

## THINKING FROM CORRESPONDENCES

---

### VIII. Seeing and Understanding

N. J. Berridge

The sight of the eye corresponds to the affection of understanding and being wise (AC 4405) or to the understanding (AC 4406). Perhaps therefore we may broaden our ideas of the understanding by thinking about sight.

1. *The common use of seeing as a symbol of understanding*

The Writings make it clear that the universal acceptance of sight as a symbol of understanding is from the spiritual world (AC 4406) and it is, of course, more than a mere symbol because of the correspondence. In fact the closeness of the correspondence and its acceptance into the language make it difficult to write about the understanding without using correspondences based on sight and light. This can be seen(!) from a short list of words frequently used in relation to mental things; e.g. clear, dull, bright, short-sighted, point-of-view, imagine (from image), project, show, outline, adumbrate, black-and-white. In a case like this, one can hardly avoid the comic situation of trying to explain a thing by making use of the thing itself.

2. *The intellectual and emotional effect of seeing*

The eye is a complicated device by which the outside surroundings are as it were brought right into the brain. There is no communication between the separate strands of the optic nerve; they do not divide and re-join, though it has recently become clear that their inputs are to some extent integrated in the lateral geniculate bodies (See part VII) and possibly modified by an inflow from the cerebral cortex. Even so, the pictures on the retinae are transferred as a pattern of the same kind to the visual cortex, and in the brain there is therefore a stereoscopic representation of the surroundings; a little world in the head corresponding to the big world outside. It is as though we take the environment into ourselves and this, from the point of view of our own experience, is like flowing out ourselves and pouring and spreading our being into the surroundings. We feel as though we are in the scene we are looking at.

This is an emotional, not a factual experience, but it may have its roots also in correspondence; for when we study the internal sense

of "He led him forth abroad and said Look now toward heaven..." (AC 1806, 1807) we learn that the eye "is properly nothing but the sight of his spirit led forth abroad." This happens whenever things seen by the eye of the body lead the man to think of things concerning the Church or Heaven. Perhaps it is not straining the meaning of correspondences to think that by means of the understanding one is liberated and led out of oneself to explore the natural or spiritual world.

### 3. *No sight without understanding*

The complete process of seeing involves also understanding, for unless the patterns of light, shade, color, and the stereoscopic results of using two eyes are properly interpreted there will be no apprehension of the surroundings; no real seeing. It is therefore true to say that sight not only corresponds to the understanding, but that it *is* understanding, though of a limited kind. This is confirmed by the experience of those born blind and later cured by modern surgery. They need to learn what the patterns on their retinæ mean and to connect them with their previous experience through the other senses.

### 4. *The Lord is the Only One who sees*

At the level of being able to interpret the patterns on the retina we have much in common with the animals, but in addition we have more interior things that correspond precisely with, and are the cause of, the bodily processes, which are so like those that are in animals. Thus we read that unless man's interior sight "continually inflowed into his outer sight, which is that of the eye, this latter could not possibly apprehend and discern any object". (AC 1954) Neither would the interior sight be effective unless something still more interior flowed into it; and

even this does not see of itself, for it is the Lord who sees through the internal man and He is the Only One who sees because He is the Only One who lives and He it is who gives man the ability to see and this in such a manner that it appears to him as if he saw of himself. [AC 1954]

### 5. *The spiritual counterpart of seeing*

It was suggested above that the process of seeing is as it were a taking of our environment into our own brain. This in turn suggests that the spiritual function of the understanding is to take into the

personality a true, useful, and necessary representation of spiritual objects, which are goods in the form of truths and of course include people. The analogy of sight shows that (in the first instance) by understanding these things we are not so much explaining to ourselves how they work as taking them into ourselves in the form of adequate images. An image is adequate when it enables the man to appreciate the real thing and to act appropriately towards it. Thus the humiliating fact is that we can have no real genuine truth in ourselves; it is a mere image; it is always limited by our own understanding or spiritual sight. Nevertheless the image is formed according to the orderly way provided by the Lord, who designed the eye and also gives the light.

It is obvious that in ordinary daylight it is the sun's light by which we see, even if it is diffused by clouds and reflected from the walls of a room. Even so is the image on our spiritual retina formed by the radiating Divine Truth, but only after it has been reflected by spiritual objects, which ideally are goods in the form of truths. Our spiritual eyes cannot otherwise receive this form of Divine Truth, just as we cannot gaze at the sun without being blinded. For a healthy spiritual environment, and to provide beneficent scenery, we need many truths. Doctrine provides them; the Divine Truth shines on them; and our understanding accepts an image of them. (This is explained in beautiful and vivid language in AC 8707). The image is often inadequate, but as our spiritual sight grows stronger the image becomes less inadequate. As our lives improve we move into regions where the Divine Sun is less obscured by clouds, or the day advances and the light grows stronger.

