

A DISCUSSION OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY: THE TREND TO NATURALISM, AND SWEDENBORG—A PHILOSOPHY FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM?[†]

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There couldn't be a more appropriate time than at the beginning of the new millennium to talk about philosophy. We are at the dawning of a new and exciting era. The world today is vastly different than the world at the beginning of any other century. And the pace at which it is changing seems to have accelerated exponentially. Asking about philosophy is asking about where the human race is going, how it perceives itself and the world it is creating, and what its place is in the natural, cosmological scheme.

I'd like to start with a very modern definition of philosophy taken from Swedenborg himself. In his *Principia*, written in 1734 before beginning his theological writings, Swedenborg defined a true philosopher as one who

is enabled to arrive at the real causes, and the knowledge of these things in the mechanical world which are invisible and remote from the senses; and who is afterwards capable of reasoning a priori, or from first principles or causes, concerning the world and its phenomena . . .¹

What's most interesting, and most modern, about this observation from one of Swedenborg's most important pre-theological works, is the emphasis on three things:

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¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Principia*, tr. Rendell and Tansley (London: The Swedenborg Society, 1912), 35.

1. The search for real causes, or first causes;
2. The focus on the mechanical world, meaning the natural world;
3. The importance of reasoning a priori, or deductively.

In fact, these three things—a focus on the natural world, the commitment to a priori or deductive reasoning, and the search for ultimate or first causes—have been key preoccupations of modern philosophy for most of the latter half of the last millennium.

Let's review briefly the historical background that led to this preoccupation. By the 1400s, clearly, the human experience in Europe had changed markedly, and as conditions changed, so did the outlook of the human population. By this point in Europe there was an increasing focus and fascination with the natural world as opposed to the spiritual world and an insatiable drive to understand the natural world—to explore it, to study it, to understand it, and to turn this knowledge to use. The discipline of science and the application of science, or technology, was becoming a pervasive and very important occupation. And science is the study of causes—the application of logical reasoning to causes and their effects in the natural world.

But First causes, or ultimate causes—that was the realm of the spiritual world, of the church, and one which the church of course jealously guarded at the time. So, as science and the art of logical reasoning expanded their sphere and began to take on questions of cosmological significance, conflicts developed. One example is that of Galileo, the Italian physicist and astronomer who was tried and jailed for his support of the Copernican theory of the heavens. The mathematics and observations by that time were compelling evidence that the earth orbited around the sun. But the doctrine of the church was that the earth was the center.

In this and other subsequent conflicts between science and religious doctrine, science had two things going for it. First, science was empirical. You could see nature, and science successfully explained nature. The natural world obeyed immutable laws which could be described with increasing sophistication by scientific tools and mathematical techniques—tools and techniques which helped scientists to gain Swedenborg's goal,

“knowledge of the things in the mechanical world which are invisible and remote from the senses,”² the laws of nature.

Second, science, and particularly mathematics, offered the convincing clarity of deductive, logical reasoning—reasoning which cannot be argued with; a priori reasoning. What is deductive reasoning? Let me provide an example. What is two plus two? The answer is four. The answer is always four and must be four, because we understand what quantity represents, and we can see what happens when we add quantity together. Two plus two equals four. This statement does not require any empirical observation. It is known to be true deductively on the basis of the definition of numbers and of addition. It is always true, and it is the only true answer. This is an example of a priori, deductive reasoning.

Now the scientific thinkers of the late sixteenth century were convinced that the methods of rational analysis in science, or working from causes through deductive reasoning, could ultimately be applied to a set of first causes, the “initial conditions” of the universe, and then everything could be known or proved with perfect clarity. But how do you get to these First causes. And, at a more practical level for the scientists of the day, perhaps, how do you do that without creating conflicts with the church?

