

Swedenborg's Philosophy as a Whole

IV. The Divine End as a subject continued; and to "define the meaning of the terms 'natural' and 'divine' "

446. Review leading to the conclusion that the divine end is obtainable in man.

The principal subjects of *The Infinite* are three arguments: First for the existence of the Infinite as the cause of the finite; Second, for the existence of a nexus between the Infinite and the finite; Third, for the existence of the divine end, and that it is obtained in man. Let us review the spirit in which these arguments are conducted, keeping in mind that existence is the subject and not nature.

1. Swedenborg tells us clearly in the first two sentences of *The Infinite* what his view is concerning the Infinite as the cause of things finite.

In order that we may be favored and happy in our endeavors, they must begin from the Infinite or God, without whom no undertakings can attain a prosperous issue. He it is that bestows on all things their principles; from whom all things finite took their rise; from whom we have our souls, and by whom we live; by whom we are at once mortals and immortals; to whom, in short, we owe everything (*Infinite* p.7).

2. Yet the principal effort of the first hundred pages of *The Infinite* is an argument that the Infinite exists and is the cause of things finite. It is addressed to those

of the philosophical temper, and these, with such a disposition... will not be withheld from sacred subjects by the dictum that they are revealed (p.8).

3. This is followed by an argument that there is a nexus between the Infinite and the finite.

4. To this is added the question

Whether there be any source besides mere reasoning, from which we can know the existence of the nexus (pp. 99-100).

The source is revelation, which tells us

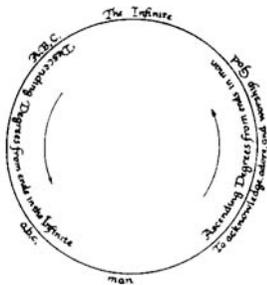
that the connection between the finite and the Infinite is effected by the only-begotten infinite and God— Thus then we have agreement of revelation with reasoning (p. 101).

5. This brings us in the review to the four final notes of the previous installment, so I will refer to them briefly. Note 442 considers the two statements referred to in item 4. Note 443 explains the heading "Man is the ultimate effect in the world through which the divine end can be obtained," Note 444 under the heading "But hear now in what this divine or infinite predication may consist," begins a series of conclusions of which the first is

Thus the true divinity in man, who is the ultimate effect in which the divine end dwells, is none other than an acknowledgment of the existence and infinity of God, and a sense of delight in the love of God (p. 112).

Note 445 under the heading "The Circle of Creation and Formation,"¹ concludes the previous installment with the following:

¹ Because the circle of creation and formation was introduced and described in earlier notes (New Philosophy Oct.-Dec. 1980, notes 380-382) and that issue of the New Philosophy may not be easily available to some readers, the following is added. How man is the last effect in descending order from the Infinite is given in number 380. In number 381 it is shown that man is so created that, first, "he can acknowledge the existence of God as the Infinite"; second, that man can be "sensible in love, or delight from love, of a peculiar connection with the Infinite"; and third, that "All worship proceeds from this foundation of faith and love" (quotes from The Infinite pp. 111-112). In number 382 there is a figure to illustrate the circle of creation. It is here reproduced.



A,B,C — Series of finites, of actives, and of atmospheres.
 a,b,c, — Mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms

In describing the diagram the following was included: "The circle is a continuous circle originating in the Infinite as the highest or most prior degree, descending by intermediate degrees to the final or ultimate effect in finite creation, and returning by ascending intermediate degrees to the Infinite. 'Continuous circle' does not refer to continuous degrees but to a continuity from degree to degree, wherein no intermediate degrees are missing."

... yet this divine principle could never be realized in man, unless his body had a soul given to it out of the purer and more perfect world, and unless reason were afforded as the fruit of the intercourse between the two with a power of concluding by self-contemplation, by the view of effects, and by everything in the world, that there is a God, and that He is infinite; although human reason cannot do this of itself, inasmuch as man, with all his parts and his very soul, is finite; notwithstanding which, he may be a fit recipient, and as he is in the finite sphere, he may concur to dispose himself for reception (p. 112).

