

## THE SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE<sup>†</sup>

---

Edward F. Allen

When the philosophical mind asks itself about the source of knowledge, it does so—at the outset at least—with the implicit faith that *truth* exists, else how could the question arise in the first place. Denying all would naturally cause the mind rather to ask, “What is responsible for the illusion we term truth?” However truth is defined, it depends upon knowledge, and it is the source of knowledge that is the concern of this paper.

“What is the source of knowledge ?” is a profound question. It is the problem of epistemology which permeates the whole of the history of philosophy. The pursuit of its answer has consumed many of the best work-years of the most responsible philosophers.

The subtlety and difficulty of the subject is of a sufficient degree to suggest that perhaps only two classes of scholars would dare write on the subject. *First*: A very young scholar, because of his lack of realization of the seriousness of the responsibility he takes upon himself or because of that confidence so peculiar to youth. *Second*: An old and wise scholar, who, now if ever while still possessed of this earthly body and brain, might venture forth with humility toward his subject to add his own contribution to man’s search for truth. But many who fall in neither of these classes must, nevertheless, make of the science of epistemology a working tool to carry them through their personal efforts in science and philosophy.

Our historical survey begins with Aristotle as an historian. Already in his time the problem of mind and matter had become defined. Democritus, on the one hand, had led the arguments in favor of atomistic concepts wherein the whole of nature is made of corporeal bodies. Anaxagoras, on the other hand, had supported the existence of the spirit or of incorporeal substances. In speaking of the materialism of Democritus, Aristotle says:

---

<sup>†</sup> Address given at the Annual Meeting of the Swedenborg Scientific Association, held on May 22, 1947.

Those, then, who say the universe is one, and posit one kind of thing as matter, and as corporeal matter which has spatial magnitude, evidently go astray in many ways. For they posit the elements of bodies only, not of incorporeal things, though there are also incorporeal things, and, in trying to state the causes of generation and destruction, and in giving a physical account of all things, they do away with the cause of movement. (*Metaphysics*, Bk. I, chap. 8, 998b)

It does not help if fire is one of the elements, for it would be merely the most elementary of corporeal substances; however viewed, it is still materialism, and this is no answer to a mind like that of Anaxagoras. "What is the spirit that moves?" is his question. Those who fix their attention upon this view begin with nature in chaos; and of this philosophy, Aristotle says:

For if nothing was separated out, evidently nothing could be asserted of the substances that then existed. I mean, e.g., that it was neither white nor black, nor grey nor any other color, but of necessity colorless; for, if it had been colored, it would have had one of these colors . . . but he [i.e. Anaxagoras] says all were mixed except reason, and this alone was unmixed and pure. (*Ibid.*, 989b)

Even as he cannot accept the materialists' philosophy, neither can Aristotle be a follower of Anaxagoras, but responds:

But these thinkers are, after all, at home only in arguments about generation and destruction and movement; for it is practically only of this sort of substance that they seek the principles and causes. But those who extend their vision to all things that exist, and of existing things suppose some to be perceptible and others not perceptible, evidently should study both classes, which is all the more reason why one should devote some time to seeing what is good in their views and what bad . . . (*Ibid.*)

Thus is defined the problem of mind against matter. However, a third school, led by Pythagoras, has said that all creation is number, and of them Aristotle says:

The "Pythagoreans" treat of principles and elements stranger than those of the physical philosophers (the reason is that they got the principles from non-sensible things, for the objects of mathematics . . . are of the class of things without movement); yet their discussions and investigations are all about nature, for they generate the heavens, and with regard to their parts and attributes and functions they observe the phenomena, and use up the principles and causes in explaining these, which implies that they agree with the others, the physical philosophers, that the *real* is just all that which is perceptible and contained by the so-called "heavens" . . . They do not tell us at all, however, how there can be movement if limit and unlimited and odd and even are the only things assumed, or how, without movement and change, there can be generation and destruction, or the bodies that move through the heavens can do what they do . . . How (Aristotle asks) are we to combine the beliefs that the attributes of number, and number itself, are causes of what exists and happens in the heavens both from the beginning and now, and that there is no other number than this number out of which the world is composed? (Ibid., 990<sup>a</sup>)

Nearer in time to Aristotle, than these others, was Plato, for whom science is constituted of perceptions and opinions alone. These are the objects of science. Science is concerned with an *incorporeal world*. Perhaps there is a world of generation, destruction and movement, perhaps there is a corporeal world—but the objects of scientific study are not these but the Ideas. The cosmological problems of the existence of mind and matter do not concern Plato. He is interested in the Ideas known through conceptions. Rather than develop knowledge by this process from perceptions, perceptions act as stimuli to draw out from the soul recollections already present with her.

The creative activity of consciousness, the inductive method, does not exist for Plato.

