

THOUGHT

Introduction

It is in a man's thinking that the drama of his life is acted out. Our thoughts are the very stuff of consciousness; they reveal to ourselves and others those myriads of affections that mold our character and direct our path. In them we come as close as we can while in the natural world to the inner realities of the spiritual, for "Man's natural mind consists of spiritual substances together with natural substances; thought comes from its spiritual substances, not from its natural substances..." (DLW 257⁵). From our conscious experience of them we know that they are spacially without dimension, for who can measure the volume of a thought; and how casually do they disregard time, and who has ever determined the mass or electrostatic charge of a thought? Thus, while to us they are the only reality, yet they partake of none of the qualities essential to the description of the space-time universe.

But at the same time, reflect on the character of a thought stripped of its images based on space-time sensation; just as clearly, thought perishes without its foundation in sense impressions made possible by that organ of the human mind, the human body.

In the Silliman Memorial Lectures of 1967, though published in 1978 in the book *The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination*, Jacob Bronowski addresses problems encountered in the exploration of the universe. In the fourth lecture entitled "The Laws of Nature and the Nature of Laws," he declares that:

Since I hold that the universe is totally connected, that *every* fact has some influence on every other fact, then it follows that any cut [scientific examination of some small part of nature] you make at all is a convenient simplification. But in essence it is a distortion... And it is not surprising that while you keep on getting approximate good answers (the answers are better and better as you progress because you exclude less and less), it is in principle out of the question that we should ever have an ultimate explanation. That would involve setting

* Parts I, II & III published in 1984, 87:1:253-262 and 87:4:380-390; and in 1986, 89:4:195-221 respectively.

up experiments in which the whole of the universe was perceived from a God's eye view.

I do not think there is a God's eye view of nature, that there is a truth, an accessible truth of this kind... [W]hile the universe is totally connected, we *cannot* extricate ourselves from our own finiteness.¹⁸

In the same series of lectures he discusses paradoxes inherent in mathematical systems of thought, reflected, for example, in Godel's theorems published in 1931 that "(1) if an axiomatic system is consistent, then there are statements it cannot prove, and (2) not only are there statements it cannot prove, but there are also true statements it cannot prove."¹⁹ And in science we run into trouble also, for "we invent words like 'gravitation' or 'electron,' which are just as much inventions as the words 'tree' and 'love.' They are just as real, but they are also just as much something which human beings put into their interpretation of the world. An electron is like a tree; it is there. But if you were asked to define a tree, then you run into the same troubles that you run into when you are asked to define an electron."²⁰ The problems encountered both in mathematics and science arise, in Bronowski's view, from the problem of self-reference, a problem whose recognition dates back at least to classical Greek time, and derives from the fact that we use an invented language to describe a system of one kind or another.

These problems have a parallel in, if in fact they are not derived from, the fact of our existence described in *Arcana Coelestia* no. 1953: "... the rational can by no means think about itself in regard to its quality, for nothing can look into itself; but it must be something more internal or higher that thinks about it. for this can look into it." And by way of illustration, try to imagine what a 2-dimensional plane is like if you dwelled only in that plane; you need to be in a 3-dimensional world to perceive a 2-dimensional surface.

The point of all this is to show that so long as man fails to acknowledge the inherent limitations in reason from the light of the world alone, the age-old philosophic problems will persist, and in

¹⁸ Jacob Bronowski, *The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination*, Yale University, 1978, pp. 69-70.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95

2500 years from now a Jaspers will again say, in effect, that we have made no advances since Plato.²¹

However, it is our belief that, by means of the Word, man can get something of a "God's eye view" of himself and nature, for through the Word the mind is elevated to see lower things in the "light of heaven," which light has its source in God. We turn, therefore, to the Word in what follows.

