

# SWEDENBORG'S PHILOSOPHY OF CAUSALITY

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## CHAPTER VI

### TOWARD A RECONCILIATION OF SOME CAUSAL CONCEPTS OF SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY, AND RELIGION

The second section of this study has thus far been principally concerned with setting forth some key instances of the application of Swedenborg's causal theory to two areas of broad philosophic concern. Inherent in these treatments are certain ideas of significance, ideas therefore worthy of note by historians of philosophy. It may well be philosophy's loss that so few of its annotators have been cognizant of the philosophy under consideration here.

However, to borrow for the moment William James' famous pragmatic stance, it can make not a single jot of difference so far as the past goes<sup>1</sup> that philosophers and their historians have, by and large, ignored Swedenborg. That this situation need not (indeed should not) prevail in the future, may depend upon efforts such as this present one to call attention to the relevance of the Swedish genius's philosophic concepts to present-day philosophic problems—if such relevance does in fact exist.

This present chapter will attempt to delineate some lines of thought which would seem to qualify for further contemporary consideration under the above cited standard.

Mention has been made a number of times in this study of the many attempts philosophers have made down through the centuries to develop a philosophy of causality which was reconcilable with "nature" as it was conceived at any given time in history. As a result, causal theories have tended to reflect, directly or indirectly, the concept held by the particular thinker as to the true nature of substance and /or matter. It has been noted, *e.g.*, that Descartes' successors regarded his insistence on linking the consideration of substance with that of cause as antiquated dogmatism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907, Chap. III.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

Perhaps more directly relatable to the causal attitude toward substance developed by Swedenborg are the views of two of his predecessors, both of whom were concerned with causation as a philosophic hypothesis, but who arrived at radically different conclusions, essentially because of the concept each accepted concerning substance. The two whose contrasting ideas will be presented briefly are Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716).

Bruno set out to show that the universe consists of but *one indivisible substance*, which is infinite, eternal immutable, and divine. He lays down the *rationalistic postulate* that there is one and the same scale by which nature or God's causal power descends to the production of things and by which the human intellect ascends in its knowledge of things.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Bruno was a forerunner of Leibniz in regard to the concept of monads, but the two seem to have little in common beyond that. Bruno's heterodoxy, which confounded the infinity of God with the finitude of nature, led to his arrest and execution by the Inquisition. His attempts to preserve a concept of causality were completely thwarted by his lack of an adequate doctrine of substance.

Leibniz, on the other hand, with his monad theory, so restricted the idea of substance that any possibility of causal relation was obviated.

1. The *monad* of which we shall speak here is merely a simple substance, which enters into composites; *simple*, that is to say, without parts.

2. And there must be simple substances, since there are composites; for the composite is only a collection or *aggregatum* of simple substances.

3. Now where there are no parts, neither extension, nor figure, nor divisibility is possible. And these monads are the true atoms of nature, and, in a word, the elements of all things...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Monadology*, in *Leibniz Selections*, edited by Philip Wiener, p. 533.

This rather protracted definition concludes crucially that no communication is possible between monads. Thus there can be *no* causal relation at all between substances. This, of course, led to the famous doctrine of preëstablished harmony, *i.e.*, relationships which may *appear* to be causal are simply the manifestations of a God-ordained synchronization. Leibniz, in short, applied the monad theory in a manner diametrically opposite to that of Bruno, with equally disastrous results as far as the formulation of a rational theory of causality is concerned. It was into this arena that Swedenborg entered.

However, it was not in any sense in direct answer to Bruno or Leibniz, or any other philosopher for that matter, that he formulated his causal theory. He simply sought to verify his underlying religious conviction that this is God's universe, purposefully caused by Him according to discernible laws of order. Therefore it was absolutely essential that his mature idea of substance be such that it would lend itself to a philosophically defensible place in a causal universe.

Ultimately, three terms in particular had to be coped with. Doctrines were formulated for each of them as lemmas contributory to an all-embracing philosophy. But their very nature is such that his treatment of them assumes present-day import. These three terms, in fact, as defined and used by our author, offer substantive aid to those seeking to discover ultimate reality.

The abstruseness of at least two of these terms—rivaling their ubiquity—is manifested by the utter failure of centuries of philosophers to come anywhere near agreement in defining them. These perennial offenders are: "substance" and "matter." The third term, almost as abstract, is "form."

Stephen and June (Goodfield) Toulmin, in the second volume of their history of science,<sup>5</sup> set themselves the task of tracing concepts of "matter."

To the best of our knowledge, in fact, this is the first recent attempt to give a coherent general account of the whole field we have called "matter theory" (*i.e.* the physics, chemistry and physiology of material things, both inanimate and animate) as it has evolved since the very beginnings of science.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Architecture of Matter* (Harper Torchbooks, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

The work as a whole is both scholarly and absorbing. But the epilogue strongly bears out our contention that the term "matter" has eluded lexicographer, scientist and philosopher alike. The authors note that about A.D. 1700 astronomy and dynamics had so developed that men for the first time saw "the fabric of the heavens" clearly and in proportion. Newton's work, although by no means constituting the "last word," nevertheless can be described as an "intellectual watershed." But no such crucially important line of demarcation was found in "matter-theory."

...The intellectual revolutions in men's ideas about matter have been unending: the very foundations of physics and physiology have (it seems) been dug up and relaid every half-century. As a result, in these parts of science...the fundamental concepts have never remained stable and universal long enough for common sense to take hold.<sup>7</sup>

The learned husband and wife team do maintain, in the face of this, however, that they see signs of what they call "the possibility of a reunified view of matter and life."<sup>8</sup> What they are bearing witness to is the conclusion that mankind has at last been weaned away from Newtonian dualism. Still, the problem of matter remains far from resolved.

The Toulmins are by no means alone in drawing attention to the ambivalence toward Newton which has so often developed, starting with his contemporaries. This phenomenon is accounted for by E. A. Burt as being due to inherent contradictions between Newtonian physics and Newtonian metaphysics. The great scientist's dislike of hypotheses, says Burt, led him to

...give or assume definite answers to such fundamental questions as the nature of space, time, and matter, the relations of man with the objects of his knowledge; and it is just such answers that constitute metaphysics.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>9</sup> E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, p. 33.

The metaphysical concepts were not subjected to the same scrutiny and testing as the clearly scientific ones, but were "swallowed whole" forming a source for chronic philosophic dyspepsia right up to the present.

Lest we become inextricably embedded in the morass of "matter-theory," let us turn and look briefly at the extent of the problem surrounding the sister concept of "substance."

One evidence of its contemporaneity as a subject of philosophic investigation is a Johns Hopkins Press publication titled *Ideas About Substance*.<sup>10</sup> Professor Emeritus Albert T. Hammond writes engagingly, if not irreverently, about man's far-flung "substance" ideas from "Pre-Socratic Pre-emptions" to "postphenomenalism." Some of this first-chapter observations are:

The word "substance," I believe, was first meant to do the same job as the phrase "what is really there"...

There is now a fairly distinct threefold division of verbal usage...

1. ...the most frequent use of "substance" is from chemistry: "Chemical substances" are sub-superficial stuffs or materials...

2. Among the philosophers perhaps the most significant from this point of view is Whitehead, who rejects "substance" because he accepts a definition of it as unchanging and he wants process...

