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THE HUMAN MIND

A Study by Hugo Lj. Odhner

I. The Quest for the Mind

Before undertaking an examination of the human mind as this is presented to us in the inspired teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, it would be useful to devote some attention to what the world about us says or has said on the subject. Every man talks about his "mind" as if this was without question the chief element of his personality. Yet ask men to define what their mind is, and we encounter a great confusion. Some will identify it with their consciousness or with their thought and knowledge; some will grant that it includes also emotions and will; others will say that it is a process which goes on more or less constantly in the cells of the central nervous system—as some kind of physiological reaction. The learned have even constructed the "science" of Psychology, the object of which is to study, analyze, and catalog the phenomena which men regard as mental, and this in order to separate our knowledge of these phenomena from the superstitions and errors with which human tradition has beclouded it. Many psychologists are therefore averse to the very mention of a "mind." Other writers will admit that the question as to whether we have a mind or not is one which cannot be determined by the methods of Psychology but is to be relegated to the field of Philosophy or even Theology. There is in fact truth in the remarks of Everett Dean Martin that "the psychologist today . . . must boast his ignorance of philosophy and make a noise like a biologist." [1] And since a little, or too specialized, knowledge is often a dangerous thing, it is common today to hear men scoff at the idea that the mind could ever exist as an immortal soul apart from the body.

[1] *Meaning of a Liberal Education*, Norton and Co., New York 1926, p. 36.

This was something which the ancients never seemed to doubt. Thinking from ends rather than from effects, the people of the Ancient Church took the spiritual world for granted, even if they were as yet unable to distinguish it by any clear bounds from the world of nature. And even though the teachings of their primeval revelation—which we know of as the Ancient Word—were gradually misunderstood and contorted, we find in the burial rites and oldest records of antiquity indications that there was from the beginning a clear idea that man possessed a soul which would survive death. To them, this simple acknowledgment was confirmed by their dreams, in which they saw their own soul or mind conversing and acting with others, living or deceased, apart from their sleeping bodies. This was perhaps the chief reason that the idea of immortality was preserved among the most primitive peoples long after any sound religious traditions had perished, or before any knowledge had been given by further revelations. And as a faint echo of the lost Eden of the celestial infancy of our race there persists among the most undeveloped peoples the idea that not alone man, but all objects of the earth have life, or contain a spirit or conscious soul. This belief has been labelled "animism."

What those who belonged to the Ancient Church at its height of wisdom believed about the mind and the soul is unknown from any records of which we know. If the Ancient Word that was lost is ever recovered here on earth, it would doubtless be found written in "correspondences so remote" [2] that even New Church students would find difficulty in ascertaining how far it revealed the character of the human mind to its ancient readers. The Writings state, however, that the Christian Church in its beginnings and the Ancient Church "were altogether the same as to internals and differed only in externals," so that if the externals or representatives of the Ancient Church were unfolded, the Christian Church would be disclosed (AC 4772). But this is said of the essentials of love and charity. Presumably, the Ancient Church was mostly a practical church, enjoying spiritual light but not much given to intellectual speculations. In some nations there was indeed a special cultivation of the science of correspondences; as in Egypt, where, by such scientifics, they explained "those things that were written in the books of the church" (AC 5223).

[2] TCR 279.

In Egyptian records we actually find traces of a developed doctrine of the soul and the mind. Beside the mortal body (*khat*), man was apparently thought to possess not only a semi-material "double" (*ka*), but a spirit or spiritual intelligence (*khu*) and a soul (*ba*) of ethereal substance which after death could partake of heavenly blessedness among the gods; as well as a "name" (*ren*) or memory in which his quality was eternally inscribed.[3]

But the quest for a knowledge of the nature of the human mind must have been present among all thinking men, and is reflected in various mythologies. Oriental religious concepts had a strong influence upon the early Greek thinkers who set about the task as an intellectual adventure. It has been said that the Greeks, in the process of developing the new field of "philosophy," as we now call it, worked out the separation of mind and body, seeking to conceive of the mind as a distinct entity.[4]

Contrary to the general concepts of their own and Egyptian and Babylonian mythologies, the Greeks brought in, from sources originally Hindoo, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato—all believed that the mind of man, after death, was reborn again and again, as a new individual in later generations; and they confirmed this by the sensation which men sometimes have that they have experienced something before, although knowing that they could not have done so in their lifetime (HH 256).