The series of concluding remarks is brought to an end with the following:

Thus we see that the end is obtainable through man alone, and through no other creature, although other creatures may be regarded as means to the existence of the ultimate effect [i.e. man], and therein of the divine end. Therefore the acknowledgment of God, with faith for its ground, is the foundation of all worship (p. 112).

447. "Objection: The divine end is not obtained in the ultimate effect, that is, in man."

But while the mind is thinking on this subject, many perplexing considerations cannot fail to arise, and first it may be argued, that if the above were the impelling cause of creation, or what is the same thing, were the final cause in the Infinite; and if man be the ultimate effect designed to realize the divine end; then it is evident that although there is the final cause in God, yet the Infinite has not obtained His end. From which it is inferred, that failure in this respect argues a certain imperfection and finiteness, destructive of the divine infinity in the cause. For if the end does not answer to the cause, what becomes of the infinite in the cause? Besides which, we do not see that there is any divine end in the ultimate effect *per se*; and how is this difficulty to be surmounted? (p. 113).

448. Step 1 of "Reply to Objection: God has exercised His prevision and providence at once, to ensure obtaining the primary end, by giving a soul to the body" (Heading of Section XIV, p. 118).

God foreknew that the high degree of perfection in the first thing of creation could not be present in all successive things down to the

corporeal body, so he created a soul "consummately rational" and "most perfect." But the soul was not alone in government; there was the body.

And here we might expatiate at great length on free-will of man, and specifically on that which the first man enjoyed in worldly things... (p. 121).

Thus the subject of free-will is introduced early in Swedenborg's philosophy. Free-will in its turn will be a principal subject when philosophy turns to man as the subject. But let us be content as to Step 1 with the following selection:

Let us therefore continue the thread where we left it, and proceed with the conclusion, that the infinite Deity has exerted both prevision and providence, in making all things tend to the divine end; and this, through a soul destined to have dominion over the body, and with the body to govern the determination of the will: through a soul which was endowed therefore in the first man with a superlatively perfect direction to that primary end (p. 121).

449. Step 2 of "Reply to Objection: By the only-begotten Son, who took upon Himself the ultimate effect" (heading on p. 124).

The Only-Begotten has been introduced before, that is, in the final paragraph of Chapter I of *The Principia* (Note 429), and again as an alternate argument to acknowledge the existence of the nexus (Note 442). For immediate benefit to the reader I quote extensively from *The Infinite*.

Now by the fall, and the dominion of the body over the soul, the connection was broken and the end would have been frustrated. But God provided against this by His infinite, only-begotten Son, who took on Him the ultimate effect of the world, or a manhood and a human shape, and thereby was infinite in and with the finite, and consequently restored the nexus in His own person between the Infinite and the finite, so that the primary end was realized. Thus we see that all things have conspired to it; that to further it man has a soul given him, whereby he becomes a rational being: that the soul and the body have a divided and at the same time a combined dominion in the human will: that as the Deity foresaw that the issue of this dominion would be unhappy, *He provided for the event by a connection of man, or the last effect, with the Infinite, who thus Himself*

became the last effect, at once God and man, the Mediator between the finite and the Infinite. That so by Him alone, and through our connection with Him alone, we ourselves are ultimate effects to the primary end. And that without Him there would be no connection between the last effect and the Infinite; whereas through Him somewhat of the divine may dwell in us, namely, in the faculty to know and believe that there is a God, and that He is infinite, and again through Him, by the use of the means, we are led to true religion, and become children of God, and not of the world. This, however, is not the place to enquire what the nature of the above connection is. For the present let us be content with the certainty, that through the only-begotten Son of God, the first finites are connected with the last, and both with God; and that the nexus itself is the infinite in the last and the first alike; as we stated before (pp. 124-125, emphasis added).