3. In literature and common sense the old meanings of the word, multiple but centered, and approbative, remain. So the Whiteheadian who has been lecturing on the needlessness of substance will go home and praise the substance of the editorial in the evening paper.<sup>11</sup>

In the course of the study attention is drawn to the early identification of substance with the Greek *ousia*, substance being the existent thing, and its essence the definition of the thing.<sup>12</sup> Further along in the history of

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<sup>10</sup> A. L. Hammond, *Ideas About Substance*, 1969.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.* (For a firsthand account of Whitehead's position on substance, cf. *Science and the Modern World*, Chapter 3.)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. (Hammond, and others, point out that the Latin roots of "substance," *sub* and *stare* [standing under] tend to confuse the intent of the term rather than clarify it.)

philosophy, possibly first with Descartes, the basic trait of enduringness metamorphosed into unchangingness. This Hammond tags a falsification. No conclusion is drawn in this study, again underlining the apparently unavoidable ambiguity of the concept. One need only contrast, for instance, the view of Scholasticism with that formulated by Spinoza to see how extremely divergent ideas about substance can become. Let it suffice for now to say that it is a continuing problem.

Our third term under consideration, "form," has both Latin and Greek forebears of which one should be aware. The Greek *eidōs*, reflected by the Latin *species*, and in turn by the English "form" (the English "species" being only incidental to our main concern) leads to such synonyms as "intelligible structure," "essence" (which adds a further note of confusion) and even "formal cause." The closely related Greek *morphé* generally translated into Latin as *forma*, also comes to rest in the English "form." Here we more distinctly sense ideas such as shape, figure, image; but also, pattern or mold—thus not at all clearly distinguishable from either the intelligible-structure or essence connotation of the *eidōs* derivative.

Various methods have been employed to refine the meaning: Scholasticism speaks of metaphysical form, but then seems to cross the substance-form line by defining a substantial form. This is differentiated from accidental form. Later, in the hands of a phenomenologist, Husserl, *eidōs* becomes the technical term to denote the essential structure of kinds of intentional acts.<sup>13</sup> With the existentialist, Blackham notes, man ultimately makes his own "form" or essence.

When Ortega y Gasset says, "Man has no nature, what he has is history," or Heidegger or Sartre says that with man existence precedes essence, they are not professing any form of historicism; they are agreeing with Hegel and Marx and Vico that man is only what he does, and has no substance or essence by which he can be intuitively and absolutely known and by which he is or should be determined.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Gilson, Langan and Maurer, *Recent Philosophy*, pp. 105-108.

<sup>14</sup> H. J. Blackham, *Six Existentialist Thinkers*, p. 162.

Reference to just these few widely varied uses of the term "form" may serve to illustrate our point: that contemporary philosophy seems no nearer to consensus on its significance and meaning than it is concerning the closely associated terms "matter" and "substance." If, therefore, a philosophy could be found which assigned universally applicable meanings to these terms, meanings which in practice proved to be consistent and compatible, one in search of philosophic understanding might be expected to take steps to acquaint himself with it.

Such a philosophy should not be expected to be a panacea for all metaphysical woes; but it could well be looked to to contribute notably to philosophic thought.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to setting forth and illustrating the methodical unfolding of thought which led to Swedenborg's mature and certain use of the three terms in question. His definitions of these terms will be seen to have wide applicability to ontological and epistemological considerations as well as to the more specific concern of this study, the philosophy of causality.

First, let us look at the three basic terms, matter, substance, and form, as to their *semantic* content, *i.e.*, as Swedenborg construed them. Then we shall again look at each in turn to discover the particular *philosophic* content which he assigned to them.

We would appear to be greatly aided in our first task by a small work drafted in 1742 (but not translated and published until 1880) bearing the single-word title *Ontologia*. The definitive English edition,<sup>15</sup> retranslated and edited in 1901, bears the subtitle: "Or the Signification of Philosophical Terms." The editor notes that in the latest of several prospectuses mentioning this work the author so titled it, adding that it "fully describes the nature of the treatise."<sup>16</sup> Although the work is fragmentary, it includes sections defining the three terms of special interest to us here.

The format followed is to state the term, quote briefly one or more pertinent passages from one or more of three philosophic writers (only one of whom, Wolff, is widely known)<sup>17</sup> and then state his own conclu-

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<sup>15</sup> E. Swedenborg, *Ontology*, translated and edited by Alfred Acton, 1901.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi, note.

<sup>17</sup> The others are Scipio Dupleix (1569-1661), a French historiographer, and Robert Baron (1593-1639), a Scotch Presbyterian divine.

sions as to how the term should be defined. The author comments, in part, on “matter” as follows:

Matter, understood philosophically, may be attributed even to spiritual forms. For matter is that out of which form is, whether you call it substance or element...Matter, therefore, considered philosophically, is not taken to be heavy, inert, or corporeal, but is taken as the beginning of existence [*principium essendi*], and as that without which there is no determination and no form; for that something which is determined, is called matter.<sup>18</sup>

We shall find in his late writings that *this* definition of “matter” coalesces with that of “substance” and that he adopts, generally speaking, a definition of “matter” or “material things” [*materialia*] to which only passing notice is given in *Ontology*. There, identified as “physical matter,” it is summarily dismissed as being, apparently, of little concern to philosophers.

It is not clear to me why he here elevates the word “matter” to the extent that it is made inapplicable to the things of earth. Whatever the reason, it seemed to have lost its significance by the time he embarked on the publication of his theological works. Thus, in his subsequent usage of the term, he follows for the most part the commonly accepted or dictionary meaning of “matter,” *viz.*, that which occupies space, can be sensibly perceived, constitutes physical bodies, et cetera. Sometimes he links it with substance; but then it seems consistently to be understood as the first or lowest or natural level of substance.

It is not, then, the semantic content of “matter” which need concern us; it is the metaphysical connotation which it assumes in Swedenborg’s treatment of it. This we shall investigate shortly.

In the pre-theological work before us, the author elaborates a definition of “substance” which is dependent on his definition of “form.” Therefore, let us look at the latter term first. The key paragraph reads:

Form is the entire construction of a body; namely, the composition, coördination, subordination, and determination of the parts,

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<sup>18</sup> *Ontology, op. cit.*, n. 47.

both integral and individual, in a compound, whence that compound derives, not only its essence, but also the quality of that essence; for it is from its form that an ens is what it is taken to be. Therefore, from a knowledge of the form, there follows a knowledge of the quality and essence of any given body, as also of its dependence and relation; since a knowledge of the form involves a knowledge of the connection, the position, the order, the fluxion, and many other things which cause the body to be what it is rather than something else.<sup>19</sup>

To this definition, which seems to contain largely the common or prevailing ideas of the term, is added in the closing paragraph of the section the following word of emphasis:

All things must have their own form in order that there may be anything. From form is derived actuality or essence, the quiddity of the ancients, quality, causality, and the faculty of acting and being acted upon. Thus a thing without form is an atom without a beginning, that is, nothing.<sup>20</sup>

Now, since I foresee no particular linguistic problem with the term "form," let us turn to the considerably more complex, and in many ways less satisfactory conclusions reached in this treatise concerning "substance." Why I find myself somewhat bemused by his definition may appear more readily to my reader if I quote in full his remarks on the topic. It begins, as was noted, by a reference to his treatment of "forms."

Substances, like forms, are simple and compound, prior and posterior, superior and inferior. But primarily and properly, there are no substances except the simple, first, and supreme, which at the same time are the most perfect. Yet posterior and compound substances cannot be called non-substances, seeing that forms, attributes, forces, modes, accidents, and qualities belong to them.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 11.

Therefore, every form distinct from another is a substance, since it is a subject in which is form together with its adjuncts and predicates. Thus substance remains substance even though the state of its form is changed; for nothing substantial is either destroyed or produced by variation of form or modification. In this way, all the definitions can be made to agree. But to give a single definition which shall exhaust the subject, I scarcely believe possible. That all definitions agree, can be demonstrated. In superior substances predicates, accidents, and qualities have no place; for superior substances are above every notion belonging to predicates.

