

# Re-Visioning Resurrection: St. Paul and Swedenborg

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**ABSTRACT:** St. Paul's "spiritual body" is envisaged as imaginal body, the word *imaginal* standing for the intermediate realm of beings and events in Neoplatonism and Sufism. Swedenborg's world of spirits and angels conforms to this view and so is seen as contributing to a richer understanding of St. Paul in the sense of a "good" docetism. Crucial in this kind of re-visioning the mystery of resurrection is the creative power of visionary imagination, which, in turn, is inseparable from the reality of the soul as the *situs* of visionary events.

Two seminal contemporary psychologists, Jacques Lacan and James Hillman, have recently expressed the opinion that much of the disorder and suffering undergone by modern man is mainly due to his refusal to remember the dead. Lacan draws attention to Freud's finding that neurotic persons suffer "from a past that has not been dealt with, from a mourning process that has not reached its term, the unburied dead." Even though "the hysteric may try to forget the dead . . . the dead do not forget her."<sup>1</sup> Lacan argues that therapy "has as its major task the repairing of the relationship people have, not with other people, but with the dead."<sup>2</sup> Hillman has stated that the aim of archetypal psychology is to enable us "to live life in the company of ghosts . . . ancestors, guides—the populace of the metaxy. . ."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, his book *The Dream and the Underworld* is devoted to a re-visioning of psychology from the perspective of death and the ghostly underworld.<sup>4</sup>

In this article I would like to suggest that our neurotic inability to deal with the dead is more basically traceable to the confusion that exists in most people's minds about the true identity of the dead; hence, before trying to "remember" the dead, it is necessary to ask the preliminary psychological and religious question: who are the dead? (I am not going to ask the philosophical question about the possibility of survival beyond death, immortality of the soul, and the like.)

In the way of answering this question, I propose to consider the idea of "spiritual body" in St. Paul and docetism and in the writings of the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic and visionary Emanuel Swedenborg. My reason for singling out Swedenborg among other visionaries (Böhme, Blake, Persian Sufis, Protestant "spirituals," etc.) is twofold: first, his works contain probably the most thorough and consistent treatment of our subject in the history of Western religion; second, Swedenborg, in my opinion, provides a

framework in which the “spiritual body” need no longer be merely an article of faith, but can be understood as part of a complete (visionary) anthropology, that is, as pointing to a new holistic—and at the same time very ancient—conception of man. I shall begin by situating Swedenborg within the context of what is commonly referred to as “perennial wisdom” (*sophia perennis*). From there I shall move on to St. Paul and a discussion of “good” docetism as it would present itself in the light of Henry Corbin’s and Carl Jung’s understanding of the soul and imagination. The second part of the article will be devoted to Swedenborg’s conception of “spiritual body,” preceded by a brief exposition of his doctrine of “correspondence” and visionary space (Spiritual World).

### *Swedenborg and esotericism*

We are witnessing today a burst of interest in esotericism—in esoteric (literally “inner” or hidden) knowledge or gnosis—comparable to the enthusiasm for Far Eastern spiritual teachings in the 1960s. The word *esotericism* points to secret suprasensory things that are accessible only to the initiate—to a person who has attained an adequate degree of spiritual realization. Esoteric knowledge is *gnosis*, usually defined as salvational or redemptive knowledge, in that it changes and transforms the knowing subject.

The significance of the growing interest in esotericism lies in the fact that it is a Western phenomenon with roots in the Western soil. It is as if people who represent the avant-garde of the movement—Owen Barfield, Huston Smith, Jacob Needleman, James Hillman, David Miller, Raymond Panikkar, Kathleen Raine—have taken to heart Jung’s admonition to get at the Eastern values from within—in our own souls—instead of mindlessly borrowing them directly from the East. In other words, there is a “conspiracy” among those who are dissatisfied with the Aristotelian and predominantly rationalistic Western theology, philosophy, and psychology to discover something like Western Nirvana. Another way of characterizing this movement would be in terms of a return to the Platonic tradition, which is more or less identical with the tradition of “perennial wisdom,” including men like Scotus Erigena, Ficino, Paracelsus, the Cambridge Platonists, Blake, Goethe, Coleridge, Schuon, Guénon, Coomaraswamy, Jung, and Steiner and the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky groups. Probably the least known among these esotericists is the enigmatic figure of Emanuel Swedenborg, sometimes called “the Plato of the North” and rebaptized by D. T. Suzuki as “the Buddha of the West.” Swedenborg’s name (outside the members of the “New Church,” who follow his teachings as a sort of revelation) is often associated with the “occult”—a convenient label for almost anything that does not fit into the scientific-technological orthodoxy of our time. Therefore, before I proceed with my topic, I should like to correct some of this shoddy thinking by providing the reader with a brief sketch of Swedenborg’s life and personality.

