

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

Foundation of Knowledge in Philosophy. The Reverend Ormond Odhner's paper in this issue distinguishes between "source" and "foundation."

What is the foundation of knowledge? This is a question that must be answered in any philosophy. The answer ought to come before the philosophy itself. Philosophy makes little sense without an answer to this question.

The dialogues that Plato carries on with the Sophists through Socrates mean little if we interpret them only as a search for values or as informative on the topics discussed. The theme that connects all the dialogues is the effort to dignify the place of knowledge itself. I am not here trying to compare the relative importance of knowledge and value; I am commenting only on what Plato has to offer with respect to these two.

Another example is Descartes' statement of the first principle of philosophy as the *cogito ergo sum*. In this case the point is not just to establish knowledge but *certain* knowledge.

The empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume is based on strict adherence to the origin of knowledge in sense perceptions only.

Although the *a priori* nature of knowledge does not enter explicitly into the philosophies of these three, it is so introduced by Kant. "What is knowledge?" "How is knowledge possible?" These are questions fundamental to Kant's studies. And in his effort to answer these questions he makes repeated use of the question, What is *a priori*, not in time, but to the very existence of knowledge itself? Kant's answers to these questions or alternate answers given by others have affected all philosophies since his time.

Knowledge That Arises in Sense Perception vs. Other Knowledges. The sole source of knowledge recognized by many is sense perception. Nevertheless some thinkers in all times have seen the insufficiency of such a unique source. I give some examples:

Augustine held that the only knowledge worth having is the knowledge of God and self. Logic, metaphysics, and ethics also have value for him insofar as they support the other two knowledges. True, this is a value judgment on different kinds of knowledge rather than an explicit principle of the origin of knowledge.

But behind this judgment is the acknowledgment of the source of knowledge about God, viz., revelation.

Thilly and Wood express his ideas as follows :

Reason must first decide whether a revelation has actually occurred; when it has been decided that a revelation is authentic, faith affirms it and reason seeks to understand and interpret it. (*A History of Philosophy*, p. 178.)

However, during a long period of the history of the Christian Church, the origin of knowledge, whether in natural science or in revelation, was largely academic. In the former case there was not yet natural science as it became known by Swedenborg's time. As for immediate contact with revelation, even after the ability to read became widespread, men continued in large measure to depend upon Church interpretation.

The special demand by Augustine, a spiritual leader, concerning knowledge is seldom repeated in our time. Yet the demand for some knowledge beyond that originating in sense perception is made by some modern philosophers with less lofty aspirations than those of Augustine. For example, the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce said :

. . . while to say that all our knowledge relates merely to sense-perception is to say that we can know nothing—not even mistakenly—about higher matters, as honour, aspiration, and love. (Section 28 on "The Concept of God" in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. by Justus Buchler.)

After natural science began to be developed in the form in which it is now known some men of science acknowledged the two-fold nature of the foundation of truth.

Giorgio de Santillana cites the example of Galileo by referring to the contents of a letter written by Galileo, in which he says,

. . . the two truths, that of God's Nature and that of God's Writ, never appear to be in conflict. (*The Crime of Galileo*, p. 41.)

Burt gives Newton as another example :

So, although religion and science are fundamentally different interpretations of the universe, each valid in its own way, yet for Newton in the last analysis, the realm of science was dependent on the God of religion, and led the reverent mind to a fuller assurance of his reality and a readier obedience to his commands. (*The Metaphysicals Foundation of Modern Science*, E. A. Burt, p. 283-4.)

Although both spiritual leaders and men of science have given testimony of their belief in the two-fold foundation of truth, spiritual leaders as well as men of science have also stated a negative principle with regard to the possibility of spiritual knowledge—especially about God.

The Dominican, Meister Eckhart (1260–1327), expressed such a view.

God, as the inexpressible, transcendent being, cannot reveal himself. (See Thilly, Wood, *ibid.* 251.)

We may be tempted at first to regard this as dated to Eckhart's time of the fourteenth century, but Hermann Weyl, twentieth century mathematician, famous for his work in relativity, closes his book *The Open World* with a paragraph in which among other things he says,

. . . God as the completed infinite cannot and will not be comprehended by . . . [man's mind]; neither can God penetrate into man by revelation, nor man penetrate to him by mystical perception.

