

SWEDEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO PHILOSOPHY*

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IF it be true that the literature of a people indicates its genius and character, this is especially so in regard to its philosophy. Poetry and fiction give expression to feelings and emotions while philosophy gives form to thoughts shaping them into concepts and arranging them into systems, which represent the highest achievements of the human mind. The Greeks with their overpowering sense of harmony and beauty were the first to produce systematic philosophical thinking in Europe. The Romans, absorbed as they were in pursuits of conquest and world-dominion, could do nothing better than imitate the Greeks. The middle ages lived to a great extent of Greek remains mixed with scholastic speculations. The new time has got hold of the lost chord and built on Greek foundations, until recent thinking has dared to move on independently with Germany and England as standardbearers of new world conceptions.

But even if the main currents of modern philosophy are to be found among the Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon subraces still even the smaller nations have had their say and made their contribution to the common fund of human speculation. This is especially the case with Sweden, a country located dangerously near the Northpole, almost half a year veiled in semi-darkness, and inhabited by an industrious and sturdy race of people hard working during the short summer, studying, meditating and speculating to while away the

*Swedish philosophy is almost as unknown outside of the mother country as was Hindu speculation some fifty years ago. The following discourse is intended to serve as an introduction to the study of that philosophy by introducing to the reader three representative Swedish thinkers, Swedenborg, Bostrom and Bjorklund, the main features of whose systems are here given in outline, and may be likened to three brilliant beads on the same string, for, aside of some minor differences, they are closely connected by one idea, common to them all, though seen from three different view points. Of the value of the idea, as an element of modern culture, this brief outline might enable the reader to form an independent judgment.

loneliness of the long winter nights. No wonder then if these exceptional climatic conditions should have fostered thinkers of an independent trend of mind deeply tinged with impressions from the rugged nature of the homeland.

Sweden's geographical location as isolated from the rest of the world by large sheets of water has created a spirit of independence and self reliance, which has found expression in characteristic adages such as "help yourself and God will help you", "a brave man helps himself" etc. It has also contributed to the rise of an independent philosophical thinking, the main characteristics of which are derived from the physical condition of the country. Located at a safe distance from the equator, far too "safe" some might think, Sweden does not know of any destructive cyclones, awe-inspiring quakes of the earth or vastating floods. Nature might in some respects have dealt in a stepmotherly way with the Swedes, but in return she has been a good stepmother, for she is calm, orderly and well tempered, and if she sometimes rules with the mailed fist of iron still every Swede feels that this hand is governed by justice and order. Would it then surprise us that a people fostered and nurtured in such an environment should create a philosophy, whose main feature is order, system and organization? In fact we shall find this to be the case. Of all the Swedish thinkers, in whom this common trait is conspicuous, we shall confine ourselves to the three, whose accomplished systems entitle them to occupy the first rank among many. They are in order of time Emanuel Swedenborg, Christopher Jacob Bostrom and Gustaf Bjorklund.

SWEDENBORG'S KOSMOSOPHY

Emanuel Swedenborg was born 1688 and died 1772, and consequently was a contemporary of Leibnitz, Locke and Christian Wolf, whose system is a further development of Leibnitzian metaphysics, and whose writings were the main source, through which Swedenborg got acquainted with Leibnitz, as appears from his extended notes on the psychology of Wolf, published under the title of *Psychologica; Being Notes and Observations on Christian Wolf's Psychologia Empirica*. He was the last of the great thinkers of the "Illumination" so called, which preceded the French Revolution.

But while our Swedish philosopher undoubtedly has been in-

fluenced not only by Leibnitz, but also though in lesser degree both by Locke and Spinoza, still his thinking is independent enough to warrant the statement that he has neither taken his starting point from, nor built on any of his predecessors.