The Greeks early began an earnest study of the mind and of its processes and characteristics. Some thought that the mind had come together as an aggregate of many things present in some original chaos. Others regarded it as the result of a splitting up of an original unity—as when light is separated into many colors. Some were materialists in tendency, and even identified God with the matter of earth. Some stressed that the only reality was the principle of unity which underlay all multiplicity and change. The world of matter, the body, the objects of earth, were non-real, insubstantial. Some claimed that there was nothing stable, but everything was in transition or in flux; while others drew the cynical conclusion that all changes were merely illusions

[3] Budge, *Egyptian Religion*, London 1908, pp. 163ff.
[4] Baldwin, *History of Psychology* (1913 ed.), i, p. 39.

of the senses. But there was considerable respect held for man's reason. That, many pointed out, was the organ of truth and unity.

Socrates (469–399 B.C.) introduced into this muddle of opinion the element of common sense. And his disciple Plato (427–347 B.C.) developed the Socratic teachings by regarding the things of the mind as reflections of a world of "ideas"—the source and fulness of which is God. Plato conceived of the rational soul as an independent substance, a spiritual essence which comes from beyond space and time and is temporarily exiled into a body of matter where its own conscious ideas are obscured by the fallacies of the senses. Matter, such as the world and the body are made of, is a negative something which acts as the womb or mother for the soul. By philosophy—or the search for practical wisdom—the soul can disentangle itself from the appearances of matter and the lusts of the body, and thus, after death or after many incarnations, can purify itself from all feeling and emotion and enter a state of pure reason akin to divinity.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), who followed Plato, made more explicit a distinction which his master had not clearly made: a distinction between the soul and the mind. He conceived of the mind itself as a divine individuality which was never polluted by its presence within the living man and which alone was worthy of immortality. The mind, identified with a pure reason, lived an aloof life of intuitive contemplation. As for the soul, this was an ethereal thing present in all organisms. Plants had a nutritive and reproductive "soul"; animals had, besides, a sentient soul which gave the power of impulse, feeling, and imagination. Man alone possessed a rational soul, which was formed by the Divine Reason and at death dissolved and went back to its source. Thus the *soul* was that which gave form to the body and was the cause of its vital functions, its growth, its appetites, desires, feelings and sensory perception; while the *mind* was the eternal, persistent individuality which during earth life dwells within the soul and influences it without being itself changed.

We have tarried to describe these concepts of Plato and Aristotle because Christian ideas of the mind and soul were largely founded on the teachings of these and other Greeks. The Church Fathers were much concerned to find a clear idea of the immortal spirit of man—the salvation of which was their mission. While

they were hampered in the doctrine of the resurrection of man's body at the Last Judgment, they must also show that the spirit could survive death so as to be ready for the great event of rejoining its body.

When Greek converts had difficulty on this score, Paul in his Epistles pointed out to them that just as the mortal soul (ψυχή) had a mortal body which meets corruption in the grave, so the eternal spirit (πνευμα) has its own "spiritual" body which is immortal (I Cor. 15: 44). And this should have satisfied the Corinthians, if they knew their Aristotle; or at least given them a less gross idea of the eternal life than the Jewish Christians tried, with apparent success, to fasten on Christian theology.

No. The spirit that lives after death must be of a different nature than the mortal flesh. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." In this Paul simply voices the common perception that—throughout the ages and despite doctrine—lingers in the inner recesses of human minds. And if not flesh and blood, what can the spirit be except something like that mind which abides inwardly within our flesh and often seems to struggle against it?

