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THE NATURAL MIND AND MENTAL PROCESSES

Introduction

In Part 1 of this series the focus was on man as a whole and his relationship to the spiritual world. In this part we want to expand the treatment of the memory given in Part 1, and touch on sensation, imagination and reason as mental processes. The treatment of these is necessarily brief, and suffers deficiencies on that account. But it provides an essential link to our later consideration of questions central to the study of how and what we know.

Memory

Gerard⁶ says of memory that it "involves the making of an impression by an experience, the retention of some record of this impression and the re-entry of this record into consciousness (or behavior) as recall and recognition...." In addition, the record of past experience can be modified by new experiences, and each particular memory (or engram as it is sometimes called) has a physical basis in the brain, somewhere in the neuronal tissue. Implied also in modern psychological accounts is the view of the memory as a unitary entity. Now although in other respects the Writings and secular treatments are in accord, in this they differ; for the Writings describe the memory as a two-fold structure as was pointed out in Part 1 of this treatise. In addition, while experimental psychology can probe the nature of the functioning of the memory, the Writings present aspects of it which are not susceptible of examination *a posteriori*, and it is to these that we now turn. In particular, we shall comment on four aspects of memory; its role as "the ultimate of order"; its function as the "book of life"; the means whereby retention occurs; and the influence of the internal man on it.

In AC 2492—one number in a series on mans memory after death (AC 2469-2494)—Swedenborg describes from his own experience in the spiritual world the quality of the external memory of various people. This quality is represented by correspondential images. He contrasts the quality of the external memory of people whose focus in life had been themselves (imaged by a "callosity"—

⁶ R. W. Gerard, "What is Memory?" *Scientific American*, Sept. 1953, p. 118.

depicting something that has a hard, ugly, and opaque character), with that of people whose focus in life had been concern for the well-being of others, a focus directed by truth from the Word. With them, their interior memory permits the transmission of spiritual light (truth from the spiritual sun) into the exterior memory. Here "the rays are terminated, and find delightful receptacles there [images from the Word]. *For the exterior memory is the ultimate of order, in which spiritual and heavenly things are softly terminated and reside when there are goods and truths therein*" (emphasis added). Here is given a reason of cosmic proportions for the need for the external memory of man to contain knowledges from the Word—to serve as the basis in the natural universe for all the heavens. Conversely, too, this memory with self-centered people serves as the basis of disorder—the hells. This truth is one of the cornerstones of New Church educational theory; that knowledge from the Word must be present in the external memory to serve as "delightful receptacles" for the influence of (influx from) the Lord via the heavens.

Earlier (in Part 1) we noted that everything "a man hears and sees and by which he is affected" (AC 2474) is preserved—as to ideas and intentions—in his interior memory, and that "not anything perishes; although the same things are obliterated in the exterior memory" (*ibid.*). We noted, too, that this complete record is what constitutes a person's "book of life which is opened after the death of the body and according to which he is judged" (*ibid.*). Evidence for the existence of this record is gained through psychiatric exploration of patients' past either in or out of the hypnotic state. And the "obliteration" of things in the external memory with death (not so stated but implied, as the passage is in the series on the memory after death) must be understood to mean loss of *conscious recollection* only, for elsewhere (AC 2476) it is clearly stated that the exterior memory is retained in all detail. This brings home to us the recognition of the exterior memory as a *spiritual* rather than a corporeal entity. If it were not so, it would not survive death and the destruction of neuronal tissue.

The Internal Memory

While the nature of the external memory can be explored by *a posteriori* means, the internal memory cannot. We therefore turn to the Word. In *Arcana Coelestia* 2490 it is reiterated that in the interior memory is "retained...not only all and each of the things the man from his infancy has ever seen and heard, and those he has thought,

spoken and done; but also those which he sees and hears, and which he thinks, speaks, and does, in the other *life*." We ask now what is the character of the objects retained in the interior memory?

