

RATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY— DEAD END OR A NEW BEGINNING?¹

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An alternate title for this address is, "Why Didn't Swedenborg Publish *Rational Psychology*?" While I hope it will help you understand Swedenborg and his preparation, and perhaps offer some insight into the fundamental use of his life—serving as an instrument for the Lord's Second Coming—there will probably be no immediate application to your life. I have thought a great deal about whether ideas without direct application to life are useful for people to learn and think about. Certainly there is a great deal of totally unnecessary and useless information about. On the other hand, it is self centered to want all doctrine, all ideas, to benefit and relate to oneself now. There are many important ideas, spiritual and natural, that we have to learn and live with for a time before we understand what they really mean, much less apply to life. If we attend only to those ideas that we understand and can apply immediately upon hearing them we are not going to change very quickly, but will remain pretty much where we are. Only ideas that stretch us can move us out of the comfortable or uncomfortable ruts we tend to run in. Only new ideas can renew the vision, or even keep it alive.

My purpose tonight is to look at Swedenborg's search for the soul in the years after 1733. That year marks a watershed in his life. He was 45 years old, and before this time, his life was dominated largely by two concerns. As a member of the Swedish College or Board of Mines he helped superintend the major industry of his country. Daily the College of Mines met to regulate mining, to set proper standards, to settle quarrels, and generally to promote the health and reputation of Swedish mining. It was an important job.

Swedenborg's other major interest was scientific, especially mathematics, geometry, mechanics, physics, chemistry, astronomy—the study of moving things. His crowning work of these years was the *The Philosophical and Mineralogical Works*, in three huge Latin tomes. The second and third tomes dealt in considerable detail with copper and iron mining, and were used in the European mining industry for a number of years. The first tome is the famous *Principia*, an elaborate speculation in physical theory. He developed a fascinating hypothesis about the structure of nature, as being

¹ Slightly revised text of Annual Address delivered to the Swedenborg Scientific Association, May 2, 1983

formed out of motion.

Basically he speculated that the first of nature was a First Natural Point, consisting of *pure and total motion*. Nature began with an enormous number of these first natural points, all of them intensely active. From them there were formed, by combination and composition, larger particles or centers of activity—the four basic elements of the natural world (we would call them subatomic particles and the atoms made up of them). Each of the four elements, in huge quantities, constituted an atmosphere. Thus there were four basic elements, each lower or grosser one formed by combinations of the next higher or finer elements. Each element was very active and full of motion, or what we would today call energy. And there were four basic atmospheres, each one consisting of one of these elements. The most external or gross atmosphere was air, and the higher three were discretely finer and interior, though all were in space and time. The *Principia* theorizes in detail how from these elements the natural universe was built up. It is a fascinating theory, and anticipates the better known nebular hypothesis.

Now all this was the work of the young Swedenborg the scientist, natural philosopher, and important government official. How he had time for it in addition to his daily work on the College of Mines, I cannot imagine. It is speculative, and however suggestive even for modern physicists, is not Divine revelation. It says nothing about any spiritual world, and while God is presumed as the source of creation, these tomes are books about nature and physics, not about God or spirit. When this great work was finished Swedenborg was more than a decade away from the Lord's appearance to him and the opening of his spiritual eyes.

But a change came over Swedenborg in 1733, as he went to Germany to publish these tomes. (One student has related this change to an increased notice of trees.) From about 1733 Swedenborg grew interested in the soul and life. The life sciences intrigued him: biology, anatomy, the brain, animate life in the body, psychology. He wanted to understand the soul itself: what is it, where can we see it, what does it do? Also, he became disturbed by the unbelief of many of the learned, and he wanted to prove that there is immortal life. He wanted to prove that the soul, whatever it is, lives to eternity. And he wanted to do this through the sciences in which he was expert. No, he had no idea of his future theological mission. He believed in the Bible as the Word of God, but he was a scientist and natural philosopher, and it would be through the

sciences that he would learn about the soul and its immortality. Or so he thought.