Definition and origin of thought

The basic definition of thought is that given in *Divine Providence* 198: "... thought is nothing but the form of affection," to which the expression in common parlance "affection is father to the thought" can be related. This link with affection is expressed elsewhere in the Word, as in *Arcana Coelestia* 2480; "Everyone thinks from affection; and no one without affection." Also "Affection makes observation possible [calls the mind to attention] and introduces things to the senses. From things that have entered by affection comes thought, and from this, speech." For this reason, in the tone of the voice we learn the affection that fathered the thought, and for this reason too, Bronowski is able to say of us, as distinct from animals, that "We are able to get at what the [spoken] message says and to separate it from the emotional charge [affection] which the message also carries."²²

A series of passages from *Divine Providence* amplifies the ideas expressed above, and because the concept of thought is central to our whole thesis, and because the direct message of Revelation is here better than our paraphrase of it, we quote them in full.

[T]he life's love produces from itself subordinate loves, which are called affections, and... these are exterior and interior; ... [and] when taken together form as it were one sovereignty or kingdom, in which the life's love is lord or king... [T]hese subordinate loves or affections join to themselves mates, each its own; *the interior affections, mates called perceptions, and the exterior affections, mates called thoughts*; and... each cohabits with its own mate, and discharges the offices of its life... [T]he conjunction of each is like that of life's being (*esse*) with life's going forth (*existere*), which is such that one is nothing except

²¹ Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom*, Yale Univ. Press, 1954, p. 8.

²² Bronowski, *loc. cit.*, p. 31

with the other; for what is life's being unless it goes forth, and what is life's going forth except from life's being? Moreover, the conjunction in the life is like that between tone and harmony, or between tone and speech, and in general like that between the heart's pulsation and the lungs' respiration, which conjunction is such that one is nothing without the other, and each becomes something by conjunction with the other. Either there must be conjunctions in them or conjunctions must be effected by them. Take tone for example: He is mistaken who thinks that tone is anything unless there is in it that which makes it distinctive. Moreover, the tone corresponds with the affection in man; and because there is always something that is distinctive in it, the affection of one's love can be recognized from his tone when speaking; and from the variation of it, which is speech, his thought can be recognized. For this reason the wiser angels merely from the tone of the voice of one speaking have a perception of his life's loves, together with certain affections derived from them. This has been said to make known that no affection is possible apart from its thought, nor any thought apart from its affection. (DP 194; emphasis added).

It has been shown above that no thought is possible to man except from some affection of his life's love; *and that thought is nothing but the form of affection. Since, then, man sees his thought, but cannot see his affection, for that he feels, it follows that it is from sight, which is in the appearance, and not from affection, which comes into feeling and not into sight, that man concludes that his own prudence does all things.* For affection is evident only through a certain delight in thought and satisfaction in reasoning about it; and this satisfaction and delight then make one with the thought in those who from self-love or love of the world believe in their own prudence; and thought floats on in its delight like a ship in the current of a stream, to which the master pays no attention, regarding only the sail he spreads (DP 198; emphasis added).

Nevertheless, a man may reflect upon a delight of his external affection while that delight is acting as one with the delight of some bodily sensation. Nevertheless, *he does not reflect upon the fact that this delight is from a delight of his affection in his thought.* For example: when a fornicator sees a lewd woman his eye glows with the fire of lasciviousness, and from that fire he feels a