Hence, if the Ideas are not given in perception, and the soul nevertheless finds them in herself on occasion of perception, she must have already *received* these Ideas in some way or other . . . (Windelband, *A Hist. of*

*Philosophy*, p. 119. [References are to the Tufts translation into English and will hereafter be referred to by W.]

As to how these ideas are obtained in the first place, Plato depends upon the mythical stories:

That before the earthly life, the souls have *beheld* the pure forms of reality in the incorporeal world itself. (W. 119)

These Ideas are much more than Mental processes alone. They are substantial, they have an existence apart from things, they exist prior to things, they are the archetypes of things.

The particular objects which we perceive are imperfect copies or reflections of these eternal patterns; particulars may come and particulars may go, but the idea or form goes on forever. Men may come and men may go, but the man-type, the human race, goes on forever. (Thilly, *Hist. of Philosophy*, p. 63)

Of these Ideas Aristotle says:

But as for those who posit the Ideas as causes, firstly in seeking to grasp the causes of the things around us, they introduced others equal in number to these, as if a man who wanted to count things thought he would not be able to do it while they were few, but tried to count them when he had added to their number. For the Forms are practically equal to—or not fewer than—the things, in trying to explain which, these thinkers proceeded from them to the Forms. For to each thing there answers an entity which has the same name and exists apart from the substances . . . (*Met.*, Book I, Chapt. 8, 990b, p. 706)

We shall accept Aristotle's judgment of Plato's doctrine of ideas when he says:

. . . of the ways in which we prove that the Forms exist, none is convincing. (*Ibid.*)

As for Aristotle himself, when regarded in retrospect, the power of some of his thoughts upon his followers was too great; for they seized upon his *Analytics* to the almost exclusion of the spirit of his thoughts. What followed, as associated with Aristotle until the eighteenth century, can be characterized by such terms as “methodical formulation,” “syllogisms,” “categorical forms,” “dry schematism” and “scholastic formalism.” Of which Windelband says:

The unfruitful subtlety of this process took special delight in the solution of sophisticated catches, in which the real meaning was inextricably involved in the contradiction of forms . . . The more pedantic the form taken in the development of the particular features, the more the consciousness of the living thought, to which Aristotle had aspired, was replaced by a schoolmaster-like network of rules—essentially designed to catch thoughts and examine their formal legitimacy, but incapable of doing justice to the creative power of scientific activity. While, even with Aristotle, regard for proof and refutation had occupied the foreground, here it occupies the whole field. (W., p. 198)

We come up to more recent times through Galileo, whose methods in scientific investigation also brought new insight into the investigation of philosophical problems. The leading advocate of this new approach among the philosophers is Hobbes. The limit of our insight into nature is determined by the limits of mathematical theory. Geometry the most certain of all knowledge is our starting point. What we can construct by geometry and what we can derive as a mathematical necessity, we can know.

Hence knowledge of all things, in so far as it is accessible for us, consists in tracing back what is perceived to motion of bodies in space. Science has to reason from phenomena to causes; and from these latter in turn to their effects; but phenomena are, in their essence, motions; causes are the simple elements of motion, and effects are again motions. Thus arises the apparently materialistic proposition, philosophy is the doctrine of the motion of bodies! (W., p. 389)

And thus we have the significance of such scientific methods to philosophy as follows:

The essential result for philosophy in these methodical beginnings of natural research is, therefore, twofold: empiricism was corrected by mathematics, and the shapeless Pythagoreanism of the humanistic tradition was made, by empiricism, definite mathematical theory. These lines meet and are bound together in Galileo. (W., p. 389)

The two lines of thought, referred to by Aristotle, that are brought together in Galileo, are represented, on the one hand, by those who “posit one kind of thing as matter,” and, on the other, by those who are at “home only in arguments about generation and destruction and movement.”

If, with Galileo, that which satisfies the mind “in arguments about generation and destruction and movement” becomes mathematical, it is because this mathematics is the mental discipline by which the mind of Galileo could be *more* at “home in arguments about generation and destruction and movement.” Mathematical necessity becomes a tool. It is of the same importance as Aristotle’s logic to methodology. It is not yet a source of knowledge, but one of the means to an end. It is mental equipment as important as the physical equipment consisting of a swinging lamp in the cathedral at Pisa or the rolling balls on the inclined plane of the *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences*.

The shapeless Pythagoreanism, or the third line of thought referred to by Aristotle, had now developed into a science of necessary conclusions based on accepted postulates, axioms, and definitions by means of Euclid. It now becomes with Descartes a new philosophical approach.