It’s at this point that I’d like to introduce the philosophy of René Descartes. Descartes lived from 1596 to 1650—he died thirty-eight years before Swedenborg was born.³ Descartes possessed an immense intellect, and he has been called the father of modern mathematics and the father of modern philosophy. In mathematics he brought together the fields of geometry and numerical analysis, providing the foundation for calculus and vastly assisting the work of Newton and innumerable future scientists. In philosophy he published several short but profound works that helped to shape philosophy for the next several centuries. In some ways, the seeds of virtually all modern secular philosophies can be found in Descartes.

² Ibid.

³ In fact, Descartes was invited to Sweden by the Queen, and died in 1650 after only four months. Descartes’ impact was enormous, particularly on the University at Uppsala, where Swedenborg matriculated in 1699, at the age of eleven, when his father was appointed Primary Pastor.

One of these works, first published in 1641, is titled *Meditations*. In the Letter of Dedication, written to the Dean and Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris, Descartes states,

I have always thought that the two questions, of God and of the soul, were the principal questions among those that should be demonstrated by rational philosophy rather than theology. For although it may suffice us faithful ones to believe by faith that there is a God and that the human soul does not perish with the body, certainly it does not seem possible ever to persuade those without faith to accept any religion, nor even perhaps any moral virtue, unless they can first be shown these two things by means of natural reason.⁴

Descartes also notes,

I consider that the arguments I use here equal or even surpass in certainty and obviousness the demonstrations of geometry.⁵

There are six meditations. The first mediation, titled “Concerning Things That Can be Doubted,” sets up the conditions for absolute truth to the mind of the rational thinker. Such things must be “beyond doubt,” such that denial cannot be conceived of—a standard of pure, theoretically perfect, logical, deductive proof—a priori truth. In the first meditation Descartes struggles to free himself of any presuppositions. He is seeking to “set aside all the opinions which I had previously accepted among my beliefs and start again from the very beginning.” And later “reason convinces me that I should abstain from the belief in things which are not entirely certain and indubitable.” Again, “it will be enough to make me reject them all if I can find some ground for doubt.”⁶

Through this process, Descartes sheds his former beliefs. He sheds his belief in the reality of the external world and postulates instead that it is all

⁴ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, tr. Laurence J. Lafleur (The Liberal Arts Press, 1960), 61.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

an illusion. He also sheds his belief in a benevolent God. Rather, quoting excerpts from the first meditation:

I will therefore suppose that, not a true God who is very good and who is the supreme source of all truth, but a certain evil spirit, no less clever and deceitful than powerful, has bent all his efforts to deceiving me. I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all other objective things that we see are nothing but illusions and dreams that he has used to trick my credulity. I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing that I have all these things. I will remain resolutely attached to this hypothesis; and if I cannot attain the knowledge of any truth by this method, at any rate it is in my power to suspend my judgment. That is why I shall take great care not to accept any falsity among my beliefs and shall prepare my mind so well for all the ruses of this great deceiver that, however powerful and artful he may be, he will never be able to mislead me in anything.⁷

And so he ends the first mediation—believing, it seems, in nothing. In the second meditation, Descartes resolves his dilemma, because, try as he might, he cannot doubt away the fact that it is a rational, thinking mind that is having these thoughts.

thus, after having thought well on this matter, and after examining all things with care, I must finally conclude and maintain this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true every time that I pronounce it or conceive it in my mind.⁸

From this sentiment comes one of the most famous lines of modern philosophy, as expressed in Descartes Discourse on Method—"cogito, ergo sum"—"I think, therefore I am."⁹

⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁸ Ibid., 62.

⁹ Ibid., 24.

Descartes then proceeds in a series of what he argues are logical deductions to rebuild the cosmos. In the third meditation he reaches the conclusion that God must exist since ideas are outside of the self and implanted in the self and must derive from a more perfect, outside creative force—God.

thus there remains only the idea of God, in which we must consider if there is something which could not have come from myself . . . And, consequently we must necessarily conclude from all that I have previously said that God exists. For even though the idea of substance exists in me from the very fact that I am a substance, I would nevertheless have no idea of an infinite substance, I who am a finite being, unless the idea had been placed in me by some substance which was in fact infinite.¹⁰

Since God is the ultimate source and force by which ideas are implanted in the self, his existence is “prior to” or “a priori.” More simply, Descartes concludes that the self cannot by definition exist without a higher being which he names God.

