental cause, is to be called the spirit and soul of its body." Now because this fluid is the purest in the body, and the most perfectly adapted for reception of life, it is said to be the spirit and soul of its body and is therefore called the spirituous fluid.

5. Now we cannot understand the actual mode by which life and wisdom flow into the soul from the Creator, because God is infinite and we are finite and it is therefore above our understanding. However, we can see a representation of it by means of a comparison, for nature is a means by which we can see, if we will, the image and operation of the Creator. We can see a representation of God's operation in light, for as God is the fountain of life and wisdom, so the sun is the fountain of light in the universe. We see that the sun by means of its atmospheres flows into the natural objects of the universe and is received according to their forms and modifications; and so likewise does the Sun of life and wisdom. The natural sun operates in the objects of creation by means of successive auras, and so also does the spiritual sun, by means of the Spirit of God, which is compared in the Scriptures to a purest aura. Swedenborg cautions us that comparisons do not teach the nature of things but only illustrate, and therefore must be used only for that purpose. He continues the discussion by pointing out that

the life flowing from the Creator is universal and omnipresent, and therefore flows constantly into the created universe according to order and laws, from an end, through intermediate ends, to an end.

6. There are thus two principles which determine the spirituous fluid. One enables it to exist and be moved in the world, and thence it is spiritual. From these two principles there arises a third, in the spirituous fluid itself; which is the principle of determining itself to ends consistent with the ends of the created universe. Because it has this third principle of self-determination, the soul must descend in its operations through the same number of degrees as there are degrees of created substances, and must form organs reactive to these degrees and forces. These degrees are four, since there are four auras; and the organs which react to these four auras are the spirituous fluid of the *mens* or mind, the *animus*, and the body with its external senses. This is the series by which every operation of the soul descends and ascends.

7, 8. Swedenborg now distinguishes between the soul, mind, animus, and body in respect to their functions. The soul is the highest, having intuition of ends. Its office is to represent the universe. It is above the mind, because it possesses from the beginning all the knowledge it will ever possess. Also, even though the mind may become sick, the soul continues in its operation undisturbed. This mind is the second degree and its office is to think, will and understand. This is possible when it receives impulses from the world through the senses of the body and these are illuminated by the light of the soul. Thus the thinking mind partakes of both soul and body. The animus is the third, and its office is to conceive, desire and imagine. The fourth is the body with the external senses, whose function it is to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch, as well as to act in obedience to the higher degrees.

9. Swedenborg now points out that if the operation of the spirituous fluid is the soul, and the operation of the soul in the cortical substance of the brain is the mind, and if the affection of the whole brain is the animus, and the faculty of feeling and acting is in the body; then a careful investigation of anatomy should show the nature of the intercourse between the soul and the body. Swedenborg incidentally notes two important principles. One is that the soul is not derived from the mother, but, as Aristotle taught, from the father (no. 295). The second is that there are no innate ideas in the mind, but only in the soul, where they exist as laws.

Swedenborg now gives us the requisites for having a sound mind in a sound body (no. 306). 1) The spirituous fluid must be of the richest character and have the truest order of nature. 2) The cortical substance must be of the most perfect form, receiving only genuine blood. 3) The fibrils of the cortical substance must be in harmony with it and communicate with the organs of the body perfectly. 4) The way of this communication must be opened by cultivation and habit according to an established order. Only under these and other conditions can the mind approach the intuitions of the soul with any degree of clarity.

Swedenborg then asks whether the soul should be called material or immaterial. He concludes that since the spirituous fluid is the first substance in its kingdom, on which the whole organism depends, and this is natural, therefore in this respect it is material, but in respect to its reception of life it cannot be called natural; and so it is both material and immaterial, depending on the viewpoint from which it is regarded.

The spirituous fluid is very different from the first aura out of which it is derived. In respect to the first aura, it is said that its chief perfection lies in its being susceptible to variety, and in its ability to undergo all these accidental mutations without retaining any memory of them. The aura, being inanimate, relapses at once into its natural state. But those things which are impressed on the spirituous fluid inhere in it.

Swedenborg now asks: Can the soul undergo an essential mutation? He concludes that as to the principle of motion, or as a formative substance, it cannot be essentially changed, for we see that children, whether born of evil parents or good, are perfectly formed. But as to the reception of life and wisdom from God it can be changed by the life a man chooses to lead. This he calls a superior essential mutation. This superior essential mutation is granted so that there may be a distinction between souls by which a variety may exist through the exercise of free choice which will contribute to the end of creation which is the glory of God.

10. Free will exists because the spirituous fluid is capable of assuming infinite changes of state and modification, and can in this way know everything that occurs within the body or that affects the body from without. From this knowledge the mind can choose what it wishes, direct it to an end either with or against the affection of the animus, and then compel the body to act accordingly.

But it can do this only in matters in which it has been instructed through the organs of the body.

11. The distinction between the souls of brute animals and man is this, that man's spirituous fluid or formative substance has its origin in the first aura, but the purest fluid of a brute has its origin in the second aura. Swedenborg confirms this by pointing out that the second aura is the magnetic ether and that this accounts for the peculiar ability of animals to return home through unknown territory, where a man would be lost. Animals do not have the power to think and will because, with them, there is no light from a higher source to illuminate the impressions received through the senses, nor from a rational mind. Because animals lack this, there is a direct communication between their soul and body and they remain in the order of their life.

12. In the final part of this work the subject of the immortality of the soul is treated of. It is not immortal in itself, but from God who alone is immortal. It is not destructible by any forces lower than itself for, it is the cause for which they exist; so even if the sublunary world were to be destroyed it would live, for a cause can exist without its effect. When the soul has left the body, and is emancipated from the bonds and trammels of earthly things, it assumes the exact form of the human body; for that form is the form of the soul. This is observable in the formation of the foetus in the womb, for the spirituous fluid first forms fibres, organs, and lastly a body in the human form, and the fluid reigns universally in the body. From this it is clear that the soul will return into the human form when freed from the body. It can never again migrate back into life by means of an ovum, nor can it again attract the elements of nature and be materialized on earth. But it will live to eternity, thus forming a society of souls.

"If there be a society of souls, must not the city of God on the universal earth be the seminary of it? The most universal law of its citizens is, that they love their neighbor as themselves, and God more than themselves. All other things are means, and are good in proportion as they lead directly to this end. . . . The Holy Scripture is the code of rules for obtaining the end by the means" (no. 366).