Swedenborg (1688–1722), son of a Swedish Lutheran bishop, grew up in a

rigorously Christian and intensely pietistic home. He was educated at Uppsala, where he received his degree of doctor of philosophy at the age of 22. In 1718, Swedenborg was appointed by the king of Sweden, Charles XII, assessor in the Royal College of Mines. Besides his long association with the mining industry, Swedenborg devoted the first half of his adult life to scientific investigations ranging from the composition of matter to the seat of the soul in the human body; his studies embraced anatomy, astronomy, crystallography, mineralogy, geology, mathematics, and physiology. The publication of his philosophical and mineralogical works won for Swedenborg a European reputation, and he was elected to the membership of the Royal Academy of Science. His contributions to the science of the period include the design of a submarine and a glider, the nuclear hypothesis of creation of the universe, and discovery of the function of the cerebellum. From 1710 till his death in London in 1772, Swedenborg was engaged in extensive travels to England, Holland, France, and Germany with the aim of improving his practical knowledge of mining and publishing the numerous treatises he had produced. A radical break with all the previous activities came in April 1745 while he was living in London. According to his own testimony, his sight was opened into the spiritual world and he was able to converse with spirits and angels.<sup>5</sup> Having returned to Sweden, Swedenborg immediately devoted himself to the study of Hebrew and the Scriptures, while continuing to discharge the duties of the assessor of the Board of Mines till 1747. After retirement from the official post, he was either actively engaged in writing his theological works or traveling in foreign countries. Swedenborg enjoyed excellent physical health and complete clarity of mind; to the end of his days, his conduct was that of a level-headed, cool-tempered man. An entry of his *Spiritual Diary* (March 4, 1748) reads:

Whereas now I have been almost three years . . . in that state in which, my mind being withdrawn from corporeal things, I could be in the societies of spiritual and celestial spirits, and yet be like another man in the society of men, without any difference, which spirits also wondered at.

The above statement is important insofar as it shows that Swedenborg enjoyed what in mystical literature is known as dual vision, the ability to perceive things in at least two ways simultaneously. In Paul Valéry's words, he was capable of "*an effortless coming and going between two worlds*" that "makes it possible for us to avoid mistaking mysticism for delirium."<sup>6</sup> There was no confusion in Swedenborg's mind between ordinary reality and the world of visionary imagination; he never mistook what he beheld in his ecstatic states for what he perceived with his bodily senses. During the period of his extraordinary experiences, he watched and studied his own case with the eye of a detached observer, and his descriptions of what he "saw and heard" resemble a course of lessons in celestial geography more than religious effusions of an enthusiast.<sup>7</sup> As one writer has it, Swedenborg's "ideas of spiritual life are as calm and composed as the curls of his eighteenth century wig."<sup>8</sup> To conclude these biographical notes, it must be mentioned that among the men of letters

influenced by Swedenborg are some of the major Romantic philosophers and poets: Schelling, Goethe, Coleridge, Emerson, Henry James the Elder, Carlyle, Balzac, Yeats, Blake, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and Strindberg. I shall discuss the nature of visions reported by Swedenborg—hallucination versus imagination—in due course. For now we must go the St. Paul and the views of the “resurrected body” that were current among his contemporaries.

### *Spiritual body in St. Paul and docetism*

When St. Paul proclaimed the Evangel to the Athenian philosophers assembled at the Court of Areopagus, the audience listened to him patiently till he made the statement that God had raised a man from the dead. At this point the meeting came to an abrupt end. Some of Paul’s listeners laughed, while others, more courteously, told him that they would wait to hear more from him on this subject when they found another opportunity (Acts 18:32).

It is safe to assume that Paul’s Greek audience might have been willing to hear him out if he had declared that Jesus had an immaterial preexisting soul that would live eternally. The hypothesis of personal immortality of souls was familiar to Greeks of Paul’s generation. Plato, in his philosophical dialogues, had provided plausible rational grounds for the indestructible nature of soul, which he identified primarily with reason and held to be alien to the body. Incidentally, it was this view of the soul that, as Oscar Cullmann has argued, enabled Socrates to face his approaching death in perfect serenity, in contrast to the agony undergone by the dying Jesus.<sup>9</sup> St. Paul, however, was not interested in a rationally demonstrable sort of survival. In effect, he shared the Pharisees’ belief (developed toward the end of the Old Testament period) in the resurrection of the dead as involving a renewal of the whole man—that is, man as a pneumosomatic entity. Consequently, for him it is not the case that at death a soul escapes from the shackles of physical existence, but that the entire person, a *soma*, dies and the same person is raised to life. Yet there is a radical transformation: one dies mortal and corruptible (in *sarx*) and is raised a glorious body; one dies animal and is raised spiritual. The risen body is a *soma pneumatikon*, the spiritual body (I Corinthians 15).

