

ORDER IN NATURE

The Divine sphere of order which flows from the Lord never stops midway, the Writings say, but continues all the way down into the outermost things of nature. This is the source of the amazing order which even an atheist can see in nature, though an atheist knows nothing of its true significance.

In the *National Geographic* television program titled "The Brain," Carl Sagan stated that "there is not one smidgen of evidence that there is a mind other than the physical brain." He restricts himself to the physical evidence, obviously, for there is certainly a wealth of other kinds of evidence for the existence of the mind. He is very impressed with the wondrous construction of the brain, but in denying the mind as a distinct spiritual entity he is missing the whole significance of the brain.

Signs of Divine Love

And what is the real significance of the amazing order in all created things? They are signs of the Lord's Divine love.

Divine order is caused by the Divine good that flows forth from the Lord. It begins in Him, goes forth from Him through the heavens in succession into the world, and is *terminated there in outmosts*; and everything there that is in accordance with order is a correspondence. Every thing there is in accordance with order that is good and perfect for use, because everything good is good in the measure of its use... (HH 107; also 305, 315).

Divine order, then, comes from Divine good, which begins in the Lord and comes through the heavens and all the way down into nature, all the uses of which correspond to the good from the Lord.

Furthermore, the Lord is a Man, He is Human, and from Him heaven is in the human form, the human form being simply the form of the Lord's Divine love. The order of nature is the same—it is a *human order*, the order of human life. The order of love.

*Second installment. The first installment was published in vol. 88, no. 4, pp. 559-576.

The universal heaven is founded in love, and so is universal nature; for in nature nothing whatever is possible—in which there is any union and conjunction, whether it be animate or inanimate—that does not derive its origin from love. For every natural thing comes into existence from something spiritual, and the spiritual from the celestial. *Hence love, or a semblance of love, has been implanted in all things* in general and in particular; with man alone there is not love, but the contrary, because man has destroyed in himself the order of nature. When however he can be regenerated, or restored again to order, and can receive mutual love, then there is "the covenant," or conjunction by charity (AC 1055; emphasis added).

The fact that there is order in nature is undeniable. The solar system is a good illustration, the fine balance that holds the planets in their courses around the sun. The science of ecology posits a natural order, a complex web of life, in which there are precise relationships between all things in nature. The balance of nature is very intricate, but we can see that it is a delicate balance, and that a disturbance of one part has far-reaching effects. It is a law of nature that the prosperity or extinction of one species affects others. They are all bound together as parts of a larger whole.

Our thesis is that the thing that binds all created things together is not a by-product of nature, or something that exists just because of the way natural forms evolved, but rather that this force—order—is above or prior to nature. It is not produced by nature, but rather nature exists from it, and reflects it.

Divine Intelligence and "Humor"

The word often used for this ordering force is "intelligence." For those inclined to believe in God, the order of nature is evidence of Divine intelligence. Even scientists (such as Einstein) who do not believe in a personal God perceive that there is superhuman intelligence of some kind governing creation. It is manifest in the order of the universe, which so impressed Einstein, although he was of the opinion that this intelligence was inherent in nature itself. In his essay on "Science and Religion," Einstein wrote of being "moved by profound reverence for the rationality made manifest in existence," and of the need to attain "that humble attitude of mind toward the

grandeur of reason incarnate in existence... which, in its profoundest depths, is inaccessible to man. This attitude appears to me to be religious in the highest sense of the word."¹⁴

We sense the presence of this supernatural intelligence when we observe colonies of ants or bees, flocks of birds, schools of fish, or migrating herds of caribou, in which great numbers of animals act in unison, as if they were so many cells in one great body moved by a single brain. It has been observed that, functionally, there is no such thing as a *single* termite. We are also impressed by individual instances of creatures, even lowly insects and fish, which instinctively do things which illustrate the presence of intelligence, and even humor. The many fascinating kinds of camouflage and breeding rituals come to mind.

Lewis Thomas, a medical doctor and author of several popular books on biology, was once invited by a magazine editor to make a list of his own "seven wonders of the modern world." Third on his list is a species of beetle which exists in a relationship with a mimosa tree which is indeed wonderful.