According to Swedenborg there are three means whereby knowledge is acquired, namely experience, mathematics, and rational thinking, or in other words the subject matter is supplied by experience and further elaborated by rational thinking according to mathematical laws. It is only through this process that we can acquire knowledge about God and the world and their relation to one another. Swedenborg conceives of the whole universe as a living organism, whose center is God, who is likened to a central sun, from which life emanates and fills the material world. God consequently is the creator and sustainer of everything. Originally nothing but God existed, and when he produced the world he created it out of himself, as there was nothing else to create it from, and out of nothing, nothing can come forth. How could God, who is infinite, out of himself produce the world, which is finite and limited? Swedenborg devotes considerable attention to the answer to this question in his *Cosmology* in one of his greatest works: *Principia or The First Principles of Natural Things*, Vols. 1 & 2. First, he says, there arose within the Infinite innumerable whirling points, which formed around the central sun of the universe two luminous belts, the one outside the other, consisting of "bubbles", which according to their distance from the center became more and more dense or concentrated, so to say more "material", until at last they were condensed into an aura or finer atmosphere, which he also calls the spiritual or human aura, because in it the human soul originated. The elements of this first aura, as also of the two luminous belts, Swedenborg calls "the first and second finite" in contradistinction to the Infinite, which is God. (See also the author's work on *The Infinite and the First Cause of Creation*). Said elements are invisible to the human eye. Still farther from the central sun is found the second, magnetic or animal aura, composed of the so-called "third and fourth finite elements", which also enter into the composition of the natural sun, and consequently fall within the visible world. This aura is closely surrounded by the ether or the electric aura, whose elements likewise are said to consist of "the fourth finite". This aura serves as the conductor of light. Next comes "the fifth finite" consisting of the aerial atmosphere, the

medium of the phenomena of sound, and last and outermost is found "the materially finite" or limited, which is perceived as water, steam, vapour and finally courser material forms such as wood, stones, minerals, the bodies of plants and animals. All these atmospheres or "auras" are composed of small particles, by Swedenborg called "bullae" or "bubbles" so formed that their interior or kernel consists of the inner or finer aura, while their exterior or shell is composed of the courser particles of the nearest lower aura—resembling an egg with its yolk and surrounding white substance. Do not these elementary "bubbles" remind of Leibnitz's "monads" as also of the "cells" whereof all organic beings are built? And yet the attentive reader will agree that they are not identically the same, as their origin and structure differs. All this vast universe with its solar and planetary systems, yea, all their supersensual equivalents or correspondences, emanating from a central sun, forms one single living organism, sustained by a continual influx of life from God; and so strongly does Swedenborg emphasize the organic structure of the universe and all its constituent parts as to ascribe to it "Human Form"—form not meaning "shape" but a structural unit performing functions and "uses" in and for a common whole. This far-reaching idea is further developed by Bostrom, and still more in detail elaborated by Bjorklund, as will appear from what follows.

The statement of Swedenborg that the world is created out of and from the very substance of God, and is an emanation from him, could easily lead to the conclusion that it too were God, as in fact Spinoza taught. This difficulty, which Swedenborg anticipated is met by him by the doctrine of "discreet degrees" original with him. According to this doctrine the divine life emanating from God does not flow into the world in an uninterrupted or continuous stream or current, but is going on stepwise or by degrees so sharply defined and distinguished from one another, that one degree cannot merge into or as it were mix with another degree as for instance is the case with degrees of cold and heat, or light and darkness, and so forth. However, for the maintenance of the unity and continuity of life there must be an interaction between them, and this mutual co-operation is effected by means of the bond of causality, so that a higher degree of life produces effects in a lower degree, which there manifest themselves as "correspondences" to similar phenomena in a higher degree. Through this ingenious

reasoning Swedenborg saves his philosophical system from being entangled into the labyrinth of pantheism as was the case with Spinoza and most Hindu philosophers. But in so doing he at the same time emphasizes the fact that the life of the universe is maintained only through the divine "influx" and that the whole creation would immediately become annihilated if this divine inflow should cease.

What so far has been said refers not only to the corner of the world we know but also to the whole universe with its innumerable worlds, many of which Swedenborg thinks are inhabited by rational beings. His world-conception embraces the whole existence, both the spiritual and material and comprises not only all the solar systems of the universe but also all the realms of nature: the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, and the human, which all are subject to uniform laws, obey one will, and constitute one harmonious and orderly kingdom. Its originator aimed at the merging of all sciences and all human knowledge into one grand harmonious system, a science of sciences, which when completed should solve the riddle of the universe. He therefore extended his researches to all branches of human knowledge and thus became one of the most many-sided scientists of his time well worthy of the title of the Aristotle of the North.