That substances be substances, they must be modifiable and able to change their state. Thus they must be endowed with force. The modifications themselves, which are changes of state or variations of forces, although they are forms, still cannot be called substances, but only the operations of substances. For these modifications, regarded in themselves, are not modifiable nor can they change their state, and therefore they are only the operations of substances, which do change their state. Thus thought cannot be called substance, nor can sensation; for it is the sensory organs that are the very substance of the sensations. That is to say, the eye is the organic substance of the sensation of sight; the ear, of hearing; the tongue, of taste; the brain, of all the sensations; the cortical glands are the organic substances of the imagination, and, together with the pure intellectories, of the thought.

The sensories, therefore, and not the sensations, are substances, because they are organic forms. The whole body is a substance composed of all organic substance; the soul is a substance whose operations are spiritual, for it is a form, and indeed a spiritual form; and so with other things.

We must conceive of active and motive force, and also of nature, after the manner of substance; but they are not substance, they only so appear.<sup>21</sup>

The editor provided one explanatory footnote—on what our author means by “pure intellectories”; but, unfortunately, that was not one of my

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 33-35.

problems. One must remind oneself, of course, that this is translated from a rough draft manuscript, not a final, published work; therefore, one stands ready to excuse jumpy transitions and incipency in the development of ideas. But somehow this statement seems more descriptive than definitive. One familiar with the later writings senses not only the lack of certain key definiens in this passage but also what appear to be assertions that are in conflict with later concepts. For example, one finds it hard to reconcile the declaration that predicates "have no place" in "superior substances" with one from his final publication to the effect that "both substance and form may be predicated of God,"<sup>22</sup> even though the latter one continues, "but in the sense that He is the only, the very, and the primal Substance and Form."

Elsewhere in the late works there is an unobtrusive but subtly different approach to the relationship between the sensory organs and their sensations in which the organ and that which it senses are simply equated: the eye, *e.g.*, is sight. Or, if you will, sight is predicated of the eye.

Finally, that "nature" is not substance, but only so appears, seems adequately refuted by a rhetorical question posed in *True Christian Religion* [1771], "What is matter but an aggregation of substances?"<sup>23</sup>

Thus we find that although there is indeed a definite doctrine of substance in the late works, the 1742 statement cited above is inadequate to express it; and, as is so often the case, the student of Swedenborg is faced with the task of piecing together a definition or cogent statement of the concept under consideration.<sup>24</sup>

The reason for the apparent inadequacy of the pre-theological definitions, especially that of "substance," may well be the same underlying one that has plagued all philosophers down through the ages who have tried to define this term in some sort of final and fixed and unambiguous form. "Substance," in one sense, is not unlike "electricity" or "gravity"—at least,

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<sup>22</sup> *True Christian Religion*, n. 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 280[8].

<sup>24</sup> Note: The almost invariably reliable Alfred Acton in this instance, it seems to me, does the reader a disservice by quoting with approval a statement by the translator of the first edition to the effect that the definitions in this work are generally applicable to the terms when used in the theological writings. Of the three we have investigated, only one, "form," seems so to qualify.

so far as the problem of defining, not what they do, or what are their discernible characteristics, but what they *are*.

If one reads with care dictionary entries under these words, one sees that despite all the descriptive data given as to the activity of both electricity and gravity, the lexicographer ultimately ends up saying, in effect if not explicitly, that "gravity is gravity," and "electricity is electricity." Most—possibly all—philosophic definitions of substance are similarly reducible to the formula that "substance is substance." Be the definition based on *substantia* or *hypostasis*, *ousia* or one of the several verbal forms denoting "being," it ultimately is equatable with Hammond's observation<sup>25</sup> that "substance" is "what is really there."

This, as a matter of fact, is not a bad definition at all; at least, so long as one remains incapable of defining more concisely, if I may be forgiven the expression, the substance of substance.

It is precisely at this point that Swedenborg, in the role of revelator, radically departs from all his scholarly predecessors and states confidently and with absolutely no equivocation *what substance is*. At the same time he humbly admits that unaided human reason, even that of the most brilliant of men, would never have discovered this truth. It could only have come to men's minds through the extraordinary channel of revelation. But here, once again, in typical fashion, our seer quite obviously feels that once this revolutionary fact of life is clearly set forth and made readily available, no thinking person should experience any difficulty acknowledging the logical consistency of the idea and hence its undoubted truth. Further, its ramifications are such that other key terms, including "matter" and "form" and many more, will for the first time be seen in undistorted perspective.

Knowledge of the true nature of substance, or what is the same thing, knowledge of the true nature of ultimate reality, is the pivotal factor or the first essential component on which a whole new metaphysics may be built. Even more than that: one's whole philosophical outlook, not only ontological but also epistemological, logical, ethical and aesthetic, will be fundamentally reshaped in the light of this revealed truth. A new and unexampled harmony will be seen to exist between all parts and phases of one's philosophy. However, this optimistic purview is not without its solemn

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. p. 511, *supra*.

note. In the previous chapter it was noted<sup>26</sup> that the question of mind/body communication was somehow intimately related to ethical considerations. Earlier,<sup>27</sup> attention was drawn to our author's doctrinaire assertion that an individual's moral state largely determined one's capacity to grasp the meaning and significance of certain religious ideas.

Now we shall be apprised that because of the very nature of substance, this is through and through a moral universe, and one's moral state will obtrude at all the critical points along the way. Those, in short, who have no real desire to acquire truth whereby to live a better life will utterly fail to understand either revealed truth when confronted with it, or its implications. To those whom he refers to as "mere critics,"<sup>28</sup> the new truth for this new philosophy will seem banal, vapid, inconsequential. Therefore, may the reader of this present treatise consider himself suitably warned concerning what is to follow!

Ready? The one only substance, the ultimate reality, is *love*. That by and through which it takes form is *truth*. The result or end-product of that process is *use*. These three are discrete degrees separated from each other, being related by correspondence as end, cause, and effect. Love uncreate is God. The form, or truth manifestation, which God takes is the human form. All of creation, therefore, is related to and in some sense reflects the divine human form. The goal of creation is an endlessly increasing heaven of human beings embodying, so far as finitude can mirror infinitude, this divine human form. "Ultimate reality is personal life, and personal life is love."<sup>29</sup>

This philosophy, the essence of which I have deliberately tried to compress into one paragraph, is the specific concern of Swedenborg's one patently metaphysical volume, *Divine Love and Wisdom* [1763], and various aspects of the doctrine are given extensive treatments throughout the thirty volumes of his theological works. Many of the subsidiary propositions are introduced only gradually, starting with the first volume of

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. pp. 430-431, *The New Philosophy* (Oct.-Dec., 1990).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. p. 417, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Arcana Coelestia* n. 6621, and *Heaven and Hell* n. 353 and 464.

<sup>29</sup> L. Hite, *Ultimate Reality*, p. 45. (Note: Free use will be made in what follows of Hite's excellent statement of this ontological view which comprises pp. 29-46 of his treatise.)

*Arcana Coelestia* which appeared in 1749. For example, early in that book he observes:

It is in everyone's power very well to know that no life is possible without some love, and that no joy is possible except that which flows from love. Such however as is the love, such is the life, and such the joy: if you were to remove loves, or what is the same thing, desires—for these are of love—thought would instantly cease, and you would become like a dead person...<sup>30</sup>

There is surely nothing very startling or revolutionary in that passage. The author himself classifies it as being virtually common knowledge. Yet it contains within it the seeds for the later philosophically couched premise that love is life, life is love.

In a later volume in this same massive work, he leans a little further in that direction, however, when he writes:

Love is the will of man, and derivatively is his thought, and thus is his action.<sup>31</sup>

The reader is reminded of my earlier characterization of an existential trinity of love/truth/use.<sup>32</sup> The one suggested here: will/thought/action, might with some justification be called an empirical trinity; for one's experience of love is through the process of willing, that of truth is in thinking, and that of use is in acting. Each of these trines, within the appropriate context, sums up the basic nature of man. Everything essential to the mirroring forth of the human form can somehow be categorized as willing, thinking, or acting. Will is basic; its substance is love. Or, put another way, love as substance corresponds to the will of man. In the trine of end/cause/ effect, "end" is a present state or affection of love. Such a state, by its intrinsic nature, seeks objectification. Hite likens this *conatus* to

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<sup>30</sup> *Arcana Coelestia* n. 33.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 3938[8].