delight in the body. And yet in his thought he feels no delight of his affection or lust except a certain longing connected with the body. So a robber in a forest when he sees travellers; or a pirate on the sea when he sees vessels; and so on. *Evidently it is these delights that rule the man's thoughts and the thoughts are nothing apart from them; yet they seem to him to be nothing but thoughts; when in fact, thoughts are nothing but affections so composed into forms by his life's love as to be presented in light; for all affection is in heat, and thought is in light.* [2] Such are the external affections of thought, which manifest themselves in bodily sensation, but rarely in the thought of the mind. *But the internal affections of thought, from which the external affections have their existence, never manifest themselves before man.* Of these man knows no more than one sleeping in a carriage knows of the road, or than one feels the revolution of the earth. Considering, then, that man knows nothing of the things that are going on in the interiors of his mind, which are too limitless to be numbered, and yet those few externals that do come within the view of his thought are produced from the interiors, and the interiors are governed by the Lord alone by His Divine providence, *and only those few externals by the Lord and man together,* how can any one say that his own prudence does all things? If you were to see but one idea of thought laid open you would see wonderful things, more in number than tongue can express. [3] That in the interiors of man's mind there are things too limitless to be numbered is clear from the infinite things in the body, from which nothing comes to sight or feeling except action only in much simplicity; and yet in this thousands of motor or muscular fibers concur, thousands of nerve fibers, thousands of blood-vessels, thousands of lung cells, all of which must co-operate in every action, thousands of cells in the brains and spinal cord, and many more yet in the spiritual man, which is the human mind, in which all things are forms of affections and of their perceptions and thoughts. Does not the soul; which directs the interiors, direct also the actions from them? *Man's soul is nothing else than the love of his will and the love therefrom of his understanding. The quality of that love is the quality of the whole man;* and that is determined by the way in which the externals are disposed, in which man and the Lord co-operate. Consequently, if man attributes all things to himself and to nature, the love of self becomes the soul; but if he attributes all things to the Lord, love to the Lord becomes the

soul; and this love is heavenly, while the other is infernal.

... affections, which belong to the will, are nothing but changes of the state of the purely organic substances of the mind; and... thoughts, which belong to the understanding, are nothing but changes and variations in the form of these substances... [while] memory is the state of these changes and variations that remains permanent. Who does not acknowledge, when it is stated, that affections and thoughts are possible only in substances and their forms, which are subjects? And as these exist in the brains, which are full of substances and forms, the forms are called purely organic. No one who thinks rationally can help laughing at the fancies of some that affections and thoughts do not exist in substantiated subjects, but are exhalations modified by heat and light, like images appearing in the air and ether; and yet thought can no more exist apart from a substantial form than sight apart from its form which is the eye, or hearing apart from its form which is the ear, or taste apart from its form which is the tongue. Examine the brain, and you will see innumerable substances, and fibers likewise, and that there is nothing there that is not organized. What other evidence than this ocular proof is needed? [7] But it is asked, *What is affection there, and what is thought there?* This may be inferred from all things and each thing in the body; in it are many viscera, each fixed in its place, and these perform their functions by changes and variations of state and form. That each is engaged in its own operations is known—the stomach in its own, the intestines in theirs, the kidneys in theirs, the liver, pancreas, and spleen in theirs, and the heart and lungs in theirs; and all of these are moved to their work solely from within, and to be moved from within is to be moved by changes and variations of state and form. All this makes clear that the operations of the purely organic substances of the mind resemble these, with the difference that the operations of the organic substances of the body are natural, while those of the mind are spiritual; and that the two make one by correspondences. [8] *The nature of the changes and variations of state and form in the organic substances of the mind, which are affections and thoughts, cannot be shown to the eye; nevertheless they may be seen as in a mirror in the changes and variations in the state of the lungs in speaking and singing. There is also a correspondence; for the tone of the voice in speaking and singing, and also its articulations, which are the words of speech and the*

modulations of singing, are made by the lungs, and tone corresponds to affection and speech to thought. They are also produced therefrom; and this is done by changes and variations in the state and form of the organic substances in the lungs, and from the lungs through the trachea or windpipe in the larynx and glottis, and then in the tongue, and finally in the lips. The first changes and variations of the state and form of the tone take place in the lungs, the second in the trachea and larynx, the third in the glottis by the various openings of its orifices, the fourth in the tongue by its various adaptations to the palate and the teeth, the fifth in the lips by their varied forms. All this makes clear that mere changes and variations, successively continued, in the state of organic forms, produce tones and their articulations, which are speech and singing. Inasmuch, then, as tone and speech are produced from no other source than the affections and thoughts of the mind (for they exist from these, and never apart from them), it is evident that the affections of the will are changes and variations in the state of the purely organic substances of the mind, and that the thoughts of the understanding are changes and variations in the form of those substances, the same as in the pulmonary substances. [9] As affections and thoughts are mere changes in the state of the forms of the mind it follows *that memory is nothing else than the state of these changes that is permanent.* For all changes and variations of state in organic substances are such that having once become habitual they are permanent. Thus the lungs are habituated to produce various sounds in the trachea, and to vary them in the glottis, to articulate them with the tongue, and to modify them with the mouth; and these organic activities, having once become habitual, are in the organs and can be reproduced. That these changes and variations are infinitely more perfect in the organic structures of the mind than in those of the body is evident from what has been said in *The Divine Love and Wisdom* (n. 199-104), where it has been shown that all perfections increase and ascend with degrees and according to degrees. More about this may be seen below (n. 319) (DP 279; emphasis added).