Descartes sought a *universal mathematics*. Geometry, the science of necessary conclusions suggested to Descartes what has been called the “single principle of highest and absolute certainty.” By inductive process one is to be driven to accept the existence or reality of something with the same degree of certainty with which he accepts a theorem in Euclid. From this reality then one would be able to explain the whole of experience in this natural world. Windelband recognizes the distinctiveness of this approach in the following words:

This demand was entirely original, and had its root in the felt need for a systematic, connected whole of all human knowledge; it rested ultimately upon his surfeit of the traditional reception of historically collected knowledge, and upon his longing for a new philosophical creation from one mould. Descartes will then, by an inductive enumeration and a critical sifting of all ideas, press to a single, certain point, in order from this point to deduce all further truths. (W., p. 390)

We pass on to Descartes himself where it says in *The Method*:

I had long before remarked that, in relation to practice, it is sometimes necessary to adopt, as if above doubt, opinions which we discern to be highly uncertain, as has been already said; but as I then desired to give my attention solely to the search after truth, I thought that a procedure exactly the opposite was called for, and that I ought to reject as absolutely false all opinions in regard to which I could suppose the least ground for doubt, in order to ascertain whether after that there remained aught in my belief that was wholly indubitable. Accordingly, seeing that our senses sometimes deceive us, I was willing to suppose that there existed nothing really such as they presented to us; and because some men err in reasoning, and fall into paralogsms, even on the simplest matters of geometry, I, convinced that I was as open to error as any other, rejected as false all the reasonings I had hitherto taken for demonstrations; and finally, when I considered that the very same thoughts which we experience when awake may also be experienced when we are asleep, while there is at that time not one of them true, I supposed that all the objects that had ever entered into my mind when awake, had in them no more truth than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately upon this I observed that, whilst I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, *I think, hence I am*, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the skeptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruples, accept it as the first principle of the Philosophy of which I was in search. (*On Method*, Part IV)

And to return to Windelband:

After fundamental doubt has been thus pressed even to the farthest extreme, it proves that the doubt breaks off its own point, that it itself prevents a fact of completely unassailable certainty: in order to doubt, in order to dream, in order to be deceived, I must be. (W., p. 390–1)

Descartes' rationalism depending upon the "clearness and distinctness" of mathematics would seem to be the last word. But it requires the patience of a Kantian mind to see otherwise.

The teaching of the Wolffian school that logical necessity and reality are identical represents the extreme development of the rationalistic philosophers. To Kant, something appears wrong with this doctrine—for to him metaphysicians are the architects of "many a world of thought in the air" which have no relation to reality.

Driven to the other extreme, Kant sought refuge in those conceptions given through experience, since the connection of these with reality seemed to be immediately evident. Formerly, however, Hume had been able to lay down convincing arguments, that experience of itself would never lead us to certain concepts of cause nor even of reality itself. These result from a certain "mechanism of association without any demonstrable relation to the real." For Kant, therefore, neither empiricism nor rationalism has solved the cardinal question of the *relation of knowledge to its object*. Kant says:

Experience is no doubt the first product of our understanding, while employed in fashioning the raw material of our sensations. It is therefore our first instruction, and, in its progress, so rich in new lessons that the chain of all future generations will never be in want of new information that may be gathered on that field. Nevertheless, experience is by no means the only field to which our understanding can be confined. Experience tells us what is, but not that it must be necessarily as it is, and not otherwise. It therefore never gives us any really general truths, and our reason, which is particularly anxious for that class of knowledge, is roused by it rather than satisfied. General truths, which at the same time

bear the character of an inward necessity, must be independent of experience—clear and certain by themselves.

But if we remove from experience everything that belongs to our senses, there remain nevertheless certain original concepts, and certain judgments derived from them, which must have had their origin entirely *a priori, and independent* of all experience, because it is owing to them that we are able, or imagine we are able, to predicate more of the objects of our senses than can be learnt from mere experience, and that our propositions contain real generality and strict necessity, such as mere empirical knowledge can never supply.

But what is still more extraordinary is this, that certain kinds of knowledge leave the field of all possible experience, and seem to enlarge the sphere of our judgments beyond the limits of experience by means of concepts to which experience can never supply any corresponding objects.

And it is in this very kind of knowledge which transcends the world of senses, and where experience can neither guide nor correct us, that reason prosecutes its investigations, which by their importance we consider far more excellent and by their tendency far more elevated than anything the understanding can find in the sphere of phenomena." (*Int. The Critique*, pt. 1-2, Müller Translation)

For Kant, pure reason is that which is not mixed up with any experience or sensation, and is therefore possible entirely *a priori*, that is, precedes everything else in our thought. And all knowledge which is occupied with *a priori* concepts of objects, as, for example, with our manner of knowing objects, so far as this is meant to be possible *a priori*—such knowledge is called *transcendental*.

In order to be able to represent to ourselves objects as external or outside ourselves, two pure forms of sensuous intuition (or appearances, *Anschauung*) act as principles of *a priori* knowledge, namely—space and time. The establishment of space and time in Kant's system depends upon the proper coordination of sensuous intuitions and pure reason as the source of knowledge.

However, it remains yet to identify the method by which transcendentalism, or the search for knowledge beyond the world of senses, may be controlled or disciplined so as to be able to ascribe an element of certainty to these creations of the mind. It is at this point that Kant departs explicitly and with a considerable degree of finality from the rationalistic school.