One of our readers has recently delivered a paper on *The Infinite*. I hope he will prepare it for publication. It includes a discussion on the sense in which, according to the Writings, God may be known that man may worship Him. The negative principle in the two above quotes is more a denial of the possibility of revelation than a denial of God's existence. The writers say that even if God exists there is no possible knowledge about Him that is available to man.

Twofold Truth. In addition to references to this concept in other places in this issue we note the following:

Philosophy, if it be truly rational, can never be contrary to revelation. . . . (*Infinite*, Preface.)

If philosophy (or science?) is one foundation and revelation another then there is a distinction between this kind of twofold foundation and something referred to as "twofold" in rationalism. Swedenborg addressed himself to the school of rationalism in *The Infinite*.

Windelband, in speaking of the cross currents of thoughts among the Scottish philosophers which seem to end up with principles called *common sense*, says,

In the philosophy of the German Enlightenment all these tendencies mingle with the after-workings of the Cartesian and Leibnizian rationalism. The twofold tendency in the method of this latter system had taken on a fixed systematic form through the agency of Christian *Wolff*. According to him, all subjects should be regarded both from the point of view of the eternal truths and from that of the contingent truths: for every province of reality there is a knowledge through conceptions and another through facts, an *a priori* science proceeding from the intellect and an *a posteriori* science arising from perception. (*A History of Philosophy*, p. 460.)

There is another kind of twofold truth that superficially sounds like that in the Writings but yet is different. This is illustrated in the distinction between "philosophical truth" and "theological truth" as drawn by Averroes during the thirteenth century. According to one interpretation, the distinction was a device to deceive the Church authorities in order to advance heretical propositions.

The distinction stated in the Writings is not between "philosophical truth" and "theological truth" but between two *foundations* of truth.

The Origin of Knowledge. The terms "source" and "foundation" have already been used as examples. But writers on knowledge have used other terms: "window," "inlet," "conduit," "beginning," and "fountains," to cite a few.

Each of these words carries with it a dependence upon some presupposition in the writer's philosophy, with respect to the origin of knowledge.

Locke, for example, describes the mind in its first state with each man as a "*tabula rasa*," a "dark chamber," an "empty cabinet," or "white paper," void of characters and without ideas. (Discussed by Thilly and Wood in *A History of Philosophy*, p. 334 et seq.) An example is the following:

I pretend not to teach, but to inquire; and therefore cannot but confess here again, that external and internal sensation are the only passages that I can find of knowledge to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room. (*An Essay Concerning Understanding*, Book II, Chapt. XI, Sec. 17 entitled "Dark Room.")

Earlier Locke had characterized his ideas using the word "inlet"; Section 15 or Chapter IX of his *Essay* is entitled: "Percep-

tion the inlet of all materials of knowledge." By perception he means sensual perception.

Locke distinguishes in his usage of "inlets" from what he calls "conduits." He speaks of words "as the great conduits of truth."

"Beginning" is a more general term used in describing a fact or perhaps defining what we are talking about, for example in describing how man comes to be as a man, that is, as distinct from other living things such as trees or animals. This is illustrated in the Writings when it is said that man has two beginnings of life: one which is natural and depends upon the heart beat, the other which is spiritual and depends upon the will of the mind. (DP 193:2) "Beginnings" seems to be more appropriately a term applied to the historical order in which things arise with respect to the individual man, the church, etc.

We must distinguish between "beginnings" as a historical thing in time (for example that we begin our studies in science by learning geometry) from "origin" or "source"—that is what makes knowledge possible, either in geometry or in science.

But, as indicated in the paper by the Reverend Ormond Odhner, "source" and "foundation" each have a special and distinctive meaning in the Writings. The same is also true of some of the terms from secular philosophy mentioned in this note.

Reference to "beginnings" in Potts' *Concordance* calls this to mind. And I add two notes for reference only, one on "beginnings" and the other on "fountain."