So Swedenborg set out to find the soul. Now if you were looking for the soul, how would you know if you had found it? What would you look for? In late 1733, Swedenborg thought he had the answer. The soul was mechanical! It was geometrical! In Dresden he came across an important German philosopher's book on psychology, and as he studied it, took notes and wrote down his reflections, he thought he saw all the seeds of the basic answer to his quest. The book was the *Psychologica Empirica* of Christian Wolff, just published.

Swedenborg's unpublished notes, commentary and reflections on Wolff have been titled *Psychologica*. In very sketchy form he considers the soul and how it seems to connect up with the theoretical system in the *Principia*—the four elements which form the interior or atomic structure of all matter. Many of the ideas in these study notes are his, not Wolff's, and they breathe excitement as he develops a theory of a mechanical soul, wholly within nature, wholly within space and time, consisting of the mechanical motions of the four elements of the *Principia*. In fact he draws diagrams to illustrate the probable geometric motions of the soul's different parts. One diagram even purports to be of the soul itself, full of spiral motion and forms made up of intense spiral motion. The finest parts of the body and brain, he feels, are made up of the four elements of his four-atmosphere system, and all the functions or mental operations of the soul are in fact simply the natural activities, the space-time motions, of these natural elements. Fundamentally all our sensation, all mental activity, is vibration or tremulation of the different membranes formed out of these various natural elements.

Thus *spirit* is not some hidden, occult force. Any created spirit will have figure and motion, and will take up space. It will be geometrical and mechanical, and he excitedly writes that if we had proper microscopes, "we might be able to see the entire structure both of the soul and the spirit"² And if we could learn the soul's *mechanism*, we could know the nature of memory, intellect, imagination, and the passions of mind and body.³ Further, if we could know the soul's mechanical motion, we could understand the nature of life after death. The particles of the evil soul are small and gross, hard and inflexible, while angels have a finer, subtler mechanical motion.⁴

² *Psychologica* 75e

³ *Ibid.*, 116

⁴ *Ibid.*, 209, 211; he always believed in angels.

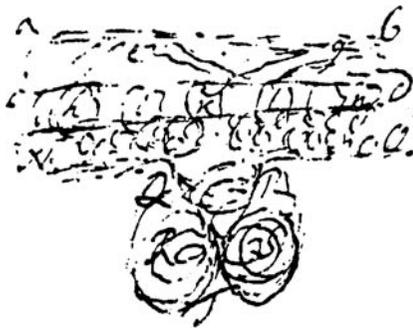
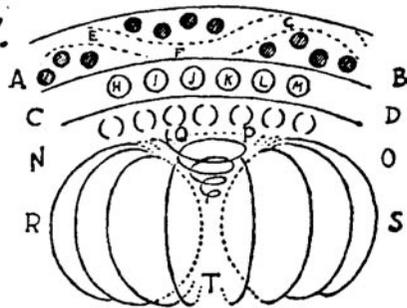


Fig. 1. Diagram of the Soul in Swedenborg's *Psychologica*, Number 17.

Interpretation of Swedenborg's Diagram:



1. RS are the spirals or helices of the supremely subtle [membrane] of the soul. Within them are actives of the first finite. At T where there is no attachment, is the first element.
2. QP is the tortuosity with its hollow spirals. The membrane consists of third finites. Within are enclosed actives of the first and second finite.
3. NO is the membrane adhering to it, in which is enclosed the first element.
4. CD is the membrane in which is enclosed the second element; yet together with the former it constitutes a single membrane.
5. ABCD is the membrane where ether is enclosed, which can flow like a rivulet [e, g, f].
6. There is a still grosser membrane, where there is a subtle juice.
7. And another yet grosser, where is blood with its arteries. Such is the nature of the membrane found throughout the entire head, and over each individual particle or minutest gland.
8. But in a body where there is no rational soul but only a sensitive, RS are lacking.
9. The one RS is entirely similar to the other.

Spirits of the devil have a relatively gross mechanical motion.⁵ He even thought he might be able to demonstrate the torments of the soul "mechanically and geometrically."⁶

Now his point is not that the soul inflows from some spiritual world to produce all this mechanical and vibratory activity. At this state he does not know about influx, especially about influx from the spiritual into the natural. He knows nothing about correspondences. His geometrically structured elements, properly

⁵ *Ibid.*, 212
⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.7

organized in the human body, *are* the soul, and the subtle tremulations or vibrations of its various membranes and other parts, *are* our mental and spiritual life.

