

Freedom and Equilibrium

By Brian Kingslake

Heaven and Hell

In the world of politics we sometimes hear the expression "Balance of Power", and we find that a cold war can also be a cold peace. And we learn in mechanics that two equal and opposite forces impinging on each other produce a state of equilibrium. Emanuel Swedenborg shows how this same principle applies to the balance in the cosmos between good and evil, focused respectively in Heaven and Hell.

When God first created the world, there was no evil in it. *"He saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good"*. But the time came (we don't know after how many thousands or millions of years) when certain individual men began to produce a state of evil, by misdirecting their life's love towards self and the world rather than towards God and the neighbour. This resulted in a loss of innocence, and a self-conscious sophistication likened to the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Man's subsequent degeneration, spiritually speaking, is symbolized in Genesis by the ejection from Eden, the flood (surely a flood of falsity!), the building of the Tower of Babel, and the scattering of the human race. God had now to take into account the existence of an aggressive Hell, so He devised a new plan of salvation, by which men on earth were exposed equally to influences from Heaven and Hell, and were thus brought into a state of freewill.

Looking at the matter in detail, we find that there is, in the spiritual world, a kind of buffer zone or no man's land between Heaven and Hell, which Swedenborg calls the "Intermediate State" or "World of Spirits". It is neither good nor evil. Rather, it is both good and evil, but is in Equilibrium between the two. You and I, and all of us on earth, live as to our spirits in this "Intermediate State". From one side, Heaven presses upon us - an angelic sphere of pure unselfish love, gentleness and healing. Opposing it on the other side is the diabolical sphere of Hell - hate, lust, violence, cruelty and malice. We are in equilibrium between the two opposing forces, perfectly free to align ourselves with one side or the other. Without this freedom, we could not develop our own individuality. We could not make up our minds as to what kind of people we want to be, that is to say, whether we want to end up as angels in Heaven, or devils in Hell.

One of the main activities of the Divine Providence on man's behalf has been to maintain this Equilibrium, and thus man's free will. If the Lord were to permit Heaven to have a greater influence than Hell, we should become puppet angels, mere automata, or at best hothouse plants, which is not what God wants. On the other hand, if Hell were allowed to dominate the world, no one could be saved. Two thousand years ago, that was what was happening. Hell was increasing in power to such a degree that God Himself had to enter the arena, to control it from the human side, and thus restore Equilibrium.

That was the Redemption. He did not destroy Hell, but He got it under control, so that man could never again be dominated by it. The Redemption permanently restored free will to the whole human race. Redemption is not the same as Salvation of course; Salvation depends on the cooperation of the individual, which Redemption did not do.

The world is a school in which we are training for our eternal life. As in all schools, the students will never be wholly good or wholly bad; all are in an ongoing process of spiritual development. From time to time down through the ages, certain forces impinging upon the world have increased; but always the Lord has balanced them by allowing a greater inflow from the opposite side. The spiritual "Balance of Power" must be preserved.

New Age

Just now, in this New Age (which Swedenborg calls the "New Church") Heaven has been opened, and there has been a tremendous increase of love, wisdom and power, pouring into men's hearts and minds from within. It is indeed the "Second Coming of the Lord". Therefore to balance it the Lord has had to allow a

comparable increase in the influence of evil from Hell. The devils are greatly enjoying this licence; but they cannot go too far. The Lord still has His hands on the balance lever. Our freedom will always be assured.

Imagine an enormous pair of scales. There are two pans, delicately balanced. More and more "good" is being placed on one scale, pan, tending to tip the whole thing up towards Heaven. But, in order to preserve Equilibrium, an equal amount of "evil" is being put on the other scale, pan. As we go further and further into the New Age, the weights on both sides are increasing to a fantastic degree. The most ignorant labourer today has greater responsibilities for good or ill than many of the great feudal Barons of old. Everybody now is an individual. Each person today is their own authority. It is a wonderful Age we live in, but a dangerous one. That is our new age responsibility.

Equilibrium

It has been truly said that the world has never been better than it is today. It is equally true that the world has never been worse than it is today. That is what is meant by equilibrium.