So far we have tried to briefly indicate the main features of Swedenborg's Cosmology. We cannot here enter into an exposition of his Psychology as this would require more space and time than now at our disposal, and besides, at least partly lies outside of the purpose of this brief sketch, which is to give an outline of his philosophy in its most general features. From what has been said it is plain that Swedenborg belongs to the idealistic current of thought which can be traced from Plato, Pythagoras, Plotinus, Cartesius, Spinoza and Leibnitz up to our time. But he also belongs to the era of "illumination" and shares with other thinkers of that period in an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and an incessant effort to usefully employ that knowledge in all departments of human activity not excluding new mechanical inventions. But as he flourished towards the close of that period there may also be noticed in his philosophy currents of thought, which already during his life time were about to develop into, and later found expression in German idealism, for the philosophy of the eighteenth century had, with Locke and his followers evolved into a materialistic world-con-

ception which gradually culminated in the optimistic political economy of Adam Smith, whose entire sphere of thought was limited to the industrial world and its interests.

And while Swedenborg's Cosmology like that of his contemporary Isaac Newton was "mechanical", the universe being conceived of as a machine operating according to mechanical laws, he nevertheless was in advance of other thinkers of his time through the decided emphasis he put upon the reality of a spiritual and supersensual existence, in accordance wherewith he, when referring to experience as the source of knowledge, understood not only sensual but also spiritual experience, which latter to him was just as real as the former, and also most decidedly vindicates God's position not only as the creator but also as the ruling sustainer of and the moving force in the world-mechanism.

Swedenborg has given no name to his philosophy. When designating it as "Kosmosophy" we intend thereby to indicate its far-reaching scope and universal character as well as its claim to represent the universe as a harmonious and well-ordered Kosmos subject to immutable laws and governed from a common center.

BOSTROM'S RATIONAL IDEALISM

Hegelian Pantheism was about to conquer Sweden and had already invaded the southern regions of the country when in the North it struck an impenetrable wall in the form of an independent native philosophy. The originator of this new philosophy was Christopher Jacob Bostrom, who, while influenced by his contemporaries, Fichte and Schelling, nevertheless went his own way, not so independently as Swedenborg but still without adhering to any of the then existing philosophical schools. Bostrom was born 1792 and died as professor at the University of Upsala in 1866. Like Hegel he elaborated a complete and finished system of thought, which no doubt to a certain degree contributed to the popularity, not to say sovereignty, which he enjoyed among the intellectual and educated classes of his native land.

The Bostromian philosophy claims to be the logical development of idealistic speculation as represented by eminent thinkers from Plato to Leibnitz by putting the capstone of completeness and perfection on all previous philosophical efforts along idealistic lines. Bostrom claims to have reached this goal by eliminating from his conception of philosophy all materialistic and empirical elements and retain only what he considered as purely idealistic, why he also

designated his system as "rational idealism". Philosophy is, according to him, the highest and most perfect of all sciences or, as he says God's own thinking, and is consequently perfect truth. But as such it cannot be conceived by man, whose philosophy on that account is marred by many imperfections and limitations, for man, although rational, is a finite being—"sensually rational" as Bostrom expresses it—and therefore cannot think the thoughts of God, which are perfect and free from sense limitations. Philosophy is either theoretical or practical and treats of God, man and human society. God is said to be "infinite reason"; man is defined as a "sensually rational being", whereby is indicated that his reason or rationality is limited and conditioned by his "sensuality" i. e. his position in the world of senses or materiality; society is defined as a system of rational beings, and humanity, as composed of all human societies, is the highest and most complete of all social systems, why it also is called "the system of systems". It should be noted that Bostrom by system means a harmonious entity or an organism, and here we may observe his close relationship to Swedenborg.

Bostrom further teaches—as also does Swedenborg—that originally nothing existed but God, and that everything else is nothing but God's conceptions or ideas. As such, that is in and before God, they must be perfect, because God can think no imperfect thoughts, and consequently the whole creation, including man, as conceived by God, must be perfect. To themselves, however, and as their own conceptions, they appear with all the limitations conditioned by their "sensuality" or existence in the world of senses, and consequently imperfect. As conceived by God then the whole sensual or natural world, thus also man, must appear as perfect, that is without sensual limitations, because such limitations cannot be thought by God, for if he should in his thinking give place to the sensually limited, he himself would, of course, become "sensual" and consequently finite, which is contrary to the idea of God and makes God a part of his own creation, (in contradistinction to Hegelian Pantheism).