Descartes gives us a clear picture of the philosophical landscape of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the period into which Swedenborg was born. The most important factor—the elevation of logical, deductive reasoning as a first commandment of rational inquiry. Rational inquiry seeks perfection—the perfection of logical proof.

The story of what happened after Descartes is quite long and very complex. There is no doubt that he fostered a continent-wide explosion in rational philosophy. The idea of a rational proof to everything, and of a universe that could be completely and totally explained in mathematical terms, was very, very exciting.

Several subsequent philosophical threads followed Descartes into the study and analysis of the self, its elements, the role of perception and of the will. Other philosophers followed the logical or skeptical path, delving deeper into the determination of ultimate proofs and of the structure of logic and language itself. Most philosophy and science, though, focused on the empirical, natural world. In all of these modern philosophical

¹⁰ Ibid., 101.

threads, however, there remained an underlying commitment to logical proof—either self-evident, a priori, deductive proofs or empirical proofs from the demonstrations of science.

I would like to jump forward to the twentieth century, but before I do I need to point out that there is a fatal flaw in Descartes' logic, one which was keenly exposed by the skeptic philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), a contemporary of Swedenborg's. In his essay "Argument From Design," Hume attacks Descartes' conclusion as to the existence of God as being an inference or analogy and not deductive proof. According to Hume,

Experience alone can point out to him the true cause of any phenomenon . . . For aught we can know a priori, matter may contain the source or spring of order originally, within itself, as well as mind does . . . There is no more difficulty in conceiving that the several elements, from an internal unknown cause, may fall into the most exquisite arrangement, than to conceive that their ideas, in the great, universal mind, from a like internal, unknown cause, fall into that arrangement . . . Can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from parts to the whole?¹¹

Hume shows that Descartes failed to apply his standard of perfect logic when he jumped from a conclusion about the existence of the self to the existence of a prior, more perfect being—God. According to Hume you cannot go backwards from causation to a "cause" with certainty. Descartes had introduced into his logical thinking not an a priori deduction from first principles but an inference. "Since I exist, God must exist"—is an inference, an analogy, a less persuasive, and a less than perfect, "proof."

So by Descartes' own methods, his philosophy was undone. No rationalist or Cartesian philosopher since has been able to reconcile his method with his conclusion that God exists.

So here we are in the twentieth century, actually now the twenty-first, some 350 years after Descartes, and what has Cartesian rationalism brought us to? In hindsight, I would have to say that modern philosophy, as it

¹¹ David Hume, "On the Argument From Design," from *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part II, reprinted in *Philosophic Problems*, 2nd Ed., (The Macmillan Company, 1967), 695–696.

evolved from the work of the father of modern philosophy, has an abysmal record. Existentialism (I suffer, therefore I am), Nihilism (I don't care, or as the teenagers say these days—"whatever"), Idealism in the form of Nazism or Fascism, Relativism, Materialism, Marxism. Through the entire history of modern western philosophy, first causes have eluded philosophers completely—the result rather seems to have been more often final solutions.

On the other hand, science, the tool of rational exploration of the natural world, has been extremely successful. We have plumbed the depths of matter; we're unraveling the intricacies of biology; we're traveling to the stars, and we've created wonderful programmable machines that can do any computational task perfectly every time. And we have dramatically raised the standard of living. According to the Economist magazine,¹² the average standard of living in Western Europe over the last one hundred years has increased from about \$4,000 per capita to almost \$20,000 per capita and is increasing at an exponential rate. Over the last millennium, the increase in the standard of living has been by a factor of fifty, from a level of about \$400 per person. All of these increases in the standard of living have been the result of science and technology.