This beetle is not new, but qualifies as a Modern Wonder because of the exceedingly modern questions raised for evolutionary biologists about the three consecutive things on the mind of the female of the species. Her first thought is for a mimosa tree, which she finds and climbs, ignoring all other kinds of trees in the vicinity. Her second thought is for the laying of eggs, which she does by crawling out on a limb, cutting a longitudinal slit with her mandible and depositing eggs beneath the slit. Her third and last thought concerns the welfare of her offspring; beetle larvae cannot survive in live wood, so she backs up a foot or so and cuts a neat circular girdle all around the limb.... The limb dies from the girdling, falls to the ground in the next breeze, the larvae feed and grow into the next generation, and the questions lie there unanswered.

How on earth did these three linked thoughts in her mind evolve together in evolution? How could any one of the three become fixed as beetle behavior by itself, without the other two? What are the odds favoring three totally separate bits of behavior—liking a particular tree, cutting a slit for eggs, and

¹⁴ Albert Einstein, "Science and Religion" Ken Wilber (ed.), *Quantum Questions, Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists*, Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boulder, Colorado, 1984, p. 111.

then girdling the limb—happening together by random chance among a beetle's genes? Does this smart beetle know what she is doing?

And how did the mimosa tree enter the picture in its evolution? Left to themselves, unpruned, mimosa trees have a life expectancy of twenty-five to thirty years. Pruned each year, which is what the beetle's girdling behavior accomplishes, the tree can flourish for a century.

The beetle-mimosa relationship is an elegant example of symbiotic partnership, a phenomenon now recognized as pervasive in nature. It is good for us to have around on our intellectual mantelpiece such creatures as this insect and its friend the tree, for they keep reminding us how little we know about nature¹⁵.

How can anyone be satisfied with the explanation that all this just "evolved"? This is just one of the endless examples of things in nature which lead us to ask, "what does it *mean*?" We know it must correspond to something spiritual, but more than this it is hard to say. One thing is clear, though: the mimosa beetle has no mind of its own, so its useful and ingenious behavior must be guided by Divine intelligence. Thomas's question "Does this smart beetle know what she is doing?" is similar to the series of questions posed in number 335 of *True Christian Religion*, "Does a bee think in his little head..." about how to find and gather nectar and build a hive? "Does the silkworm think in its little head" about how to make silk? The ordered actions of such creatures make it appear as if they think as man does. But the intelligence is not theirs. We call it instinct, but this is nothing other than "influx from the spiritual world" (TCR 335.6).

The amazing things we see in the animal kingdom give evidence of something which is at least akin to a sense of humor. I think these things spring from the same source as what we call humor, namely, Divine rationality. There are many kinds of laughter, and, as the Writings note, laughter very often involves feelings of contempt. But the real essence of laughter, I believe, is a sense of the incongruous, and there could be no incongruity unless there were an accepted order upon which our expectations were based. We expect one thing because we take a certain order for granted, and when something else happens we laugh. Some of the amazing things in

¹⁵ Lewis Thomas, *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony*,

nature strike our sense of the incongruous in a way which is analogous to humor. (And not just in nature, but especially in human beings. If we think of God as a Man, is it not permissible to imagine Him enjoying His creatures and laughing at some of the things men do? The word "jovial" comes from Jove.)

The humor in nature is perfectly innocent; it is a rejoicing in the endless surprises flowing from Divine wisdom. Our humor usually involves some violation of order from below, whereas the Lord's Divine wisdom is *above* the order we perceive—it does not violate natural order, but because it is above our perception of natural order it surprises us as it comes into nature. Real humor (not just contemptuous laughter) requires rationality. Isaac, who represents the rational, was named for "laughter." We call something that seems incongruous with our understanding of natural order "humorous." There is an analogue to this in the delight which is felt when we perceive something of the Divine wisdom coming into nature from above. "Humor" seems a poor word for it, but laughter—the kind of laughter in pure, innocent, childlike delight—seems appropriate.

Very often the delight in what we call "humor" is a delight in some disorder which is presented to view; but for one who desires order, the revealing of disorder is also a revelation of order, and such a person finds delight in the perception of order. The delight which attends the perception of order in nature is different from the delight produced by a joke, but the key element in each is rationality. The delight in humor is often a delight in disorder (but not necessarily), while the delight found in nature is a rational delight in order. The Writings note that an artist will place an ugly face next to a beautiful one to accent the beauty by contrast (TCR 61). Similarly, the spiritually rational person has a special delight in order because he sees the contrast with disorder. In C. S. Lewis's book *That Hideous Strength*, one of the characters is placed in a room in which all the furnishings and pictures are distorted or grotesque in some way, and when he emerges he is filled for the first time with a conscious appreciation for the *normal*.

Miracles

We spoke of Divine wisdom coming into nature from above, with results analogous to humor. Another, more special, effect of Divine influx into nature is a miracle.