All God's thoughts or ideas, which constitute the whole conceivable world, form a system, that is to say, they are in an organic union with one another. This organism is called the spiritual world or "the kingdom of God", in conformity with the teachings of Swedenborg. All the members of this organism are mutually connected with each other as the links of a chain, but in such a way

that some are on a higher, others on a lower stage in the realm of existence. This relationship might be illustrated by the series of numbers, where every single number in itself contains all the other numbers either as a whole or as a fraction, i. e., either in a positive or in a negative sense. This might also be exemplified through man's relation to his environment. He is first a member of his family, then of the nation, and lastly of humanity, which is the highest of all societies. This doctrine, too, strongly reminds of Swedenborg.

When thus, according to Bostrom, everything existing is nothing but conceptions, either God's ideas, which are perfect, or man's ideas, which are imperfect—it follows as a logical conclusion that nothing that we are able to conceive can be the real thing, but is only a phenomenon or an appearance, as also Kant taught. Thus, for instance, we can never form an adequate idea of God in his perfection, neither can we perceive the smaller societies—the nations and the states—nor the totality of them all, which is humanity, as rational and personal beings, which in reality they are. (Swedenborg with his characteristic preference for concrete representation of the abstract expresses the same thought so, that they have or “are in the human form”,—form not meaning shape, but referring to organic function and uses). For “to be” is, according to Bostrom, the same as “to be perceived”, and “to be perceived” is “to be”, in consequence whereof perfect “being” is the same as the perfectly “perceived”, why it cannot be pronounced of human beings, except from the viewpoint of God.

In Bostrom's philosophy also enters a system of rational theology, which is in harmony with the rest of his world-conception. His rational religion coincides in the main with the religious liberalism of our time, and consequently it made him a “*persona non grata*” in the eyes of the Swedish clergy. More fortunate he was in his application of his “doctrine of the state” to conditions then existing in Sweden, thereby following in the steps of Swedenborg and Hegel. He considers monarchy the only rational form of government, and the division of the legislative body in four estates as the most perfect form of popular representation, which of course made him very acceptable to the ruling class, and to some extent made the authorities overlook his religious and philosophical radicalism.

The Bostromian system has exerted a wide-spread and deep influence on philosophical research in Sweden for various reasons.

Bostrom's world-conception is characterized by an honesty, straightforwardness, boldness and intrepidity, which always has strongly appealed to the national humour of the Swedish people. Furthermore Bostrom had a highly winsome and attractive personality, which made him very popular with the young generation at the university of Upsala, where he was active as a teacher and lecturer for nearly forty years. But the main reason for the general acceptance and popularity of his philosophy is perhaps to be found in the very nature of his system, its universality and completeness, which makes the impression of something compact, finished and harmonious, for Bostrom has developed idealism—in contradistinction to empirism, naturalism and materialism—to a maturity, unknown before him, and endeavored to give logical and decisive, not to say ultimate, answers to many problems which were either left unanswered or only imperfectly solved by previous philosophical research. He has reached this goal by eliminating all amaterialistic or "sensual" elements from his idealistic speculations, whereby his thinking has become, as he claims, purely rational or, if you prefer, reasonable. (There is not the slightest doubt that Bostrom would have branded all philosophies but his own as "irrational"). However that may be, it cannot be denied that his system occupies a high rank in the history of philosophy. But whether he has succeeded in placing it on a vantage ground unassailable for all time to come is another question which in his case, as in all others, can be satisfactorily answered only by the following development of philosophical research.