<sup>32</sup> Cf. p. 428, *The New Philosophy* (Oct.-Dec., 1990).

the process of *self-representation*.<sup>33</sup> Of the various states of affection he writes:

...Being present, living, self-conscious, self-identical affections of love, they are its self-representative images, in which the love sees its own longing for self-realization reproduced in the definite striving of the particular affection.<sup>34</sup>

Along with this term are introduced the related ones of *self-projection* and *self-realization*. These three essential factors of experience or life combine to produce the process of love.

The divine is self-represented in the spiritual and, through the spiritual, in the natural. This is the relation of correspondence. It is self-realized in the spiritual and, through the spiritual, in the natural. This is influx. The spiritual and the natural are self-projections of the divine. This is creation.<sup>35</sup>

The ramose implications of this laconic passage would lead us far afield from our immediate task if we were to try to follow each of them in turn right here. With the full intent of returning to a further consideration of much that it implies, let us content ourselves for now by simply taking note that we seem to have added two more trines to our mounting collection.

If, then, substance or the essence of life is love, what do we mean by asserting that that by and through which it takes form is truth? The distinction intended is precisely that which Aristotle made between essence and existence, the latter for him being matter invested with form. Much later the same basic thought is echoed by Leibniz. Lovejoy, drawing on the *Philosophische Schriften* of Leibniz, adduces this thesis:

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<sup>33</sup> This concept of Julius Dedekind was adapted by Royce for his own philosophic purposes; cf. *The World and the Individual*, Vol. 1, Supplementary Essay.

<sup>34</sup> *Ultimate Reality*, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

There can, Leibniz often says plainly enough, be only one ultimate reason why anything exists, namely, that its essence demands existence, and will inevitably attain it unless interfered with by a similar demand on the part of some other essence; and the superiority of the actual world to all the other abstractly conceivable ones consists in the fact that in it this tendency of essences to exist is realized in greater measure than in any of the others. An *exigentia existentiae* is inherent in every essence; *nisi ipsa essentiae natura quaedam ad existendum inclinatio esset, nihil existeret*.<sup>36</sup>

It is in this same tradition that Swedenborg frames his doctrine, only adding to it that since the nature of substance or essence is love, then the existence which it attains will be truth in one or another of its numerous manifestations. To illustrate, in the case of man, the mental faculty that loves is will; its basic attribute is *conatus* or endeavor.<sup>37</sup> In order for will to carry out its endeavor it must first stimulate an idea. To do this the will's mental partner, understanding, is called into play, resulting in an act of attention, from which results an idea. In this idea the initiating love is self-represented. Once the idea or thought is fully formed, then the continuing *conatus* of the will, acting through the understanding, moves the body intelligently to carry out the desired act, thus achieving fulfillment.

This example has been drastically oversimplified in order to bring out clearly the end/cause/effect process which occurs. Thus, love or will or *conatus* constitute the end; truth or understanding or idea constitute the cause; and use or body or action constitute the effect. The end exists successively in all three stages.

There are three things that follow in order, called first end, middle end, and last end; they are also called end, cause, and effect. These three must be together in every thing, that it may be anything. For...an end alone, without a cause and an effect is impossible. Equally impossible is a cause without an end from

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<sup>36</sup> A. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Arcana Coelestia*, n. 8911.

which and an effect in which it is, or an effect alone, that is, an effect without its cause and end...

It must be known further, that the end is everything in the cause, and also everything in the effect; from this it is that end, cause, and effect are called first end, middle end, and last end...

These three, namely, end, cause, and effect, are in the created universe, both in its greatest and least parts.<sup>38</sup>

Here our seer not only extends the end/cause/effect trine far beyond the triad of will/understanding/act which characterizes the life of man, to include everything in the universe, from greatest to least; he also asserts that because ends reach down, so to speak, and are also "in" causes and "in" effects there must be a sort of universal self-projection and self-realization of ends. One seems to be teetering precariously on the edge of the chasm of pantheism; or *some* sort of monism.

One could, in fact, build quite an impressive case against Swedenborg on this count simply by lifting out of context brief passages from his writings such as the following:

God only, thus the Lord is love itself, because he is life itself.<sup>39</sup>

God alone is Substance itself, for this is *Esse* itself.<sup>40</sup>

God is the Itself, the Only, and the First which is called *Esse* and *Existere* in Itself.<sup>41</sup>

God is the All in all things of the universe.<sup>42</sup>

However, it will not be by grouping such truncated statements as this that we shall uncover our author's true position. One could as easily

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<sup>38</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom*, n. 167-169.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 283.

<sup>41</sup> *True Christian Religion* n. 22.

<sup>42</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 198.

charge Augustine with pantheism by pointing out that he made assertions such as this:

...He who is God is the only unchangeable substance or essence, to whom certainly Being itself, whence comes the name of essence, most especially and most truly belongs.<sup>43</sup>

The simple fact is that the Swedish theologian was very strongly opposed to what we now know as pantheism.<sup>44</sup> At the same time he fully believed that God, as traditional Christianity dictated, was omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Thus he wrote:

Let every man guard himself against falling into the detestable false doctrine that God has infused Himself into men, and that He is in them, and no longer in Himself; for God is everywhere, as well within man as without, for apart from space He is in all space (as was shown above, n. 7-10, 69-72); whereas if He were in man, He would be not only divisible, but also shut up in space; yea, man then might even think himself to be God.<sup>45</sup>

There is no question about the intent of this statement. Even though God is Love uncreate, and hence the one only Substance, all of reality as we know it is His *creation*, including man and all the rest of the physical universe. Many times in many ways it is said that

...there is only one life, and this is not capable of being created, but is eminently capable of flowing into forms organically adapted to its reception. Such forms are each and all the things in the created universe.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *On the Trinity*, v, 2.3.

<sup>44</sup> It is possible he did not know the term, even though he knew the concept. *OED* lists 1732 as the earliest known occurrence of the term. Hence, he *could* have known it.

<sup>45</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 130.

<sup>46</sup> *Influx* n. 13.

Thus there is no “spark [*scintilla*] of life”<sup>47</sup> in man that is his own. He, along with the rest of creation, is simply an organic form capable of being enlivened. But there is a critical difference. Man [*homo*] alone of God’s creations is in the *human* form. In our one-paragraph summary above<sup>48</sup> we said that “the form, or truth manifestation, which God takes is the *human* form” [emphasis added]. The Genesis creation myth tells us that God created man in His own image. How are we intended to understand this patent anthropomorphizing of God? The tendency in philosophic circles is to construe it pejoratively. Is this necessarily vindicated? Not in Swedenborg’s view, we shall see. His argument, in part, is as follows:

Those who have a natural corporeal idea of God as a Man are entirely unable to comprehend how God as a Man could have created the universe and all things thereof. For they think within themselves, how could God as a Man wander all over the universe from space to space, and create?...Bring your thought into the angelic idea about God as being a Man, and put away, so far as you can, the idea of space, and you will come in thought near to the truth...For the spiritual is like thought which, although it is in man, yet man is able by means of it to be present as it were elsewhere, in any place however remote...From these considerations it can be established that God...is not to be thought of from space. And it can then be comprehended that He created the universe, not out of nothing, but out of Himself; also that His Human Body cannot be thought of as great or small, or of any stature, because this pertains to space also; consequently, that in things first and last, and in things greatest and least, He is the same; and furthermore, that the Human is the inmost in every created thing, though apart from space...