The science of mathematics presents the most brilliant example of how pure reason may successfully enlarge its domain without the aid of experience. Such examples are always contagious, particularly when the faculty is the same, which naturally flatters itself that it will meet with the same success in other cases it has had in one. Thus pure reason hopes to be able to extend its domain as successfully and as thoroughly in its transcendental as in its mathematical employment; particularly if it there follows the same method which has proved of such decided advantage elsewhere. It is, therefore, of great consequence for us to know whether the method of arriving at apodictic certainty, which in the former science was called *mathematical*, be identical with that which is to lead us to the same certainty in philosophy, and would have to be called *dogmatic*. (*Method of Transcendentalism*, Sect. 1, p. 572, Müller Translation)

Thus the die is cast. Descartes has clung to the appeal of certainty held out by the methods of geometry. If only one object can be shown to exist with the same degree of certainty that a theorem in geometry can be shown, all the rest will follow. But with others this led to the dictum “what is *necessary* logically *is*” and so by this criterion of certainty much more could be shown to exist beyond experience than had ever been supposed by Descartes. Kant, trying to avoid the consequences, sought in vain for the answer in empiricism, only to be driven to accept the existence of forms *a priori*.

[I was] weary, therefore, as well of dogmatism, which teaches us nothing, as of skepticism, which does not even promise us anything, not even the quiet state of a contented ignorance; disquieted by the importance of knowledge so much needed, and lastly, rendered suspicious by long experience of all knowledge which we believe we possess, or which

offers itself, under the title of pure reason. (*Prolegomena*, § 4. Carus Translation, p. 24)

The limitations of the reason alone when applied beyond experience, guided only by the formal processes of thought, are demonstrated by Kant in the *Antinomies of Pure Reason*.

Kant proves . . . in the “thesis” that the world must have a beginning and end in space and time, that as regards its substance it presents a limit to its divisibility, that events in it must have free beginnings, and that to it must belong an absolutely necessary being, God; and in the “antithesis” he proves the contradictory opposite for all four cases. (*W.*, p. 550)

Since then the reason must be guided by experience, the objects of science must be these perceptions alone. A knowledge of things-in-themselves through “sheer-reason” and extending beyond experience is a non-entity, a chimera.

Nevertheless, Kant declares that it had never come into his mind to deny the reality of things—so the matter must rest that at least there is no contradiction to think of the thing-in-itself. In fact things-in-themselves must be thought, but are not knowable.

To be introduced into Kant one must accept the cause-effect relation between the thing-in-itself and the sensibility. But as the theme is developed, the knowable, consisting of phenomena alone, is extended to include the whole of human knowledge, leaving the thing-in-itself as a thing which only probably exists.

As it was seen by Jacobi, “without the presupposition of realism, one could not enter the Kantian system, and with the same could not remain in it” (*W.*, p. 573).

Once Kant is penetrated, the process of demolition is continuous: “The critical reason is a reason busy about pure nothing, i.e. about itself” (*W.*, 574). What is the “reason” but a thing-itself? What are the faculties “sensibility” and “understanding” but things-in-themselves?, the very things-in-themselves not knowable according to his own conclusion. The

only certainty is, that we cannot be certain even of this most patiently constructed of all structures of the human thought.

Various derivative philosophies have succeeded Kant down to the present. Each in its turn has developed its peculiar weakness even as it seemed at first to grow in strength. The story is always the same. Only one other will be given—and this one which shuns at the outset the criteria of distinctness, clearness and certainty. Something of it is suggested in each of the philosophies where the philosopher has returned from the mental sport to face life itself. With Plato it was to his system of ethics, and even Hume, who though he had succeeded in vanquishing certainty at every turn whether it be affirmation or denial, yet he must say:

Thus the skeptic still continues to reason and believe, even though he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason. (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I, Section II)

With Kant it was Practical Reason. This attitude reaches its extreme in the Positivism of Comte, who classified all phenomena in an ascending series of complexity. The disciplines thus are arranged in a hierarchy of sciences beginning with mathematics and ending with sociology. Each contains within itself elementary facts basic to those which follow. But each which follows must have something completely new even as in biology the fact of life is such a completely new thing not capable of deduction from presumed physical and chemical processes. All which precede, contribute to the practical ends of that which follows—and the practical end constitutes the end of these studies. The extreme of this is the so-called practical man's point of view. It works. How many investigators in nature can be heard to apply this criterion to the job at hand? "It works." But this is not epistemology, it has no interest in knowledge, it is a convenience.