In *Arcana Coelestia* 2471-2474 is given the following: (1) The objects of this memory are ideas of thought and ends (purposes and intentions), and anything spoken and done from them (AC 2474). (2) These are associated with words of speech as they are in the external memory, but are on a higher level of ideas; and for this reason after death a person can communicate with other spirits universally, and at length—after judgment—with people in heaven or hell, because everyone after death is in the function of this interior memory which finds expression correspondentially in a universal language (AC 2472). (3) This memory "surpasses the exterior...as light to darkness" (AC 2473). (4) The interior memory while distinct from the exterior (AC 2471) is nevertheless the causative factor in all thought, and continuously operates into the exterior memory. So in *Arcana Coelestia* 2470 we read:

Man, while living in the body, can scarcely be aware that he has an interior memory, because the interior memory then acts almost as one with his exterior memory: for the ideas of thought of the interior memory flow into the things of the exterior memory as into their vessels, and the two are then conjoined together. The interior memory is also the origin of all thought:

To the interior memory pertains the ideas of the speech of spirits, which are of the inner sight, and all rational things [ideas having to do with good and truth] from the ideas of which thought itself comes into existence (AC2471).

(5) *Arcana Coelestia* 9394.5 is a key number in describing the interrelationship of the two memories, and the nature of the interior memory itself. We read:

That scientifics are vessels, and in the Word are signified by vessels of every kind, as by "basins," "cups," "waterpots," and the like, is because every memory-knowledge is a general thing that contains in it particular and singular things that agree with the general; and such generals are disposed into series, and as it were into bundles; and these bundles and series are in turn so arranged in order as to bear relation to the heavenly form; and thus everything is set in order from things the most singular to those the most general.

We note that the things in the exterior memory are the vessels or containers of what can be added from above; and the sequence general, particular, and singular involves a discrete series—in the sequence natural, spiritual and celestial.⁷

Then following illustration of the ideas by their correspondential counterparts in the human body, Swedenborg goes on:

...all the muscles, and the motor fibers contained in them, in the whole body, have been so set in order as to concur in every action according to the pleasure of the will, and this in a manner incomprehensible.

Thus the "generals" that the muscular fibers comprise are activated from above by the affectional influences (causative influences on a discretely higher plane) that cause the motor activity that the person desires.

And then follows the most significant part of the passage, when we read:

So it is with the knowledges of the memory, which also are in like manner excited by the delight of the man's love, which is of his will, yet by means of his intellectual part. That which has been made of man's life—which is that which has been made of his will or love—excites them; for the interior man has them constantly in view, and is delighted with them in so far as they agree with his loves; and those things which enter fully into the loves, and *become spontaneous*, and as it were natural, vanish out of the external memory; but remain inscribed on the internal memory, from which they are never erased. In this manner scientifics become of the life [emphasis added].

We understand this to mean that the external memory is activated from within, from the loves and affections that compose a man's will. So, when anyone wants to do anything he unites this desire with his understanding as to how to do it; then jointly these search out in the memory the knowledges that will enable him to do the behests of the will. Thus the will and the understanding "flow into" the knowledges—as vessels—and activate them. And further, note that "those things which...[have] become spontaneous, and as it were natural, vanish out of the external memory but remain

⁷ A brief treatment of this is given in an article of mine entitled "Generals and Particulars," *Academy Journal*, 6:2:19-25. See also AC 5114:4.

inscribed on the internal memory, from which they are never erased." This is the Book of Life spoken of in the New Testament Word. By way of illustration, if the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" is known and yet does not deter one from stealing when the opportunity arises, it is as yet in the external memory; but once taken to heart—elevated to the interior memory—it becomes natural for the person not to steal, and no conscious thought need be given to it for it has vanished from the external memory, and has become a kind of permanent engram on the interior memory. We take this to mean also that someone who repeatedly breaks the law likewise establishes a permanent engram on the interior memory, and will continue to break the law whenever he considers this to be in his best interests.

This is further illustrated by our ability to predict—within certain limits—the kind of response to certain circumstances we are likely to get from people we know well. We learn from recognized behaviour patterns that an obliging friend will willingly help in a given set of circumstances—knowing, as it were, that his internal memory has a set of permanent engrams disposing him to be helpful. Note also the emphasis given to the volitional aspect of men with whom knowledges are "excited by the delight" of their loves. From common perception we know how excited we can become in the contemplation of the delight associated with the fulfillment of some desire. Thus, although the impressions of the interior memory are beyond the realm of consciousness, nevertheless we can contemplate the constant influence they have in directing our lives. Finally, we note the means whereby things are fixed in our memories. First it is the *internal man* (the spiritual and celestial degrees of the mind above the natural degree) that makes possible the implantation of memories—even those obtained in childhood "from the objects of senses, especially from the hearing" (AC 1460); and recall that with hearing there are strong affective factors. Quoting from this passage:

For...there are in the external man receiving vessels, called the things of the memory, and these are formed by means of knowledges..., the internal man flowing in and helping; and consequently knowledges are learned and are implanted in the memory in accordance with the influx of the internal man.

