

Swedenborg's Dual Consciousness and Theistic Psychology

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The case of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) is unique in modern science history. His writings constitute a new methodology and knowledge that I have called "theistic psychology" (James, 2008a,b). Swedenborg describes the transition of a person at death from consciousness in the "natural mind" to being awakened in the consciousness of the "spiritual mind" that survives the death and dying process. Unlike the normal pattern, he became fully conscious in both his natural mind and in his spiritual mind for 27 years prior to his death. He wrote more than two-dozen books and extensive essays reporting in detail on his experiences as a dual consciousness person.

Swedenborg was a keen observer of anatomical research of his day, being the first to conclude from the data of anatomists that the cerebrum deals with the cognitive functions, while the cerebellum deals with affective functions. Also, that the right brain operates with the motivational functions, while the left brain specializes in cognitions and reasoning. He also made careful neuroanatomical observations that anticipate the much later discovery of the neuron and the cerebro spinal fluid (Gross, 2009, 2003, 1997; Tubbs., *et al.* 2011; Fodstad, 2001).

Swedenborg's works in the natural and anatomical sciences stood in contrast with other scientific works of his day in that he tries to trace all scientific phenomena and principles to the spiritual realm and ultimately to "God, the Creator" as the First Cause. He described the natural world as the "world of effects" and the spiritual world of the afterlife as the "world of causes". He concluded that every single natural event is an effect of a prior spiritual event, which is the cause of it. The apparent cause-effect relations that are observable in the physical plane he defined as correlations. He argued that only by studying the phenomena of both worlds together as cause and effect, can reality be understood. Further, all causes in the universe originate from one source, which Swedenborg identifies as "God the Creator" who is the source of all things that exist and is their First Cause. Swedenborg's system is therefore within the philosophical tradition known as "theistic" and "dualist" (Thompson, 2011; James 2008a,b).

These extraordinary super natural claims were not well received by many (e.g., Kant, 1766), yet Swedenborg has had a consistent following worldwide for the past 250 years (Brock, 1988; Larsen, 1988; Suzuki, 1996). Swedenborg's writings consist of some 30 published volumes in Latin giving theoretical explanations and empirical descriptions of the human mind as it appears objectively from within. His ethnographic descriptions of life in the societies, communities, and cities of the after-life in eternity, such as those of "heaven" and "hell", are unique in the annals of literature and science. Upon death of the physical body, the remaining spiritual body is "resuscitated" and awakened within 30 hours and then continues life in the new spiritual environment of the afterlife, no longer connected to the physical world.

Life after death evolves in community with others. The memories of life on earth are gradually phased out, becoming unconscious, and replaced by the interior personality and "loves" that were hidden within the external social personality, and thus not apparent to others and even to self. Actual motives, intentions, and desires that were underlying through out one's life on earth but were covered up, now irresistibly come to the fore of the personality and become visible to others who are also in the afterlife.

The laws of the spiritual world cause people of a similar inner personality to congregate together and form distinct urban communities of a spiritual type. No past natural language, culture, or family is involved in these spiritual communities. Every one communicates through a universal spiritual language that is innate and common to all human beings. Upon resuscitation through the three-day dying process one's natural language and culture becomes unconscious and is replaced by this universal spiritual language.

Swedenborg has had an extraordinarily significant influence during the past two hundred-fifty years on the ideas of key Western philosophers, poets, and humanists. The list of documented names who acknowledge Swedenborg' influence and "extraordinary genius" include Goethe, Heine, Kant, Schelling, Tennyson, Blake, Coleridge, Dostoevsky, T. Carlyle, Emerson, Henry and William James, Jung, Helen Keller, R. Frost, and many more (Thompson, 2014; W. James, 1898).

At the same time it is noteworthy that there is a total absence of Swedenborg's name in the history of psychology textbooks, even though there is brief mention of Descartes, a contemporary of Swedenborg who lived in Sweden prior to his death. One reason may be that Swedenborg's theistic dualist system and concepts do not fit anywhere in the 'line of descent' in the history of ideas for the past two centuries in science. Was he scientist or mystic? Was his expertise in engineering, anatomy, psychology, or theology? Was his ethnographic method intuitive or empirical? Strange as this may sound, it appears that since Swedenborg fits everywhere, he is put nowhere.

At this point however, many features of Swedenborg's theistic psychology and spiritual ethnography are being extended and applied to psychology (James, 2004, 1998, 1995, 1993; James & Nahl, 1982), physics (Thompson, 2011; Sylvia, 2010; Baker, 1994), and biology (Bryntesson, 2009; Shank, 2007).

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