In proceeding to more recent times to see what has happened to all this, we read:

Auguste Comte has said somewhere, that it would be idle to seek to know the composition of the sun, since this knowledge would be of no use to sociology. How could he be so shortsighted? Have we not just seen

that it is by astronomy that, to speak his language, humanity has passed from the theological to the positive state? He found an explanation for that because it had happened. But how has he not understood that what remained to do was not less considerable and would be not less profitable? Physical astronomy, which he seems to condemn has already begun to bear fruit, and it will give us much more, for it only dates from yesterday.

First was discovered the nature of the sun, what the founder of positivism wished to deny us, and there bodies were found which exist on the earth, but had here remained undiscovered; for example, helium, that gas almost as light as hydrogen. That already contradicted Comte. But to the spectroscopy we owe a lesson precious in a quite different way; in the most distant star, it shows us the same substances. We might have been asked whether the terrestrial elements were not due to some chance which had brought together more tenuous atoms to construct of them the more complex edifice that the chemists call atom; whether, in other regions of the universe, other fortuitous meetings had not engendered edifices entirely different. Now we know that this is not so, that the laws of our chemistry are the general laws of nature, and that they owe nothing to the chance which caused us to be born on the earth.

But it will be said, astronomy has given to the other sciences all it can give them, and now that the heavens have procured for us the instruments which enable us to study terrestrial nature, they could without danger veil themselves forever. After what we have just said, is there still need to answer this objection? One could have reasoned the same in Ptolemy's time; then also men thought they knew everything, and they still had almost every thing to learn. (Henri Poincaré, *The Value of Science*, 294-5)

And we are now up to the present in our problem. Many interpolations to the developments represented by Plato, Descartes, Kant and, finally, Poincaré are possible. But is there profit to us in these examples of human thinking over the problem of the source of knowledge?

Were we not far better off at the beginning of our reading of philosophy, in our naive state when eternal and invariant truth exists as a conviction? Or is it better that we suffer the mental agonization brought on by

doubt, as we see each great mind labor, even as the proverbial mountain, to bring forth a puny thing, when even this last becomes so short-lived under the review of the next great mind to follow?

But to go back as if nothing had happened is impossible. The result was not known before but afterwards. Only indolence can protect the inquiring mind from this agony.

There is one ray of hope that we have been too hasty in our readings; that somewhere we have missed the thread. Returning to Plato, we hear Socrates saying in *Meno*:

If the cramp-fish be itself numb, and through its numbness benumb others also, then am I like to it . . .

Socrates will not lead others into doubtfulness on any subject when he can explain the matter at hand. But Socrates himself has doubts and he says:

But as I am entirely distressed for true definition of some things myself, in this condition I involve in the same distresses those with whom I am conversing.

In the sequel, Meno's servant boy is used as a subject in an effort to demonstrate the doctrine of recollection of ideas. What happens to the thesis is beside the point. However, the boy finally breaks down and confesses ignorance to a matter in geometry he had previously thought he understood.

Socrates asks:

Is he not (now) in a better disposition with regard to the matter he is ignorant of? . . . In making him therefore to be at a loss what to answer, and in benumbing him after the manner of a cramp-fish, have we done him any harm? . . . being now sensible of his ignorance, he is prepared to seek and to inquire.

Have the philosophers succeeded in benumbing us after the manner of a cramp-fish? Any mind that has directed all its energies toward the

solution of a problem must experience sooner or later that quasi-paralysis that grips the mind with fear that it will fail even just as it is about to succeed. Let us take another view of this history of philosophy allowing ourselves to be guided by the philosophical writings of one who wrote just at the height of the reign of the rationalistic school and also just at the time when Kant was in his formative years.

For students of the philosophy of Swedenborg there is one lesson in our examples drawn from the history of philosophy. If that philosophy is to be evaluated in terms of the philosophy of another, then it would be worth while to investigate a little more closely the philosophy of this other. The history of philosophy gives us fair assurance as to the outcome. But there is another lesson to be learned. If Swedenborg's philosophy is to stand, then it must be possessed of a degree of permanence not had by these others.

The great minds that have been paraded before us are the best minds. If what they produced was so transient, we cannot blame the minds because they are inferior. Lesser minds would only have succeeded to defeat more quickly. What one single fact stands out in our inquiry! This is, that the mind by itself—however great—can do nothing else but turn upon itself. It can either affirm what it has already perceived or it can deny. It can develop by induction necessary conclusions. But by itself the mind cannot go beyond these to show existence of the reality of that which is without itself.

The mind by itself is not the source of knowledge; neither are experiences by themselves such a source. Repeated efforts by the great minds have demonstrated the former; and as for the latter, the imbecile can in an hour be subjected to the same experiences as the savant but have no more knowledge for all that.

Our first temptation as students of Swedenborg's philosophy is to compare the philosophies of others with Swedenborg. An example of how this may be done is as follows. If in the *last* half of the eighteenth century Kant could say:

I openly confess, the suggestion of David Hume was the very thing which years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave my

investigations in the field of speculative philosophy quite a new direction.