This was no doubt what led St. Augustine (354–430) to study the mind by introspection and conclude that it was immaterial and immortal and consisted of intellect, will, and memory. The mind, being self-conscious, proved itself to be distinct from the body and the world about it.

After the speculations of the Schoolmen had relieved the pall which the Dark Ages had cast over western thought, we find in the doctrines of Thomas Aquinas (1227–1274) some further arguments which show that the soul or the mind is self-subsistent as far as the body is concerned, since it has an operation apart from the body. Aquinas—whose philosophy is still the norm of Catholic thinking—pointed to the facts of consciousness and memory respectively as the proofs of the existence and permanence of the soul as a truly individual substance. He said that the soul was "substantial form" or absolute form, while the body was a composite of "form and matter." [5] He also associated with the soul, or the mind, various powers or faculties by means of which the soul acts. And he distinguished these faculties as the vegeta-

[5] Compare the English poet: "The soul is form and doth the body make . . ."

tive, the sensitive, the appetitive, the motor, and the intellectual faculties. The understanding is therefore a "faculty" of the soul, and includes in it "reason" and "memory."

But it is to be made clear that the "Angelic Doctor" regarded the soul of man as the lowest of intellectual substances, i.e., lower than the angels who were of a superior breed and created before the world. Therefore the soul was fitly joined to a material body and compelled to seek knowledge by way of the senses, and thus reach rational ideas or abstract concepts by coming to see the "generals" or "universals" which underlie the imagery of sense-experience. He was able indeed to lay down that the "angels" would have a superior intelligence capable of knowing all things intuitively—for upon their nature are inscribed "universals," or the "ideas" of all forms, abstractions themselves.

In the survey which we have followed so far, we see a gradual approach to the position that the mind or soul of man is a real substance, a spiritual essence which has its own operations—like thought, will, appetite, sensation—and is that which imposes its form upon the body. Although Christian dogma would not allow that the spirit could live without eventual reunion with a body of some sort, yet there was a drift towards contrasting the body and the mind, the flesh and the spirit. And in the century in which Swedenborg was born this tendency took a bold and decisive turn, when Rene Descartes (1596–1650) formulated a theory in which mind and body are defined as two substances discretely separate and apparently incompatible. These two substances, he showed, had utterly different properties and characteristics. The body was of matter and matter was extended substance. The mind was a thinking substance. And the problem—which Descartes did not succeed in solving—was: How could the mind and the body ever work together if they were so different in type and character?

The learned all over Europe began to scratch their heads and publish learned tomes. The trouble with Descartes was that he had put into logical language what every one had felt as an embarrassment, a mooted question. Every simpleton—even you and I—can see that there was an essential and inescapable truth in the claim that the matter of the body was simply an inert extended substance moving according to mechanical laws, and that the mind

with its thoughts and its conscious affections partook of a wholly different nature—was devoid of spatial or material attributes. To try to explain life or love or virtue or intelligence in terms of mechanical motions or physical tensions is fruitless. To say that a wave-motion in the air affects nerve-endings in the ear and causes a current through the nerves into the brain—that we can understand. But to say that in the brain it is transformed into a mental sensation is just so many words to which we can attach no real meaning. Similarly, "an intention in our mind" we can understand as something real. Yet we fail to picture how this mental state can possibly affect the molecules of material and extended substance of which our nerves are made—so as to cause our muscles to contract.

Yet every one also knows as a fact that our minds and bodies can and do work together in the closest harmony. In ancient times this was simply taken for granted, as it generally is today. And yet, modern man is such that he must see things clearly and distinctly, that is, see the causes of things, or else his faith in spiritual things is shaken and gradually dissolves into ineffective generalities.