People sometimes wonder if the Lord's miracles were not contrary to order, or at least to natural order. Since they were done by

the One who is Order Itself, we can answer with assurance that the Lord's miracles could not have been contrary to order. Whatever the Lord does is, by definition, according to order.

Divine miracles have been wrought in accordance with Divine order, but in accordance with the order of an influx of the spiritual world into the natural world; about which order nothing has been known heretofore, because heretofore no one has known anything about the spiritual world (TCR 91).

In regard to the miracles of healing, we would say that the condition of health miraculously restored represents true order while the disease represents disorder. The disease, not the miracle, was contrary to order.

But what about turning water to wine, and calming the storm? In these cases, I think we have to begin by asking, what is the order of nature? The laws of nature are not contrary or opposed to the laws of heaven, but are the working of the Lord's Divine order on a lower plane of life. In changing the water to wine and stilling the storm, the Lord did not violate the laws of nature so much as He temporarily imposed a higher order upon nature. The "violation" of natural law was from *above*. There are degrees of order, and in the case of a miracle the natural degree is momentarily suspended so that a higher degree of order may operate. The special thing about a miracle is that in this case the higher order is made to act into and become manifested on the natural plane in a fuller and more immediate way than usual.

For the sake of illustration, we might reflect upon how Divine law operates in heaven and in hell. The law is the same, but it operates differently according to the states of those who live under it. In hell, punishments are in order. The Lord does not will them, but He permits them for the sake of order. And He also, according to an even higher order, restrains them as far as possible.

Another example is temptation. Temptations are necessary to regeneration; we would not regenerate without them. Yet they are not from the Lord; He tempts no one. Temptations themselves are orderly in one sense, in that they are the means of bringing a person into order, and so they are permitted. But in another sense they are disorderly.

As with punishments and temptations, so with disease. It occurs according to natural order, but in itself is disorderly. It was according to the law of nature that a man was born blind, due to some

congenital defect. But that natural law was always subject to and even expressive of a higher law, namely the Lord's Divine wisdom, manifesting itself here in the law of *permission*. The law of permission is an orderly expression of Divine love, but it was according to an even higher expression of this love that the man was healed.

Normally, this higher expression of Divine love operates only in heaven; but heaven is where the Lord is, and when He was on earth heavenly laws could operate here. The immediate application of His Divine love so as to restore order (sight) to the blind man without any physical process of healing was not a violation of order, but a fuller and more concentrated application of order. All healing, actually, is from an influx of the spirit into the body; a body from which the spirit has departed will not heal itself. And of course the life of the spirit is only from the Lord. It is according to Divine order that disease is permitted, but disease itself is not orderly; healing is orderly. In the miracles of healing, the Lord simply restored order more quickly than would normally be the case. And how really essential is time?

The Lord's healings were tied to the faith of the person cured. In this disordered world a good person may have a sick body; in the miracles of healing, the Lord simply restored the harmony between a healthy soul (one in which faith lived) and the person's body.

The Lord's miracles were distinguished from magic by the fact that they all had reference to the states of the church, and were mostly miracles of healing (AC 6988.3, 7337, 8364.6). His miracles represented the restoration of spiritual order which He came to accomplish. The "miracles" of magicians in ancient times and in the spiritual world resembled Divine miracles outwardly because they were produced according to the same order of influx from the spiritual world; but these were done by a misuse of their understanding of this order.

Magical miracles, although in outward form similar to Divine miracles, nevertheless have within them a contrary end, namely that of destroying the things of the church; whereas Divine miracles have within them the end of building up the things of the church (AC 7337).

Miracles are not done today, the Writings explain, because they would compel belief, and even this external belief would depend upon continual repetition of miracles (AC 5508.3; DP 133; TCR 501). Actually it is "manifest miracles" which have ceased, "and

miracles have succeeded which are unknown to man, and do not appear, except to those to whom the Lord reveals them" (SD 2434). Everything in this world which exists from the Lord is a miracle, really, if we have eyes to see this. "Consider the lilies." All the things in nature, which exist and are held in their progression and order by Divine influx, are miracles, but we do not recognize them as such because these miracles are "invisible and continual" (SD 2434).

Life itself is a miracle. Nature in itself is dead. According to the order of nature, our bodies should decay, but as long as life from the Lord flows into them, they live. This imposing of life upon the body is not contrary to the order of nature, since the body was created for the sake of receiving life from the Lord, yet for a body to live is not inherent in the natural material of the body, and so in a certain sense we could say that for any body to live is a miracle. We do not consider this a miracle simply because it is so common. Still, people often use the word "miracle" when a baby is born.