From this last passage (DP 279) it is clear why it is that a monist-behaviorist view of man can have ready appeal: viewed "from without" all the "higher" activities we associate with our humanity are intimately bound to the material organ through which they become

manifest, and *only* someone who has experienced elevation out of the space-time world to view things from "above" whereby the realms of cause and effect can be seen in discrete, separate though contiguous, connection, could discern the two. And this is the experience that Swedenborg had for decades.

But the origin of thought needs to be traced to its Source, the Lord, and in general terms this is described as follows:

The internal man [that first receptacle of influx from the Lord] in everyone belongs to the Lord alone; for there the Lord stores up the goods and truths with which he gifts man from infancy. Thence through these He flows into the interior or rational man and through this into the exterior; *in this way it is given to the man to think, and to be a man* (AC 1707).

In addition to this immediate influx from the Divine to every man, there is an influence mediated through the spiritual world, called "mediate influx." Of it, we read in *Arcana Coelestia* 4077 that: "man has not the least of thought, nor the least of will, but by influx through them [spirits] from the Lord; and . . . it is by means of them that the Lord mediately governs the human race, and every individual in particular." This can be illustrated by analogy with the influence exerted by government on individuals of a nation. Can any of us claim independence from the influence of our government? And does not that government influence the lives of its nationals? And is not the influence felt by the mediation of people?

And again, in describing the process of the Lord's glorification involving the union of the Human Essence and the Divine Essence of God, the parallel in the conjunction of man with God is described in *Arcana Coelestia* 2004:

That the union was effected reciprocally, is an arcanum which has not yet been disclosed, and it is such an arcanum as can scarcely be explained to the apprehension; for as yet no one knows what influx is, and without a knowledge of influx no idea can possibly be formed in regard to what is reciprocal union. Yet this may in some measure be illustrated from the influx in the case of man, for with man too there is a reciprocal conjunction. From the Lord, through man's internal (treated of just above, n. 1999), life continually flows into man's rational, and through this into his external, and in fact into his knowledges (*scientifica el cognitiones*), and this life not only adapts them to receive the life, but also disposes them into order, and

so enables the man to think, and finally to be rational. Such is the conjunction of the Lord with man, without which man could not think at all, still less be rational; as every one can see from the fact that there are in man's thoughts numberless arcana of science and analytical art—too numerous to render their exploration possible to all eternity—and which do by no means flow in through the senses or through the external men, but through the internal.

To reinforce the idea that man is a receptacle of life as expressed above, and is utterly dependent not only on immediate influx from the source of all life but also on influx mediated through others²³—despite his overriding sense of self-life—we draw attention to two passages, again from *Arcana Coelestia*. The first is from a section headed "Concerning man's freedom" (AC 2870-2893) in which freedom is defined as the ability "to think and will from affection, and that the freedom is such as the affection is" (AC 2874). Later, in number 2886, our dependence on others for all our affective and cognitive experience is presented in these terms:

No one, whoever he may be, whether man [in the natural world], spirit [man in the world of spirits intermediate between heaven and hell, or in hell], or angel [man in heaven], can will and think from himself; but from others; nor can these others will and think from themselves, but all again from others, and so on; and thus each one from the First of life, which is the Lord. *That which is unconnected has no existence.*²⁴ Evils and falsities have connection with the hells; from the hells come the willing and thinking of those who are in evils and falsities; and also their love, affection, and delight, consequently their freedom. But goods and truths have connection with heaven, and the willing and thinking of those who are in them is from heaven, and so also are their love, affection, and delight, and therefore their freedom. From this we may see

²³ For an elaboration of this influence, see Hugo Lj. Odhner's *Spirits and Men*, The Academy of the New Church, 1958.