"Beginning" as a Principle. In the previous note I emphasized the usual historical, *i.e.*, time-sequence of events, implication in the word "beginning." But the Writings give to the term more important meanings. These meanings are identified with "principles." Potts in the *Swedenborg Concordance* lists numbers from the Writings where significant usage of "principles" is involved under the heading "Beginning," even when the word "beginning" itself is not used.

There is for example "the principle [which] must be from the Lord, and not from self," AC 129; principles of falsity, AC 130, AC 794; negative and false principles from which men think, AC 2588:2; the beginning of a representation, AC 4670:3; and many others. The Writings seem also to use beginnings in the time-

sequence sense as indicated above (DP 193:2) and again as "the beginning of reformation," AC 16, AC 4174 and in the strictly historical sense: "in the beginning such worship was not so profane," AC 1182.

The opening words of *Genesis* no doubt refer in the literal sense to a mere historical, but it also means "new creation" in several respects—especially with reference to new states in the process of man's regeneration. (AC 16)

"Fountain" as a Source. "Fountain" is used in secular philosophy differently from the way it is used in the Writings. It is necessary in order to understand the Writings to recognize also that "fountain" is not entirely the same as "source"; it is a special kind of source. For example, as in ". . . of all things flowing from one fountain, and thus from the Lord." Fountain seems to refer to the highest source in a series. That is, the Writings speak of a source or even a foundation of truth ("truth" unmodified). But they speak of "the fountain of *all* truth" (AC 3413e) and of "a fountain of *living* water," not just of water. The distinction between water that is from a well and from a fountain is given in AC 3096, 3424, 6774, and other numbers.

"The Scientific Attitude of Mind." This is the title of a chapter in the book *The New Church and Modern Christianity*, by George de Charms (Bryn Athyn, 1963), which bears relation to our consideration of "foundation" and "source." First the author distinguishes between scientific method and scientific attitude. Of the method he says,

It would be a great mistake . . . to condemn the scientific method, rightly understood, simply because a misapplication of it has proved so injurious to the cause of spiritual religion. (p. 68)

But of scientific attitude he says,

. . . the scientific attitude is nothing but a profound conviction that human imagination and human reason are both unreliable, and are constantly subject to error. (p. 69)

Bishop de Charms then develops this proposition, showing how the scientific attitude usefully regulates thinking in science. But later he says,

Thus far the scientific attitude of mind is right. It is the indispensable mode of approach to natural truth, and it is this attitude that Swedenborg com-

mends. But in our modern age another element—an element that is altogether wrong—has been introduced into this concept of the scientific method. This subversive principle which has turned modern science against religion is the unwarranted scientific assumption that the only kind of truth to which we can attain, or of which we can have any positive knowledge, is that which can be subjected to sensual proof. (pp. 70-71)

As examples of concepts beyond sensual perceptions that are required in the search for truth, he refers to the "abstract idea of cause and effect," the "faculty of generalization," and the "idea of use," of which concepts he says,

these are not tangible things capable of analysis by the bodily senses, yet they underlie all scientific truth. (p. 71)

There are only a few places where Swedenborg in the philosophical works explicitly calls attention to the twofold nature of the foundation of truth. Nevertheless his entire collection of writings in science and philosophy testify to his acknowledgment of such a foundation.

Bishop de Charms says,

The scientific method of investigation is essential to the discovery of truth, both natural and spiritual. It is entirely responsible for the rapid progress of our western civilization in modern times. It was not only adopted by Swedenborg, but was highly commended by him in his scientific and philosophical works. (pp. 67-68)

However, he says later,

[Swedenborg's] whole effort, therefore, as a scientific philosopher, was to demonstrate that there was no . . . antagonism between [science and religion.] (p. 76)

I commend the above-mentioned little work to the reader's attention for its treatment of a number of topics other than the scientific attitude in relation to thought in our time.

But to return to the particular chapter more or less under review, its main plea seems to be to see the use that natural science has performed in restoring a conviction that there is a way to truth. The love of that truth manifest by the "great men of science" is a lesson. And so we read,

We must permit our minds to be led by a love of spiritual truth, just as the true scientist must commit his mind to the guidance of the love of natural truth. (p. 73)

E. F. A.