The Art and Science of Nature

To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven
in a wild flower... (Blake).

The works of human imagination and engineering pale compared with the marvels of nature. If we have eyes to see, there is such wisdom, and love, manifested in all things of nature, especially considered in the complex, that we can only say, in the words of the Psalm: "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8.1).

The best works of human technology are only copies of natural things. Before man invented the airplane, the Lord made the bird; before the hypodermic syringe there was the snake's fang; before that marvelously simple and useful invention, Velcro, there were burrs in the field (which, by the way, inspired the inventor of Velcro); before man ever invented barbed wire, the principle was used by plants with thorns and creatures with spines in nature; dolphins and bats used sonar long before man, and ours still can't approach theirs in quality; no man-made glue equals that made by a barnacle; no computer can compare with the human brain, no pump with the heart, no camera with the eye. And soon; the list is endless. The essential order which is in all beauty and use may be found in nature.

I think the connection between beauty and use is nicely illustrated in a jet plane. On the one hand, it is a completely utilitarian structure, designed according to strict physical laws so that it can fly. And yet the resulting object is very aesthetically pleasing. The streamlined shape of an airplane reminds me of a shark's body. A bridge is another example; it is built according to practical engineering principles to carry weight, and yet, with no decoration, the structure is usually graceful and appealing to the eye. The Eiffel tower is another example. Musical instruments, also, though designed to produce a certain sound, are also very beautiful visually. A cello or French horn is a work of art just to look at. It is the same with things in nature—they are designed for a use, and as a result are also beautiful. The beauty is not incidental, but is inherent in the use. Another outstanding example of the conjunction of use and beauty is a butterfly's wing—the scales which give it color in various lovely patterns, are also essential aerodynamically. Of course, even if they weren't, it could be said that just being beautiful is itself a use. The scales serve the butterfly for flight, but they serve man by giving delight. Similarly, the parabolic arrangement of the petals of some flowers act like a miniature radio telescope, focusing the sun's warmth on the seed-forming organ at the center of the flower. The petals perform a vital practical function and are also beautiful.

The beauty in various natural forms of use is a human beauty, a Divine beauty. And the quintessential form of use is the human form:

Man, as regards both his exteriors and his interiors, is a form of all uses, and all uses in the created universe correspond to those uses in him God as a Man is the form itself of all uses, from which form all uses in the created universe derive their origin, thus that the created universe, viewed as to uses, is an image of Him. Those things are called uses which from God-Man, that is, from the Lord, are by creation in order; but those things which are from what is man's own are not called uses; since what is man's own is hell, and whatever is therefrom is contrary to order (DLW 298, emphasis added; cf. n. 65; also Div. Love III, IV, V, VIII).

The Golden Section

Many of you are no doubt familiar with the "golden section" in which a line is divided into parts having a ratio of roughly 5 to 8.

These numbers are part of a series known as the Fibonacci series, in which each succeeding number is equal to the sum of the preceding two numbers. So 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc. Any number in the series divided by the following one approximates 0.618, and any number divided by the previous one approximates 1.618. Another way of describing the division: a line is divided unequally into two sections, so that the length of the whole line bears the same relation to the larger of the two sections as that section bears to the smaller. The ratio, roughly .618 to 1, has been shown to be the basic proportion of growth in nature.

In ancient times this proportion (known as the "Divine proportion") was recognized as especially pleasing aesthetically, and it is found in Greek temples, for instance. And before the Greeks, the Egyptians used it in the pyramids. The golden rectangle made with these proportions is found everywhere in buildings and other things made by man (as in window panes, playing cards, fireplace openings, billboards, and in a thousand other familiar structures). We instinctively like this shape. Why? It incorporates the proportion of growth found in nature, of course, and for this reason is pleasing. But why this particular proportion is so universal in nature, I don't know. It must in some way reflect Divine order.

The golden section is embodied in various forms. The spiral built on the golden rectangle is seen in various shells (the chambered nautilus, for example), in the arrangement of sunflower seeds, flower petals, the outside curve of beaches (such as Cape Cod), and many other places, even spiral galaxies. This same spiral also appears in the path certain insects follow to a light, or a shark to food.

Most especially, the golden section is found throughout the proportions of the human body. So the mathematical ideal in Greek temples and vases is a *human* proportion. And in this way, too, man is a microcosm; the mathematical harmony of all the created universe is beautifully represented in the human body.