That God could not have created the universe and all things thereof unless He were a Man may be very clearly understood by an intelligent person from the fact that he cannot deny within himself that in God there is Love and Wisdom, mercy and com-

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Cf.* p. 519, *supra*.

passion, also Good itself and Truth itself because these are from Him. And because he cannot deny these things, neither can he deny that God is a Man. *For not one of these qualitates is possible, abstracted from a man [emphasis mine], for man is their subject, and to separate them from their subject, is to say that they are not.*<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the most difficult task the confirmed Swedenborgian faces is to be able to be sufficiently sensitive to the probable presuppositions of his auditors as to be able not so much to persuade others to his views as simply to make clear what those views are. The above abridged citation contains several key ideas, the full import of which must be grasped before one can hope either to understand or to explain to another the metaphysics of Swedenborg. First, one must see that his idea of God as “a Man” is in no sense a construct which involves the physical human *shape*, although, paradoxically, once that hurdle is passed one finds it extremely convenient to draw on man's easily assumed knowledge of human shape. But this is *always* to talk metaphorically or by analogy. Swedenborg relies on his readers to remember this.<sup>50</sup>

One needs to recall that our seer was probably as thoroughly acquainted with human physiology and anatomy as any man of his generation. This fact alone should help explain why human anatomical metaphors are liberally sprinkled throughout his theological works. But it is more than that: the human form is for him the primary *functional* entity. It is of a piece with his including “use” in his existential trinity of love/wisdom/use.

...Let no one believe that man is man from his possession of a natural human face, body, brain, and organs and members; for all these are common to him with brute animals, and therefore these are what die and become a carcass. But *man is man from being able*

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<sup>49</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 285-286.

<sup>50</sup> For example, early in his *Arcana Coelestia* he builds a strong case for not identifying Adam and Eve as true historical personages, but as mythical and symbolic types. He even turns to linguistic analysis pointing out that “Adam” means “mankind” and “Eve” means “life.” Then, in subsequent writings, he freely uses such phraseology as, “Adam, the first and best of men...” assuming his intelligent reader will readily understand this as metonymy.

*to think and will as a man*, and thus to receive what is Divine, that is, what is of the Lord. By this man distinguished himself from beasts and wild animals; and in the other life also his quality as a man is determined by what he has received from the Lord and made his own in the life of the body.<sup>51</sup> [Emphasis added.]

A recent writer, perhaps entranced by the “existential flavor” of passages such as the above, and being well versed in both Swedenborgianism and Existentialism, makes what seems to this writer a somewhat extravagant claim that all of existentialism's “good” basic concepts “can be found, clearly proclaimed and abundantly demonstrated, in the theological works of Emanuel Swedenborg.”<sup>52</sup>

If I were to choose a philosophical bedfellow (if there is any desirability at all in making such a choice) I should almost rather prefer pragmatism to existentialism; its “good” concepts, that is. James enthusiastically adopted Peirce's credo, adding that the pragmatic method “tries to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences.”<sup>53</sup> Mention has been made earlier in this study of the eminently practical bent of the remarkable Swede. This trait is especially evident in his ontology (a science usually thought of as theoretical).

The human form, defined as to its most basic qualities, is uniquely possessed of Liberty and Rationality. Rationality is the ability to distinguish between truth and falsity. Liberty is the freedom to choose, in the life, between these two opposite forces.<sup>54</sup> These faculties in man, in fact, make possible the most essential ultimatum or “completion” of divine love and wisdom. All of nature also contributes to this completion; but nature's function is to be ancillary to (by forming a context for action) the *mental processes* of man, *viz.*, loving (or willing) and thinking (or understanding). These functions—themselves free from the limitations of time and space—find *their* ultimatum, within the confines of time and space, in action or use.

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<sup>51</sup> *Arcana Coelestia* n. 4219.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. H. Barnitz, *Existentialism and the New Christianity*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Pragmatism*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 240, and *Divine Providence* n. 75[2].

It is forever and always the *use* man freely chooses to seek and carry out, through the instrumentality of his God-given faculties of liberty and rationality, which finally will determine his eternal state.

...Every man on earth is born into the human form as regards his body, for the reason that his spirit, which is also called his soul, is a man. And this is a man because it is receptive of love and wisdom from the Lord. And to the extent that the spirit or soul of man receives these, so far he becomes a man after the death of the material body which enveloped him. But so far as he does not receive them, to that extent he becomes a monster which derives something of man from the ability to receive.<sup>55</sup>

Up to this point we have tried to make clear that the one only substance, the ultimate reality, is love; that love is uncreate and hence is God. By reference to human psychology we have attempted to illustrate the thesis that that by and through which love takes form is truth. This form of love is based on and corresponds to the form or truth manifestation which God takes, *i.e.*, the human form. But this is not to be understood as endorsing either a pantheism or an anthropomorphism. God is complete and whole in and from Himself. All else is His creation—created from His own basic substance, love, but discretely separated and distinguishable from the divine essence. The uniquely “human” abilities that man has to understand what is good and true, and to choose in freedom whether, or to what extent, he will embody the truth and goodness he perceives, are what ultimately define a man as a man. But this is because these “human” qualities are first and primarily divine qualities. Therefore, God is a Man; not in figure but in function. Thus the goal of human life on this plane is to strive to mirror the Creator as completely as a finite being can reflect the infinite in order to establish what one’s ultimate and continuing life will be. The life which God ordains—but does not force or predestine—is that in which the human capacity to love wisely and well reaches its apex. The assembly of human beings, all manifesting God-like loving, thinking, and acting, is heaven.

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<sup>55</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 287.

What remains to be explained is *how* God's love and wisdom are self-represented by the relation of correspondence, self-realized through the process of influx, and self-projected in His creation. To do this we must turn once more to the doctrines of degrees, influx and correspondence. Much of what they involve has been implied in what has been said thus far; but in the hope of further clarification, let us turn and see, first, what our author says about degrees in his late works. There are a half dozen or so more or less systematic treatments of the doctrine in the late writings, almost all of which contain the same basic points. The following citation is selected from one of the more concise of these passages.

There are continuous degrees and there are discrete degrees. Both of these are in every form in the spiritual world and in the natural world...Continuous degrees, which all know about, are like the degrees...from light to shade, from heat to cold, from rarity to density...But discrete degrees are wholly different. These do not advance in one plane to the sides around, but from highest to lowest; and for this reason they are called descending degrees. They are separated as efficient causes and effects are, which in their turn become efficient causes even to the lowest effect. They are also like a producing force in relation to the forces produced, which in turn become producing even to the last product. In a word, they are degrees of the formation of one thing from another; thus they are the degrees from first or highest to last or lowest, where formation subsists. Therefore things prior and posterior, also things higher and lower, are such degrees. All creation was effected through such degrees, and all production is by means of them, and likewise all composition in the nature that belongs to this world; for in analyzing anything that is composite you will see that one thing therein is from another, even to the very last, which is the general of them all...The interiors of man, which belong to his mind, are distinguished from each other by such degrees; so, too, are light which is wisdom and heat which is love,...The same is true of the degrees of affections; and as this is true of the degrees of affections it is true also of the degrees of uses, for the subjects of affections are uses...Without discrete

degrees there is not that within a form that constitutes a cause or soul, and without continuous degrees there is no extension or appearance of it.<sup>56</sup>

It would seem necessary to add only the following observations in order to have before us an outline of the complete doctrine of degrees. Continuous degrees are of no particular significance to the philosophy of causality; only discrete degrees. The latter is descriptive of series of creative processes. The substance of each successively lower plane, though created from that of the degree immediately prior to it, is a different—though related—substance. The lower the plane, the less vital and the less potent the substance, even though it maintains some “family resemblance” to the higher.

Since, as we have said, divine love is the first or highest substance, one need not look for an analog but can simply review in his mind the degrees of love with which he is either directly familiar or is able to picture mentally. Theologians, *e.g.*, distinguish *eros* from *agape*. The love of friendship differs markedly from romantic love. Love of food and love of country seem hardly on the same plane; *et cetera, et cetera*.