And to emphasize the overriding importance of affections in establishing things in the memory (memory retention) we read in *Arcana Coelestia* 1900 (and see also AC 4018):

Man's very life is from the internal man, which cannot have communication with the external, except a most obscure communication, until the receiving vessels that are of the memory have been formed, which is effected by means of knowledges (*cognitiones et scientiae*). [2] The influx of the internal man goes into the knowledges of the exterior man; *affection being the means* [emphasis added].

As an aside, the educational implications of this last phrase are far-reaching. As every teacher will tell, unless interest (affection) is aroused in the learner, no learning of any real value will occur; maybe temporary lodgment in the external memory later regurgitated in testing when an appropriate stimulus is given. By way of substantiation, note this from *Arcana Coelestia* 4018: "Truths and goods that are learned, but with which the man is not affected, do indeed enter into the memory, but adhere there as lightly as a feather to a wall, which is then blown away by the slightest breath of wind."

Sensation, Imagination, and Reason

It is beyond the scope of this treatise and the capability of the author to present a detailed account of these processes. They have been the subject of enquiry for centuries by philosophers, aestheticians, logicians, theologians, and lately by experimental and rational psychologists; and all the literary, artistic, scientific and technological works of man are the product of their operation. And in every waking moment each man is employing them—indeed consciousness may be defined in terms of the activity of one or more of these processes. However, in the context of New Church thought they are associated with a view of the mind which in some vital respects differs from other views, and we must therefore present an outline of them.

The concept of discrete degrees was outlined above, and it is important to keep it in mind. Of particular importance is the idea that what brings about the opening of a discretely higher degree (plane) of the mind—what brings into play a discretely more interior plane—is *love* and its attendant affections, love being like a genus, and affections varieties and species within it. To be explicit, the structure of the whole spiritual world can be described in terms of the following loves: love of the Lord, which is the primary motivating force of people residing in the highest or celestial heavens; love

of the neighbour, which is at the center of the lives of people who live in the spiritual heavens; and loves of the world and self which rule with people dwelling in the hells.⁸

Turning now to the topic of this section, the Writings of the New Church and secular studies are in agreement in the recognition that sensation (perception in modern usage), imagining, and reasoning are all interdependent, and essentially on the same plane. Henderson,⁹ for example, refers to the "quasi-discrete" degrees of the natural mind, implying that sensing, imagining, and reasoning are respectively more interior, but not on discretely different planes in the sense described above. More recently, Taylor¹⁰ expressed essential agreement with Henderson, although giving emphasis to the idea that imagining (image making) is very closely related to sensation, more so than perhaps Henderson had in mind. And in contrast to either of these views, Eccles describes imagination as "the highest level of mental experience" in the following quotation:¹¹

Imagination—the synthesis of new ideas and images from elements of past experiences and perceptions—is a process that goes on in the sheet of gray matter, .1 inch thick and 400 square inches in area.... The way to the imagination,—the highest level of mental experience, lies through the lower levels of sensory experience, imagery, hallucination and memory, and that is the path we shall follow [in the article]. All that we shall learn must itself, of course, be a product of *perceiving, reasoning and imagining* by our brains [emphasis added]!

In contrast with Eccles, Henderson and Taylor give to reasoning (seeing relationships, forming inferences and conclusions) a higher place than Eccles in the hierarchy of mental processes. But this difference is not substantial, and all three agree that there is essen-

⁸ For detailed accounts of the structure of the spiritual world and its influence with men on earth, see *Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell and Divine Love and Wisdom*.

⁹ W.C. Henderson, "The Formation of the Natural Mind," a paper presented to the General Church Educational Council, 1952.

¹⁰ D.M. Taylor, "Putting the Imagination in its Place," a paper presented before the General Faculty at the Academy of the New Church, Feb. 1979.

¹¹ Sir John C. Eccles, "The Psychology of Imagination," *Scientific American*, Sept. 1958, p. 135.

tial interdependence between the processes, and that they all belong on the natural plane of mental activity.

However, New Church thought departs from secular in a fundamental way once we move away from consideration of the lower mental processes. The point of departure arises from the New Church recognition of the existence of discrete degrees and of the role played by the driving forces of all mental activity—motivating loves.