This became apparent when the weak point of Descartes' system was pointed out. The spiritual of the soul could not move the material substance of the body, nor could the body affect the soul with sensations. The world was soon flooded with theories which essayed to get around this dilemma. Some did away with the problem by saying that there was no material world, and no body; the mind itself manufactured its own sensations. Others threw doubt about the soul or mind being anything except another aspect of the body, not a distinct substance. The mind, as Hobbes put it, was a function of the body; or, as Hume presented it, was simply the sum-total of man's experiences. The reason was simply built up from below! But some friends of Descartes came to his rescue by developing the idea that while the soul could not move the body, *the Lord* could set the body in motion in correspondence with the mind's intentions. This theory was called "occasional influx" and, by Swedenborg, "spiritual influx." Similarly, Malebranche (1638–1715) contended that God aroused ideas in the mind on the occasions when the bodily senses were affected from the world.

The result of such discussions was to produce a literature about the mind and its various elements and sensations and faculties, and about the relation of the body, the brain, and the senses. No longer was it sufficient to look up what Aristotle or the Church Fathers had said about these things. Descartes had started a movement for studying the human body as you would an intricate machine wherein all reactions are mechanical and calculable. And he also showed that the mind's existence was the primary of all truths. He encouraged men to start with this first acknowledgment and, by reasoning, build up a real psychology—a systematic doctrine of the mind, a "rational psychology" which would be "a science of those things which are possible because of the human soul."

It was so that Christian Wolff defined it. Wolff (d. 1754) was a prolific and popular philosopher, scholar, and writer to whose opinion Swedenborg, in his *Principia* period, sometimes politely refers. Wolff published (in 1732) an *Empirical Psychology* on which Swedenborg made copious critical comments, and (in 1734) a *Rational Psychology,* in which Wolff, in his dogmatic and minute fashion, treats most systematically of almost all the subjects and problems which Swedenborg (c:a 1742) expounds in his work on *The Soul,* which is also entitled *Rational Psychology.*

For to Swedenborg also the establishment of a rational confidence that man survives death and that the soul is a real entity, became a most necessary task to which he turned all his learning. But Swedenborg approached the problem from a scientific rather than a philosophical standpoint. He shows a pronounced aversion to the way the philosophers involved their ideas in terms which evaded the real issues and solaced the minds of men with high-sounding phrases. He knew of course from the outset that truly spiritual things like intelligence, instinct, and love were beyond the range of the mechanical order of nature. But he believed that the manner of proving the immortality and real existence of the soul was to show that it had a physical basis. At first he identified this with the "soul"—using this term in the Aristotelian sense, as the formative essence of the body. He sought to prove that in the inmosts of nature there was a mechanism so perfect that it cannot perish. And for the next ten years he labored, studied, and wrote with the view of examining the workings of

this soul in the body. He traced its presence in the bloods and in the marvelous economy of the brain and the nerve fibers, and studied the modes of sensation and the manner in which the outside world by means of the atmospheres affects the state of the brain, where he placed the most subtle organic structures whence the soul rules the body as from a throne. He therefore calls the human body Regnum Animale, "the Soul's Kingdom"—a title ambiguously translated into English as *The Animal Kingdom.*

As long as Swedenborg was bent on establishing a physical basis for immortality, he was not directly at grips with the problem which Descartes had brought into clear relief. For by the "soul" Swedenborg then meant an organic essence which served the forces of life and intelligence as a vice-regent in forming and maintaining the body. He meant an inmost vital fluid which Descartes and others had called "animal spirit" and which Aristotle had distinguished as the first "formative essence" (or *entelecheia*) of the physical body. This did not mean the "rational soul," or the mind, the intellectual, spiritual part of man.

But when Swedenborg came to draw up his *Rational Psychology,* he was faced with the "dualism" of substance of which Descartes had spoken. He had to describe the substance which Descartes had called "thinking" substance. Swedenborg had never pretended that natural substance could "think," still less "feel, perceive, understand, or regard ends" (2 Econ. 231–36). The real soul, or the intelligent spirit of man, must therefore be regarded as a "spiritual substance," "of spiritual essence and spiritual form, immaterial, without extension, motion, or parts," yet having something "analogous" to parts, extension, and motion (R. Psych. 498, 486, 516, 501, 303; Ontol. 56–60).[6]

But this "spirit" or spiritual essence of man lives and works within man's body. Using the vital fluids as a tool, it forms the body from conception, and forms within the body special organs in which it may receive sensations and originate actions, and thereby form *itself* into a conscious and free "mind."