It seems clear, then, that whatever Paul might have meant by the expression “spiritual body,” he did not mean that the resurrected bodies were numerically identical with the earthly bodies—a view that was advocated by most writers for the Western or Latin church.<sup>10</sup> The crucial question in all speculations of this kind has to do with Paul’s treatment of “matter.” We are naturally perplexed with the notion of a body that is composed of a material other than physical matter. Probably the best that can be said on this score is that Paul had chosen a middle course between, on the one hand, a crassly materialistic doctrine of physical resurrection (reanimation of a corpse) and, on the other hand, a dualistic doctrine of the liberation of the soul from the body. According to C. F. D. Moule, he formulated a view that was “perhaps wholly novel and derived directly from his experience of Christ—namely, that matter

is to be used but transformed in the process of obedient surrender to the will of God. Matter is not illusory . . . , not to be shunned and escaped from, nor yet exactly destined to be annihilated. . . . Rather, matter is to be transformed onto that which transcends it."<sup>11</sup>

The above statement seems to be an adequate interpretation of the resurrection-body from a strictly biblical point of view. It is difficult, though, if not impossible, to understand just how a material spirit or spiritual matter can be in any meaningful way distinguished from "something vaguely spiritual" or "something vaguely material." In other words, what remains obscure is the ontological status of such a new and astonishing entity as the Pauline *soma pneumatikon*. There are historical precedents for an explicit use of this conception among the fourth- and fifth-century Neoplatonists (Proclus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Synesius). For example, Proclus (c. 410–45) speaks of two *okhema* (vehicles): first, the higher *okhema*, called *augoeides* (luminous, auroral), which is the original body (*proton soma*) permanently attached to the soul; second the *okhem apneumatikon*, which survives death but is destined to disappear (our "phantoms" and "ghosts").<sup>12</sup> Similar attempts to posit a third factor between matter and spirit were made by the Cambridge Platonists (More, Cudworth) in seventeenth-century England. Platonism and Neoplatonism, however, have been excluded from the mainstream of Western spiritual tradition and replaced by the essentialist (Aristotelian) tradition, culminating in Cartesian dualism between matter and spirit. Within the terms of Cartesianism, something like a "spiritual body" must remain utterly incomprehensible—unless we make it out to be a hybrid, an artificial concatenation of "partly this," "partly that"—that is, a phantom.

In the early Christianity, the materialistic view of the resurrection-body was opposed by docetism, which held that the body of Christ was not a real human body but only a "simulacrum," a "phantom." Christ only seemed (*dokein*) to have a body, and hence he suffered only in appearance. This is docetism at its grossest, assuming that "spirit" is so much above the material that it never gets involved in it. It is unnecessary, however, to understand docetism in this crude and commonly accepted fashion. The term itself is ambiguously broad, and it denotes not a set doctrine but a tendency.<sup>13</sup> The great French Islamic scholar and mystic Henry Corbin (1903–1978), whose name is rapidly becoming a household word among contemporary esotericists, has suggested that we should take the Greek term *dokesis* not in its current acceptance of a "simulacrum" but in its etymological sense of apparitional reality—that is, as "real apparition," corresponding in every case to the faith, the mode of being of the perceiver. The dominant intuition behind such a view is that in the sphere of religious or mystical experience "the soul is not the witness of an external event but the medium *in which* the event takes place."<sup>14</sup>

To illustrate his thesis, Corbin refers to a narrative, contained in the Acts of Peter,<sup>16</sup> concerning Peter's vision of the transfigured Christ. Before a gathering of people the Apostle refers to the scene of Transfiguration that he had witnessed on Mount Tabor. Essentially, all he can say is "*Talem eum vidi qualem capere potui* [I saw him in such a form as I was able to take it in]." It is

also during this episode that Peter speaks to the assembled widows who are afflicted not only with physical blindness but also with incredulity of heart: "Perceive in your mind that which you see not with your eyes." The women then begin to pray, and instantaneously the hall is filled with a resplendent, invisible light such as no man can describe. When afterwards the women are asked what they have seen, some have seen an old man, others a youth, still others a little child who lightly touched their eyes and made them open. Each one has seen according to the mode of her perception and the capacity of her being. A similar incident is reported in the narrative of the calling of the Apostles (Acts of John, 88–89). When John and his brother James return in their boat after a night spent on the sea, both of them behold on the shore a being who beckons to them. But again—they do not see the same figure. One has seen a little child, the other a pleasant and comely man of noble bearing.

Corbin, who has commented on these and similar apparitions in Islam, calls them *theophanic visions*. Their perception, he says, is "an *event of the soul*, taking place *in the soul and for the soul*. As such its reality is essentially *individuated* for and with each soul; what the soul really sees, it is in each case alone in seeing. The field of its vision, its horizon, is in every case defined by the capacity, the dimension of its own being."<sup>15</sup> Origen, as if echoing Corbin, declares that the Savior existed not only in two forms—the one in which he was commonly seen, the other in which he was transfigured—but that in addition "he appeared to each one according as each man was worthy."<sup>17</sup>

### *Soul and imagination*

The word "soul" (psyche), as used by Corbin, should not be understood in the sense of a substance—that is, a fixed, unchanging something *behind* our thoughts, intuitions, emotions, perceptions, and actions. It is not a vaporous, boneless phantom inside the body ("ghost in the machine"). In Corbin, as well as in Platonism and Jungian psychology, soul is not a purely spiritual entity standing in opposition to matter, but a microcosm, a compendium of nature reflecting the macrocosm. The advantage of envisioning soul in this manner is that it obviates psychologism. The charge of psychologism (often made against Jung and his school) has meaning only when it is assumed at the outset that the subject (the soul) stands apart and in isolation from the object (the world). One is then inclined to look pejoratively at the "contents of the psyche" as being "nothing but" psychological and therefore "subjective," quasi-real, fictitious, imaginary. By contrast, in the macrocosmic view, the question of "inner" versus "outer," subjective versus objective, spirit versus matter, does not arise, for here all events whatsoever take place in the soul or, rather, they are transfigured in the light of the soul. And it is for this reason that Peter, just like every one of us in our more imaginative moods, can say "*Talem eum vidi qualem capere potui*," for fundamentally, each individual soul sees what it desires to see. To put it in William Blake's words, "As a man is, so he sees."<sup>18</sup>