In fact what most excites him is that this idea of the soul may enable him to demonstrate to man's very senses that the soul is immortal. The soul's immortality can be visibly proven, by showing that there is a mechanical motion "which cannot perish."⁷ The infinite God is the cause of immortality, but the reason the soul will live forever is that it consists of subtle elements of his *Principia* system, and these finer elements, though in time and space, are of such a subtle mechanical character that they are indestructible.⁸ In fact the very reason that people doubt that there is an immortal soul is that they believe such a soul would be purely spiritual, and beyond space and time. When the learned realize the soul is mechanical and within nature, its immortality will be recognized, and eternal life will be proven to our senses.

Swedenborg thinks his insights are in agreement with the Bible. Angels, man's soul, and all our senses are mechanical and natural, and any other idea of them leads to atheism.⁹ Hear his enthusiasm for the great advance to human knowledge to which he hopes to contribute:

But the literary world is daily taking increase and ever advancing onwards. How great has been its advance in the commencement of the present century! And in the century that is past! So that now from reasons and experiments we seem at last on the point of coming to causes themselves, and of seeing that all things are done mechanically. Seeing this, why should we not anticipate them! Why should we not reach forward, and establish that which surely our posterity will establish!—the truth namely, that this body of ours is mechanical! that its organs are mechanical! that its senses are mechanical! the intellect, the reason, and the soul itself! Yet in course of time the learned world will come to this position. If the great body is mechanical, why not the small? There is no other reason, no other nature; in a word, two natures are impossible.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*, 52

⁸ *ibid.*, 209

⁹ *Ibid.*, 231

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 227

In many respects this is dismaying, coming from one who in less than a dozen years would be daily conversing with inhabitants of an entirely spiritual world. What he is urging is not all that different from materialist arguments today which claim that all the life of the mind, all our loves, fears, hopes and thoughts, are nothing more than the activity of electrons, or the operations of various chemicals in our brain. We may well ask if a passage written later in *Heaven and Hell* applies: sensual men do not understand the differences between the spiritual and the natural, "and are therefore unable to conceive of what is spiritual otherwise than as a purer natural"¹¹ At this point in time Swedenborg seems to have thought that anything created and finite must be geometrical and mechanical. There is just no room for anything purely spiritual, beyond space and time of this world. And the problem of finding an immortal spirit or soul, to his mechanical mind, amounts to finding interior or subtle planes of natural motion. This is the way to establish belief in eternal life and in God. Perhaps he had been affected by a materialistic sphere from Wolff.

To his credit, Swedenborg in his future work receded from this enthusiasm for a mechanistic search for the soul. Never again would he make a diagram of the soul as a thing of nature. But for some time he continued to link the affections and thoughts of the mind with the four natural elements of his *Principia* system. In the years after 1733 he threw himself into the life sciences, especially anatomy and the structure of the brain, and he continued to see our mental life as fundamentally an activity within the realm of nature.

The fruit of all this study began to appear in 1740, when Swedenborg published the First Part of the *Economy of the Soul's Kingdom*. In 1741 came the Second Part, with a preliminary treatment of the soul. Unbelievably prolific, he also wrote, but did not publish, a major work on the minutest fibers of the human brain and body, because he believed the life of the body resided first of all in these simple fibers. He also produced many short works and first drafts on subjects like the red blood, sensation, action. He seems to have envisioned a series of five treatises on the *Economy of the Soul's Kingdom*, the last of which would be his crowning achievement, a study of the soul itself. Much of this work was apparently written, at least in note or rough-draft form, but only the first two parts were published. But before looking at the pinnacle of this series, *The Soul* or *Rational Psychology*, let us note a certain evolution of his

¹¹ HH 38.3

thought from the heady days when he wanted to demonstrate a mechanical soul to our very senses.

