

REASON AND REASONINGS

The distinctions made in the Writings between truth and falsity and true reason and mere reasoning are tied in a fundamental way to the nature of man, for it is through the internal man that he can be truly intelligent and wise, while from the external man alone not conjoined to the internal come reasonings, denial of truth, espousal of falsity and the life of evil. The means or intermediate whereby the internal and external man may be conjoined, thereby restoring the external to order, is the "rational" to begin with, the "first rational" represented by Ishmael in the Old Testament Word, and later the second or true rational represented by Isaac. This idea is expressed in AC 268 as follows:

The rational... is in itself a kind of medium between the internal man and the external; for the internal man, through the rational, operates on the corporeal external. But when the rational consents, it separates the external man from the internal, so that the existence of the internal man is no longer known, nor consequently the intelligence and wisdom which are of the internal.

This view of man and the nature of his thought depart so radically both from ideas we employ in common parlance and those of the world at large, that it is necessary to examine what the Writings have to teach, and draw the distinctions carefully.

Before proceeding to do this, we need to state two basic ideas upon which all else follows. The first is that"... the very capacity to think rationally, viewed in itself, is not man's but is God's in man; upon this capacity human reason in its general nature depends..." (DLW 23). And second, in human thought, one or other of the negative or affirmative principles is at play, as described in *Arcana Coelestia* 2568:

The former principle is to deny all things, or to say in the heart that we cannot believe them until we are convinced by what we can apprehend, or perceive by the senses; this is the principle that leads to all folly and insanity, and is to be called

* Parts I and II published in 1984, 87:1:253-262 and 87:4:380-390; Part III in 1986, 89:4:195-221; and Part IV in 1987, 90:1:241-253.

the negative principle. The other principle is to affirm the things which are of doctrine from the Word, or to think and believe within ourselves that they are true because the Lord has said them: this is the principle that leads to all intelligence and wisdom, and is to be called the affirmative principle. The more they who think from the negative principle consult things rational, the more they consult memory-knowledges, and the more they consult things philosophical, the more they do cast and precipitate themselves into darkness, until at last they deny all things.

In *Arcana Coelestia* 4760 this is illustrated with reference to men and animals. One in the negative principle sees man as an animal, whereas one in the affirmative recognizes the fundamental distinction that "animals act from instinct, while man acts from reason. . . . Moreover, man sees confirmations in everything else that belongs to nature, and at last sees in universal nature a representative of the heavenly kingdom."

Before examining what the Writings present, let us take a look at what a modern philosopher has to offer by way of summary of the current state of affairs in regard to reason. G. J. Warnock in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* says:

What then is reason? Alternatively, what is reasoning? It seems scarcely possible to maintain that these questions can be given definitive answers. The definitions, implicit or explicit, of the relevant terms that have been employed by philosophers and other writers vary widely and significantly; and while some may be judged preferable to others, or may adhere more closely than others to senses which the terms may bear in common discourse, there seems to be no basis secure enough to support a pronouncement that a particular meaning, and hence a particular answer to the question, is exclusively correct. In any case, what is important to the understanding of philosophical writing on this topic is not that one should know what "reason" means, but rather, that one should discern, so far as possible, what meaning is attached to "reason" by the author.²⁵

In the same article, Warnock gives a definition in the context of his discussion of reason's power in regard to psychoanalytic theory, as

²⁵ Vol. 7, Macmillan, New York, 1967, p. 84

"the dispassionate consideration of arguments and evidence. . . ." This is the sense very commonly understood in both scholarly and common discourse, and in addition, it is the sense implied frequently in the Writings.

What, then, is the source of true reason? What are the prerequisites to it? And what is the distinction between reason and reasoning?

We noted above that the capacity to engage in true reason is "not man's but is God's in man" (AC 2568). But then this capacity remains dormant until it is stirred into life by mediate influx from the heavens. Thus in *Arcana Coelestia* 5993 the development of reason is described in terms of the role of men from heaven with whom a man may choose to associate himself while in the world—his capacity to choose or reject this heavenly association in favor of hellish ones constituting his freedom. And "if he were not acted on from the heavens he would have no interior life of thought and will such as is proper to man... because a man is born without any use of reason, and can be initiated into it solely through influx from the heavens." And in a similar vein, in *Arcana Coelestia* 6089 in reference to the passage "And Joseph brought Jacob his father," we read: "That it [natural truth; truth in general] is from the internal is because 'Joseph' is the internal from which is truth in the natural. . . . This is afterwards enriched with particular truths, and lastly there comes forth the view of them from the internal, that is, *there come forth reason and understanding*" (added emphasis).

Reason, true reason, then, is only predicated of what is seen in the light of heaven with a man who acknowledges God and His Word as the only foundation of truth in any real sense. But can we know, in a conscious way, whether or not we ourselves or anyone else has reason as so defined? Because it is only possible with a person who is regenerating, who is, through temptation combat, establishing a new, good, will (as conscience) in his natural mind, and because those who are in this state are known only to God, it would seem out of the question for us to state with assurance that we know this. We can, however, be assured that unless those basic acknowledgments given above are made, it is impossible for anyone to be the possessor of true reason.

If this position seems unsatisfactory, reflection reveals that with mortals there are many questions to which definitive answers cannot be given, or to which an answer like the one above—an admission of the impossibility of knowing something—is all that is

available. For example, how did Napoleon feel on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo? How do we know that what we *think* an instrument is measuring bears any resemblance to what we are in fact measuring? What does infinity, in itself, mean? And so on. The nature of these questions and our response to them will be examined in detail later, but for now we will simply recognize the existence of these kinds of questions, and acknowledge that the basis for our acceptance of the answer to our question about true reason is our belief in the Writings as an authoritative foundation of truth.