So how should we characterize the state of philosophy as we move into the twenty-first century? I'd characterize it as "naturalism with anxiety." There is great confidence in the natural order, the proofs of science and the products of technology, and yet there is anxiety, great anxiety, regarding the question of first causes. The anxiety is less for those who have maintained a faith in God, but at the same time no one living in the modern world can ignore the pervasive skepticism about things that cannot be seen or proved.

Walter Stace (born 1886), in his book *Time and Eternity*, said it quite well:

When philosophers speak of "proofs of the existence of God," what they have in mind is always a logical passage from the natural order, or some fact in the natural order, to the Divine Order . . . In all cases, we use some

¹² *The Economist*, Millennium Special Edition, December 31st, 1999, article and graph pp. 10–12.

fact or facts of the natural order as premises for our argument, and then leap, by an apparently logical inference, clear out of the natural order into the Divine Order, which thus appears as the conclusion of our argument. "If God does not live at the end of any telescope, neither does he live at the end of any syllogism." "The evidences are torn to shreds by the skeptic without difficulty, and it seems then to all the world as if religion has been destroyed."¹³

John Dewey, great American thinker who died in 1952, in "A Common Faith" said:

all the beliefs and ideas in question . . . are connected with the supernatural, and this connection is the factor that has brought doubt upon them . . . New methods of inquiry and reflection have become for the educated man today the final arbiter of all questions of fact, existence and intellectual assent.¹⁴

Ernest Nagel, born 1901, in a 1954 essay "Naturalism Reconsidered," stated:

When naturalists [practitioners of naturalism] refuse to acknowledge . . . the operation or presence of a divine power, they do so not because their commitment to a logical method prevents them from treating it seriously, but because independent inquiry fails to confirm it. Knowledge is knowledge, and cannot without confusion be identified with intuitive insight or with the vivid immediacy of profoundly moving experiences. For unlike many world-views, naturalism offers no cosmic consolation for the unmerited defeats and undeserved sufferings which all men experience in one form or another.¹⁵

¹³ Walter Terence Stace, *Time and Eternity*, Chapter 8, "The Divine as Beyond Proof," reprinted in *Philosophic Problems*, 700.

¹⁴ John Dewey, "A Common Faith," Lectures I and II, reprinted in *Philosophic Problems*, pp. 792–794.

¹⁵ Ernest Nagel, "Naturalism Reconsidered," (1954), reprinted in *Philosophic Problems*, pp. 809–810.

And finally, the final sentence from David Hume's *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume—of divinity or school metaphysics for example—let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.¹⁶

Is this how the twenty-first century should begin? Is there another approach, another way to go?

Yes. Swedenborg showed us the way three hundred years ago. Even looking only at his pre-theological works, Swedenborg was far ahead of his time, and clearly saw the dangers of where Cartesian rationalism was heading.

Swedenborg, in the *Principia*, argued very clearly that reasoning from analogy, whether you call it intuition, or inductive logic, or insight, was fundamental to rational thought. Unlike Descartes and others of the time that elevated deductive reasoning above all else, Swedenborg recognized the limits of pure deduction, or what he called geometry.

But though the world is mechanical and composed of a series of finite things which originate by means of the most varied contingencies; and though the world . . . may, with the aid of geometry, be explored by means of experiment and its phenomena; it does not, therefore, follow, that all things in the world are subject to the government of geometry.¹⁷

We see from experience and a posteriori, that there is such a connection of incidentals, from causes, and their result in producing a given end; but to know the nature of this connection a priori is not within man's province or that of geometry.¹⁸

¹⁶ David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Charles W. Handel (ed.), ([Place]: The Library of Liberal Arts Press, 1955), 173.

