

PREDESTINATION AND HUMAN PRUDENCE

PART ONE

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Our host in the Colombian city where we were visiting advised us that the tap water was not safe to drink. An American missionary later informed me: “There are Amoebas in the water supply. They can be nasty. It’s better to be safe. I have some pills that you can take that will kill them. Remind me to give some to you.”

I got the message more clearly this time. The water from the environment was contaminated with microscopic organisms. Yes, it’s better to be safe. It seemed that was always good advice.

The awesome beauty of the Colombian landscape would inspire anyone, in my opinion. Nevertheless, I was left with the stern admonition that care is needed. Unseen dangers such as the *ENTAMOEBEA histolytica*, which predominantly infects humans and other primates, lurked ominously in the seemingly innocent waters that flowed through that landscape. Microscopic organisms: viruses, bacteria and protozoa that attack the body promoting temporary sickness, lasting disability, and even death are the cause of the vast preponderance of physically debilitating conditions and diseases, from plagues to the common cold. These organisms are essentially parasites—organisms that grow, feed, and are sheltered on or in a different organism, while contributing nothing to the survival of its host. ¹

What a strange mixture of inspiring beauty and inexplicable danger exists in this world. How can a person come to terms with the phenomenon of this apparent dichotomy? We can ponder the question in the company of Darwin who wrote to a colleague:

With respect to the theological view of the question; this is always painful to me. I am bewildered. I had no intention to write atheistically.

But I own that I cannot see, as plainly as others do, & as I should wish to do, evidence of *design & beneficence* on all sides of us. *There seems to me too much misery in the world.* I cannot persuade myself that a *beneficent & omnipotent* God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* ² with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice. ³ [*Italics mine*]

To attribute the existence of disease-causing parasites and all “the misery in the world” to an all-encompassing foreordained Divine plan seems to attribute evil itself to a beneficent God. Darwin could not do this. If the Lord is goodness itself, then for what purpose did He deign to permit a place in His creation for all the terrible or parasitic creatures that excite such fear or bring devastating disease? Darwin’s view was that either everything was determined [by God] or nothing was. His bewilderment is understandable mostly because the premise underlying the question is wrong.

If the purpose of the natural world is to provide a stage for the spiritual growth of human beings, indeed if without this forum no real development or exercise of liberty and rationality necessary for spiritual redemption could occur, then why do dangers such as pathogenic threats to physical health exist to contaminate it? Swedenborg answers the dilemma by revealing that these vermin and carnivorous creatures are neither predetermined nor reflective of God or Nature but are essentially the creations of hell, manifestations of human evil. (*Arcana Coelestia* 46).

From this it can be seen that like things in the natural world did not derive their origin from the Lord, and were not created from the beginning, neither did they spring from nature through her sun, but are from hell. That they are not from nature through her sun is plain, *for the spiritual inflows into the natural, and not the reverse.* And that they are not from the Lord is plain, because hell is not from Him, therefore

nothing in hell *corresponding* to the evils of its inhabitants is from Him. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 339), [*Italics mine*]

This statement, vast and almost overwhelming in its implications, indicates that the material creation, which is the necessary arena for redemption, also mirrors or reflects externally the internal conditions or realities of the human spirit in relation to the influx that is received by humans from either heaven or hell. This mirroring or communication that conjoins the spiritual and natural worlds is effected by correspondences (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 83). Indeed, *all* influx from the spiritual world is effected by correspondences (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 88). Organisms that cause disease were brought into existence by man's choosing to submit to the influx from hell and to appropriate evil in the misuse of his spiritual freedom, as a correspondence of that evil. This reality, although not willed by the Lord, was permitted in accordance with the necessity of spiritual freedom and the general principle that evil must be seen when it is appropriated, not only in its effect but also in its cause, in order to be removed (*Divine Providence* 278).