Thus in all our seeing it is really the Lord who is coming, in the form of His Light into our understanding. The reflection of daylight by objects in the world doesn't destroy the daylight. Neither is the Lord's light destroyed by reflection from His truths, and He chooses to reveal Himself by being reflected by all the truths of His Word. It is solely by His light that these truths can be seen, and they are there so that they may reflect His Light. Our attention focuses the light on our spiritual retina, and we have then in ourselves an image of the truths, which image even gives the relationships among the truths, e.g. which are near each other, above, below, behind, joined or separated. And this image is not the truths themselves. In some ways it is less. In another way it is more, for it is formed by the Divine Light. We have then, in our "eye," not the truths but something of the Lord sent to us *via* the truths. In such a way even beliefs which are not correct can mediate to us something of the

light which is the Lord, providing we are living where the Sun/light is.

Even in hell, however, the light still comes, in the last analysis, from the Lord, but by so many derivations that its character is changed. (We know that coal contains solar energy trapped by plants that have then become fossilized.) (AC 4531)

In spite of what has been said about seeing and understanding being a taking into ourselves of our environment, such a process is limited to seeing merely; or to the first stage of seeing or understanding. Spiritual things especially are not limited, and after we have taken truths into ourselves by the process of spiritual sight we can as it were turn them over and around and see them from a different point of view and perceive connections and meanings that previously escaped us. In this way we arrive at the second stage of seeing, which is that of understanding how a thing works. (At a lower level the 'thing' might be a machine, or a chemical process. At a higher level it might be reformation or marriage).

These thoughts suggest that the process we have been thinking about is a way of seeing the Lord and worshiping a visible God. Although only those who have their spiritual eyes open can glimpse the Lord as we glimpse the sun, others may occasionally feel that they have seen the Lord in His Word; but there must be moderating atmospheres, and for the continual uses of life the light from the Lord must enter our spiritual eyes by reflection from truths.

6. *What is the connection between eyes and lungs?*

We now consider a problem which must have occurred to many before now. As all New Church students know, the heart and lungs correspond to the will and understanding. We have here just been considering the implications of the correspondences between the eye and the understanding. How can it be that such different organs correspond to the same thing?

If this problem has already been solved, perhaps I will be forgiven for presenting a solution as it occurs to me. It is only a specific example of a much wider question, which may well have a much wider answer, but in this instance the explanation may perhaps be that the eyes correspond on a different level; for, whereas the use of the lungs is chemical, the use of the eyes is for information, i.e. it is mental; and so, although the eye is an ultimate bodily organ, its use is less ultimate.

When we consider the use of the eyes, we see a close parallelism with that of the lungs. As the lungs (understanding) provide the

stream of blood (love, AC 1001) coming from the heart (will) with oxygen (truth) to enable the blood to do its work in the body (use), so the eyes provide the stream of desire (or love) coming from the will with information (or truth) to enable it to achieve its purposes (use). Clearly on this latter mental or spiritual-natural level the correspondence is of a closer kind.

Thus we find that, strange as it seems at first, the existence of the same correspondences for very different organs is merely a single example from presumably thousands, which illustrate the universal connection by innumerable means between the spiritual and the natural and hence between the Creator and His creation. ■

## PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

---

Edward F. Allen

### Connected Whole, V

373 *Review and Prospect.* In the first part of this series (*The New Philosophy*, July-September, 1979), the connected wholeness of the universe in time was illustrated in the attitude of physicists that evidence is still present of the "big bang" origin of the universe, 15 or 20 billion years ago. Further, because that evidence includes the presence of expected wave lengths in the radiation, there remains over that time its physical properties. This was compared to attitudes with regard to the universal aura of Swedenborg's philosophy. (N. B. the comparison is one of attitude, not correlation.) In the second part of this series (*The New Philosophy*, October-December, 1979), connected wholeness in the universe was illustrated by Bell's theorem in physics, which states that causes are universal; there are no local causes.

In the third and fourth parts of the series (*The New Philosophy*, January-March and April-June, 1980), examples of connected wholeness from Swedenborg were given. The fourth part was devoted to examples of connected wholeness in each of the nine sections of "An Introduction to Rational Psychology" (*Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, Part I, chapter VIII).

With the introduction to wholeness in the natural world from our contemporary physics and to wholeness depending on the doctrine of degrees, I now pass to examples of connected wholeness with regard to man and the Word.

The connected wholeness of man is illustrated by two theorems