¹⁷ *Principia*, 27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

Notice how this conclusion anticipates Hume's arguments two decades later. He goes on to say,

The rational principle in the soul does not consist in knowing many things which the world naturally exhibits and represents to the senses . . . [or] in knowing the figures and spaces in which motion terminates . . . [or] knowing the proportion between figures and spaces, and the other rules and proportions of motion . . . But the rational principle consists in knowing how, and at the same time being able, to arrange into such order and connexion the reasons or proportional facts known from the world, as to view their analogy: yet this presupposes an active principle . . . The rational active principle derived from this, consists in knowing how, and in being able, actually to elicit from analogy a third or a fourth truth previously unknown . . .¹⁹

Swedenborg is saying that the activity of rational thinking relies upon analogy and inference, the drawing out of patterns and causal principles, and not upon deductive or geometrical processes alone. Moreover, any philosophical system that relies solely on deductive reasoning is going to fail.

. . . let a man possess the utmost store of experimental knowledge and be at the same time a complete geometer, and yet suppose him to be deficient in the faculty of just reasoning, or of comparing the several parts of his knowledge and experience . . . he can never attain to the mysteries and inward recesses of philosophy. Knowledge without reason—a heap of many things in the memory without judgment to separate and distinguish them . . . —in a word, the possession of the means without the faculty of arriving at the end.²⁰

Swedenborg was three centuries before his time. Let me mention two specific developments in the twentieth century that demonstrate this point.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

First, in spite of most scientists' conviction that the practice of science is based on logical deduction from observable phenomenon, a simple explanation of cause and effect, it has been shown, notably in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,²¹ that science is in fact an intuitive discipline. Kuhn's description of the scientific process is now known as the paradigm theory of science. Scientific theorization involving the development or enhancement of paradigms, working from analogy or insight, is the first and most important step in the scientific process, followed by observation and verification. Science as a strictly deductive exercise is an illusion. To paraphrase—You cannot deduce your way from observations about nature to theories about nature, any more than you can deduce your way from the existence of nature to the existence of God.

Second, and a more subtle point about the limits of logical reasoning, is drawn from the arcane field of symbolic logic. Kurt Godel, a twentieth century logician, was able to prove, using purely deductive reasoning, that any complex logical system (meaning any logical system complex enough to be interesting, which surely the universe itself must be) contained statements which could not be proved either true or false.²² Quite simply, deductive reasoning itself has proved that deductive reasoning is incapable of determining absolute truth or falsity. Descartes' whole notion of the logical proof of absolute truth, and that pursued vigorously by many philosophers for three hundred years, simply falls apart.

Swedenborg did not stop, of course, with the conclusion that the rational principle involves more than deductive reasoning. In fact, the quotation above is on page thirty-two of the first chapter of the *Principia*, which is some one thousand two hundred pages long, and the *Principia* was written well in advance of the many volumes of theological writings. Swedenborg had a lot to say on this issue which can't possibly be addressed in a short paper. But I would like to attempt a brief explanation, from a New Church perspective, of the errors of naturalism, and then proceed to a discussion of what we can do about those errors.

The simplest and most obvious error of Descartes and all the practitioners of naturalism that followed, from the New Church perspective, was

²¹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

²² Godel's Incompleteness Theorem.

that they placed the self before the Lord. The Love of self, the pride of intelligence, the arrogance and lack of humility, are palpable in all the naturalist quotations I cited above. And Descartes' famous maxim itself, "I think therefore I am," places the self at the center of life and thought. From this standpoint, "naturalism" never even got to the First Commandment, let alone all ten of them. As the New Church teaches, an error so huge leads inexorably to the undermining of God's preeminence, to ignorance, to doubt, to denial, and eventually to outright rejection of God. The practitioners of naturalism have raised false idols in their temples, idols of the self, idols of the natural laws, and they suffer the consequences—loss of meaning, loss of happiness, loss of grace, and loss of love.