Much has been written about the golden section, especially since around 1900 when Jay Hambidge, a researcher at the Yale School of Fine Arts, discovered its use as an important principle of design that had been lost since hundreds of years before Christ. He called this principle "dynamic symmetry." The following are some brief quotations from a book I have found interesting in that it demonstrates how a certain basic order, based on the golden section, may be discerned in every created thing.

The power of the golden section to create harmony arises from its unique capacity to unite the different parts of a whole so that each preserves its own identity, and yet blends into the greater pattern of a single whole. The golden sections ratio is an irrational, infinite number which can only be approximated, yet such approximations are possible even within the limits of small whole numbers. This recognition filled the ancient Pythagoreans with awe; they sensed in it the secret power of a cosmic order. It gave rise to their belief in the mystical power of numbers. It also led to their endeavors to realize the harmonies of such proportions in the patterns of daily life, thereby elevating life to an art¹⁰.

The idea that the root harmonies in music... correspond to good proportions in the human body, and should therefore also be followed in architecture, became a leading idea among the masters of the Renaissance¹⁷.

So the same Divine order is represented in a seashell and in a Greek temple, in a musical composition and in a Gothic cathedral, in an airplane and in a human body.

The Roots of Art

Another fascinating book I'd like to refer to is called *The Roots of Art*.¹⁸ In it the author, an architect and professional photographer, notes: "Everything made by human hands and most things conceived by the human mind have their prototypes in nature." The book is filled with photographs illustrating this point. The author shows what marvels of engineering and design are seen in the structure of plants, seeds, shells, skeletons, butterfly wings, and other natural forms. Again and again he notes the mystery in these things. How can it be that a minuscule blob of slime such as a snail can make a shell which is a marvel both of aesthetic design and engineering? Clearly, the snail shell exhibits intelligence, and it is also obvious that this intelligence does not belong to the creature itself.

The astounding thing about the book is that the author, who expresses his amazement with the beauty and wisdom of natures

¹⁶ Gyorgy Doczi, *The Power of Limits*, Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1981, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 96.

¹⁸ Andreas Feininger, *The Roots of Art*, Viking Press, 1975, p. 10.

designs on every page, seems to reject the only satisfactory explanation for these phenomena—namely, the wisdom of the Creator. All the things pictured in his book cry out that there is *intelligence* behind natural designs. The author himself sees that this intelligence is not possessed by the snail or the bird. Who is the designer then? Incredibly, he passes over the idea of God, and simply demands that we consider the question. "Some people find reassurance in God. Others, like myself, are still searching. To find ultimate truth we must be free spiritually—free from taboos and superstition, free from dogmas laid down in fear and ignorance and never revised in the light of added knowledge...."¹⁹

It is ironic that one who has collected so much evidence of Divine wisdom is "still searching"; that one who obviously prides himself on having an open mind has apparently closed it to the very truth for which he has presented so much proof. But it is usual in our society, which prides itself on being scientific, to attribute these things to nature. "Nature" and "Evolution" are spoken of as if they were sentient beings. "Nature planned it this way . . ." "Evolution decided to . . ." The intelligence and deliberate purpose are manifest, and since references to God are unscientific, these qualities are assigned to nature and evolution. The effect is given credit for causing itself.

In any case, we, too, may feel a sense of awe and delight at the manifest wisdom and order in nature. Then nature truly does become, as it should be, one of the foundations of truth, along with the Word (see SD 5709).

There is a great power in natural things rightly seen. Some of you are familiar with the book *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers, in which the author speaks of how belief in God came to him as he contemplated the exquisite structure of his little daughter's ear. Could anything so perfect and beautiful just have *happened*?

My daughter was in her high chair. I was watching her eat. She was the most miraculous thing that had ever happened in my life My eye came to rest on the delicate convolutions of her ear—those intricate, perfect ears. The thought passed through my mind: "No, those ears were not created by any chance coming together of atoms in nature (the Communist view). They could have been created only by immense design." The thought was involuntary and unwanted. I crowded it out

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of my mind. If I had completed it, I should have to say: Design presupposes God. I did not then know that, at that moment, the finger of God was first laid upon my forehead.²⁰

In a wonderful book called *The Seven Mysteries of Life*²¹, the author tells a story about an 18th-century Irish earl who, inspired by the discoveries of Kepler and Newton, had a working model of the solar system built inside his castle. A friend, who happened to be an atheist, was awed by this apparatus. "Where did you get this magnificent thing? Who made it?" the earl's friend asked. "Nobody made it. It just happened," the earl answered. "How could that be?" retorted the atheist. "Surely these intricate gears and wheels couldn't create themselves. Who made them?" The earl stuck by his answer while his friend became more and more frustrated, then finally proposed a bargain. "I will promise to tell you truly who made my little sun and planets down here as soon as you tell me truly Who made the infinitely bigger, more wonderful and more beautiful real sun and planets up there in the heavens."²² The point was taken.