450. Step 3 of "Reply to Objection: How the end may be obtained in the Gentiles" (heading p. 125).

Since the argument is difficult to preserve by abstracting, and the conclusion would be merely to restate the heading, I again quote at length:

Now the question is, whether those who were and who are ignorant of the coming of the Messiah, could, or can, be in the divine end? I answer that they can. For whoso has faith in the Infinite, does not exclude from faith the only-begotten Son. It is true he does not distinguish between the two, because he cannot; nor can the persons in the Godhead be distinguished in faith in point of divinity and infinity. Hence those who can believe implicitly in God and the Infinite, thereby implicitly include all that is infinite in God, yea, even those attributes of which they themselves are ignorant. And as there is a divine essence in faith, so therein the one infinite is inseparable from the other. And thus although the gentiles be ignorant, yet even in this point there can be no negative principle, for if they believe in the Infinite, they comprise all that there is in the Infinite. Nevertheless they can neither become partakers in the divine end, nor believe, nor be saved, otherwise than through that infinite nexus, without whom there is no salvation. The only question remaining therefore is, whether we are made partakers of the divine end by the advent of the

Messiah, by His assumption of the form of the ultimate effect, whereby He has connected it with the Infinite; or whether, for this result, we also require to possess a knowledge of His advent? I reply that those who did not know, and do not know, that He has come, could and can, become partakers, by the grace of God, through His coming; for otherwise we should suppose something in God that would seem at variance with His divine nature and end. But as for those who know the Messiah, or have the opportunity to know Him, we say that they too are made partakers through His coming, but the knowledge also of His coming is necessary to them, in order to [*sic*] their faith; for the quality of faith is determined by knowledge, and its perception rendered distinct and full; and therefore where knowledge is given, it and faith are inseparable. But on this head we shall have more to say when, in pursuance of our present plan, we come to treat divine worship. Here we are only desirous to show what the end of creation is, and to prove that it exists primarily for the Infinite or the Creator; and that everything in the created universe tends thither (pp. 126-128).

451. Step 4 of "Reply to Objection: There are many secondary ends" (heading, p. 128).

This "subject opens,

But lastly, if the primary end be infinite, and terminates as it begins in the Infinite, for whom alone the world was created, are there not other ends also for the existence of man? Was he not meant to enjoy the earth as a possession? to enjoy human delights? (p. 128).

Among examples given that contribute to the affirmative are as follows: those originating and persisting in sight and hearing that affect the soul with delight; "the privilege which is possessed by the soul, united to the body by the tie of natural harmony; all things pleasurable"; "if the thought of God is in its enjoyment, converting all things into still more exquisite delights." All these things and more are listed that can contribute to acknowledging, loving and worshipping God. Added to these are enjoyments associated with gaining nourishment, procreating and rearing offspring (pp. 129-132).

Thus we see that as all secondary ends can tend to the primary end, so human delights are not really at variance with it (p.132).

But if regarded as ends in themselves, they can, as delights, become self-consuming. Eating candy comes to mind as an example.

The delight, however, that tends to the divine end, inasmuch as it dwells in finite parts, has its origin indeed at the same time as reason, and has also its increments and its degrees; yet we see that instead of reaching the highest degree, and then declining and diminishing until it vanishes away, it ever tends to the very acme of perfection, up to the hour of death, when it ought to be present in all the perfection of which it is capable (p. 132)....

452. "CONCLUSION: Let us now define the meaning of the terms 'natural' and 'divine ..' " By these words the last few pages of *The Infinite* are introduced. It is easy to give examples of what is natural (see pp. 134-6). However, with regard to what is divine, Swedenborg runs into a "but."

But yet there is nothing natural but is divine. The only difference is, that the primitive is made natural by God immediately, while the other substances successively arising and subsisting from it, are made so mediately (p. 136).