There were thus, in a sense, two "souls." There was the spiritual soul or spirit within, which could not be described in terms of physical substance or in terms of motion or geometrical

[6] When he wrote this new definition of the "soul" he had already, in a premonitory way, been introduced into certain contacts with the spiritual world.

dimensions. And there was also the soul of the body, the physical agent of the spirit; and this soul of the body was an inmost natural substance, a finest vital fluid which carried out the behests of the spirit throughout its bodily kingdom and took upon itself an impress of the whole life of man, in general correspondence to his mind and character, so that it could serve the spirit eternally as an individual basis and a plane of contact with the world of space and time.

In order to understand what the human mind is, the relation of the spiritual soul to the organics of the body must therefore be studied. Swedenborg makes clear that while the spiritual soul, which commences as an offshoot from the father's soul propagated in the seed, contains the endeavor (*conatus*) to develop into an immortal mind of the general genius of the parental stock; yet this development has to commence with birth in the natural world, and is thus dependent for its individual immortality on the creation of a material body of its own. It is also obvious that what we call our "mind" takes on peculiar and distinctive characteristics because of our life in the world, the experiences and circumstances which we encounter, and the special knowledge which we here accumulate. Yet an infant who dies immediately after birth, leaves his body and grows up to adult age in the other life; the potentialities of his soul thus unfold apart from natural sense-experience. After death, he will possess all the human faculties and degrees and full bodily stature. From his brief life on earth he will have appropriated a physical basis from the inmost things of nature—that basis which Swedenborg from the first urged as a requisite for the immortality of the soul. He will have a spiritual mind in a spiritual body; yet his natural mind will be undeveloped and he must presumably depend on other angels for all things which depend on this plane of life and thought. But for most of us Providence ordains a prolonged life in the natural body, in order that the soul may—through the medium of this body—form itself into a mind; a natural mind, such as can only be formed on earth and in fact only through the natural organics of the human brain and through the experience of the bodily senses.

Swedenborg's *Rational Psychology* therefore starts out with a description of the senses and their functions. He shows that the five senses—most of them seated in the head—all send their im-

pulses and reports, in the form of subtle tremulatory wave currents traveling up the sensory nerves into specific regions of the brain, but communicating their general effect also over the whole brain, which he therefore calls a common sensory. The momentarily changing conditions of our earthly environment exert specific changes in the various organics of the brain; changes in the very flow and direction of the nerve fluids at their very spring and points of origin, which he defines as the cortical "glands."

So far he argues within the bounds of what is now common knowledge. But he goes further. He reasons—from certain philosophical doctrines about Forms and Order and Influx and Correspondences and Degrees—that each of the cortical glands themselves serves as a brain on a more exalted level, and contains parallel functions to those of the brain as a whole; and that thus each cortical gland contains a myriad of other organic centers which generate the highest vital fluid by which the soul rules the body. These inmost organic centers continually flash out subtle and invisible fibres like vibrating rays which by their formative action continually build and maintain not only the cortical glands but all the structures of the whole body.

This concept of the inmost constitution of the body aided Swedenborg to conceive how the spiritual soul could affect the substance of the body. For if a spiritual substance was to exert a government over the material body it could do so only through the most primitive constituents of natural substance, such as existed in a free state within the supereminent blood and its simple cortices.