We have tried to point out the most conspicuous similarities and also the differences between Sweden's culturally most prominent thinkers, Swedenborg and Bostrom. The causes of the former are not difficult to discover. Both of these thinkers have sprung from the deepest soil of native Swedish culture, and why then should they not move within related spheres of thought? Both follow the path of idealistic thinking in the realm of philosophy, and how then could they be total strangers to each other, even if not contemporaries as to time? Add to this the fact that a comprehensive and very sympathetic work on Swedenborg was published in Upsala during Bostrom's professorship at the same university and under the authorship of one of his most celebrated fellow-academicians (Atterbom); how could he have avoided to undertake the study of so prominent a precursor? His works cer-

tainly bear the stamp of an intimate acquaintance with him. Again as far as the differences are concerned they are easily explainable from the different theories regarding the sources of knowledge held by the two thinkers, Swedenborg drawing from the rich resources of experience, whether spiritual or natural, while Bostrom confines himself to rational thinking alone. But nevertheless both of them have—let alone their similarities or differences—through the solid and magnificent dimensions of the structure of their speculative systems made highly valuable contributions to the treasure house of philosophical research.

GUSTAV BJÖRKLUND'S ORGANIC IDEALISM

Gustaf Johan Bjorklund was born 1846 and died 1903, barely 57 years old. His was a sad fate. It was not given him to lay before the world a finished and complete expression of the philosophical ideas, for the elaboration of which he had broken tender family ties and forsaken the glories of an illustrious and influential career, to which his eminent mental and intellectual capacities not less than his commanding personality and striking physical appearance entitled him and upon which he no doubt would have successfully entered had he chosen to do so. But instead of all that he voluntarily chose poverty and seclusion to get an opportunity to devote himself exclusively to the fulfillment of what he considered to be his sacred mission in the world.

Bjorklund is a disciple of Bostrom. But he could not, as so many others "*jurare ad verba magistri*". He moved independently within the sphere of thought delineated by his teacher, and he made practical applications of Bostrom's "rational idealism" which might have startled its originator.

We are already familiar with Bostrom's conception of humanity as an organism or, as he preferred to express this pet idea of his, a personality, a sort of living entity composed of ideas systematically arranged in such a way that the lower always entered into the higher either positively or negatively, either inclusively or exclusively. We have further seen that Bostrom was wont to illustrate this relationship of the ideas by the series of numbers. Bjorklund, however, chose another illustration, which led to far more important practical results than Bostrom ever dreamed of.

From the very beginning of his philosophical speculations Bjorklund aimed at a practical result. Like Swedenborg he cared very

little for theories unless they could be made useful. Taking for his starting point the Bostromian "rationally idealistic" conception of human societies as "persons", i. e. organisms, and humanity as the highest of all organisms known to "sensually rational" beings, Bjorklund drew the logical conclusion that all human societies, the smaller not less than the greater, are involved in a process of evolution, the aim and purpose of which is their final coalescence into one single organism-humanity, and he undertook to show how this process is effected and at the same time indicate and define the laws that govern the same. Thus the abstract theory of the organic nature of society would be supported and corroborated by empirical proofs of its correctness whereby it would plainly appear that its logical consequences must of necessity lead to a brotherhood of nations and a peaceful co-operation free from international complications, so that wars would be impossible and a state of eternal peace realized.

Bjorklund's intention originally was to show, by a historical survey, how the primitive smaller societies gradually had combined, thus forming greater and greater communities until this growth at last resulted in the now existing nations, which again in their turn are destined to combine into one single society-humanity. But during his preparatory studies for this work Bjorklund changed his original plan into another which, though novel, seemed to him more productive of conclusive evidence. There were, so he reasoned, other organisms than the human societies. Man himself was an integral part of a social organism and at the same time a nature-organism subject to the same evolutionary laws that govern all organic beings. Would it not then be possible, yea, even probable that an analogy existed between the growth of human societies and the development of the nature-organism? It was for the purpose of analysing this presupposed connection that Bjorklund turned from history and instead engaged in such anatomical and biological researches which he thought would further his aim. During the pursuance of these studies he became more and more convinced that not only did a similarity or analogy exist between the evolution of the human societies and the growth of the nature-organisms, but rather a complete identity. For the constant evolution from lower to higher forms of existence, in which both are involved, is realized and made actual through the mutual coalescence of the former and their merging as organs into the higher entity which is formed