Perhaps most important was the development of the doctrine of forms. This was the idea of more and more complex spiral forms within the plane of nature, forms of motion which he still linked with his four elements of the *Principia*. But he also began to envision a form above the highest natural form. He called this the *spiritual* form, and described it as being above all created nature, and thus completely incomprehensible and inexpressible to the human mind, totally abstract and ineffable. In fact this form was even above angelic forms and our souls.¹² The spiritual had begun to get its foot in the door.

And he became more interested in the mind itself, rather than just its mechanical activities. As he contemplated the mind, he was led into a simple, primitive concept of correspondences and representations. His early correspondences were in four degrees, not three, because he was still tied to the four-element system of the *Principia*. But he began to compare states of the soul, mind and body:

guilt in the soul, evil states of the rational mind, sicknesses in the natural mind, diseases in the body.¹³

hell in the soul, evil conscience in the rational mind, anxiety in the natural mind, pain in the body¹⁴

good conscience in the soul, contentment, gladness, laughter¹⁵

Though these are not true correspondences, they involve the basic correspondence concept of hierarchical relationship between different planes of spiritual and natural organics. Swedenborg was beginning to see the reality of the life of the mind and soul.

Some years later, in the *Spiritual Experiences*, he noted that during these preparatory years he sometimes experienced unusual changes of state while he was writing.¹⁶ Perhaps one of these changes of state occurred while writing his rough draft on *Action*. The first half of this little work considers action as caused by various fibers and organs in the brain, as though the secret to action can be determined by brain anatomy. But then he began to consider the operations of

¹² *Fibre* 267

¹³ *Ibid.*, 378

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ EAK I 6 & 9

¹⁶ SD 2951

the *mind* that produce action, and to say such things as the following: "In the mind we view and embrace an entire action before it exists."¹⁷ "Action is an idea of the mind represented in the body by the ministration of organs; consequently the whole body is framed after the image of the operations of the mind."¹⁸ In a rational action "the effect is physical and bodily, and is accompanied with motion, but the end [or purpose] is spiritual and without motion.... We are profoundly ignorant as to the mode whereby the mind's idea and will, flow into action.... Human actions are to be considered as spiritual and not as bodily."¹⁹ This was a rather different approach from the brash self-confidence of the *Psychologica*. Finally he presented a new description of the soul: it was without motion and without parts.²⁰ And so much for the search for a purely mechanical soul.

Little by little, Swedenborg was coming to see attributes and qualities of the mind as truly things in themselves, and not just as activités and vibrations of membranes and fibers in the brain. At the end of the little work *Action*, he said the heats and fires of our actions in fact were desires of the will.²¹ It would seem that primitive correspondences between states of mind and states of the body were revealing more to him than analysis of motion.

In 1792 when he began *Rational Psychology*, his great work on the soul, Swedenborg probably realized that he might not yet have full answers in his search. He was not very sure just what the soul was. Only lately had he redefined the soul as *totally* spiritual, above motion, and without any parts. He was still wedded to what he felt was his fundamental insight of 1733: that our *mental* life comes from the motion and activity of the various membranes, fibers, and natural substances which are composed of the four elements of his *Principia* system. And he now believed this activity was located in the cortex or bark of the cerebrum. Would it be possible to bring together these different ideas of mental life into a coherent whole? Was he ready? The only way to find out was to try, and after years of anticipation, he began the work on the soul, *Rational Psychology*.

¹⁷ *Action* XVI

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, XVII

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, XXII

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XXVII

²¹ *Ibid.*, XXXV

In his Preface he hopefully writes, "Kind reader, if you will deign to follow me...I believe that you will apprehend what the soul is, what its relation with the body, and what its state in the body and after the life of the body. But the way is steep. I would wish that my companions do not abandon me in the middle of my course; but if you do abandon me, I yet pray that you show me favor. And you will show me favor if you have the will to be persuaded that my end is Gods glory and the public gain, and not in the least my own profit and praise." It certainly sounds as if he hopes this will be published. Fifty-four years old, he still has no idea of his future calling; this is not Divine revelation.