He therefore explains that the inmost substances of the brain were derived from the highest and first aura of nature, and contained the most intensely active units such as those from which everything else in the natural world is composed. Later, in the Writings, he points out that such "purer things of nature," because they are "nearest to spiritual things," could "agree and harmonize with spiritual and celestial things, and serve them as containants" (DP 220). But it seems that Swedenborg never had any real difficulty with the Cartesian dilemma which had resulted from destroying all bridges between the spiritual and the natural. Swedenborg never thought of matter as mere space cut up into pieces, i.e., as mere extense. Radically differing from all

of his contemporaries, his idea of matter was dynamic—as a form of energy which bound itself up in larger and larger bundles; or as energy tied up in closed circuits, forming particles which then combined into new and more passive particles. Matter, in his view, was therefore intelligibly defined only in terms of motion in space-time. This is the main purport of his *Principia* theory. Pure energy, from which this motion was derived, he pictured as the result of a creative *conatus* to motion—for he claimed that the only real thing in motion is conatus (or endeavor), since when the underlying endeavor ceases, the motion ceases. (Action xxvii; Fib. 289, 290; AC 5173.)

Thus matter had a spiritual cause and origin. For "endeavor" or "conatus" is a spiritual thing, while motion is the essence of the material. From within, therefore, the spiritual had access to the natural without itself becoming natural. The spiritual and the natural were not divorced from each other. Indeed, it is said in the Writings that the substance of nature is created out of spiritual "primitives" (TCR 79[7], 280[8]). "All natural things, even earthy matters, are effects produced by the spiritual as a cause" (AE 1207[3]). Without the influx of the things of the spiritual world, nature "could not subsist for a moment" (AC 4939, 5084, 10185; AE 395).

This theory of matter, its dynamic constitution and spiritual origin, is of tremendous importance in many widely separate fields. Here we are interested in it only because it aids us to understand how the spiritual soul can operate as a disposing cause in the body and there intelligently direct the release of the energy which is latent in the bodily tissues. For the soul does not govern the body by "brute force"; it does not add an ounce of energy to the body. Nor does the body offer any energy to the mind to be used up in the form of thought or affection; for the mind does not need any energy to think. The brain needs food and uses physical energy. But the mind is fed by spiritual food from spiritual sources. In speaking of the communication of soul and body, Swedenborg seeks therefore to avoid the word "influx." "I would wish," he says in the *Rational Psychology,* "that this intercourse might be said to take place by correspondence" (n. 167).

To repeat: the soul or mind directs the body, decides what kind of "conatus" or endeavor should inspire and direct its energy.

It does this through the finest or first substances of nature in the brain. But in order that the body may be able to carry out the behests of the soul or mind, the brain with its nerve-fibres must be capable of adapting itself to the outside world. And the brain becomes adapted to the world by sensory impulses which impress the tissues of the brain with changes that in greater or less detail correspond to the objects and situations in the world of nature, so that the brain shall become a replica of the world—a little world under the soul's control. This is the purpose of sensation—which will form the subject of our later treatment.

(*To be continued*)

LILLIAN GRACE BEEKMAN

(*Concluded*)

By Alfred Acton

To the members of the New Church, Miss Beekman's resignation came as a great surprise. Her opponents were relieved, while supporters were by no means shaken in their belief of much that she had taught.

On August twelfth, after a few days in a Philadelphia hotel,[1] she was received into the Catholic Church, and the next day received her first mass—at Old St. Joseph. She thought that her quick reception into the Caltholic Church was extended to a woman *in extremis,* "who looked scarce able for physical life."[2] Her state of exaltation amounting almost to ecstasy can be judged from her words after partaking of mass.[3] "Ah! that He—wonderful—may enter the organic body of me, and make it the temple of His purification and power and blessing and love—may enter the house of me—Ah Dominus non sum dignus—Dominus non sum dignus." She wanted to enter a convent,[4] but such sudden moves are not countenanced by the Catholics.

After her first mass, Miss Beekman hoped to stay for a few days at the Sacred Heart Convent in Philadelphia, but instead, the Mother Superior, who, it seems, was the first Catholic she ap-

[1] Two friends in Bryn Athyn had given her financial aid (Letters, p. 3).
[2] II, Aug. 13, 1915; Jan. 27, 1916.
[3] II, Aug. 31, 1915.
[4] Letters, p. 3.