To the above we must add a further clarification stemming from Jung's work. Jung's most important discovery consists in his identification of psyche with imagination: "Every psychic process is an image and an imagining."<sup>19</sup> What Jung is saying is that our experience of "reality," all that we think, feel, or perceive, is psychic. We never relate ourselves directly to any so-called material objects. There is no such thing as immaculate perception: we are steeped in a world that is a creation of the psyche, and psyche *is* image.

Jung's psychology represents a modern version and a resuscitation, on the empirical level, of the Neoplatonic tradition that sees imagination as an original and creative faculty discontinuous with and independent from sensation and perception. Moreover, imagination is envisaged here as the central power not only in man but in the cosmic creation itself: the subjective pole of being (man) and the objective pole of natural phenomena interpenetrate through imagination. Nature *in its highest (subtle) sense* is identical to the soul of man.

The cosmological import, ascribed to imagination, implies a new mode of cognition appropriate to the kind of reality encountered within the macrocosm. It is imperative, therefore, at this point to posit the existence of what Corbin calls visionary or archetypal imagination. To distinguish this extraordinary power or agency from other modes of knowing, Corbin has coined the adjective *imaginal*, which he contrasts above all with the derogatory connotations of *imaginary*.<sup>20</sup> He proposed this term, as well as the Latin locution *mundus imaginalis* ("imaginal world") to denote a realm of angelic beings that is ontologically no less real than what we call the physical reality, on the one hand, and the spiritual or intellectual reality, on the other. The "specialty" of visionary imagination is to effect a complete, immediate, and embodied realization of the imagined contents. Imagination on the visionary plane "posits real being."<sup>21</sup> Note, however, that the "real being" refers here to the "being" of images, not to the objects of sensory perception or to something "purely spiritual." Hence, the "real being" is real *imaginal* being—angel.

In scientific psychology, images are usually understood in a reproductive sense—as after-images or reflections of a physical object. Corbin and Jung have departed from this view by insisting on the autonomous, *sui generis*, and self-referential character of images and imagination. Elaborating on the Jungian stance, archetypal psychology (Hillman, Berry, Miller, Lopez-Pedraza) regards the image as "an irreducible and complete union of form and content."<sup>22</sup> Imaginative presentations are monadic wholes in which all is given at once, simultaneously. They mean what they are and are what they mean. According to Patricia Berry, images are sensate yet not perceptual; their form, color, and texture are not derived from external objects: "The two modes, imaginal and perceptive, rely upon distinctly different psychic functions. With imagination any question of objective referent is irrelevant. The imaginal is quite real in its own way, but never *because* it corresponds to something outer."<sup>23</sup>

It is also for this reason that imagination must be distinguished from hallucination. One of the basic features of hallucinations is that they tend to replace ordinary perceptions for an indefinite period of time, as, for example, in

the case of “visions” induced by drugs or under hypnosis, synesthetic sensations, eidetic images, misreadings of written texts, et cetera. Edward Casey, the foremost American phenomenologist of imagination, defines *hallucination* as a mistaken belief in “the perceived presence of something that is not given in perceptual experience.”<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the paranormal character of hallucinations, imagined objects or events never interfere with or replace actually perceived items in this world. There is no competition between imagination and perception; we can (as Swedenborg did) imagine and perceive concurrently (dual vision).

The phenomenon of hallucination has been widely used to discredit imagination. Empirical psychiatrists like to stress that the so-called visionaries are often hysterical and schizophrenic types or that religious visionary experiences may be generated by extreme asceticism or systematic practice of meditation, leading to abnormal concentration and tension. This may or may not be so. Suffice it to say that the identification of visions with hallucinations ignores the fact that religious visions usually lead to a regeneration and strengthening of an individual’s total personality, whereas the common hallucinations leave no such trace in the makeup of the human subject.

In view of the preceding considerations, we may venture the hypothesis that St. Paul’s idea of “spiritual body” is best understood in terms of “imaginal body”—that is, as a real imaginal body existing in a real imaginal world or in what Corbin calls *mundus imaginalis* and what in Swedenborg’s visions is referred to as “the world of spirits” and angels. Since, however, the latter’s phenomenological descriptions of the “other world” may sound utterly incredible and fantastic to a reader accustomed to a language of scholarly caution when dealing with things of this sort, I shall attempt to mitigate the confrontation with Swedenborg by prefacing him with some insights derived from psychical research and put forward by H. H. Price, a skeptical and rationalistically inclined Oxford philosopher. In an essay titled “Survival and the Idea of ‘Another World,’” Price speculates that newly dead individuals may continue, without knowing it, to make mental images resembling their earthly surroundings and that this kind of image-making would be analogous to dreaming. The “other world” would be a world of mental images, a kind of dreamlike world in which people would have image-bodies similar to the old body in appearance but possessed of rather different causal properties. In the image-world our desires would have the tendency to fulfill themselves instantaneously. A desire to go to Oxford might be immediately followed by the occurrence of a vivid and detailed set of Oxford-like images. “In a dream world Desire is king.” To those who dismiss belief in life after death as “mere wish-fulfillment,” Price therefore can reply that the *post mortem* dream world (similar to the Hindu conception of *kama-loka*, the “world of desires”) “would have to be a wish-fulfillment world.” As to the nature of the world (celestial or hellish) in which a person in the *post mortem* state has to live, Price assumes, in a truly Swedenborgian fashion, that it would be the outgrowth of his character represented before him in the form of dreamlike images. In a sense, therefore, a person gets exactly the sort of world he most intensely and most secretly wants.<sup>25</sup>