The Writings, also, appeal to the wisdom evident in nature as testimony of the Lord's providence. I was especially struck by this passage in *Divine Providence*, which speaks of how perfectly ordered and useful for man things in the natural world are, and then asks:

When these things go forth regularly in accordance with the laws of Divine order established in their first creation, how is it possible for the primary end, which is the salvation of the human race, not to go forth regularly in accordance with the laws of its order, which are the laws of the Divine Providence?

Watch a fruit tree. Does it not first have birth as a slender shoot from a small seed, and does it not afterwards gradually grow to a trunk and spread forth branches, which are covered with leaves, and then put forth blossoms, and bring forth fruit, depositing therein new seeds by which it provides for its posterity? The same thing occurs with every shrub, and with every herb of the field. In these do not each and all things go

²⁰ Whittaker Chambers, *Witness*, Random House, New York, 1952, p. 16.

²¹ Guy Murchie, *The Seven Mysteries of Life*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1978.

²² *Ibid.* p. 611.

forth regularly and wonderfully from end to end in accordance with the laws of its order. *Why not likewise the primary end, which is a heaven from the human race?* Can there be anything in its progress that does not go on most regularly in accordance with the laws of the Divine Providence? When there is so regular a progression of the Divine Providence in the growth and regeneration of trees, there must need be a regular progression in the reformation and regeneration of men, who are of much more value than trees (DP 332; cf. Luke 12:6, 7, 25-28, which the number quotes; emphasis added).

The Buddha once gave a sermon without saying a word; he merely held up a flower before his disciples. And of course the Lord said, "consider the lilies."

Reverence for Nature

The feeling we should have toward nature is one of reverence, not for nature itself, but for God in nature.

Richard Weaver says there must be a restoral of "piety" (to use his word) toward nature, the neighbor, and the past, if order is to be restored to modern society. The point is that these are things *outside ourselves*, which we must respect. The following are a few selections from the chapter on "Piety and Justice":

I see no way to sum up the offense of modern man except to say that he is impious It is the nature of unlimited egotism to deny any source of right ordering outside itself Piety is a discipline of the will through respect. It admits the right to exist of things larger than the ego, of things different from the ego. And before we can bring harmony back into the world, we shall have to regard with the spirit of piety three things: nature, our neighbors—by which I mean all other people—and the past.

This continual warring upon nature is not a sign of superiority to her; it is proof of preoccupation with nature, of a soft of imprisonment by her This immersion in the task of reconstructing nature is an adolescent infatuation.

The spoiled-child psychology is encountered almost solely in those people who have abandoned nature Turn where we

will, we find that *the countryman has a superior philosophic resignation to the order of things*. He is less agitated by the cycle of birth and death; he frets less; he is more stable in time of crisis. He is better integrated than his city cousin because *he has piety enough to accept reality, which is possibly tantamount to a belief in providence*.

Santayana has observed that we should take leave of life as Ulysses took leave of Nausicaa, blessing it but not in love with it; and I think that our attitude toward physical nature should be similar.²³ (Emphasis added.)

The irony is that those who are most infatuated with nature are least able to see the real significance of nature; while those who look beyond nature are able to see its real meaning and essence, namely the Divine order which nature represents. Those who give "glory to God in the highest" actually have a greater love and appreciation of nature than those who view nature as supreme. A philosophical naturalist or materialist ignores the essence of the very thing he worships; he sees the body but not the soul of nature.

The case is similar with a humanist. He holds man to be supreme, yet he is blind to the true essence and source of the very humanity he worships, that is, God. Again, in regard to human society, those who place all importance in life in this world, dismissing heaven as irrelevant "pie in the sky," are ignorant of the best plan for improving society in this world. A really successful life in this world requires knowledge of heaven, in which we find the pattern for human society on earth.

The true way to view nature is to look beyond the things of external sight to the spiritual things which they represent.

When a man who is looking at external things from internal sees the heavens, he does not think at all of the starry heaven, but of the angelic heaven. . . . And when he sees the immensity of the heavens, he does not think of their immensity, but of the immeasurable and infinite power of the Lord. It is the same when he sees all other things, for there is nothing that is not representative (AC 1807).