²⁴ I expect that the idea of the interconnectedness of everything could be found expressed in many sources, and undoubtedly in classical Greek literature. Bronowski (*op. cit.*) has expressed his belief in it as noted above. This statement, however, goes beyond connection only, for the very existence of anything is said to depend on it.

whence comes the one freedom, and whence the other. That the case is really so is most fully known in the other life, but is at this day altogether unknown in the world (emphasis added).

And substantiating this idea of dependence, we read the following in the same work, number 904:

Man knows no otherwise than that he thinks from himself, whereas he has not a single idea, not even the least bit of an idea from himself; but he has what is evil and false through evil spirits from hell, and what is good and true through angels from the Lord. Such is the influx with man, from which is his life and the intercourse of his soul with the body (emphasis added).

"[Man] has not a single idea, nor even the least bit of an idea, from himself." So much for the craving for the approbation of one's colleagues in academic and other circles, and the quest for the Nobel prize; so much for the wrangling associated with the attempt to establish priority in the expression of some idea! Recall John 3:27: "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven."

Elsewhere in *Arcana Coelestia*, immediate influx is termed "intellectual truth," and it is the extent to which a man allows this to enter his rational mind, bringing the latter into correspondence with it, which determines the quality of man's thought in the natural mind. Thus in *Arcana Coelestia* 1901 and 3679 we read:

By "Sarai" .. is signified intellectual truth which has been adjoined as a wife to good. Intellectual truth, which appertains to the inmost, is altogether barren, or like a childless mother, when as yet there is not any rational into which and through which it may inflow; for without the rational as a medium intellectual truth cannot inflow with any truth into the exterior man, as may be seen from the case of little children, who can know nothing whatever of truth until they have been imbued with knowledges; but, as before said, the better and more perfectly they are imbued with knowledges, so much the better and more perfectly can intellectual truth which appertains to the inmost, or to good, be communicated. [2] This intellectual truth, represented by Sarai, is the spiritual itself which flows in through heaven, and this by an internal way, and with every men; and it continually meets the knowledges that are insinuated by means of things of sense, and are implanted in the memory. *Man is not aware of this intellectual truth*

because it is too pure to be perceived by a general idea. It is like a kind of light that illuminates the mind, and confers the faculty of knowing, thinking, and understanding.

[4] With respect to thought, the case is this: So long as man lives in the body he thinks from the rational in the natural, but with a difference accordingly as the natural corresponds to the rational, or does not so correspond. When the natural corresponds, the man is rational, and thinks spiritually; but when the natural does not correspond, the man is not rational, nor can he think spiritually; for with the man whose natural corresponds to his rational the communication is opened, so that the light of heaven from the Lord can flow in through the rational into the natural, and enlighten it with intelligence and wisdom; hence the man becomes rational and thinks spiritually. But with the man whose natural does not correspond to the rational the communication is closed, and there only flows in somewhat of light in general round about, and through chinks through the rational into the natural; and the result is that the man is not rational, and does not think spiritually; *for a man thinks according to the influx of the light of heaven that he enjoys.* This shows that every man thinks according to the state of correspondence in respect to good and truth of the natural with the rational.

With the foregoing in mind, the following classification of all thought into three kinds provides a useful summary of the presentation on thought to this point. In the *Arcana Coelestia* 2715 all thought is classified into three groups: thoughts from perception, thoughts from conscience, and thoughts not from conscience.