The brevity of this statement can be misleading because of a complexity. The words do not explicitly say so, but a comparison is being suggested between two relations: 1. Relation between soul and body. 2. Relation between the Infinite and primitive of the world. Comparison by analogy is suggested at first because of an apparent similarity between the two relations. As to the soul-body relation:

Apart from the soul there is neither action, passion, life, nor intelligence in the body. The immediate effluence and minister of the soul is that analytic, philosophical, and distinct rationality by which we are distinguished from the brutes. All the remaining operations are the property of the soul, although only mediately (p. 137)

As to the Infinite-primitive of the world relation:

And in the same way nothing whatever can exist in the macrocosm of the world, but is referred to the Infinite; without

whom there is neither existence nor substance; for in Him is the source, cause and end of the whole universe And hence without the Infinite there would be neither activity, life, nor intelligence in any subject in the world, and above all, neither existence nor subsistence (p. 138).

But Swedenborg observes that "Analogical instances illustrate, they cannot demonstrate." The demand for the stronger condition of demonstration does not mean that illustration be discarded, because in order to avoid total ignorance illustration has some benefit:

Thus by the comparison of the soul and body it seems possible to gain some little light respecting the connection of the Infinite with the world (p. 137).²

In suggesting the superiority of demonstration over illustration, that is, in seeking an alternative to analogy, Swedenborg may have associated "demonstration" with mathematical proof, such as is completed when "Q.E.D." is added. The use of geometry (together with rational philosophy) is one of the means leading to true philosophy, and *The Principia* illustrates Swedenborg's use of it. In his time, geometry was regarded as an example of thought that leads to certain knowledge. Such knowledge arises for Swedenborg in some of his inductions that depend on anatomical observations, and lend support to the way of philosophy when these are conclusions of causes from effects. At least he seems to take that view in Chapter 1 of *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom* on "The Composition and Genuine Essence of the [Red] Blood," since he placed the letters "Q.E.D." at the end of the chapter.

Returning to Swedenborg's discussion on comparison, we come upon,

² It is interesting to notice that Jacques Maritain in referring to a treatment of his on analogy also uses the expression "to shed a little light."

The pages on Chapter V devoted to analogy of being and the transcendentals are not an exposition in *forma* of the doctrine of analogy. They are simply an attempt to shed a little light on certain particular important aspects of the doctrine from the point of view with which we are concerned, to wit, the critique of metaphysical knowledge (Appendix II, "On Analogy" in *On Degrees of Knowledge*, Scribner's, New York, 1959, p. 418).

But if the reader should choose to adopt a different argument, proceeding by induction, he may, if he please, reason of the Infinite from things in the finite sphere (p.138)

As we shall see later, the use of induction rather than analogy becomes essential to Swedenborg's philosophy as it leads to what he calls the "analytic way." And yet, as he closes *The Infinite* with the following words, he withholds support not only for analogy but even induction, if induction is included in what makes rational, or philosophical sense.

Yet whatever inferences we make in the way of analogy and comparison from finites to the Infinite, conduce to illustration indeed, provided they are not contradictory to the case, but they in no wise help us to form an analytic induction in a finite and geometrical sense. All modes, and analogues of modes, and of such it is that analysis [induction] is formed, begin in the simple or primitive of nature, and not in the Infinite, in and from whom nothing can be said to exist, or issue, immediately, by any mode which is intelligible to us in any geometrical, analogical, rational, or philosophical sense whatever (pp. 138-139).

From these final words of *The Infinite* it is clear that further philosophical exploration of the Infinite is ruled out. As indicated by the title of its companion work *The Mechanism of the Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body*, the subject to be explored now will be the relation between the soul and body. That is philosophically possible because both the soul and the body are finite. But even long time devotion by Swedenborg to that subject testifies that the search was not easy. Even after ten years and at least as many volumes, the search was not complete. Nevertheless, the experience gained in natural science, in examination of causes by means of philosophy, and training in reasoned exposition of the results, were parts of the preparation of Swedenborg to become Seer and Revelator.