### *Correspondences and influx*

The key to Swedenborg's visionary universe is his doctrine of "correspondences." Simply stated, it means that everything we perceive in our visible or material world has a counterpart in or symbolizes the invisible or the spiritual world. Expressed in more general terms, everything outward and visible has an inward and spiritual "cause." One of the clearest formulations of such "correspondences" reads as follows:

The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, and not merely the natural world in general, but also every particular of it; and as a consequence everything in the natural world that springs from the spiritual world is called a correspondent. It must be understood that the natural world springs from and has permanent existence from the spiritual world. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Besides the correspondences that exist between the outward creation and the spiritual world, there is also an intimate (symbolic) relation between nature and the spirit (or soul) of man. As in the ancient spirituality of both East and West, the Swedenborgian man is a microcosm. There is a correspondence of all things in man with all things in the physical universe. There is a mental and spiritual (imaginal) heaven and earth; there are spiritual sun, moon, and stars; there are mountains, hills, valleys, and plains of the soul; there are spiritual (imaginal) trees, flowers, and tender herbs, also thorns, thistles, and poisonous plants; there are spiritual (imaginal) beasts, birds, reptiles, and insects. The "true man" is not a species of the genus called animal, not "rational animal" at all, but is himself a kingdom, a "world" that participates in all strata of the universe. He is the quintessence of all the elements, a copy in miniature of the divine, cosmic order (the Platonic *anima mundi* or the *Homo Maximus* in Swedenborg). Expressed in religious language, man is the image of God not only in the spiritual but also in the corporeal sense. He is a *Gestalt*, an image in which God himself is present and *spiritually perceptible*.

Another central idea in Swedenborg is that of "influx." All things exist by divine influx: "Every created thing . . . is . . . a recipient of God"—that is, "an image of God in a mirror."<sup>27</sup> It is important to note, however, that the divine influx or the divine life is received according to the capacity or the disposition of the recipient and thus presents infinite variety. Spiritual knowledge in Swedenborg's system is not something abstract, impersonal, or "objective." Contrary to the prevailing Western view extending from Aristotle to Descartes, the knower is not divorced from the known, the subject from the object, the inner from the outer. We are able to know the so-called outside world only because something of that outside world is also inside ourselves. In a religious context, this would imply that God is knowable but we cannot know him until we become similar to him.<sup>28</sup>

### *Visionary space*

Western (Newtonian-Cartesian) science has described the universe as an infinitely complex mechanical system of interacting discrete particles and

separate objects. In this perspective, matter appears to be solid, inert, passive, and unconscious. In the last decades, however, the mechanical picture of the world has been severely undermined, and we are witnessing a gradual replacement of the Newtonian paradigm by Einstein's four-dimensional continuum of space-time. The so-called objective world can no longer be separated from the subjective, and the "whole thing" appears more and more as a unified network of events and relations.<sup>29</sup> The emphasis has shifted from substance (solid matter) and object to form, pattern, and process. In Korzybski's sense,<sup>30</sup> we have access to maps, not to territory—that is, to our own mental constructs, not to the unknown X that may or may not exist behind these constructs. In a word, modern science seems to be rapidly becoming neo-Platonic.

I am not going to say that Neoplatonists and Swedenborg anticipated the discoveries of modern science. The Swedenborgian universe exists in a visionary space and visionary time, which are qualitatively different from the quantifiable space-time of science. By the same token, the organs of perception required for reaching this universe must correspond to the kind of "stuff" or reality to be reached. To be specific, what Swedenborg and other visionaries have discovered can never be replicated in the laboratory—by inventing ever more perfect space-traveling devices—but only by a change of consciousness. In other words, the scientist, so long as he has not turned into a mystic, cannot abandon the scientific method consisting in controlled observation of and experimentation with nature. Unlike the mystic or the visionary, the scientist is not interested in changing or enhancing his organs of perception. Therefore, he can only succeed in seeing more of the same (smaller and smaller objects with a microscope or far-away objects with a telescope) but never something essentially different. Whether he sees the infinitesimally small or the infinitely large, he still sees it as an object, because he looks at it in the same quantifying way and with the same prismatic eye. The scientific map of the universe can undergo only quantitative changes, and as long as science progresses (which progression is inseparable from the method employed in the course of progression), the map will never be the territory.