We also find Swedenborg saying in the first half of the eighteenth century:

I awoke as from a deep sleep, when I discovered, that nothing is farther removed from the human understanding than what at the same time is really present to it; and that nothing is more present to it than what is universal, prior, and superior; since this enters into every particular, and into everything posterior and inferior. What is more omnipresent than the Deity, in him we live, and are, and move—and yet what is more remote from the sphere of understanding? In vain does the mind stretch its powers to attain, to any degree of knowledge of the essentials and attributes of the Supreme and Omnipotent Being, beyond what it has pleased Him to reveal in proportion to each man's individual exertions. (EAK, pt. II, n. 208)

And also

But to know the manner in which this life and wisdom flow in, is infinitely above the sphere of the human mind; there is no analysis and no abstraction that can reach so high. The doctrine of abstracts does not extend beyond its own series, in which there are degrees; in short, it cannot ascend beyond nature to a Being that cannot be finited in thought, and still less can be circumscribed by ontological terms or vocal formulas. (Ibid., n. 252)

Swedenborg here and in many other places has seized upon Kant's conclusions even while Kant was a boy. Furthermore, Kant saw that mathematical necessity led at best to *possible* reality; also that necessary conclusions can easily be empty of content, when they are representations in the pure reason. But Swedenborg sees that

. . . in order that these sciences (i.e. those involving mathematical certainty) may be available, we must have recourse to experiment, and to the

phenomena of the senses; without which they would remain in a state of bare theory and bare capability of aiding us.

If Kant could not open his *Critique* without the appeal to sensibilities which arise from an implied reality of cause and effect, reality with objects different from these, that is things-in-themselves, we find in the *Economy*:

If, therefore, we deprive the soul of every predicate that belongs to material things, as of extension, figure, space, magnitude, and motion, we deprive the mind of everything to which, as an anchor, it can attach its ideas. (Ibid., n. 216)

If we are attracted by the *usefulness* of Comte's hierarchy of sciences, then we will see the greater generality of what is also in the *Economy*:

Thus the first aura represents the second; the second represents its ether, and the ether its air. The case is the same in the animal body, of whose degrees we shall treat in the sequel, and every one of which is represented by the degree prior to it. This representation extends as a cause to all causates or effects, and as an antecedent to all consequents, and from past things to future; so that effects, consequences and futurities, may be said to exist potentially in their prior, like the proportions and analogies in an equation, into which they are successively insinuated, and they exist simultaneously (*existo*) in it, and are successively unfolded and evolved from it. (Ibid., n. 276)

Such an hierarchy as Comte would have, is uni-directional. One begins in mathematics and ascends up through the more noble sciences. In the last passage quoted there is a general principle illustrated that runs throughout the philosophy of Swedenborg, namely, the reciprocal action of the body and soul. And while Swedenborg does indeed strive to attain knowledge of the soul itself by ascending upwards from phenomena, so also the soul in her turn must regulate the lower faculties and representations below.

It is not a hierarchy of sciences for Swedenborg. And yet the relation of a higher plane to a lower is at the basis of his entire philosophy. The dependence of the animal kingdom upon the mineral kingdom is but one illustration. At the same time there is the dependence of what is posterior upon what is prior. In fact this is what is meant by the term prior in Swedenborg, namely, what precedes as a cause. With the philosophers there is quite a different meaning for this term. Nowhere is this more clear than in Kant, who uses it to refer to what is first in the thought.

We might go on endlessly to give many similar illustrations of how Swedenborg makes use of many of the conclusions of foremost thinkers—and this, independently of them, because in the cases cited, the conclusions followed Swedenborg in time.

On the other hand, it is not hard to show that he was not influenced unduly by those whose philosophy he did read—although again we would recognize much in his works that might have had its origin in the older philosophers.

But it is interesting to note that just at the height of his interest in Wolff's *Cosmologia Generalis*, in which as Swedenborg says "the author has endeavored to establish elementary nature from purely metaphysical principles," Swedenborg is also writing the preface to the *Principia*. (Cf. *Psychologica*, Preface by Alfred Acton.)

In this we read:

The sign that we are willing to be wise, is the desire to know the causes of things, and to investigate the secret and unknown operations of nature . . . He who wishes to attain the end must wish likewise to attain the means. Now the means which more especially conduce to a knowledge truly philosophical, are three in number—*Experience*, *Geometry*, and the *Faculty of Reasoning*. (*Princ.*, pt. I, chap. I, p. 2)

This sounds very little like a blind follower of the rationalistic school. It sounds more like one who has already made his independent epistemological conclusion after reading and studying the philosophy of the Greeks. If the physical philosophers do not arrive at knowledge through the senses alone, nor Anaxagoras or the extreme Platonists through ideas alone, nor Pythagoras through number alone, then perhaps the source of knowledge

lies in a proper use of all three. It is rather patent that only among the philosophers is the source of truth sought under the highly artificial limitation of defining the source in the singular—hence confining the answer either to the one or to the other.