The second error is that the practitioners of naturalism reject outright even the possibility of spiritual knowledge. Revelation, the influence of the affections, the recognition of spiritual truth, the perception of God's hand in creation are all denied as being invalid. They willfully and intentionally reject any source of information other than the natural senses or the natural, logical mind, and they define those limited spheres as the truth and the only truth. They have closed the door, barred the windows, and closed their hearts and minds to God and to any of the many avenues for spiritual knowledge. In the New Church we learn that God is there always, wanting to help and guide us, constantly providing signals and signs, providing the spiritual light we need to show us the way.

But this will be accessible only if we are able to open ourselves to the spiritual influx from God. Naturalism completely and totally shuts out spiritual light. Imagine spending your entire life exploring the extraordinary intricacy and beauty of the natural world and at same time being oblivious to the divine miracle that created it.

It is obvious that those who practice naturalism need guidance, guidance of a spiritual nature. What can the New Church do about this? How do you begin to reason with someone who has been raised in the world view of naturalism and who now doubts or denies the existence of God and who shuns religion as nonsense or self-serving propaganda? How do you even open a conversation? How do you get them to open their hearts and minds to the possibilities of a spiritual life and direct them towards the New Church?

Let's start with logic. The great philosophers have shown, unequivocally, that you cannot deduce the existence of God through logic or by reference to any of the things of the natural world. However, these great thinkers have also shown, unequivocally, that you cannot deduce the nonexistence of God. Nature and logic do not answer the question of the existence of God. Viewed exclusively from the natural world, God may or may not exist. But, logically, there must be an answer. Either nature created itself for no purpose and I exist by chance, or nature was created by some infinite presence for a purpose, and I am part of the grand plan. Logically, one or the other must be true even though logic cannot provide the answer. So, we have a choice. We can choose to believe in God and in a grand plan, or we can choose not to believe in God and conclude that it's all just chance. Logic and nature cannot help us make that decision; so how do we make the decision?

When faced with a scientific conundrum or apparent contradiction, the logical approach for the naturalist is to approach the question with an open mind and to try to determine the truth through experimentation. The same thinking should apply to the question of God's existence. We can approach the question with an open mind or with a closed mind. To approach the question with an open mind, the practitioner of naturalism will have to first "suspend disbelief." This step of suspending disbelief is critical—it is also the logical extension of the finding above, that logic and nature cannot disprove the existence of God.

Notice that suspending disbelief is the opposite of what Descartes did—he suspended his belief. By suspending disbelief, we give ourselves the opportunity to test out, or to possibly experience, other sources of knowledge and information, sources potentially including spiritual truth and divine revelation. If we do have such an experience, then we will have positive evidence of the existence of God.

However, if one chooses to approach the question of God's existence with a closed mind, then the possibility of divine truth or spiritual insight will be denied and by definition spiritual revelation or insight will never be experienced. By choosing to maintain a closed mind on the question of God's existence, God's existence and any possible sources of information by which you could answer the question are rejected. However, this is clearly an irrational and illogical approach, one which has prejudged the

answer—an approach which a true naturalist should reject as illogical and unprovable.

Is the question of whether you believe in God an important question? Absolutely. It is the most important question people will ever face in their lifetime. It will determine whether they live their life as part of a plan, knowing that life has meaning beyond itself.

I think the above argument is compelling, and if so, at least we have opened the door, pulled back the shutters, and, by the grace of God, some light will begin to shine in. However, naturalism will still seek to define the basis on which the hypothesis may be proved. Now we have suspended disbelief and admitted the possibility that God exists. But how will we know that it is true? How do you tell if something is true?

The answer is that it's the same in science as in theology. We know that something is true if it works. Does the scientific theory explain the phenomena? Is it logical and consistent? Can we see the theory at work over and over again? Are we able to use the science to predict cause and effect?

The same is true of theology. A true theology works. It explains, it illuminates and it resonates with our own experience. It provides the patterns, analogies, and explanations that help us clarify and understand the divine order all around us, order that may previously have been obscured. And theology must be entirely consistent with science and nature. This, of course, is not true of a significant part of the organized religions of the world, some of which demand obedience to doctrine which cannot be reconciled with our own personal experience or with the natural world.