Expanding our concept of man from a New Church viewpoint, we note that men while in the natural world are associated as to their mental life with men in the "world of spirits," the region between the heavens and the hells where men sojourn for whatever time is necessary after death to allow them to find out where their eternal home shall be—in a heaven or a hell, depending upon the quality of their ruling love. Being so placed while in the natural world is what makes possible man's freedom in spiritual matters,¹² for he can freely turn to hell to receive influences from there, or towards heaven and receive its influx. The *motivation* for so turning this way or that comes either from hereditary tendencies to evil which focuses a man's life on himself and the world, or from the good affections implanted by the Lord during infancy and childhood. These latter are called "remains," and are represented in some biblical passages as a "residue" or "remnant" (see AC 5897:2,3). It is these that not only enable man to be human, "to know what is good and true, to reflect upon matters of every kind, and consequently to think and to reason" (AC 560), but also permit the opening or development of a higher plane of the mind called "the rational."

In Part 1¹³ it was emphasized that the term "rational" as here used does not carry connotations of reason as commonly employed. Furthermore, it can appropriately be applied to a person who has developed a sense of what is right and good, irrespective of the degree of development of his reason (his capacity to form conclusions), which is very largely a function of education. Indeed, most human beings have the rational faculty developed to a greater or lesser extent so long as there is at least some sense of morality, and particularly if this is founded in reverence for God and the teaching of His Word.

¹² For an extended treatment of the New Church concept of freedom, see "Providence and Free Will in Human Actions," *New Philosophy*, vol. 86, 1983.

¹³ *New Philosophy*, vol. 87, no. 1, Jan.-March 1984.

The rational degree of the mind, then, is something above sensation, imagination and reason, and is depicted in the Old Testament Word by Ishmael (Abraham's son by Hagar)—the "first rational"—and by Isaac (Abraham's son by Sarai)—the "second rational" or the "true rational." These are well described by Odhner in *The Human Mind*,¹⁴ and we can do no better than quote passages from the chapter entitled "Types, States, and Degrees of the Rational Mind."

The human Rational is distinguished into types, not only by reason of race or sex, but also according to the affections which motivate and lead it. Therefore we learn in the *Arcana Coelestia* how the Rational gradually changes its quality as man's character develops and is regenerated. This is told in the internal sense of the story of Abram's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac.

Ishmael represents the rational as first formed. It is conceived by an influx of life through the internal man and born of an "affection of knowing" (signified by Hagar, the Egyptian hand-maid). The natural affection of knowing which thus sees itself dignified as the mother of the future rational mind, becomes so inflated with self-importance that it will not acknowledge any spiritual truth (AC 1911). So long as this is the case, nothing rational can be born in man. But when there comes a recognition that it is evil and falsity in oneself that is opposed to spiritual truth and good, then the first Rational is born (AC 1944).

It is often pointed out in *the Arcana* that it is not the ability to argue or reason that makes a man 'rational,' but the ability to see truth in the light of truth (AC 4156: 3, 6240: 2). Reasoning, or what is properly called 'ratiocination,' may be merely the mental process of confirming one's positions by skillfully imitating the modes of rational thinking. The Rational is said to be born when the untrustworthy quality of the Natural is acknowledged, and there is a submission to the superior authority of the spiritual truth of Divine revelation.

The Rational is procured through experience, and especially by reflection on the truths of moral and civil life, as well as by reasoning from doctrine or from the Word (AC 2657). But in its first form it partakes of worldly things; it has in it a love of truth which is defiled by self-love and conceit. It indeed fights

¹⁴ H. Lj. Odhner, *The Human Mind*, SSA, Bryn Athyn, Penna., 1969.

whatever is not true. It has learned the lesson of self-compulsion, and submits the natural man to a stern discipline. Yet it is cold and hard, glorying in its skill, and its hand is raised against every man, seeing all as if they were in falsity. It acts from truth separated from good, and thus feels no pity and seeks not to bend minds but to denounce them. It is morose and contentious and unyielding and inspires fear (perhaps respect) rather than love and confidence. It is significantly depicted as Ishmael, the 'wild-ass man' the proud desert warrior (AC 1949-1951, 1964).