At first *Rational Psychology* proceeds as one might expect it to. Swedenborg considers sensation and the five senses as brain activities. Then he moves on to perception, imagination, memory, reasoning, and how we think and form conclusions—these also he sees as essentially motions of different parts of the brain. He thinks the key organic unit of the brain is the tiny cortical gland, millions of which form the cortex, or outer layer of the brain. (The cortical gland is somewhat analogous to the cortical cell.) Our imagination, he thinks, depends on the form of these cortical glands, and vibration of its membranes is what causes imagination.²² Some people are born more imaginative than others, he speculates, because the form of their cortical glands is more adaptable and flexible. Thus different people are born with inclinations towards poetry, music, architecture, mechanics, and so on, because of the differences in shape and pliability of the cortical glands in their brains.²³

This early part of the book is somewhat similar in emphasis to the *Psychologica* of 1733. But it is interesting to see him little by little grow more interested in the mind itself, rather than the various shapes and motions of the brain substance. Moreover, he sees the soul itself as entirely spiritual, above and beyond the body, without parts or motion, without extension or shape or mass. Yet the life of the mind still comes from brain activity.

Even the *pure intellect* is within nature. This, he thinks, is a faculty of the mind even higher than rational thought. The pure intellect allows us to look at our sensations and ideas, and to compare and contrast them, and to see how they agree and disagree with each other. "For the recognition of what is harmonious, analytical,

²² R Psych. 95,99

²³ *Ibid.*, 121

delightful, true, and good, there must be an intellectory which shall judge and shall declare that the idea is in agreement or not in agreement, and is congruous [or not congruous] with a mating idea and with many other [ideas] which are related or similar."²⁴ And even this very high faculty of the mind is essentially the activity of certain tiny particles of the brain, which he calls the simple cortex, or the outer layer of the tiny cortical gland. This simple cortex is the supreme form of nature, the very pinnacle, and he invents a name for it, the *intellectory*.²⁵ It is made up of the finest, most interior elements of nature, and its motion, though within nature, is too complex to analyze by normal mathematical techniques.²⁶ And on he goes to discuss rational thought and conclusion in terms of their brain activities. This part of the book is quite systematic and, to tell the truth, rather boring.

About a third of the way through the whole, Swedenborg leaves the subject of our ideas and thoughts and begins to consider our loves and affections, and it is here that *Rational Psychology* begins to grow fascinating. First he considers the affections of the *animus*, or what we would call the natural mind. What affections belong to the natural mind? Swedenborg includes the following: gladness and sadness, sexual love, hatred of sexual love, conjugal love and conjugal hatred.²⁷ And he considers parents' love of offspring, love of society and country, love towards companions, friendship, hatred, love of self, ambition, pride, arrogance, humility, contempt of self, depression of mind, hope and despair, love of immortal fame after death, generosity, magnanimity, the loves of the world and the body, pusillanimity and folly, avarice, prodigality, liberality, contempt of wealth, compassion, charity, fear and dread, courage, fearlessness, impetuosity, indignation, anger, fury, zeal, patience, meekness, tranquility, impatience, shame, envy, revenge, misanthropy, love of solitude, cruelty, clemency, intemperance, luxury, temperance, parsimony, frugality—and others! What makes this lengthy section so interesting is that while largely ignoring the shapes and motions in the brain supposedly connected with these

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 126

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 124,125

²⁶ See *Fibre 266, etc.*

²⁷ Here we find the first use by Swedenborg of the word *conjugal*, and he clearly applies it to a permanent, eternal, spiritual love between husband and wife, a love that will endure forever, a love granted by the particular providence of God; see R. Psych. 207.

various affections, he considers these affections as realities in themselves, and he analyzes them from examination of his own affections and from what he knows about human beings in the world.²⁸

Then he comes to the affections of the higher or *rational* mind, and he discusses such affections as these: love of understanding and being wise, the love of knowing hidden things, wonder, love of foreknowing the future, love of truths and principles, love of good and evil, affirmative and negative (because our rational mind can affirm or deny good and evil loves flowing in from two directions);²⁹ conscience, highest good and highest truth (which must go together),³⁰ the love of virtues and vices, honor, dishonor, and decorum (the form of moral virtues.)³¹ All of this leads to speculation about how the natural and rational minds are related to each other, and to the soul itself, or the spiritual mind.