through this process of coalescence. This thesis is proved by reference to animal forms which originated in the coalescence of segments, which originally lived a more or less independent life, and were only loosely connected with one another. These nature-segments consequently are not constant but rather transient forms, destined to, by emerging out of their independent individual existence, connected form a higher organism, which they serve as organs. In the evolution of human society these nature-segments correspond to the separate nations, which likewise are destined to grow out of their individual independence—their segmental state—and combine or coalesce into one single higher organism—humanity—and to serve it as organs or in other words to perform functions useful to the whole. In the first of his published works entitled, *The Coalescence of the Nations*, of which unfortunately only part I treating of “Material Coalescence” was finished by the author, Bjorklund delineates into the minutest details the comparison between the social organisms, formed by men, and the animal organisms, and shows that their development is governed by identical laws and consequently must lead to the same results. Just as the nature-organisms are composed of cells, through whose co-operation they subsist, so also human societies consist of co-operating cells, which are the human individuals that form society. Just as sure as the human cell is an organism, just as sure is human society an organism (Bostrom: a “person”; Swedenborg “in the human form”). The difficulty of so conceiving human society is caused precisely by the same obstacles which so long delayed the discovery of the cells of the nature-organisms, namely the lack of organs, or rather means, to see them. In the case of the nature-cells the discovery of the microscope removed this hindrance, revealing the diminutive cells which were invisible to the naked eye. In regard to the human societies the case is the reverse, because here the cells, being the human individuals, are visible, but not so the organism or social structure which they form, as no human being is able to see society as a whole, just as little as a cell in the human body can see that same body.

Bjorklund also has applied the cellular theory to psychology and made an attempt thereby to prove the immortality of the human soul. Life, according to him, is not a dead force of nature but a special “life-force” distinct from the former, and immortal. This life-force constitutes the very essence and life of the cells, why they

too must be immortal, and consequently also the organism they form, namely the spiritual body which is destined to be the abode of the human soul in the future life. These thoughts which are further elucidated in a work entitled "Death and Resurrection from the Point of View of the Cell-theory" are mainly to be considered as a remarkable and noble effort to strengthen the position of Idealism in its battle against the forces of materialism. Its greatest merit lies undoubtedly not so much in what it accomplishes as in the new and original method its author has adopted in availing himself of the latest discoveries in natural science, especially anatomy and biology, as a support for his idealistic world-conception. So far as the writer knows he has had only one precursor of note in that same line of thought namely his illustrious countryman Emanuel Swedenborg for instance in his work on "The Mechanism of the Intercourse Between The Soul and The Body".

Bjorklund was engaged in the elaboration of a greater and more extensive philosophical work, intended to represent the fundamental principles of a complete world-conception, when his life suddenly came to an end through an unexpected death. As he left only a fragment of this work we are unable to get an idea of its intended contents.

We hope, through this brief survey, to have succeeded in giving our readers some idea of the trend and character of philosophical research in Sweden, of its worth and value as an independent current of thought, and also of its relation to philosophical speculation in general. As will appear from the above, Swedish philosophy is built on idealistic foundations. One of its most conspicuous characteristics is also the conception of the ideal—as well as the material-world as a living organism. This idea runs like an Ariadne-thread through all the three philosophical systems, whose main principles we have tried to lay before our readers. Swedenborg, with the preference for concrete images, that pervades his whole authorship, expresses the same idea by the concept "*Maximus Homo*", "human form". Bostrom, who was very fond of abstractions, calls the same concept "personality". Bjorkland, on the contrary, with his strong leaning towards natural science and his practical bent of mind, confined himself to the designation of the same idea as an "organism".

It remains to say a few words about the sources, from which the

above is drawn. Swedenborg, though a voluminous writer, never made a continuous exposition of his system. His philosophical ideas, therefore, must be gathered from some 150 books and manuscripts, where they lie scattered broadcast among scientific, theological and theological discourses, from which they have to be carefully sifted. In the case of Bostrom, again, only certain parts of his system were finished by the originator, while most of it was orally committed to his audiences, on whose notes we have to rely. Bjorklund, finally, did not live long enough to fully elaborate his world-conception, and only fragments thereof are extant. But the material at hand is rich and complete enough to enable the interested student to get the gist of their teachings, and form a clear and distinct idea of the same. This is what we have undertaken to do in the foregoing pages, constantly aiming at faithfulness to our purpose and correctness of our statements, in the modest hope of having, at least in some measure, succeeded in contributing to the filling of a deplorable "lacuna" in American philosophical literature.