Carl Sagan take note!

²³ Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, Midway Reprint Series, Univ. of Chicago, Chicago, 1976, pp. 170-175.

Adherence to Nature in Art

In the great epochs of expression, Weaver says, art is faithful to nature.

But what are we to say of epochs like our own in which art appears unnatural, grotesque, and irresponsible, so that we feel it to be the product of some dangerous subjectivism? Is not this the parting of the ways which occurs when man leaves the truth of reality and expresses himself in isolation?²⁴

A contemporary American artist whose work I like very much is Andrew Wyeth. His paintings are far more than just nostalgic, bucolic scenes, as they might at first appear, but are filled with abstract power. Many imitators have painted similar subjects, but their pictures somehow lack the deep insight and emotion in Wyeth's paintings.

In any case, there can be tremendous abstract depth in a realistic painting. Just as the letter of the Word is necessary for us to get at the spiritual sense, so natural forms are necessary to contain the deeper truth that can be conveyed by art. By natural forms I mean actual, representational forms. The power in a painting is not just in the colors or shapes, though these may be beautiful, but in the things depicted—things in nature, or things made by man, and man himself.

I don't mean to be dogmatic about this. Surely there is such a thing as good abstract art. Wyeth himself has expressed admiration for the abstract drip paintings of Jackson Pollock. And nature itself is an abstract artist in a sense, as in the lovely patterns on tree bark, seashells, etc. But I would tend to call this "design," which, while part of art, is not art itself. Or at least I would say art has more to it.

Art should express something human and evoke some human feeling. Things from nature, even if there are no human figures present, can do this, I think. The reason is that everything in nature represents something human. Wyeth's paintings almost always have something made by man in them, but even when they do not, there is something powerfully evocative of human feelings in them.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 79.

I cannot say exactly what the feeling is that is aroused by, for instance, a close-up view of a sandy river cove, a few pebbles, bleached shell, and a herons track, beside water dark with the reflection of cedars, but it is something supernatural. It is not just a pretty scene. Or, another example: a dead blackbird lying in a brown winter field, the bird and the weeds around it shown in detail while the field stretches away to a bleak horizon. There is something in that picture; the winter of the soul, I suppose we would say. Wyeth was feeling the loss of his father when he painted it, but you don't really need to know that. The dead bird, the winter weeds, the colorless sky—these perfectly recognizable natural things convey a human feeling as no merely abstract forms could.

The Japanese are known for their highly developed aesthetic sensitivity and love of nature. Yet nature for them does not mean "nature gone wild." Rather, the ideal is to recognize an already existing form and assist or cooperate with nature to achieve the beauty of that form. And recognizing the form does not depend upon mathematical symmetry, but upon "seeing with the heart into the natural beauty of the world."²⁵ A Zen garden may seem abstract, but the arrangement of things is not arbitrary. Rather, natural forms are most carefully arranged for the sake of a spiritual end. In one of the most famous gardens, it has been discovered that the placement of the boulders in the expanse of raked sand corresponds exactly to the grouping of the stars in the constellation Cassiopeia. Was this deliberate? No one knows. Could it be that the planner of that garden, without ever noticing the constellation or deliberately following it, perceived some natural order which is also, coincidentally, present in the constellation? An amazing thought. (I realize the constellation appears as it does only from earth, but considering what is said later in this paper about man being part of the universe, that fact may not weaken the point.)

Many artists of the 19th century were strongly influenced by the Japanese ideal, which became known at that time when Japanese prints first became available in Europe. Van Gogh was one who wrote of his debt to Japan. And Van Gogh and Wyeth, as different as their paintings are, have each expressed their determination to adhere to nature in their art. They have said that the only way really to capture abstract power in art is to stay with natural forms. For

²⁵ Stuart D. B. Picken, *Shinto, Japan's Spiritual Roots*, Harper for Kodansha International, New York, 1980, p. 61.

this reason Van Gogh insisted on doing much of his painting outdoors, even under broiling sun, or in high wind, or at night. It is called representational or realistic art, but the reality which is actually being represented is not so much the thing depicted (a house or barn, tree or person), but the spiritual quality which it represents. Wyeth has said that his art is actually very "abstract" and this is true. The great Canadian wildlife artist Robert Bateman (who has written of his debt to Wyeth) makes the same point about his art; he may be painting an owl or an antelope very realistically, yet in his eyes it is an abstract painting. Abstract things exist within concrete forms, and it seems to me that there is actually more abstract power when the form is something recognizable. An abstract form seems to exist for itself or draw attention to itself, while a form from nature invites us to consider the spiritual reality represented in the form. There is no spirit apart from a body (angels have bodies); the spirit is organic—organized—and the body in which it exists should represent that order.