Then he moves on to an extended discussion of liberty and free decision. Though our liberty *to do* is restricted,³² he concludes that the *essence* of freedom is the faculty of *thinking freely*, and "consists solely in the mind's ability to induce whatever changes of state it pleases, and to run from one state into another."³³ He recognizes that loves rule our understanding. Does this mean that we are governed by necessity, without liberty? No, because the mind has the ability "to turn itself from one love to another, that is, to reject or dismiss a love of apparent good and evil, and to give itself up to a love of what is truly good, being that which it judges to be best. Liberty, therefore, does not consist in the mind being devoid of any love, desire, or end, for then it would cease to be mind; but [liberty consists] in its ability to embrace one love and reject another; and genuine liberty...consists in choosing the best."³⁴

On he goes in a discussion fascinating for anyone interested in how his mind operates. Short of Divine revelation itself, it is

²⁸ In the course of the discussion he decides that hope, indignation, and avarice are affections not of the *animus* or natural mind, but of the rational mind (p. 14 MS).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 326

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 330

³¹ *Ibid.*, 333

³² *Ibid.*, 363

³³ *Ibid.*, 365

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 366

probably the most revealing and perceptive book ever written on the human mind, with infinitely more to tell us than whole myriads of volumes on the market place today—and he never published it. In later years Swedenborg testified that from early youth the Lord prepared him for his great use, and in many parts of this book on the soul it is easy to see the Lord guiding and directing him towards a greater enlightenment and understanding of spiritual reality.

But wait, we may ask, what about the cortical gland? What happened to the fibers, membranes, shapes, vibrations, and motions in the cortex of the brain? What about his four element system? It is not that he has rejected his theory of the *mind's* operation being tied to *brain* operation. He seems rather simply to ignore it, because he is too interested in the mind itself. Gradually he has come to focus on the will, love and affections rather than on sensation and thought, and to see that the mind has reality in itself, and is not just the way we sense tremulations in our brain substances. Thus the spirit or mind of man is itself becoming his essential study, rather than its natural organics in the brain. Little by little he develops the idea that it is the mind that operates in the brain, not the brain that flows into the mind.³⁵

The reader begins to sense that his original purpose in writing is beginning to unravel, as he darts from topic to topic without much evident organization. He writes about discourse, human prudence, simulation and dissimulation; cunning and malice, sincerity, justice and equity; knowledge, intelligence and wisdom; causes that pervert and perfect the rational mind; the loves of the soul. Almost helter skelter the ideas come.

But the ultimate question cannot be put off forever, and finally he comes to it. Where does all this lead? What happens in the end? What does death do to his elaborate structure of soul, mind, and organics in the brain?

Here again the tone of the book changes. The somewhat chaotic treatment of morality and the mind's operation gives way to speculations about the soul's eternal life. Though there are some falsities inherited from the theology of the church in which he was raised, the last part of the book is in many ways the most enlightened.

But Swedenborg has a problem, and I believe it is above all his difficulty with this problem that discouraged him from publishing this remarkable book. The basic problem seems to be that he still has

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 139,146,153,155,160,166

not abandoned his four-element system. The soul, he now believes, will live forever, because it is utterly and completely beyond time and space. No longer is he looking for a mechanical and geometrical motion that will be immortal: the soul's immortality now depends on its being above and beyond all nature. He realizes *all* the motion of the brain, even its finest tremulations, will die with the body, and herein lies the problem. What happens to all the mental activity which is connected with these tremulations in the cortical glands of the brain? Swedenborg is consistent with the theory he's been working on at the start of the book, and indeed for the last eight or nine years, and he cannot conclude otherwise than that all the activities of the senses, natural mind, and rational mind, perish as their organs in the brain perish. That long list of affections in the natural mind and all those affections of the rational mind simply cease; they are completely dissipated with the death of the brain.