The lowest manifestation on the scale of substances is physical matter, which is relatively inert and seems to bear little resemblance to the sources from which, according to this hypothesis, it sprang. But it is precisely at this level that the doctrine of correspondence is to be involved, aiding one in imaging, with the help of the knowledge of the use the matter or element is capable of serving on its own plane, the higher substantial entity to which it corresponds. Particularly on this lowest level, the correspondential nature will as often as not be relatable to an entity of thought as to an entity of affection.

One of our original premises was that the only ultimately real substance was love. But even in the case of God, that by and through which divine love takes a form that can in any degree be apprehended by man is divine wisdom or truth. In actuality, however, love and truth are never separable; they are, to use Swedenborg’s unusual phrase, “distinctly one” [*distincte unum*]. This is simply his way of indicating that for philosophical

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<sup>56</sup> *Divine Love*, xi.

analysis they (love and truth) may be investigated separately; but functionally, in life, they are indivisible. One is simply more keenly aware of one aspect than another at any given time. The same person at different times or to different people may be most clearly, in turn (or sometimes simultaneously) father, teacher, lover, friend, et cetera.<sup>57</sup> Thus, at the elemental level, to give a simple example, fire may be said to correspond to love because of the warmth it radiates and which therefore is readily relatable to affection or love. But if one's primary interest in lighting a fire is to have it furnish light to read by, then its correspondential relationship would be more nearly akin to substance as truth.

There are myriads of refinements and illustrations of these principles of degrees and correspondence to be found throughout the theological writings of the seer. They all point to the same over-all philosophy, the same inevitable first premise:

God is the one self-existent Substance and Form from which all other substances and forms are derived. This substance and form is utterly inconceivable by any finite mind except by means of finite symbols, of which the fundamental one is that he is Divine Man. The first act of creation—not in time, for time has no relation to this sphere, but in order—is the putting forth from the Divine of a finite emanation of love and wisdom from himself.<sup>58</sup>

From this single starting point,<sup>59</sup> divine love and wisdom inflow, in successive adaptations, into every discrete plane of the created universe, coming to rest at last in the elemental substances of physical matter. The overarching purpose of it all was stated above in our one-paragraph summary: "The goal of creation is an endlessly increasing heaven of human beings embodying, so far as finitude can mirror infinitude, this divine human form."

It is precisely at this point, however, that an important question should be asked. In what way is this "putting forth from the Divine of a finite

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. our discussion of the doctrine of modification, Chap. II.

<sup>58</sup> Spalding, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>59</sup> In the paragraph heading of *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 40, Swedenborg even uses a singular verb form: "*Quod divinus amor et divina sapientia sit substantia et sit forma.*"

emanation of love and wisdom from himself" related (if it is related at all) to the various earlier emanation theories of creation?

That Swedenborg was aware of Plotinus, if not by direct reading of his works at least through Porphyry<sup>60</sup> and Augustine,<sup>61</sup> has been plainly established. And the Plotinian concept that all things emanate from the One has been widely regarded as a pantheism, since it does not seem to distinguish between God and the world.

The patristic attempt to cope with this problem is evidenced by the Gnostic solution which posited a series of emanations of *aeons* which as a whole constituted a "spiritual" world midway between deity and materiality. This compromise, however, did not prove lastingly significant, and the most long-lived Christian doctrine of creation was introduced by Origen (with whose ideas Swedenborg was also familiar);<sup>62</sup> of his theory we read:

...This doctrine, decisive for all later philosophy, interprets the Creation rigorously as the production of the world *from nothingness* by an act of free will of God. Creation is thereby clearly contrasted with every type of generation or emanation, and the separation between Greek and Christian thinking is sharply demarcated.<sup>63</sup>

Later, of course, a series of medieval philosophers, Scotus Erigena, for example, propounded emanation theories which met with sharp opposition from Church authorities. Origen's basic idea ultimately prevailed, and therefore anyone would be quite within his rights who challenged the Swede's theory as being possibly just a latter-day revival of an old heresy. That this present writer will not, however, sit idly by and allow such a charge to be left unanswered, his readers will by now readily presume.

That Swedenborg's philosophy of causality, as it is specifically applied to his doctrine of creation, does in fact constitute a form of emana-

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. *A Philosopher's Note Book*, *op. cit.*, p. 250, note.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 381, 383.

<sup>63</sup> J. Marias, *History of Philosophy*, p. 111.

tionism cannot be gainsaid. Not only do his commentators use this terminology,<sup>64</sup> but the author himself uses it. In one of his descriptions of the spiritual sun, "that circle most closely surrounding the Lord," his original wording continues:

*...emanans ex Divino Ipsius Amore et simul ex Divina Ipsius Sapientia...*<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, it can be strongly established that our author's emanation theory of creation not only carefully avoids the pitfalls of Neoplatonism and Erigenism but it also rejects the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>66</sup> To bring the *whole* concept of creation as philosophically set forth would, as has been noted before, require reproducing the full text of *Divine Love and Wisdom*. Therefore what follows here is perforce simply carefully selected excerpts from the main argument which, hopefully, will prove ample to make clear the gist of the doctrine and at the same time exculpate our philosopher-theologian from any hint of heresy.

The reader is asked to recall the thesis set forth earlier in this chapter that God is Man, and that therefore the whole of creation, both in its entirety and in its least parts, reflects the *human* form.

...Each and every thing which exists in the created universe has such a correspondence with each and every thing of man, that it may be said that man also is a kind of universe. There is a correspondence of his affections and hence of his thoughts with all things of the animal kingdom; of his will and hence of his understanding with all things of the vegetable kingdom; and of his ultimate life with all things of the mineral kingdom.<sup>67</sup>

This correspondential relating of man to all three kingdoms of the physical world rests in turn on the correspondential relationship which

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. p. 531, *supra*.

<sup>65</sup> *True Christian Religion* n. 365.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. p. 379, *The New Philosophy* (July-Sept., 1990).

<sup>67</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 52.

man enjoys with God-Man.<sup>68</sup> Repeatedly God-Man is described as *Esse* and *Existere*, His *Esse* being His divine love and His *Existere* being His divine wisdom. Thus we read:

Esse and Existere can be predicated of things created and finite, likewise substance and form, also life and even love and wisdom, but these are all created and finite. This can be said of things created and finite, not because they possess anything Divine, but because they are in the Divine and the Divine is in them. For everything created is, in itself, inanimate and dead, but is animated and made alive [*animatur et vivificatur*] by the fact that the Divine is in it and that it is in the Divine.<sup>69</sup>

It is then pointed out that although it may not be too difficult to see symbolic relationships between God and human beings, it is not so easy to see how this emanating of divine love and wisdom is received and reflected in, say, the vegetable and mineral realms. One of the illustrations used to explain this follows:

...in every seed there is the idea of the infinite and eternal, for there is in seeds an effort to multiply themselves and to fructify to infinity and eternity. Also in every living creature, even the smallest, this effort appears from their having organs of sense, also brains, heart, lungs and other parts, with arteries, veins, fibres, muscles, and their activities, besides the stupendous things in their instincts about which whole volumes have been written. All these wonderful things are from God, but the forms with which they are clothed are from earthy matters [*materiis terrae*], from which come plants and, in their order, men.<sup>70</sup>

These relationships are even further shown in that all animals have limbs and organs, appetites and affections; vegetables have “what is akin

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<sup>68</sup> Note: Swedenborg introduces this term from time to time in his argument using simply the Latin words *deus homo* contiguously.