Swedenborg's oft-repeated advice on what constitutes the basis of spiritual reformation and the path of a heaven-bound life is very clear. We are to "shun evils as sins against the Lord." This simple prescription indicates responsibility on the part of the person in the process of regeneration, for by making it the Writings are asserting that such a thing is possible. But what is evil and how do we recognize it? What is the effect on us if we fail to do so?

The Lord is always trying to instruct us about ourselves, to make us see those predispositions toward evil that are ensconced within us from heredity or conditioning that need to be revealed and removed in order for us to be brought closer to Him, so that we may receive the greatest happiness He can give. Internal evils can be removed by shunning them externally from a will to do

so. In this there are spiritual combats induced by temptations that often involve immense pain as we strive against our natural proprium, but we are told that peace, true inner peace, is the reward of undergoing these combats and emerging from them having “shunned evil” because it is a sin against the Lord. Combating evil, the evil within us on the plane of our inner lives is a painful exercise during which we can expect to suffer. But the consequences of foregoing or avoiding these combats and the legitimate suffering they will bring, is to forego the Lord’s peace and conversely to experience broader ranging ill effects and debilitations.

What does evil do when it is left unaddressed or ignored? Swedenborg is quite clear on this point. He asserts that the nature of evil being what it is would, if hidden or ignored, grow and fester and consume all that is vital *within* a person until there was nothing of good or truth remaining (*Divine Providence* 112). There is a sense here that evil is very dynamic, displaying the organic characteristics of consuming and growing. We can imagine some organism increasing itself through a voracious appetite that feeds on what is vital within us. In this sense evil is like a parasite. Indeed, Swedenborg commented on the spiritual meaning of lice, indicating that this particular parasite *corresponded* to evil that is in the *external* man because lice reside on the skin (*Arcana Coelestia* 7419). By application of this general correspondence it is reasonable to presume that by investigating the particular aspects of how an organism is introduced, grows, and propagates in the body by attacking from *within*, we can learn how the internal human evil that it represents is introduced, grows, and propagates itself. In the example of *ENTAMOEBA histolytica*, the infestation or *Amoebiasis* begins in the lower intestine. The unicellular organisms will populate the intestine by replicating. This is the first or intestinal stage. The organism can bore through the

enteric walls (histolysis = destroying tissue) to enter the bloodstream. Once in the blood, the organism travels through the body and resides in the liver, where it also continues to colonize. This is the second or hepatic stage. From the liver the organism will migrate to the lungs, colonizing those organs. This is the third or pulmonary stage. Eventually, due to its ability to cross the blood brain barrier it will appear in the brain itself. This is the fourth or cerebral stage. The insult to the major organs continues until the result is death. The propagation of this parasite throughout the body is illustrative of how evil enters through sensory experience as in the intestinal stage, penetrates the will through the affections as in the hepatic stage, commandeers the life of the understanding as in the pulmonary stage, and ultimately succeeds in diminishing the capacity to receive any influx from heaven at all, as represented by the cerebral stage of the infestation. The intestine where the organism takes up initial residence represents sensory experience. The correspondence of this organ or function is to the last or lowest things, such as sensual delights (*Arcana Coelestia* 10030).

From the intestine, which corresponds to the lowest sensory experience, the organism moves to the liver, the purifier of the blood and resides there. The heart represents our will and our ruling loves and the blood our vital affections that flow out of those loves (*Heaven and Hell* 95; *Arcana Coelestia* 1001). The liver, as the organ that filters and prepares the blood for purification by the spleen and kidneys represents the capacity to clean those affections or to differentiate between heavenly affections and hellish ones.

Swedenborg states: “By ‘the liver’ also is signified interior purification, for the liver purifies the blood, but the intestines purify those things from which the blood is derived... Elsewhere by ‘the liver’ is signified the external good of innocence such as

belongs to infants...” (*Arcana Coelestia* 10031).