And yet if Swedenborg did not become the follower, he did not, by the same token, become the enemy of these philosophies. There is much that could have been taken from the great rationalist Descartes. If Descartes sought a single certainty out of which the whole compass of human knowledge might find its explanation, then this demonstrated a feeling in Descartes for a “connected whole of all human knowledge” (W., p. 390). No better support of this feeling is manifested by Swedenborg than his long series of scientific and philosophic works covering the whole of the mineralogical and animal kingdoms, together with detailed studies in human anatomy and psychology. For Swedenborg, knowledge was a connected whole because nature was a connected whole.

While many other illustrations might be given to show Swedenborg’s similarity in some respects to the great thinkers—this would avail us nothing, because Swedenborg himself was one of the greatest of them all and his thoughts are his own. No! He did not have to relive all that the human race had lived. That he benefited from the philosophers who preceded him, is well attested from a perusal of *A Philosopher’s Note Book*, but as a philosopher he stood on his own grounds, and nowhere in his philosophy is this more evident than in his epistemology. And this is so, not because of any extended critical examination of it as a separate problem, but rather because of the way in which one is constantly made aware by Swedenborg of the source and grounds of what he writes.

If it is true that the reason alone of the philosophers has led them, in each case, to destroy the grounds upon which their former conclusions were based, only to suffer similarly, then what consolation can be obtained from showing endless similarities and agreements? It would seem that to succeed in this would be to fail in the realization of Swedenborg’s philosophy and it would lead eventually to its destruction.

What is the outstanding attitude behind Swedenborg’s philosophy? Students may differ as to the details. But one thing stands out, and that is the faith in the existence of a spiritual world and a natural world. And this exists throughout the philosophical works without aid from the Writings.

His cosmology consists of two worlds distinct but yet entirely analogous and, what is important to *our* problem, they have a common meeting place in the thought. The pure intellect which has its seat in the soul, is of the spiritual world. The imagination and the memory, which depend upon the senses, are of the natural world.

That the pure intellect exists is affirmed. Its existence can be proved only through constant application of our thought to itself, and thus through seeing that there is a light which manifests itself in our thought and speech which is not dependent upon our experiences. The nature of the pure intellect cannot be explained in words, yet some *idea* of it can be obtained by examination of its effects in our thought. It is not a process of thought, yet it affects all thought processes. It is not developed, but it is with us at birth (*Rat. Psych.* 129). It does not hold anything as verisimilar or probable, but either as true or false (*ibid.*, 133). It is not instructed by the senses but forms them (*ibid.*, 134).

What are the grounds upon which such ideas about the pure intellect are based? They are not philosophical but metaphysical and theological (*ibid.*, 137). If nature is a connected whole, the philosopher cannot study that nature by limiting his efforts by an arbitrary or chance boundary line of one of the disciplines.

Sensations resulting from the operation of the senses, and thence from the operation of that degree of the mind, the animus, known as the imagination, form the natural world terminus of this system. "Perhaps the substances [i.e. of the natural world] that are their subjects are not comprehended by sense" (EAK, pt. II, n. 311). Thus the problem of the "thing-in-itself" of Kant would seem to be a relatively minor one at this terminus.

It is in the plane of the thought that one meets a mixture of what originates in the pure intellect with what originates in the senses. This is not by influx from the pure intellect. Nor do the sensations arise up into the thought. The nexus connecting the intercourse between the soul and the body is in this plane of thought, and only by a considerable application of our thought to this problem can one come into some idea of how this operation takes place. "The intercourse between soul and body may be ascertained by a diligent and rational anatomical investigation combined with psychological experience" (*ibid.*, n. 309). How the pure intellect does

flow into the thought, if not by influx, must be understood by analogy with how the memory or the imagination flow into the senses. "The pure intellect . . . cannot flow into the sphere of the thought otherwise than as the images of sight or ideas of imagination into the modes of hearing or into speech, which is not influx but correspondence" (*Rat. Psych.* 139). This is the subject of the Doctrine concerning the Intercourse of Soul and Body (*ibid.*, chap. XII, n. 159s).

Several distinct meanings of *ideas* are made by Swedenborg in his *subordination of ideas*, which distinctions were not made by the philosophers:

The ideas themselves of the soul are *spiritual truths*; but the *ideas* of the pure intellect are the first *natural truths*; the ideas of our intellect are called *reasons*, but the ideas of our memory or imagination are properly called *ideas*; the ideas of sight are *images* and *objects*; the ideas of hearing are *modes, modulations, words*. (*Ibid.*, n. 138, 130)

Thus man, while living in this world, is possessed of senses by which he sensates objects of this world, an animus which imagines and is so intimately associated with the body that it *desires*, a mind which *understands* and, being closer to the soul, has a higher plane of activity than *desire*, called the will, and, finally, he has a soul whose objects are universal and whose activity consists of intuitions of ends (cf. EAK, pt. II, n. 269 seq.).