The judgment exercised by this "First Rational" is immature and superficial. It lacks sympathy and therefore fails to understand the complex states of human life. It does not penetrate beneath appearances. A man who has such a rational is impatient and intolerant even with himself, and grows bitter and discouraged. His judgment is compared to unripe fruit—sour, and not sufficiently exposed to the sunshine of charity.

Yet it is within the First Rational that spiritual freedom begins to be exercised. In its endeavor toward self-compulsion and submission to the dictates of truth, man begins to receive a new and heavenly proprium—a new character—from the Lord (AC 1937,1947). By degrees, affections of good and truth are implanted as seeds of a new beginning. The fruit ripens. The judgment mellows.

The "Second Rational" is formed from spiritual affections "implanted by the Lord in a wonderful manner in the truths of the First Rational." And as this is being done, the things which are in agreement are vivified, but the rest are separated as useless; until at length spiritual goods and truths are collected as it were in fascicles—into an organic form. Yet the First Rational, with everything in it—all its states—remains with the man; it is not removed, but only put aside (AC 2657).

To indicate the totally different nature of the "Second Rational," the Word represents it by *Isaac*, the son of Abraham by his wife Sarah. Isaac, the man of peace, represented an affection of heavenly truth and a new state in which man believes that the good and truth which he receives are not from himself, so that he disclaims pride and merit and begins to feel delight in good and in truth for their own sake (AC 2640, 2657) [Odhner, 1969, pp. 83-84].

The development of this rational degree of the mind is contingent upon the formation of a conscience that the implanted remains make possible. This conscience—also called a new will—can exist in discretely different planes, depending on the source of the affection that fathered it. Hence (and we are here quoting from Odhner) "where a perception of what is good and true, from a love of the Lord" exists, having its origin in the celestial heavens, a person has developed the "interior rational"; when a man has a "conscience of what is spiritually good and true" from the spiritual heavens, he has his "exterior rational" developed; while the "inferior rational" or "interior natural" is operative with people who have a conscience of what is just and equitable in moral and civil life, having its source in the lowest or natural heavens.

In Part III of this series we shall examine reflection, perception and enlightenment as means whereby knowledge of one kind or another is acquired.

(To be continued)

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ON SWEDENBORG'S ANIMAL KINGDOM

The following was quoted in an editorial in *Newchurchman* (2:782-83, 1844) from the medical journal *The Forceps* (Nov. 16, 1844). We thank Prof. Richard R. Gladish for drawing our attention to this extract.

[T]his is the most remarkable theory of the human body that has ever fallen into our hands; and by Emanuel Swedenborg, too! [*sic*] a man whom we had always been taught to regard either as a fool, a madman, or an imposter, or perhaps an indefinable compound of all three....

...we can honestly assure our readers...that we have carefully read through both volumes of it, bulky though they be, and have gained much philosophical insight from it into the chain of ends and causes that govern in the human organism. What has the world been doing for the past century, to let this great system slumber on the shelf...? It is clear that it yet knows nothing of its greatest men....

Emanuel Swedenborg's doctrine is altogether the wisest thing of the kind which medical literature affords, and cast into an artistical shape of consummate beauty. Under the rich drapery of ornament that diversifies his pages, there runs a framework of the truest reasoning. The book is a perfect mine of principle, far exceeding in intellectual wealth, and surpassing in elevation, the finest efforts of Lord Bacon's genius.

...we opened this book with surprise, a surprise grounded upon the name and fame of the author, and upon the daring affirmative stand which he takes *in limine* [at the threshold]. We close with a deep-laid wonder, and with an anxious wish that it may not appeal in vain to a profession which may gain so much, both morally, intellectually, and scientifically, from the priceless truths contained in its pages.

And to indicate the goal of Swedenborg's endeavors, we quote the first paragraph of the Prologue to *The Animal Kingdom*:

Nothing whatever is more to be desired, or more delightful than the light of truth; for it is the source of wisdom. When the mind is harassed with obscurity, distracted by doubts, rendered torpid or saddened by ignorance or falsities, and truth emerges as from a dark abyss, it shines forth instantaneously, like the sun dispersing mists and vapors, or like the dawn repelling the shades of darkness. For truths in the intellect or rational mind are analogous to lights and rays in ocular vision; falsities that have the appearance of truth are analogous to unreal or phosphoric lights; doubts, to clouds and shadows; and ignorance itself is thick darkness and the image of night: thus one thing is represented in another.

—Editor