

EDITORIAL REMARKS

In This Issue

Articles in this issue raise interesting questions about aspects of New Church philosophy, particularly because two of them have to do with the mind itself; the third speaks to the preparation of Swedenborg for his role as a seer.

Central to New Church philosophy of mind is that human beings are inhabitants of two worlds, simultaneously. Our essential human character develops in the will and understanding that are the essential components of the mind. Though this mind extends throughout the whole human body, nonetheless, the brain is the instrument through which our life—*itself spiritual*—comes into being in the natural world.

In this philosophy, thoughts of the understanding and affections of the will are spiritual things we have through association with people in the spiritual world; there are none that are not. Oddly, this means that the most material thought is nonetheless spiritual in nature—a materialist vehemently denying the existence of anything beyond nature is engaging in a process that stems from the spiritual world.

So in considering aspects of human and material nature we do so as spiritual beings. Focusing on things of nature, there are a variety of ways to contemplate it, one of which is the scientific way with its criteria of behavior that spell out for the scientist the distinction between science and non-science; these Gregory Baker considered in “Boundaries in Science” (*The New Philosophy* CIV pp. 395–432). Another way to consider things of nature is to include theories regarding it that can be learned from revelation—specifically that given through Swedenborg—regarding how the world works, including the role of the spiritual world and of the Divine from the Spiritual Sun.

Richard Shank’s “A Tripartite Theory of Consciousness and Mind: the Neural-menton Conjunction Hypothesis” considers the human mind from ideas revealed about it in the Writings of Swedenborg; he draws attention to the statistic that the word “mind” occurs more than 5,500 times (from a NewSearch count). More significant, however, is the approach Dr. Shank takes in building the theory: starting from what is revealed about the

human mind and the interaction of the spiritual and natural worlds, he provides what could be called “a holistic” view of the mind in the sense that he employs ideas both from revelation and from natural science; or in terms of Leon James’ approach (www.theistic-science.org/method/methods.html), one could call it “theistic science.” Recognizing that both these expressions have problems (the one because “holism” is currently applied in a variety of approaches to human life and medicine, the other, because the word “science”—in both common parlance and scientific circles—seems out of place with “theism”), nonetheless, recognizing that human thought and feeling are essential realities, an approach to the world from perspectives gained from both revelation and science is a perfectly logical way to proceed. Maybe an expression like “New Church science” could meet the bill;¹ but terms aside, the approach is one that I find not only appealing, but necessary, as New Church philosophy creates a new and developing paradigm in consideration of the world.

David Lister’s “Will and Understanding, or the Soul, Seen as the Result of Human Brain Structure and Function and Its Relationship with the Environment” first considers the mind through a metaphor of a tree blown by the wind. “The Lord sends the wind so to speak, but the BB [Body/Brain] in the form of a tree makes sense of its own life in terms of the wind it experiences, from tiny cotyledon to mighty oak.”

He then proceeds to consider the mind in the context of its environment, its *immediate* environment—the brain, with its billions of interconnected cells, that takes on a form that is, as it were, the product of both the “wind” and the intricate matrix of the brain itself; the mind (the understanding and will together) take on this form through life experiences via the senses, out of which the wonder of “meaning” comes into existence. This is something we all witness when little children discover for the first time what words “mean,” and we think of Helen Keller in this context too. Dr. Lister concludes with this: “Humans also liken the soul to the wind as if it animated an inanimate environment and their own bodies. Expressing the problem in terms of structural and functional neurodynamics may

¹ There is a long history in Swedenborgian circles on this subject; this is not the place to consider it here. But *Words to the New Church* (available from the SSA; see Publication for Sales at the back of this journal) provides a starting point for interested readers.