So much for the cosmology or the structure of this object of creation, man—but what of the logic, what of the methodology? It consists, first of all, of the principle of confirmation in all things of creation which can be sensed by the senses. And this confirmation is to be aided by the general principles of philosophy. These principles are the doctrine of forms, the doctrine of series, the doctrine of order and degrees, the doctrine of correspondences and representations, and the doctrine of modifications (cf. Preface to *Rat. Psych.*).

To enter into the details of this outline of Swedenborg's system, directed to the discovery of truth, is not the work of a single paper but rather the work of all who study and live Swedenborg's teachings. This requires

the combined effort of all who are able, in the Swedenborg Scientific Association, in the faculties of our New Church schools, and among the ministry of the New Church.

If there is one notion that stands out in our study of the history of philosophy it is the general acceptance among philosophers that a system stands or falls in terms of its own postulates and its own logical deductions. What adverse critic of Swedenborg has followed this rule?

Swedenborg's writings have been disposed of in one instance as follows:

Mystic tendencies of a religious nature such as found in classical exposition in Kant's contemporary and name-sake, Emanuel Swedenborg, rendered some of the problems of philosophy more complicated by laying special stress upon the difference between matter and spirit, and discussing the possibility and probable nature of purely spiritual beings; but all philosophizing on the subject consisted in declamations and unproved propositions. (Kant's *Prolegomena*, "Kant's Philosophy," Carus, p. 170 [Open Court, 1902]).

A critique of Swedenborg's philosophy must examine whether such an accusation holds. Swedenborg himself has stated criteria for ascertaining the truth of a statement (conf. e.g., EAK, pt. I, n. 579). One of these criteria is especially interesting:

All experience, both particular and general, spontaneously favors it. (Ibid.).

And later on:

We may consider it as an established fact, that when anyone attains the truth, all experience, both general and particular, will be in his favor, and give him its suffrage; and that all the rules and decisions of rational philosophy will naturally and spontaneously do the same; and that various systems will so come into agreement and unity with each other, that each will be confirmed thereby; for there is no system but is built upon ascertained phenomena, and upon such principles as will enable us to

reconcile the higher sphere with the lower; and the spiritual with the corporeal. (*Ibid.*, pt. II, 217)

And in the same number—that statement which New Church philosophers so often find delight in quoting:

. . . the truth of nature, and the truth of revelation, however separate, are never at variance. But in order that the truth may be brought to light—a consummation which we all devoutly wish—I would observe that its habitation is so inward and exalted, that it would not permit itself to be revealed to any who are still lingering in the last and lowest sphere, but to those only who have brought their minds into the habit of thinking, who can extend, and apply, their mental vision, throughout the whole order of confirmatory facts, and in the perception of consequences, remove it far from the senses and lower affections. (*Ibid.*)

The question of comparing Swedenborg's philosophy with others has already been discussed. There is a complementary question to this suggested by the above quotations: How to evaluate the philosophers in terms of Swedenborg? We believe that a criterion is given in the above when it says:

and that (then) various systems will so come into agreement and unity with each other.

Perhaps the perceptions of Kant are the only objects of the human thought, because we cannot know nature immediately but mediately through the agency of the senses. There is a sense in which Plato's Ideas have relation to Swedenborg's subordination of ideas. The use of the logical methods of Aristotle, of the methods of investigating mathematically necessary truths and hence a large portion of rationalism is essential in any true philosophy. Yes! even the compulsion to face what is practical—be it through the ethics of the Greeks, the judgment of Kant, or even the extreme pragmatism of Comte—are the suggestions of a more general doctrine of Swedenborg's not immediately pertinent in this paper, namely, the Doctrine of Use applied to the natural plane. Divine Providence,

through the agency of the soul, gives to every man at birth something which is invariant and governs his thought somewhat, else man would destroy his own intellectual powers by his own reason, even as his body would very soon perish if left to the care of the voluntary. And so there must be an element of truth running throughout the philosophies.

A crowd of thoughts torments our mind, making it almost a mental chaos, but here and there thoughts take shape and as they do, we feel a sense of humility. We recall what was said by Poincaré with reference to Ptolemy's time:

Then also men thought they knew everything, and they still had almost everything to learn.

But we had already read this in Swedenborg when he sets aright any tendency to suppose that the universe has been completely unfolded in his *Principia*:

What we know is nothing to what we have yet to learn.

We began this essay with an apology that we were neither young enough to be too presumptuous nor old enough to be wise. We will end by returning to the Ancients by the way in which we have come—through Swedenborg, we read in *A Philosopher's Note Book* what Plato says:

None of the gods philosophizes or desires to become wise, for he is such already . . . Nor do the ignorant philosophize or desire to become wise . . . But those philosophize who are between these two. (*A. Phil. N. B.*, pp. 203-4)