There is one partial exception: the pure intellectory, the simple cortex or outer layer of the cortical gland, the supreme form and pinnacle of nature—this highest of all forms in nature may survive death for a time, perhaps until the Last Judgment, when it will be destroyed in a most pure elementary fire.³⁶ In the meantime the pure intellect, which gives our rational the power of judgment, analysis, and recognizing harmonies and agreements, will survive, though it will have no ideas or affections of the natural or rational mind to shed its light on. Our life will then be a most obscure life, "merely life void of intelligence."³⁷ And in the end even this pure intellect will be dissipated.

So the soul will live forever, but all the life of the mind as we know it will be gone forever. This point apparently worried Swedenborg, and he started a paragraph to the effect that with all this life gone, it would appear that "we ourselves are wholly extinguished" at death. But he crossed this off and went on about the soul.³ And a little later he again worried, "But the subject of death must be treated of clearly and in its different aspects in order that these points may be presented in better coherence."³⁹ Then he moved on to the life of the soul itself, its immortality, the Last Judgment, the form of the soul, heaven and hell, and Divine providence.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 495

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 513

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 496

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 497e

Yes, the soul will have life. Especially after the Last Judgment, when the soul is freed from its connection even with the pure intellectory, the soul will enjoy a happy life totally abstract and beyond all worldly concerns. The soul is without extension, parts or motion and is of totally unknown form. Certainly it will not be in the human form. It will be completely above and beyond everything and anything of this world, and its life will be pure beyond our conception. An evil soul will somehow be a perversion of this very pure life. That was another problem: the soul seems so perfect and pure that it is hard to see how an evil life on earth could pervert it. He worried about this too, believing that somehow the soul could be perverted.

Still, the soul would be individual, and would enjoy pure affections, such as the love of a being above oneself; the love of other souls equally with oneself; the love of society as being many selves; even the love of being close to the one loved; the evil love of *surpassing* in happiness, power, and wisdom; the love of immortality; spiritual zeal; the love of propagating the kingdom of God. Living a life of these purely spiritual and abstract affections, with no human form, souls would somehow congregate together into societies of the happy (heaven) and societies of the unhappy (hell). Every soul is different from every other soul, and a most perfect society of happy souls is the very end of creation.⁴⁰ There is angelic speech and communication, but no thought of the future, no anxiety, no hope, no desire,⁴¹ because everything is eternal. Souls feel joy in their God, who is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the more souls, the happier they are.⁴²

Swedenborg's thoughts come too rapidly to summarize well, but he presents a remarkable collection of insights about eternal life. Yet it is an eternal life somehow deprived of all that we have come to recognize as the life of the mind during earthly life. The essentials are there, and no longer is immortal life sought in a pure mechanical motion, but we are still a long way from the promise in *Heaven and Hell*: "After death man is possessed of every sense, and of all the memory, thought, and affection, that he had in the world, leaving nothing behind except his earthly body."⁴³ The soul of *Rational*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 534

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 541

⁴² *Ibid.*, 542

⁴³ HH 461

Psychology will live forever in happiness with others before God, but it does not appear that the soul will have much to do. Dehumanized, a simple substance without parts and with scarcely any of its previous life, how could it enjoy all the loves, happiness and companionship that Swedenborg wanted to give it?

It was perhaps about this stage in his thinking that seven years later Swedenborg wrote the following:

"Before my [spiritual] sight was opened, the idea I cherished concerning the countless things that appear in the other life differed but little from that of others, that is to say, that in the other life there could be no light, and such things as exist from light, together with the things of sense; a notion derived from the phantasy entertained by the learned respecting the immateriality which they predicate so strongly of spirits and of all things pertaining to their life; from which no other conception could be had, than that, because it was immaterial, it was either so obscure that no idea of it could be grasped, or that it was nothing; for immateriality involves such things. And yet the fact is just the reverse; for unless spirits were organized, and unless angels were organic substances, they could neither speak, nor see, nor think.⁴⁴

By the end of *Rational Psychology* Swedenborg knew that for all the achievements of this remarkable book, he had failed in his fundamental purpose. The *soul* was immortal, and could be forever happy in some purely abstractified existence, but the *mind's* close connection with the motions of his four-element system implied the death of that mind, and what was left for the pure soul to enjoy, while beautiful, must be very remote from the life we enjoy on earth. Moreover, the enlightenment, inspiration and creativity he experienced in writing this book came not from his correlation of mind and brain, but from considering the mind as a thing in itself, to be considered as having its own reality, apart from its connection with the brain.