... it may be well to state in a few words how the case is with thought. There are thoughts from perception; thoughts from conscience; and thoughts from no conscience. *Thoughts from perception* exist only with the celestial, that is, with those who are in love to the Lord; such thought is the most internal that exists with man; and it exists with the celestial angels in heaven, for it is perception from the Lord by which and from which their thought exists; and to think contrary to perception is impossible. *Thoughts from conscience* are lower, and exist with the spiritual, that is, with those who are in the good of charity and faith as to life and as to doctrine. Moreover with these persons to think contrary to conscience is impossible; for this

would be to think against the good and truth which are dictated to them from the Lord through conscience. [2] But *thoughts from no conscience* exist with those who do not suffer themselves to be inwardly directed by what is good and true, but only by what is evil and false; that is, not by the Lord, but by themselves. Such persons believe that they inwardly think just as do those who think from conscience and perception, for the reason that they do not know what conscience is, still less perception; but the difference is as great as is that between hell and heaven. They who think without conscience think from any cupidities and phantasies whatever; thus from hell; and when it seems otherwise, it is from external decorum for the sake of reputation. But they who think from conscience think from the affections of good and truth; thus from heaven.

Now this is easy enough to accept, and is logically placed within the framework of New Church thought. The implications of this are manifold, particularly when applied to the myriad manifestations of thought with which man in the modern world is confronted through all the various media of communication. We shall turn to questions arising from this later in this treatise.

To this point, emphasis has been given to the necessity of the operation of more interior planes of life on what is lower. We noted, for example, that if you take away affection, thought perishes. But just as assuredly, thought perishes if not grounded in sense impressions, paralleling the principle that the spiritual world is dependent on the natural world for its perpetuation. Hence in *Arcana Coelestia* 5477 we read:

In regard to natural light and spiritual light the case is this: natural light is from the sun of the world, and spiritual light is from the sun of heaven, which is the Lord. All the truths of faith that man learns from infancy are apprehended by means of such objects and derivative ideas as are from the light of the world, thus all and each are apprehended naturally; *for all the ideas of mans thought, so long as he lives in the world, are founded upon such things as are in the world; and therefore if these were taken away from him, his thought would utterly perish.* The man who has not been regenerated is wholly ignorant that there is spiritual light, or even that there is in heaven a light that has nothing in common with the light of the world, still less does he know that it is this light that enlightens the ideas and objects which are from the light

of the world, and *enables man to think, infer, and reflect*. That spiritual light can do this is because this light is the wisdom itself that proceeds from the Lord, and this is presented as light before the sight of the angels in heaven. From this light appear all and each of the things that are below, or that are in man from natural light; but not the converse, unless the man has been regenerated, in which case the things of heaven, that is, of good and truth, by enlightenment from spiritual light appear in the natural as in a representative mirror. From this it is evident that the Lord, who is light itself, sees all things and each that are in the thought and will of man, nay, that are in universal nature, and that nothing whatever is hidden from Him (emphasis added).

Note again the reiteration of the dependence of natural thought, inference, and reflection upon the reception of spiritual light.

But herein lies one of the paradoxes of life. For while the appearance is that thought is generated from without, and despite the utter dependence of thought on, ultimately, sensation, yet the reality is quite to the contrary, as has been amply shown above. But we note that it is because of the strength of the appearance, that induction is commonly held to be a possible mode of thought. Is it? Can we, from the observation of a few particulars, draw a generalization or principle, an idea on a higher plane (on a higher plane in the sense that sensation is lower than the thought upon which it is based) which serves to generalize, to connect what were before, *to us*, disconnected entities? Can we, in this way arrive at a greater sense of the worlds total connectedness than we had before? At the moment we are going to beg these questions, and take them up later.

(To be continued)

ERRATA

Our readers attention is drawn to two errors in Michael Costello's comments entitled "On Church History and Gentile Religions" published in the April-June 1986 issue, as follows:

- p. 119, para. 2. "Either way it presents us puzzles..." should read "Either way it presents no puzzles..."
- p. 122. Opposite 516 BC, read "Completion" not "Destruction" of the second temple.