Faithfulness to nature, then, is a prerequisite for capturing in art that which lies behind and above nature, that is, spiritual reality. Just as we can abstract spiritual truth from the letter of the Word and nature, so there must be natural forms in art from which to abstract that higher reality which gives art its significance. Especially the human form.

Much has been written about Van Gogh's reverence for nature, and his striving to be true to nature in his painting. His voluminous letters display an extreme sensitivity to the beauty of nature. But above all it was man and his suffering that interested him. As beautiful as nature is, this world is marred by human imperfection and sorrow; yet the teachings of the Lord (the Bible was Vincent's favorite book) restore order to human life, and this is the supreme art.

The figure of the human Christ still attracted him. If he wrote of God as an artist whose one great creation, the world, was "a study that didn't come off" (Letter 490), he revered Christ as the supreme artist, "more of an artist than all the others, disdaining marble and clay and color, working in the living flesh" (Letter B8).²⁶

²⁶ Bogomila Welsh—Ovcharov (ed.). *Van Gogh in Perspective*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1974, p. 165.

"Abstract art" may be interpreted, but I always feel that not much real meaning is found in this kind of intellectual analysis. The inexpressible sense of humanity, the deeper order, is missing. I would compare it to a sentence composed of nonsense words—you can arbitrarily assign meaning to mumbo-jumbo, but what's the point? Why not use real words to express real ideas? Things in nature have correspondential meaning, so they are like words; and since the Lord made them, they are like His Word. Truth rests on the Word and on nature, and neither is a human production (see SD 5709). If thought is to be true, it should be based upon the Word; if art is to be true, it should be based upon nature. I do not agree with "art for art's sake," as that phrase is sometimes understood. Not that art should serve some propagandistic purpose, of course, but that it should serve to reveal some aspect of Divine order. The best way to do this is to be true to nature, which, as Van Gogh said, is God's art.

Although Vincent may not have produced in writing a whole philosophical system, he was nevertheless a thinker, because he was filled with a sense of the deeper cohesion of the cosmos, and because in everything he did one feels a religious motivation.²⁷

Perhaps it is naive to speak of what art *should* do. But should not everything serve a use? No doubt there are several uses that art may serve, one of which is simply to reflect the spirit of the age. In fact, it is almost inevitable that art will reflect the society in which it is produced. But there are always good and bad aspects in any age. It would seem better for art to focus on and seek to represent what is spiritually good, rather than just give expression to the artist's own feelings or the evils and confusion of the times. If some of what is acclaimed as great art today reflects the spirit of our age (and I suppose it does), it is cause for alarm. Look at the work of Jasper Johns, one of the most celebrated contemporary American artists, for example. Acclaim for this kind of art always makes me think of the story of the emperor's new clothes.

"Art for art's sake" is a good principle in the same way that "truth for its own sake" is a good principle. It is true that the Writings advocate love of the truth for its own sake, but what is "its own

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

sake?" We have to know what the purpose of truth is. The sake for which truth exists *is good*; to love truth for its own sake is to love it for the good it makes possible. And so with art—surely there is an end, or a good, for which it should exist.

(To be continued)

Notice to Authors

The New Philosophy publishes articles addressing philosophical questions and topics that bear on the works of Emanuel Swedenborg. Articles that endeavor to contribute to the growing body of philosophical thought based on the theological works of Swedenborg are of particular interest. Philosophical commentary that reflects Swedenborgian or New Church thought on the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities is also welcome. Articles are examined by two referees.

Manuscript

Authors should submit *three* copies of the manuscript with the following items on *separate* sheets: figures, figure captions, footnotes, references, and acknowledgments. The manuscript should be typed, double-spaced, on 8 1/2 by 11 paper with ample margins. Word processor printouts may be submitted provided they are of good quality and easy to read. Authors should retain a copy of the material because the editor cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage. Twenty-five reprints of articles are supplied to authors on request, free of charge.

Style

In the manuscript, three levels of heading may be used, clearly marked in the margin by circled A, B, or C. Footnotes should be numbered continuously through the whole text, not section by section. Authors are requested to follow the footnote and reference style employed in recent issues of the journal.