Swedenborg's "map" of the universe is a spiritual map. It is identical with the territory for the simple and paramount reason that the territory emerges and comes into being simultaneously with the making of the map. What I am saying is that Swedenborg's universe is a wholly imaginal world and that in this world imagination (map) *is* reality (territory).

Swedenborg held or rather "saw" that time and space, which are units of measure in the natural world, become not only variables in the spiritual world, varying with each spirit, but also varying with the spirit's every change of state. The appearances of things in "heaven" are plastic to the state of mind of the spirit. W. B. Yeats in his essay on Swedenborg expresses this as follows: "So heaven and hell are built always anew and in hell or heaven . . . all are surrounded by scenes and circumstances which are the expressions of their natures and the creation of their thought."<sup>31</sup> In Swedenborg's words:

In the spiritual world where spirits and angels are, there appear to be spaces like

spaces on earth; yet they are not spaces, but appearances [images]; since they are not fixed and constant, as spaces are on earth; for they can be lengthened or shortened; they can be changed or varied. . . . The spiritual idea of distances of space is the same as of distances of good or distances of truth, which are affinities and likenesses to states of goodness and truth.<sup>32</sup>

The Swedenborgian spirits and angels live in a world of flexible time and space, in which objects vary in appearance according to their correspondence with the states of mind. Angels are visible to one another when in accord and vanish when in discord; their distance from one another is increased or decreased in accordance with their state of affections (love). Love is a spacemaker and timemaker, which is the same as saying that space and time (somewhat as in Kant) are mental concepts or, more precisely, they are produced by the power of visionary imagination. Our real space is imaginal space in which, as Price said, the wish is king:

Whenever anyone . . . thinks about another he brings his face before him in thought, and at the same time many things of his life; and when he does this the other becomes present, as if he had been sent for or called.<sup>33</sup>

### *Spiritual body in Swedenborg*

In Swedenborg's system, death is not an absolute separation of the spirit from the flesh, but only a separation of the spirit from those elements of the body that contradict spiritual life. The underlying assumption here is that there is no such thing as something purely or absolutely spiritual in the sense of "immaterial." Everything that is spiritual has its being, life, and activity only on the basis of corporeality. Spiritual being exists only as the being of a person—that is, as a formed and organized body. This means that our body is spiritual and yet more substantial than our physical body. The spirit sees, feels, hears, and touches what is spiritual. The Swedenborgian psychologist Wilson Van Dusen puts it as follows: "Essentially, spirits are affections or feelings, the inner or essential aspects of mind that underlie thought or memory. When stripped of the body and less essential aspects of mind, these affections are even more in the form of man. Or—another way of saying it—the essential of a person is even more a person."<sup>34</sup>

Swedenborg teaches that in the physical body of man there is contained a subtle organism that is extended, but lacks the mechanical properties (inertia and weight) that are characteristic of ordinary matter. This subtle organism—called *limbus* or *nexus*—forms the link between body and soul; it persists after death and constitutes the body in the *post mortem* state.<sup>35</sup> *Limbus* is the intermediate zone between the physical organism and the suprasensory soul; an organizing mold or formative agent serving as the vehicle (Proclus' *okhema*?) of forces that Swedenborg sees as rigorously conditioned by the soul. At death man sheds the external or the less refined components of his physical nature and retains a kind of envelope composed of the purest

elements of nature that become his “containants.” One must be careful, however, not to confuse the *limbus* with the “spiritual body.” *Limbus* in itself lacks substantial unity; it is entirely plastic and protean and hence neutral in the formative sense. Having in itself no particular form (amorphous), it has the potential of assuming any form conceived by the soul. The morphological human aspect of the *limbus* derives from the human soul and its power of imagination. In the last analysis, it is imagination that creates for the soul a corporeal vehicle, a “spiritual body” that in the *post mortem* state constitutes the whole man. The organic form of man is the soul itself as it becomes concrete through the tangible matter it structures. In sum, spirits are, in Blake’s words, “organized men.”

It is a central teaching of Swedenborg that the whole man—that is, man as a “spiritual body”—immediately after the death of the physical body enters into the world of spirits, which represents an intermediate condition between heaven and hell.<sup>36</sup> The intermediate world of spirits is the theater of judgment when the true character of man is brought to light. In turn, man’s true character is determined by what Swedenborg calls his “ruling love;” for “every spirit from head to heel is such as his love is.”<sup>37</sup> Every man is his own judge and his own witness. No one is sent to hell or heaven who is not inclined to go there of his own will (his ruling love). Swedenborg explains:

A man is altogether of such a quality as is that which rules his life; by this he is distinguished from others; and the nature of his heaven, if he is good, is formed according to it; and also the nature of his hell, if he is bad. It constitutes his very will, his own Self . . . his character; for it is the very *Esse* of his life, which cannot be changed after death.<sup>38</sup>

Within the Swedenborgian frame of reference it would be an oversimplification to speak—as it has become fashionable today—of heaven and hell as states of mind. They are not *just* states of mind, but places or spaces created by the mind or, rather, by imagination. Man naturally gravitates in the direction of his most basic affections and thereby creates the kind of space that corresponds to these affections:

The activity of love is what gives the sense of delight; in heaven its activity is with wisdom, and in hell with insanity, but in both cases the activity produces the delight in its subjects. . . . If, therefore, you know what delight is, you know what heaven and hell are, and their nature.<sup>39</sup>

*Delight* is a symbolic word and as such transcends the conventional and rational notions of good and evil, just as the “ruling love” is a force that may sway us toward either a heavenly or a hellish condition. Invariably we get what we love. In this context, heaven and hell would be two separate compartments of being only from the perspective of the epistemophagous reason. Imaginatively conceived, they are places created by what we love, and thus neither “good” nor “evil” in a strictly moralistic, rational sense. As Swedenborg points out, the only distinction between heaven and hell consists in the

*quality or meaning of delight*: in heaven the delight is associated with wisdom, in hell with insanity. But it is always delight (ruling love) that moves us in either one or the other direction. There is imagination not only in heaven but in hell as well, and imagination is always “delightful,” enchanting, dangerous. Northrop Frye has expressed this idea as adequately and colorfully as one could possibly wish: “Heaven is not a place guarded by immigration officials interested only in passports and certificates, nor is it the higher class to which we are promoted by passing an examination showing what we have learned in the world. Heaven is this world as it appears to the awakened imagination. . . .” Similarly hell is “this world as it appears to the repressed imagination.”<sup>40</sup>

Swedenborg’s conception of death is summarized by F. W. Schelling, in his theology of corporeality. To Schelling, death is not so much a separation as an “essentification” destroying the contingent and preserving the essential—that is, the most truly human, which is far more real than the fragile physical body. He therefore defends the Pauline view of resurrection against all “merely rational and sterile doctrines of immortality” and maintains that spiritual corporeality is already present in our material corporeality. As Ernst Benz, commenting on Schelling’s position, writes, “in every corporeality there is a spiritual-corporeal image that is the nucleus of its essence; this nucleus strives for a higher potency, and this higher potency is spiritual corporeality.”<sup>41</sup>

Swedenborg distinguishes between an “inner” and an “outer” self in persons in their *ante mortem* state. Our “outer” self is the facade we put up to other men and, more often than not, to ourselves as well. As every psychologist knows, we tend to identify ourselves with our facade to such an extent that the latter usurps the whole of our personality. Immediately after death, a man is dominated by what Swedenborg calls his “external” or “corporeal” memory, which corresponds to his “outer” self. External memory constitutes the ultimate record of man’s life (the book of life), the whole of his acquired character and ruling love, and it cannot be essentially changed after death:

No one’s life can be changed after death because it is organized according to his love and faith, and hence according to his works. . . . A change of organization can take place only in the material body, and by no means in the spiritual body after the former is rejected.<sup>42</sup>

As a rule, the dead, when they enter the world of spirits, are surprised to find that they still have sensations, and taking for granted that sense-perception is bound up with the existence of a *physical* body, they refuse to believe that they have died at all. They meet congenial companions, speak, walk, eat and drink, and see around them objects not unlike those to which they had been accustomed in their earthly life.<sup>43</sup>

The facade that the living and the dead carry is due, according to Swedenborg, to the distortion of the original correspondence between the inner and the outer. The face becomes mask through the original sin of egocentricity.

What is lost is the plasticity, elasticity, and transparency of facial expressions. It was otherwise with the ancients:

In the most ancient times men were such that the face was in perfect accord with the internals, so that from a man's face everyone could see of what disposition or mind he was. They considered it a monstrous thing to show one thing by the face and think another. Simulation and deceit were thus considered detestable, and therefore the things within were signified by the face. When charity shone forth from the face, the face was said to be 'lifted up' and when the contrary occurred, the face was said to 'fall.'<sup>44</sup>

In the spiritual world it is not permitted, however, to persevere indefinitely in a state of disharmony between inner and outer: "There everyone must be the image of his own affection or his own love; and therefore such as he is in his interiors, he must be in his exteriors."<sup>45</sup> The surviving spirit must now act and appear to himself and to others in accordance with his inner self—that is, his ruling system of desires, emotions, sentiments, and valuations, unchecked by social and prudential considerations. The mask now drops away, and the spirits show themselves in their "true colors." Swedenborg reports:

I have seen some that have recently arrived from the world, and have recognized them from their face and speech; but seeing them afterwards I did not recognize them. Those that had been in good affections appeared with beautiful faces; but those that had been in evil affections with misshapen faces; for *man's spirit, viewed in itself, is nothing but his affections; and the face is its outward form.*<sup>46</sup>

The dropping of the mask is the judgment—a reduction to what is the essential or true image of man. In other words, judgment is a *physiognomical act*: revelation of the true face, of our imaginal essence. Swedenborg describes this procedure with his usual finicky precision:

When a man's acts are discovered to him after death, the angels, whose duty is to make the search, look into his face, and extend their examination through the entire body beginning with the fingers of each hand, and thus proceeding through the whole.<sup>47</sup>

### *Angels*

During the last few centuries the accepted imagery for angels has undergone serious deterioration. For most theologians they are either to be "demythologized" out of existence or given an inoffensive allegorical interpretation. The very concept of an angel is often hopelessly vague or, if definite, saccharin and false, as, for example, when angels are represented as souls of the departed children or as the type of female character connected with gentleness and merciful ministrations.