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A word may be useful about the use of "Induction" and "Analysis" in the works that compose his progress report on the search for the soul. Most of the Chapters in *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom* open with selections from anatomical works. Then follows a section headed Induction, which consists of statements to be treated of in the Chapter (see e.g. Chap. 1, p.32). It is the same in *The Animal*

Kingdom except "Analysis" replaces "Induction". (For this meaning of analysis see *Chambers Encyclopedia*, 1751 edition, or in *The New Philosophy*, Oct.-Dec. 1968, philos. note 250). The sections, whether headed Induction or Analysis, begin with anatomical effects. By induction each effect is related to a cause as a first step. Further induction leads to a higher cause, and so forth even to causes or ends in the soul.

453. **"...the primitive is made natural by God immediately, while the other substances successively arising and subsisting from it, are made so mediately."** If we review things so far, we find that to relate the first finite thing, by whatever name, to the Infinite is a difficult if not impossible problem for philosophy. The "first finite" in the *Principia* theory is clearly finite and is mediately related to the Infinite by what is named "the first natural point." So the problem there reduces to the question, what is the first natural point? And thence to the further question, how is the point related to the Infinite? In the effort to answer these questions two headings of successive numbers in *The Principia* are as follows

This point is produced immediately from the Infinite.(p.54)

This natural point is pure motion which cannot be conceived of according to any laws of geometry.(p.55)

In the explanation that follows the latter heading, are the words, "... Thus it cannot be viewed geometrically, but rationally"(p.56).³

³ What is the meaning of "but rationally"? There are two meanings to question: one is in the "but"; the other in "rationally." A few lines later this description is given of "Rationally speaking."

Rationally speaking, if there be a composite, there must be a simple; if there be anything extended, there must be something not extended; if there be anything mixed, there must be something pure; if there be a part, there must be a whole; that is to say, if there be a mixed and partial motion, there must be a pure and total motion. Pure motion may therefore exist, but not in space, or in a medium consisting of finites, or among finites (p.56).

I have heard persons explain the early part of *The Principia* in terms of what is "simple" and of that which is "pure and total motion." But I must confess that such explanations have not been rationally understood by me. As to the "but," somewhat later Swedenborg wrote,

How then are we to conceive of this purity and totality in motion? Certainly in no other way, if geometrically and rationally understood, than as an internal state, or effort [*conatus*] to motion(57).

In what follows in Chapter II of *The Principia*, that is, on the first natural point, it is the term *conatus* (effort) that is the subject, not so much the term "first natural point." In *The Infinite* there is another change; it is *nexus* not *conatus* that is the name of what is immediate to the Infinite. Even as there is an argument for the existence of the Infinite as the final cause, there is also an argument for the existence of the nexus as the connection of the Infinite with what is finite. Further, instead of the term "first finite", used in *The Principia* it is "first primitive" or simply "the primitive" in *The Infinite*. And still further, it is as if the reasoned argument to the existence of the nexus is not regarded by Swedenborg as sufficient, because he wrote,

... let us see whether there be any source besides mere reasoning from which we can know the existence of the nexus (*Infinite* pp.99-100).

Thus there is raised the possibility that there is an alternate or complementary argument to the reasoned one. The exploration of that possibility results in the following:

... [thus we have] the declaration that the final cause belongs to the Infinite, but through the above nexus; and that the connection between the Infinite and the finite is through the Son, and through nothing else. Thus then we have an agreement of revelation with reasoning (*Infinite* p. 101).

Later in *The Infinite* under the heading "By the only-begotten Son, who took upon Himself the ultimate effect" it is written,

And that without Him there would be no connection between the last effect and the Infinite; whereas through him somewhat of the divine may dwell in us, namely, in the faculty to know and believe that there is a God, and that He is infinite, and again through Him, by the use of means, we are led to true religion, and become children of God, and not of the world (pp. 124-5).