<sup>69</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 53.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 60.

to marriage, followed by proliferation," and even the mineral world, in its efforts to produce forms which do show relation, *viz.*, by serving as a matrix for the growth of vegetable seeds. All of these activities, in turn, depend on the heat of the sun. But it is not really the heat of the world's sun; for, as has earlier been noted, that is "dead." It is rather "from life through that heat."<sup>71</sup>

The *first* emanation of divine love and wisdom, that by which the universe and everything therein has been and continues to be created, is the *spiritual* sun. This object, he is at great pains to show, appears to the inhabitants of the other world in precisely the same way that the sun of the physical world appears to inhabitants here. But the sun of the natural world renders only subsidiary aid. Since the causes of all things are in the spiritual world, all things in the natural world are, in the first instance, effects—including the sun. For it is only the sun of the spiritual world which has the divine life within it. It, in turn, emanates a sphere or "going forth" which has intrinsic creative powers. This term "sphere" [*sphaera*], as used by Swedenborg, has many connotative similarities to the terms "nimbus" and "halo" and "aura" as used in Christian iconography. It is characteristic of the spiritual sun, the natural sun, the angels in heaven, and men on earth; except that the sphere of men on earth is not generally visible. The spheres of angels are thus vividly limned:

...[It is a] sphere of affections and of thoughts therefrom which encompasses each angel, and by which his presence is evident to those near or far...this encompassing sphere is not the angel himself, but is from each and everything of his body, wherefrom substances constantly emanate like a stream, and whatever emanates encompasses him; also...these substances close about His body constantly activated by the two fountains of the motion of his life, the heart and lungs, excite the atmospheres into their own activities, and thereby present a perception like that of his presence among others.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 62

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 291.

The carefully chosen phraseology of the above citation is equally applicable to the first emanation and all subsequent emanations. Notice that it is *not* the angel *himself*, but is *from* him. Further, it is an efflux of *substances* of such a nature that the being from whom they emanate is thereby known. From this, he works to a generalization, the truth of which I am incompetent to affirm. He states:

...It is well known, from the experience of many learned men, that it is the same in the natural world, that there is a wave of effluvia constantly flowing forth out of man, as well as out of every animal, and also out of every tree, fruit, shrub, flower, and even out of metal and stone. The natural world derives this from the spiritual world, and the spiritual world from the Divine.<sup>73</sup>

If this "law of universal emanation," as it might be described, is in fact defensible, it would contribute markedly to the desirable goal of divorcing the whole concept of emanationism from the consortium of occult and esoteric ideas. My meagre knowledge in this field seems to point to affirmation of the thesis. At least it seems established in regard to those elements which are describable as radioactive, carbon 14 being a dramatic example of the enduringness of an element which so radiates. Had Swedenborg been aware of this phenomenon of 20th Century chemistry, we may be assured that he would have accounted for the long life of the carbon isotope as being due to constant replenishment from the one ultimate source of energy.

Quite beyond such conjecture, however, what he did say in a remarkable summary statement is that from the treatment of the origin of the earth which he offers,

...it can be confirmed that, in its substances and matters, there is nothing of the Divine in itself...For they are...the endings and terminations of the atmospheres whose heat has ended in cold, light in darkness, and activity in inertia. But yet they have brought with them by continuation from the substance of the spiritual Sun,

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 293.

that which was there from the Divine which...was a sphere encompassing God-Man, or the Lord. From this sphere, by continuation from the Sun by means of the atmospheres, have arisen the substances and matters from which the earth is formed.<sup>74</sup>

There are several noteworthy concepts implicit in this quotation. We are left in no doubt that physical "substances and matters" are simply the last in the chain of discretely distinguishable effluvia which began with the infinite vitality of divine love/wisdom/use. That which began as infinite heat, pure divine love, due to the unavoidable retrogression which occurs through successive discrete manifestations, ends up as comparatively cold physical elements. That which began as infinitely brilliant light, divine wisdom, comes to rest in relative (but by no means total) darkness or obscurity. Finally, the outpouring of the combined—in fact, inseparable—divine love and wisdom, which is characterized as divine use or infinite activity, in its ultimate stage becomes relatively inert "matter." Yet within this outmost or farthest removed product of creation is still enough of the divine sphere that the potential of combining into life-receiving receptacles in myriads of forms and varieties, from the simplest form up to the highest and most complex, man, persists. Man, then, is gifted with the *conatus* which can enable him to fulfill his destiny to become indeed an image of God, perfect himself as far as finitude is perfectible, and return to God for a never-ending angelic life in heaven.

Have we now a complete picture? Not quite. For implicit in this whole scheme is one large unanswered question. If the above paragraph does indeed state the divine purpose in creation, why did God bother with the *physical* plane at all? Could He not, in His omniscience and omnipotence, have started right out with *angels*? This obviously rhetorical question leads to the real question yet to be posed and coped with: Does Swedenborg offer any *reason* why God created the *physical* universe?

The answer is, "Yes, he does." Whether or not his answer will be acceptable as cogent or definitive will, however, have to be judged by the individual reader. It is a point, the full discussion of which would lead to so many complexities, that we would be led far afield from the basic

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 305.

subject matter of this dissertation. Let us, then, be content to state the author's case and then limit ourselves to very brief comments. Two statements of the concept will be adduced; it should become clear that they are complementary.

Whoever is instructed concerning Divine order, may also understand that man was created to become an angel, because in him is the ultimate of order...in which that which is of heavenly and angelic wisdom can be brought into a form, and can be renewed and multiplied. Divine order never stops midway and forms anything there without an ultimate—but proceeds to the ultimate; and when it is in its ultimate, it brings into form, and also by means there collected, renews and produces itself further. This is done by procreation. Therefore the ultimate is the seminary of heaven.<sup>75</sup>

Here the thought is led back principally to the earlier consideration of trines, and the concept that there is unity only in trinity. To have bypassed the physical stage of life would have been to omit the effect from the end/cause/effect triad. Thus the argument here is based on the order of the trine.

The other passage to be cited ultimately depends on the same premise, but approaches the problem quite differently. It builds its case on the essential difference between spiritual substance—*i.e.*, substance at the causal level—and natural substance.

One who knows what the substances in the spiritual world are, and relatively what the matters in the natural world are, can easily see that no procreation of angelic minds is possible or can be possible except in those and from those who dwell upon an earth, the ultimate work of creation. But as it is not known what the substances in the spiritual world are relatively to the matters in the natural world, it shall now be told. Substances in the spiritual world appear to be material, although they are not, and because

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<sup>75</sup> *Heaven and Hell* n. 315.

they are not material, they are not permanent. They are correspondences of the affections of angels, and they remain as long as the affections or the angels remain, and disappear with them. And the same would have been true of angels if they had been created in the spiritual world. Furthermore, with the angels there is and there can be no procreation, and no consequent multiplication, except such as is spiritual, which has relation to wisdom and love, and such as pertains to the souls of men who are born anew or regenerated. But in the natural world there are matters by means of which and out of which procreations and afterwards formations can be effected, thus multiplications of men, and of angels therefrom.

*From this, spirits and angels derive the ability to subsist, and to live to eternity.*

They have this for the reason that an angel or spirit from having been first born a man in the world takes to himself permanent existence; for from the inmosts of nature he takes to himself a medium between the spiritual and the natural by which he is so terminated that he may subsist and endure. Through this he has what gives him a relation to the things that are in nature, and corresponding with them.<sup>76</sup>

It will be readily seen how difficult it would be for anyone other than our author to arrive at an empirical judgment concerning the proposition of this quotation. One's final attitude must hinge entirely on whether or not he feels a good logical case has been made for the premise that only the ultimate or natural plane of life has permanence, and that only here procreations are possible. If it is so, then earth indeed is the seminary of heaven. But even granting this, one still has only the haziest of notions as to what is meant in the last paragraph cited by the assertion that man "takes to himself a medium between the spiritual and the natural by which he is so terminated that he may subsist and endure."

