

PHILOSOPHY AND HOMEOPATHY: THE INFLUENCE OF SWEDENBORG

THE relationship between philosophy and medicine is a phenomenon repeatedly seen throughout the history of ideas. And, in contrast to what some people think, not only have these relationships not impeded the development of medical practice, but rather, quite to the contrary, they have made the practice of medicine possible and have sustained it. We are of the opinion that philosophy has provided medicine with the theoretical model it needed to work out a system capable of moving away from pure empiricism. This is something we can see even in the Hippocratic Corpus, in its use of the philosophical conception of the pre-Socratic philosophers as a vehicle or conceptual process in which to insert diverse medical theories. Thus notions and categories—such as the struggle between contraries, the four-part division of the natural elements, the knowledge of the similar by the similar, with the *Physis* being understood in the dynamic and energy-oriented sense—all of this was to have a decisive effect on the birth of medicine in Ancient Greece. It is true that the Hippocratic Corpus itself would also influence Greek metaphysics, but this only serves to confirm the close connection that has existed between philosophy and medicine. We encounter an example of this, on account of the fact that some great philosophers were at the same time physicians: Alcmeon of Crotona, Empedocles, Avicena, Averroes, Maimonides, Paracelsus—and also we see that many philosophical categories (including those mentioned above) have been present in the very theoretical foundations of medicine, such as the analogy and sympathy of all the elements of reality among one another (or to put it another way, the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm), hylozoism and vital organicism, etc. In so many words, philosophy provides a conceptual paradigm that serves as a reference for medicine to organize and systematize experience.

These conceptual paradigms, which medicine has made use of, have included pre-Socratic metaphysics, Platonism, Aristotelianism, hermeticism, alchemy, etc. Swedenborg has also served as a theoretical paradigm for a certain kind of medicine. But before continuing with this theme, allow us to make some reference to the meaning of Swedenborgian thought.

Emanuel Swedenborg (born in Stockholm, 1688, died in London, 1772) was of enormous influence on romantic *Naturphilosophie* and on Romanticism in general. The reason for this influence stems from the fact that the authors and thinkers of the Romantic period saw in the ideas of Swedenborg precisely what they were yearning for—fundamentally, an experience of the unity and totality of reality. Indeed Romanticism is characterized by being an ideological current in which Western man's split between the "I" and "not-I," between the interior and exterior worlds, is experienced as tragic. As a result, the Romantics were inclined to seek theoretical and vital supports in those systems that avoid such a split in consciousness, systems that instead present an all-encompassing vision of reality, in which man finds himself in solidarity with the rest of the world. And Swedenborg served that purpose, precisely because Swedenborgian thought arose in great measure as a reaction to the dichotomies that the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the Cartesian approach (Swedenborg was an outstanding example of this approach in the first period of his life) were introducing in man and in all of reality: body-soul, faith-reason, material-spirit, world of the intellect-world of the senses. All of the works of Swedenborg, subsequent to his existential crisis of 1744-45, are directed towards overcoming the conflicts that all those dualities, and many more, had imposed upon reality.

Thus, in the theological work of Swedenborg, we see his intention of reconciling in an all-encompassing unity the dualities of science and religion, heaven and earth, spirit and material, etc. For that reason, Swedenborg was to activate all of those categories, which would signify a holistic conception. He thus integrated into a differentiated unity the various determinations of reality: analogy, correspondences, organicism, teleologism, theory of degrees and of series—these were to become some of the most important concepts of Swedenborgian thinking.

Let us now turn our attention to homeopathy. In a certain way homeopathy responds to considerations very similar to those of *Naturphilosophie*, or the philosophy of nature of Romanticism, since underlying the ideological foundation of homeopathy is the idea of again linking man with the totality. As far as regional ontology is concerned, homeopathy equates the signs of man with the signs of being. For that reason, it can come as no surprise that some eminent physicians who have made history in homeopathy were at the same time great Swedenborgians, as is the case of Hering and Kent, among many others. Accordingly, let us now look into this particular aspect. We will summarize our thesis by saying that

Swedenborg served as a theoretical and systematic foundation on which the practice of medicine can find support. More specifically, Swedenborg's theory of degrees and series is what serves as a model and a paradigm for homeopathic doctrine, particularly the teaching of Kent. We have all read the prologue to *Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy*, in which Kent says that his thinking is based on Hahnemann and Swedenborg.

Let us explain then, briefly, the Swedenborgian doctrine of degrees.