The words "if geometrically and rationally understood" from page 57 seem to contrast against "cannot be viewed geometrically, but rationally" on page 56. If the "but" deserves to be changed to "and" it must be due to a change in context. But I do not see that in this case. There are other difficulties in clarity in the chapter that indicate the tentative nature of the whole. But more clear along that line is the following: "I could wish," Swedenborg wrote, "that some other person, capable of the task, would favor us with a better view or more just view of the subject" (p.61).

But there are and have been many to whom this does not apply. For example, the gentiles clearly outnumber those who are "aware that the only-begotten Son of God assumed the human form," and further "it is equally certain that before the coming of the Messiah nearly all mankind was in the dark" (pp. 125-6). So "There are many secondary ends" (heading p. 128) which tend "either mediately or immediately to realize the primary [end]" (p. 133). Thus as introduced in Note 452:

The only difference [between natural and divine] is, that the primitive is made natural by God immediately, while the other substances successively arising and subsisting from it are made so mediately (p.136).

Enough has been said about "The only difference . . ." and a "little light" by Analogy in Note 452, and now about what is "immediate" or "mediate" to justify what has just been quoted from page 136. As was said, the little light provided by Analogy results in illustration but not demonstration.

The work on *The Infinite* ends with how some of the things said so far can be extended. For example, how one

... may go further, and declare, that there is nothing in finites but the pure simple, inasmuch as all things have their origin from pure simples. Yet whatever inferences we make in the way of Analogy and comparison from finites to the Infinite, conduce to illustration indeed, provided they are not contradictory to the case, but they in no wise help us to form an analytic induction in a finite and geometrical sense ... [N]othing can be said to exist, or issue, immediately, by any mode which is intelligible to us in any geometrical, analogical, rational, or philosophical sense whatever (pp. 138-9).

Before giving consideration to *The Mechanism of the Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body* (in the next installment) which is published under the same cover as *The Infinite*, while that work is still fresh in our minds, it is well to add a few things.

It might appear that since introduction of the only-begotten Son (Infinite pp. 99-101), and even because of subsequent references (e.g. p. 125), that the reasoned conclusion of the existence of "nexus" has been left behind. Nevertheless, following the introduction of the only-begotten Son as mentioned, and continued treatment thereof (see pp. 102-103), there is this reference to the nexus:

At any rate to whatever quarter you turn, or however forcibly you entreat your reason, you will never elicit anything more than that the nexus is infinite, and that revelation therefore coincides in declaring that the world came forth immediately through both the Father and Son.(p. 103)

"Nexus" continues to appear in *The Mechanism of the Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body* where, in writing of God's love toward man, we read:

But this love can only extend... to the soul; and not to the parts of a comparatively impure and imperfect world, or to the body; which cannot be otherwise in the divine nexus than through the soul, as both the soul and body cannot be otherwise in the same than through the infinite nexus of the only-begotten Son (p. 179).

By revelation in the remark by Swedenborg "thus we have an agreement of revelation with reasoning" (see from *Infinite* p. 101 above), he meant Old and New Testaments. We in our turn may reflect from the Writings with regard to the Divine Human as mediate between the Divine and man. For example:

What immediately proceeds from His Divine Itself does not reach man, because His Divine Itself is invisible and therefore does not fall within the thought, and what does not fall within the thought does not fall within the faith; for everything that is of faith must be thought. That the Son of man, who is described [Chap. 1 AE] by the representatives seen by John, is the Lord in respect to the Divine Human, and Divine truth proceeding therefrom (see above (AE 96)

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Let us be reminded before leaving *The Infinite* that a number of important subjects have been only introduced in that book that receive extended treatment in later philosophical works by Swedenborg. 1. Essential to his way or method in philosophy is induction instead of analogy. It is called the Doctrine of Series and Degrees or alternately the Doctrine of Order. 2. By the title of *Mechanism of the Intercourse Between the Soul and the Body*, the subject of the relation of soul to body is introduced in that work, and continues to be essential to the search for the soul which is the effort of all that follows in the philosophical period. 3. Although existence has been the subject so far, whether it be of the Infinite, of the nexus, or of the divine end,