Swedenborg describes the operation of spirits associated with certain of the major organs. He writes:

The spirits of the spleen are they who mix profane things with holy; and also separate them. Spirits of the liver do likewise with moral qualities, separating those which are essentially honorable and dishonorable.... (*Spiritual Experiences* 1011)

The insult to the liver implies the loss of the capacity for internal purification and the external good of innocence. The motivation of the will thus intends more to evil instead of good on account of the destructive sensory-based impressions that remain in the affections, in the same way perhaps that the body is disposed to sickness by the toxins that remain in the blood when the function of the liver is impaired.

The parasite then migrates, again via the blood to the lungs, the seat of the respiratory system that corresponds to the faculty of understanding and consequently to perception and thought in the person (*Arcana Coelestia* 3889). The assault on the lungs represents and results in a diminished capacity to differentiate between truth and falsity. A predisposition toward confirming falsity arises in response to the existence of dishonorable affections or excited lusts that look to conjoin with falsity. Indeed these evil lusts require falsity for their protection, for as we know, the conatus of evil is always toward falsity for this reason (*Divine Providence* 33).

The contamination of the liver and subsequently the lungs represents the diminishing of the ability to differentiate between good affections and evil lusts in the activity of the will, combined with an impaired ability to recognize and confirm truth over falsity in the exercise of the understanding. The two fundamental human attributes of liberty and rationality are now debilitated.

What is left but the brain itself?

The structure of the brain is a mirror of physical reality and is also a model of spiritual reality or heaven itself (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 432). The brain was designed by the Lord to receive influx of love and wisdom and, while enabling us to live in the physical world, also connects us to the spiritual world.

In the cerebral stage of *Amoebiasis*, the parasite is in the brain, altering its organic structure. Appropriated evil also closes down and takes away the ability of the person to receive influx of love and wisdom from the Lord. Just as physical death results from the infestation of the body, so too does spiritual death when the evil it represents prevails.

What else could occur when affections are disassociated from what is good and the understanding is unable to recognize what is true, as a result of evil that is appropriated, be it hereditary or otherwise, but that love and wisdom, which is life from the Lord, are progressively shut out? Is it possible that a doctrine or an idea arising from sensual perceptions alone could follow the same process described above as it propagates through the body of religious understanding?

Consider the doctrine of predestination. We are told that Calvin, a principal proponent of this doctrine, was a sensual and corporeal man who had no other belief than what he could draw from the objects of the bodily senses (*True Christian Religion* 798). Predestination may have been an attempt to answer the problem of the dichotomy of beauty and danger in the world and the apparent duality of good and evil as it is seen naturally. This dichotomy, actually brought about by man's appropriation of evil into himself through the malpractice of spiritual freedom, was seen through a sensual sight, and the existence of evil was attributed instead to the eternal decree of God. Calvin had earlier argued from the same premise that bewildered Darwin: that either everything was determined [by God] or nothing was, and

had come down on the opposite side of the question. The premise itself is false and so it was that this doctrine was falsely formed from principles adopted in the world, a doctrine that is to be abhorred by the faith of the New Church as if it were a monster (*Arcana Coelestia* 6488; *True Christian Religion* 486). Treating this monstrous doctrine as a pathogen it is possible to see that it exhibits the same stages of infestation in the body of human beliefs as the ENTAMOEBA pursues in the body of its host.

¹*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

² A family of wasps that is an important parasitoid of other insects

³ Charles Darwin, *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* 8, 1860 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 224.

[In the next part of this article, to be published in a future issue, the writer will illustrate how the doctrine of predestination has infested the body of human beliefs. Ed.]

NEW MINISTERS

Declarations of Faith and Purpose for five ministers inaugurated into the priesthood this year are printed in the next few pages.

These men are now serving in the following assignments:

Charles Blair—Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools. Teacher and Housemaster of Stuart Hall.

Glenn (Mac) Frazier—Assistant to the Pastor, Pittsburgh Society, Pennsylvania.

Scott Frazier—Bryn Athyn College of the New Church. Teacher.

General Church of the New Jerusalem. Translation work.

Vicente Nobre—Minister in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Phila Xaba—Minister to the Alexandra Society, South Africa.