In the traditional Christian theology, angels are higher types of created spirits (spiritual substances) not bound up with a body. In this way they are distinguished from the human soul, which cannot function properly without the aid of a physical body. To circumvent the fact that in the Scriptures angels occasionally do appear to men in bodily form (for example, to Abraham and Lot), it is suggested that these bodies must be merely "assumed bodies." The angels take them on "not for their own sake, but for ours, in order to perform their ministry to us." The assumed bodies are not really living bodies; they only appear to be so. "Strictly speaking, they are like masks, which are not real visages but deceptive counterfeits of faces."<sup>48</sup>

In sharp contrast to these views, which, to say the least, are grotesque, Swedenborg teaches that angels are men and women in perfect form:

There is not a single angel in the universal heaven who was originally created such, nor any devil in hell who was created an angel of light and afterwards cast down thither, but all both in heaven and in hell, are from the human race.<sup>49</sup>

The process we described earlier as dropping of the mask is in effect an angelomorphosis, a *reductio ad modum angelicum*, or a transformation of man into an angel. In this sense, an angel is a man or a woman in whom the inner and the outer, the material and the spiritual, perfectly correspond to each other—that is, man in the state of completed self-expression (Jung's "individuation") or in the state of fully realized divine image. An angel's face, far from being a deceptive counterfeit of a face, is a true image. In Swedenborg's words:

When angels present themselves to the sight, all their interior affections appear clearly and shine forth from the face so that the face is an external form and representative image of them. It is not permitted in heaven to have any other face than that of one's affections. Those who simulate another face are cast out from the society. From this it is evident that the face corresponds to all the interiors in general, both to man's affections and to his thoughts.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, we have come full circle, for it appears now that what traditional theology regards as angels are in reality devils. Hell, according to Swedenborg, is the imaginal place where the artificial mask, acquired on earth, the lie, becomes permanent. Thus the spirits of hell (devils) are men and women, but in "imperfect form."<sup>51</sup> "All spirits in the hells, when seen in any light of heaven, appear in the form of their evil, for every one of them is an image of his evil, since his interiors and his exteriors act as one. . . ."<sup>52</sup> The faces of such spirits are hideous: some are hairy, others like torches or disfigured with warts and ulcers, et cetera; their bodies also are monstrous. In a word, "they are all images of their own hell."<sup>53</sup> The inhabitants of the hells can never become persons, because they have completely identified themselves with their mask. In a sense, hell is death, for to fail to realize one's divine image is to die as only a soul can die—that is, by losing one's potential "angelicity," one's true Self, one's archetypal image.

Swedenborg describes the condition of hells in terms of insanity, which, psychologically speaking, could be understood as a manifestation of unrestrained egoism or *hubris*. *Hubris* is from the Greek *hubridzo*, which means "to run riot." Applied to the spirits in hell, it would denote "the mania of an ego's vertigo, endlessly spinning about its own center."<sup>54</sup> Now it is precisely for this reason that angels, in contrast to their saccharin representations in popular piety, are seen by mystics and visionaries as *daimons* of might and terror prompting man to conform to his own divine image. The Sufi mystics repeatedly emphasize, "We are wrestling not *against* but *for* the Angel"—that is, for our true self. According to another Sufi saying, ". . . he who knows himself [his angel] knows his Lord." Rainer Maria Rilke wrote that "every angel is terrifying [*ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich*]." The archetypal psychologist and theologian D. L. Miller has observed that angels are terrible because their way is "to let go of things. . . . The letting-go involves one in giving up of grasping from the perspective of ego ('I,' 'me,' 'mine')." <sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, let me suggest that before we attempt to provide an unequivocal answer to the question "What is a spiritual body?" it is advisable first to ascertain *who* is asking the question. Who is raising this question and for what purpose? Obviously it's the ego, consciousness, reason, or whatever you choose to call it. Questions of this sort have to do with the meaning of a thing—that is, they presuppose that behind a thing's sheer appearance there is a hidden meaning that constitutes its "true being." The ego, having found out the true meaning of the thing under consideration, feels reassured, "in control," so to speak, and goes on asking "the next question." For better and not worse, the question about the "spiritual body" in St. Paul or Swedenborg is not a question about a "thing" or an object, and it cannot be answered by ego-consciousness. The reason for this is that to "know" the "spiritual body" would be equivalent to knowing oneself as an object—a paradoxical procedure as old as Achilles and the tortoise, involving the questioner in an infinite regress. The simple fact is that the experiencing subject can never fully become the object of his experience and trying to accomplish such a feat is like believing that if you turn around quickly enough, you will see the back of your head in the mirror. Thus, when all is said and done, we must candidly admit that "spiritual bodies" are literally meaningless entities in that they have no "backs." They are creatures of imagination, real imaginal bodies, pure presences beyond the split of subject and object. Like images, they are meaningless in the precise sense that they mean nothing beyond themselves. These angels of our imagination have no message to deliver because they themselves are the message. They are faces that we must face so as not to lose our own faces—our so-called personality, our soul, and our dead.



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