So, we ask the practitioners of naturalism to first suspend belief. We point out that they cannot prove that God does not exist. They also cannot prove that the Word of the Bible is not divinely inspired. They also cannot prove that Swedenborg did not talk with angels in heaven.

Then we ask them to try it on for a while. Ask them to see if it works. And the questions we can ask relative to the validity of the experience could include the following: "Does following the Ten Commandments as explained in the New Church, lead to a happier and more personally satisfying life?" "Do the teachings of the New Church make sense in the context of twenty-first century science and psychology?" "Does the Word

of the Bible, explained through the writings of Swedenborg and the teachings of the New Church, help you understand and explain your personal human experience?" "Does the New Church give you a better understanding of the world of nature and its relation to the spiritual world?" "Do the teachings of the New Church help provide a clear understanding of your place in the universe and your purpose on earth?" "Does being in the New Church help us become better marriage partners, better parents, better teachers, better citizens?" "Do the teachings of the New Church help us see the Divine handiwork that illuminates the natural world?"

Many of us have answered these questions for ourselves in the affirmative. We know that the theology of the New Church works and will work for others. They just have to give it a chance.

I would like to close with a few additional quotations from Swedenborg. From the *Principia*:

Nature is only a word which connotes all the actuating forces proceeding from the first motion of the Infinite till the world was completed; with this first motion it begins; and as this is produced by the Infinite, so also is nature. They, therefore, are mere children, and have reached scarcely the first threshold of true philosophy, who ascribe to nature the origin of all things, to the exclusion of the Infinite; or who confound the Infinite and nature together; when yet the latter is only an effect, or thing caused, the Infinite being its generator and Cause²³

Thus, true philosophy leads to the most profound admiration and adoration of the Deity; nor can anything be found to diminish, but an infinity of things to increase, this admiration.²⁴

There is no contingent mean, tending to the perfection of the world, which is not a miracle. The world itself is a miracle.²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 39.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

We may, therefore, conclude again, that the wiser a man is, the greater are his veneration for, and his love of the Deity. His delights wholly terminate in the love of God, a love which exhausts and replenishes all sense of delight. All the delights of the world, resulting from its variety, are nothing unless the mind also partakes of them; for no human delights can be real, without the participation of the soul.²⁶

And from *True Christian Religion*:

Those who do not regard the universe as the workmanship of God and the dwelling place of His love and wisdom, but as the workmanship of nature and the dwelling place of the sun's heat and light, close the higher regions of their mind against God, and open its lower regions for the devil.²⁷

. . . the human mind can easily fall into thinking of the creation of the universe as the work of nature . . . the mind . . . may slip headlong into nature worship that denies the existence of God.²⁸

The difference is, however, that truth opens the rational and so makes a person rational, whereas falsity closes the rational and makes him irrational, though he seems to himself while in the darkness enveloping him at this time to be more rational than others.²⁹

As a final quote, I offer *True Christian Religion* 771, which really puts the entire discussion of modern philosophy, the trend to naturalism, and the teachings of Swedenborg in perspective:

So to prevent people from plunging yet deeper into erroneous ideas about the destruction of the sky we see and the earth we live on, and

²⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁷ TCR 13:4.

²⁸ TCR 75.

²⁹ AC 3108.

consequently about the spiritual world, as the result of ignorance, which leads to worshipping nature and this automatically to atheism—something which at the present time has begun to take root in the inner rational minds of the learned—to prevent then atheism from spreading more widely, like necrosis in the flesh, so as to affect as well the outer mind which controls speech, I have been commanded by the Lord to make known various things which I have seen and heard. These include heaven and hell, the Last Judgment, and the explanation of Revelation, which deals with the Lord’s coming, the former heaven and the new heaven, and the holy Jerusalem. If my books on these subjects are read and understood, anyone can see what is meant there by the Lord’s coming, a new heaven and the New Jerusalem.³⁰ □

³⁰ TCR 771.