In other words, if we grant that the physical level of life is necessary for human multiplication, we still have only the vaguest of notions as to

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<sup>76</sup> *Divine Wisdom*, viii.

why, because a person is born on earth, he ipso facto is assured a permanent life in the hereafter. In short, can we form any better idea as to the nature of this "medium" by which one purportedly subsists and endures?

As a fact there are several relevant passages in the late writings which may help in this quest.

...after death, when man becomes a spirit or angel, the same mind remains in a form like that which it had in the world. The natural substances of that mind, which recede...by death, constitute the cutaneous covering of the spiritual body which spirits and angels have. By means of such covering, which is taken from the natural world, their spiritual bodies maintain existence; for the natural is the outmost containant...<sup>77</sup>

...at first man puts on the grosser things of nature; these constitute his body; but by death he puts these off, and retains the purer things of nature which are nearest to spiritual things; and these then become his containants.<sup>78</sup>

...After death every man...retains the spiritual which is from the father, together with a kind of border [*limbus*] from the purest things of nature about it.<sup>79</sup>

It is uncertain how familiar Swedenborg was with the doctrine of limbo<sup>80</sup> which originated in medieval Christian theology. The question probably is immaterial, for aside from the common factor of having to do with the other world, limbo and Swedenborg's limbus or border seem to have little in common. Limbo is defined as a realm on the border of hell; limbus is the extraordinary containant or skin which presumably accompanies man's spirit or soul at the time of death and by means of which he

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<sup>77</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 257.

<sup>78</sup> *Divine Providence* n. 220.

<sup>79</sup> *True Christian Religion* n. 103.

<sup>80</sup> The only place Swedenborg mentions limbo as far as I know is in *Conjugal Love* n. 29.

maintains permanent existence. Only one of the passages cited identifies this limbus with the "natural substances" of the mind. But in every case it is said to be "of nature" or "from the natural world."

One is first of all reminded of the pre-theological concept—discussed earlier in this study—of the animal spirits and spirituous fluid. These were roughly synonymous terms to describe, inconsistently, either the soul of the body or the link or nexus between soul and body. In some contexts it appeared to be a sort of sub-soul—which is one possible way to describe this limbus.

What is most troublesome about this idea of a special skin or container which not only accompanies man beyond the grave but somehow holds him together and assures his permanent heavenly (or hellish) existence is that *prima facie* it seems to violate the doctrine of discrete degrees. Odhner notes in his study of Swedenborg's psychology:

It is of course not permissible to think that a natural substance could enter the spiritual world or be visible there.<sup>81</sup>

But he offers no real clue to the solution of the dilemma. One must, it seems, either conclude that the seer has committed a sort of Whiteheadian fallacy of misplaced concreteness in regard to his limbus; or (if one wished to be more restrained) that the complexity of the subject is such that the normal earthbound mentality is simply incapable of understanding it. From time to time our author does apologize that some of his other-world insights simply defy expression in this-world language.

This one unresolved problem, however, by no means vitiates the main doctrine that has been under survey. It is, in the considered opinion of the present writer, potentially of significant value if it were to become widely known and be applied to causal concepts in the physical sciences, in many contemporary philosophies, and in religion.

Before concluding this chapter, in which the main effort has been to suggest that Swedenborg's concept of substance and form when applied to causal theory offers unique opportunities to resolve hitherto unyielding metaphysical problems, it might be in order to propose another possible

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<sup>81</sup> H. Odhner, *The Human Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

way to interpret the limbus idea. Today, possibly due to the prevalence of linguistic analysis in philosophy, we perhaps tend to be oversensitive to the occasional apparent imprecision of terminology in works written in an earlier day. For example, the case made in these last few pages seems to point unavoidably to some sort of verbal or logical fallacy in Swedenborg's brief and rather widely separated assertions about man's taking with him some sort of container or covering from the natural world into the spiritual world. The use ascribed to this "border" or "limbus" is that it somehow assures permanence of one's individuality and at the same time eternal endurance of his personal life. It is also intimately involved in the very reason for man's starting out his life on the material or natural plane.

A short talk given some years ago by J. Howard Spalding,<sup>82</sup> although not in any way directly related by him to the limbus problem, suggests a possible solution. His theme is that the spiritual world, according to our seer, is non-spatial (*i.e.*, not limited by physical space) but at the same time organic. He asks how this can be, commenting

...I am not aware that the difficulty has anywhere been distinctly dealt with by Swedenborg.<sup>83</sup>

His thesis, very briefly, is that God Himself is supremely organic, since out of the substance of His divine love all that exists has been and continues to be created and sustained. The divine form, in turn, is His divine wisdom, which is order itself. Thus organization is identifiable with order. Since it is love that is the foundation and origin of order, the answer must lie in discovering what the quality of love is that enables it to become organic. The clue seems to be found in the cellular structure of organisms. Thus Spalding ventures to suggest that all organization depends on the capacity of "life" (*i.e.*, love and its *conatus*) to form "walls" or limits out of its own substance. In organic nature every least part has a "skin" or "border" separating it from all contiguous parts. All physical growth and form takes place by this cell-structure method.

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<sup>82</sup> "The Spiritual World Non-Spatial, Yet Organic," in *Transactions of the International Swedenborg Congress*, London, 1910, pp. 164-169.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Now, raising one's sights to the mental level, it is seen that the establishing of limits or borders is equally characteristic. In short, love or affection is intrinsically capable of forming boundaries or psychic walls. Conscience, *e.g.*, is composed of series of such walls erected to ward off or exclude evil impulses. Thus it is concluded that love or affection, even though not limited by space and time, is capable of organization. And here the speaker rested his case.

To the present writer it would appear that unknowingly this author uncovered the key to the limbus problem. All of our earthly life is concerned, in one way or another, with the establishing or setting, violating, resetting and/or reestablishing limits or borders. Many of the factors which enter into this delimiting (or "setting" of personality) are at best parochial concerns. For instance, getting to the office promptly, or keeping one's shoes polished, or voting in school tax elections, et cetera, while unquestionably contributing to the ultimate form in which one contains himself, all seem utterly irrelevant to whatever we may conceive heavenly life to be.

Nevertheless, such habits and disciplines surely "cling" to us, substantively helping to define each one to be the person he is, and not someone else. Working in concert with these relatively trivial considerations will, of course, be many others of clearly spiritual significance. "Walls" which can form the limbus or border of an individual can and must be of great variety. Just as a physical building has "walls" which are floors, which serve quite a different function than "walls" that are ceilings, or windows, or doors, or just plain walls, so the walls of the spirit of man, because he is of the earth earthy, will understandably involve at least in part the "things of nature."

May I, then, submit the hypothesis that *this* may be the "containant" or "limbus" by and in which man beyond the grave subsists and endures. A limbus such as this, though formed certainly of "the purer things of nature," in no sense involves embracing natural substances and smuggling them into the spiritual world. At the same time it fulfills the requirement that it be acquired on the natural plane of life, the plane of effects. Thus, one could quite unambiguously say of those who have entered the other life:

...By means of such covering, which is taken from the natural world, their spiritual bodies maintain existence; for the natural is the outmost containant.<sup>84</sup>

Here we shall rest our case for the present chapter<sup>85</sup> since its modest goal has been “to delineate some lines of thought which would seem to qualify for further contemporary consideration” by scientists, philosophers, and theologians.

The next chapter, which will be the final chapter, will first attempt to draw together whatever loose ends there may be, and then appraise the significance of Swedenborg’s philosophy of causality both to the overall historical perspective of philosophy and to particular emphases or “schools” of contemporary philosophy.

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<sup>84</sup> *Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 257 (cf. Note 77, p. 540, *supra*).

<sup>85</sup> For some later thoughts by the author on the concept of “limbus,” see *The New Church Magazine* [London], Vol. 90, No. 657, July-September 1971, pages 90-92.

(To be concluded)