We can, however, give an answer that is something more than what is offered above, and this is provided in *Arcana Coelestia* 1186 wherein we read that: "By reason and rational things are properly meant things that are true; and by reasoning and reasonings, those that are false." But what, we ask, is to be the criterion of the true and the false? And how does this reason differ from what in the Writings is called "reasoning," and from "reason" as defined above? *Arcana Coelestia* 2584 gives a clear answer to these questions in speaking of the quality of a man's "doctrine of faith." "When it is regarded from Divine truth, *that is, from the Word*, then each and all things, of both reason and memory, confirm it; but this is not the case when it is regarded from human things, *that is, from reason and memory-knowledges; for then nothing of good and nothing of truth is conceived*; for to regard it from the Word is to regard it from the Lord, whereas to view it from reason and memory-knowledge is to regard it from man. From the former comes all intelligence and wisdom; from the latter all insanity and folly." Clearly then, unless matters of faith—by which we mean our consideration of the nature of man and God, of our relation to God and to our fellow man, of the nature of the physical universe considered beyond the limitations of the scientific examination of it—are viewed from the perspective given in the Word, then we have no hope of obtaining any ideas that bear the remotest resemblance to the truth.

The distinction between "reason" and "reasoning" must now be clear; but to give emphasis to it, we add the following qualifications respecting the latter.

The Writings have nothing good to say about reasoning that does not stem from an acknowledgment of God, and of His Word as the fountain of true reason, intelligence and wisdom. For example "There are, in general, two origins of falsities; one is the cupidities that belong to the love of self and the world; the other is knowledges (*cognitiones et scientifica*) through reasonings..." (AC 1212); and con-

cerning spirits (and that applies to anyone, whether in this world or the next) "who desire to reason about everything; they have no perception of what is good and true; indeed the more they reason, the less they perceive. They make wisdom consist in reasoning, and on this base their claim to seem wise..." (AC 1385). "When men have become inverted orders of life, and are unwilling to live, or to become wise, except from themselves and from their own [proprium], they reason about everything they hear respecting faith, as to whether it is so, or not; and as they do this from themselves and from their own things of sense and of memory-knowledge, it must needs lead to denial..." (AC 301). Thus, from these statements we learn that reason alone leads to the loss of the perception of truth, to the denial of God and of the life after death and of faith in general, and to falsity.

This indictment should be balanced by the recognition that the Writings also put great store on the need for sense impressions as a basis for all human life, and on the need for man's faith to be a rational one; for how, asks Swedenborg, can anyone have faith in what he does not understand?—and this understanding involves reasoned thought. Thus we read in *Arcana Coelestia* 3310 that "nothing is possible in man's thought, even to the deepest arcanum of faith, that is not attended with a natural and sensuous idea." And in *The Doctrine of Faith*: "Real faith is nothing else than an acknowledgment that the thing is so because it is true. . . . If such a person does not see the truth of a thing, he says, 'I do not know whether this is true, and therefore as yet I do not believe it. How can I believe what I do not intellectually comprehend? Perhaps it is false?'"

One could ask for evidence to support the contention that reason alone leads to denial of things of religion. Perhaps there is sociological evidence that would substantiate it, but aside from that possibility, I would hazard a guess that on college and university campuses among academics there is a higher proportion of unbelievers, agnostics and other varieties of people who have rejected religion on the basis of reason applied to what the senses *seem* to teach us about ourselves and our world, than with other sociological groups. *Arcana Coelestia* 10201 (see below) lends support to this.

Intelligence and Ingenuity

As with "reason," the Writing employ the word "intelligence" to mean something quite different from its common, modern use. Its meaning can be grasped from its use in *Arcana Coelestia* 5287 wherein

it is pointed out that in the Old Testament Word "by 'wisdom' is meant what is from good, by 'intelligence' what is from truth, and by 'knowledge' both of these in man's natural." By way of analogy to illustrate this, a mother's knowing intuitively what to do for a child is like knowing something from good (or love), while a mechanic's determination of the cause of an engine knock from his knowledge of engines, is like seeing from truth. We say "like knowing from good," and "like seeing from truth," because good and truth are in themselves transcendental, originating in God, and only take on appearances in man's natural—thus "by 'knowledge' [is represented] both of these in the natural" (*ibid.*).

This idea concerning knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom is crucial to New Church epistemology, and finds clear exposition in the following passage from *Arcana Coelestia* 4526 in discussing the origin of true intelligence:

The reason why man is able to acquire intelligence by means of the things which appear before him in the light of the world, is that a higher light (that is, the light of heaven) flows into the objects which are of the light of the world, and causes them to appear representatively and correspondentially; for the light which is above the light of the world is a light that proceeds from the Lord, who illuminates the universal heaven.

To place this in the context of our discussion of reason given above, *Arcana Coelestia* 121 provides the link; for therein true order with men consists in the hierarchy of thought which, originating in the Lord, proceeds to wisdom, through this to intelligence, through this to reason, by means of which "knowledges [in the natural] are vivified."

What then of "intelligence" as commonly understood? This is referred to in the Writings in various ways, including by the use of the word "intelligence." For example: "by intelligence and wisdom is not meant the capacity to think and reason on every subject..." (AC 10302:3); here "the capacity to think" refers to what is most often associated with the word intelligence. Also, "... there is nothing that cannot be confirmed, this being the work of ingenuity, not of intelligence, still less of wisdom..." (AC 6500). Here, the word "ingenuity" plainly refers to someone we would describe as being very intelligent or "smart." Elsewhere in the Writings the word "cleverness" is used in much the same sense as "ingenuity."

As with reasoning, intelligence (ingenuity) alone comes in for