Swedenborg sets forth his theory of degrees and series (also in keeping with the doctrine of correspondences) as a way of attaining a unitary vision of all the orders of the real, while at the same time respecting the substantiality of those orders. For that reason, Swedenborg divides reality, in a universal and hierarchical way, into three great areas (the degrees) that act analogically (in correspondence) in all the orders of reality. Accordingly, some examples of this tripartite division include:

Celestial	Spiritual	Natural
End	Cause	Effect
First	Medium	Last
Love	Wisdom	Use
Animal	Vegetable	Mineral
Superior	Average	Inferior
Innermost	Internal	External



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In each of these triads of degrees, the first entity is the higher one, from the metaphysical point of view. This means that each triad represents an ontological hierarchy; the second entity signifies the midpoint on the scale; and the third example is the lowest and most superficial entity. But in this theory of degrees, applicable to everything, Swedenborg introduces a fundamental point: the degrees can communicate with one another and are open to the Divine influence that thus penetrates everything. What Swedenborg means by the opening of the degrees is that the orders of reality are not airtight compartments, but rather they all belong to a higher unity that ties them together and determines them. For that reason, Swedenborg's theory is put together in a different way, as follows: Swedenborg divided the series of degrees into two classes: degrees of height and degrees of width. The degrees of height are successive and discrete (that is, separate); they go from the greatest to the least, if you start from the top, and from the least to the greatest, if you start from the bottom. The degrees of width are simultaneous and continuous, and go

from the innermost to the exterior. Swedenborg puts forth the example of a column divided into three sections: the upper, the medium, and the lower (the transversable and communicable degrees of height), and on the other hand, each section of the column would have another three degrees, continuous and possessing width: innermost, interior or medium, and exterior. There exists a correspondence between the higher and the innermost, between the middle and the interior, and between the lower and the exterior. All of reality that one finds in a degree of height participates at the same time in a specified degree of width. As all degrees of height are connected to one another, everything becomes a receptacle for the orders above. Accordingly, Divinity, Infinity, Truth, and Goodness come to each and every one of the orders, including the lowliest ones.

Let us return now to James Tyler Kent. It is evident that the theory of degrees is present in the *Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy* of Kent and permeates his entire medical thought. Accordingly, for Kent, the cause of disease is the separation of understanding and will in man, and that imbalance would exteriorize itself in use and in effects—in other words, the exterior (phenomenon) which manifests the action of the understanding and the will.

The cure, according to Kent, always moves from top to bottom (degrees of height) and from within to without (the degrees of width). What this means is that the curative power follows the order of communication of the degrees (Lesson II, paragraph “c”).

The knowledge of the principles that govern human beings in general is an indispensable prerequisite for proper therapeutic procedure. These governing principles in man are triadic: brain-cerebellum-spinal cord; will-understanding-vital force. The body is differentiated into interior, center and exterior (Lesson V).

The interior forms the exterior. The order goes from the highest to the lowest, from the center to the circumference (Lesson V).

The importance of the influx as a vital force and simple substance is rooted in the fact that it communicates its formative *vis*, its finality and utility, throughout the degrees, to all of the elements of man (lesson VIII). In the same way, the vital dynamism of the medicating substance reaches all of the series of powers, since these are receptacles of that vital dynamism. Causes are continued in the effects (Lesson XIV).

In all these Kentian propositions, taken from the *Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy*, the influence of Swedenborg becomes quite apparent,

particularly with regard to the theory of degrees. Through this theory, Kent was able to explain the action of the curative power of medicines, apart from quantitative factors. In bringing about a certain homogeneity among all of the orders of reality, the curative dynamic can exert influence throughout all those orders. It is therefore evident that the Swedenborgian presence in Kent is pervasive, since Kent takes as his starting point several fundamental principals of the Swedenborgian system: a unitary and holistic conception of reality, the correspondence of all of the stages of reality, vitalistic organicism, and teleologism. One of the applications made by Kent concerns the notion of correspondence, because we are warranted in seeing the Repertory as being constructed along the lines of a grandiose *clavis* (let us not forget that one of Swedenborg's books was *Clavis Hieroglyphica*), where the correspondences between people, symptoms, diseases and medicines are established. But Swedenborg's influence is not restricted to Kent's scientific and theoretical work (the theory of degrees, developed in the theological period is an interiorization of the anatomical ideas developed in the book *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, which is from the scientific period of the Swedish thinker's life), but also aspects of his religious thought had a major influence on Kent (and on other homeopathic physicians as well), since he was a faithful member of the Lord's New Church, the denomination to which many other famous homeopaths have belonged, such as Garth Wilkinson (one of the first translators of Swedenborg into English), Constantine Hering, Otis Clapp, Hans Gram, John Ellis, etc.

The figure of James Tyler Kent has been presented to us as a paradigm at a time when we see the use of a specific theoretical paradigm by a particular approach to medicine. Why Kent turns to Swedenborg is because the Swedish philosopher provided him with the conceptual building blocks for organizing medical knowledge into a coherent system. But above all, what Kent reveals is how the visions of Swedenborg and Hahnemann are interwoven and consistent with one another. Without a doubt, this is due to the fact that both respond to presuppositions and motivations that the two men had in common.

Finally, we wish to stress once again that a philosophical conception, even a theological one, is not necessarily an obstacle to the theory and practice of medicine. On the contrary, a philosophical model can give internal coherence to medicine. We believe that Kent has credibly demonstrated this with respect to the work and doctrine of Swedenborg.