In a somewhat ambivalent, almost bittersweet conclusion, much less confident in tone than the Preface, Swedenborg wondered which way to go next, and cautiously argued against further mathematical analysis of the soul. Instead he decided to develop a "Key to Natural and Spiritual Arcana by way of correspondences and representations which more quickly and surely leads us into

⁴⁴ AC 1533

hidden truths. Since this doctrine has hitherto been unknown to the world, it behooves me further to dwell on it."⁴⁵ Those are the last words of *Rational Psychology*; and he was no longer writing for the public but a note for his own future studies. He had written perhaps the greatest of his pre-theological works, but he knew it was back to the drawing board.

To conclude: What does one do when one's system fails? Revise it. After *Rational Psychology* Swedenborg in fact did turn increasingly to analyze correspondences in nature and in the mind, and they revealed more to him than mechanical analysis ever had. He abandoned his four-element system and was led to appreciate the *three* degrees in nature and life. Adopting a three-degree system, he went back to the anatomy books even more intently—not, I think, to see the mind itself, but to see the body and its organs as mere instruments, tools, or ultimations of the mind. The mind was the active, while body and brain were its passive organs. He now increasingly saw that reality consisted primarily in mind, not in earthly mechanism, however subtle or fine.

It is ironic that he was led to this insight especially in writing a work intended to culminate his theory of mind as mechanical activity. A large part of the book analyzes the affections, thoughts, imagination, perceptions, rationality, delights, conclusions, and freedom of the mind as realities in themselves, and when he saw that his system would destroy all these at death, leaving only an abstractified soul, he realized just how precious the mind was. Indeed he understood that the real discovery of this book on the soul was the mind itself. When he faced the death of the mind, he must have known in himself that this could not be: it was too fundamental to life to believe it would perish with the body. And the system that demanded the death of the mind must be wrong. The book's very failure with the problem of death was a success in what truly mattered: it showed its author that the mind was reality itself, that he still understood little about it, not even how it could survive death, and that if he would unlock its secrets, he must dwell on the concept of correspondences.

Swedenborg's humility after not accomplishing his goal is evident at the end of *Rational Psychology*:⁴⁶ no longer the brash self-confidence that the key to the entire secret of the spirit lay in proper mechanical analysis, but simply the calm surrender of his long-held

⁴⁵ R Psych. 567

⁴⁶ See also *Generation* 357

methodology, and the realization that he should try to understand correspondences and representations. But humility makes a better student than pride in accomplishment. This work he could not see fit to publish was in fact an enormous step towards the reality of the spiritual world. The Lord's leading in *Rational Psychology* is evident.■

**The Will and its Liberty, and What the Intellect
Is in Relation thereto**

In psychology, it is extremely difficult to search out what the will is, rightly to distinguish it from the intellect, and distinctly to view its parts. The will is not the intellect, for we can will that which goes against our understanding, that is, against a truth that is understood, or against our better conscience; hence the art of dissimulating which rules in the world. We can also act in accordance with our understanding, that is, from a conscience of truth; for the intellect scrutinizes truths, but the will is led to act from some love, and frequently without any understanding as to whether it be a truly good love. Hence the saying, "I know the better and will the worse" (R. Psych. 378).

And now let us consider what the rational mind is. If it is to be rational, it ought not to be carried along from an end to an end naturally or spontaneously, for this is called instinct, and of such a mind is predicated, not will, or willing and not willing, but what is involuntary, being a mind borne along to its ends without conscious knowledge. Therefore, the rational mind, which is an internal sight, must associate with itself an intellect; that is to say, it must not only take into view the truths of its loves, or the ends that are contemplated, as to what is their intrinsic nature, but must also take into view the nature of the means, and the order in which they are to be disposed, if the mind is to attain these ends; and for this, knowledge *a posteriori* is requisite. When the mind associates with itself the intellect it is then called a rational and human mind (R. Psych. 384).