Swedenborg tells us 'that when we die we shall wake up in the intermediate region of the spiritual world - not in heaven and not in hell, but in the neutral zone between them. This is not surprising, as we are living in that region here and now. We shall not go anywhere when we die; we shall simply switch over into the spiritual dimension. After waking up, we shall resume our normal activities, remaining in that neutral region for as long as we wish, getting to know ourselves more interiorly, and finding out precisely what we really are. There will be some surprises! All hypocrisies will drop away; all role playing will cease. We shall begin to appear as we really are. The church goer, who is really an atheist at heart, will quickly drop his "religion". On the other hand, the professed atheist who is really a religious man at heart, will quickly lose his atheism! All who are inwardly good, whether they are pagans or heathen or nothing at all, will be presented with the Divine Truth, and will absorb it like a sponge, turning in love and worship to the Glorified Lord Jesus - God in His Divine Humanity, and will move on in joy to Heaven. Those who are evil at heart will quickly forget all the truth they ever knew; will flout the Lord, repel His Love, and get away from Him as soon as they can, in Hell.

Free? Yes, technically everybody is "free" so long as they are in the Equilibrium of the Intermediate State. But, as each individual's "Ruling Love" comes to the surface and takes over control, they eagerly relinquish their freedom, and align themselves either with the angels in Heaven or with the devils in Hell. They feel an irresistible attraction, either to the loving, unselfish, out giving sphere of Heaven, or to the egoistic, grasping, self pitying, indignant sphere of Hell. That is the "Judgment", and when it is achieved, their preparation for eternity is complete, and they can go on developing from that point onwards. They adopt a new kind of freedom: not freedom to choose between good and evil (they have already made that choice) but freedom to be more and more fully themselves, freedom which none of us can enjoy absolutely here on earth. Whether they will then be happy or miserable, fulfilled or frustrated, will depend entirely on the kind of person they then find themselves to be - and that was determined by the use they made of their freedom while on earth. Let us bear that in mind in our own case, while we are still in the Equilibrium of earthly life.

Some extracts from Swedenborg's 'New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrines'

The numbers refer to paragraphs.

141. ALL freedom is a function of love, because what we love we do with a sense of freedom. Therefore all of our freedom is connected with our will, because whatever we love we also will to do; and since our love and our will constitute our life, freedom too constitutes our life. This can show us what freedom is, namely, that it is a reflection of our love and our will and therefore our life. That is why anything we do freely seems to us to have come from ourselves.

142. Doing evil freely seems to be a kind of freedom but it is actually slavery, since this freedom comes from our love for ourselves and our love for this world, and these loves come from hell. This kind of

freedom actually turns into slavery after we die, since anyone who had this kind of freedom becomes a lowly slave in hell afterward.

In contrast, freely doing what is good is freedom itself because it comes from a love for the Lord and from a love for our neighbor, and these loves come from heaven. This freedom too stays with us after death and then becomes true freedom because anyone who has this kind of freedom is like one of the family in heaven. This is how the Lord expresses it: "*Anyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not abide in the house forever, but the Son does abide forever. If the Son makes you free, you will be truly free*" ([John 8:34, 35, 36](#)).

Since everything good comes from the Lord and everything evil from hell, it follows that it is freedom to be led by the Lord and it is slavery to be led by hell.

143. The purpose of our having the freedom to think what is evil and what is false and even to put them into practice (to the extent that the laws do not prevent it) is that it gives us the ability to be reformed. What is good and what is true need to be planted in our love and our will if they are to become part of our life, and there is no way this can happen unless we have the freedom to contemplate both what is evil and false and what is good and true. This freedom is given to each one of us by the Lord. When we are contemplating something that is good and true, then to the extent that we do not at the same time love what is evil and false the Lord plants that goodness and truth in our love and our will and therefore in our life, and in this way reforms us.

Anything that is planted within us while we are in a state of freedom becomes a permanent part of us; anything, though, that is planted under coercion does not last, because our will is not engaged; the will behind it is that of the person supplying the pressure.

That is also why worship in a state of freedom is pleasing to the Lord but forced worship is not. Worship in freedom is worship that comes from love; forced worship does not come from love.

144. The freedom of doing good, and the freedom of doing evil, though they appear alike in the external form, are as different and distant from each other as heaven and hell are: the freedom of doing good also is from heaven, and is called heavenly freedom; but the freedom of doing evil is from hell, and is called infernal freedom; so far, also, as man is in the one, so far he is not in the other, for no one can serve two lords ([Matt. 6:24](#)); which also appears from hence, that they who are in infernal freedom believe that it is slavery and compulsion not to be allowed to will evil and think falsity at their pleasure, but they who are in heavenly freedom abhor willing evil and thinking falsity, and would be tormented if they were compelled to do so.

The following are extracts from Swedenborg's 'Heaven and Hell'

The numbers refer to paragraphs.

597. I have just described the balance between heaven and hell and have shown that the balance is between what is good from heaven and what is evil from hell, which means that it is a spiritual balance that in essence is a freedom.

The reason this spiritual balance is essentially a freedom is that it exists between what is good and what is evil and between what is true and what is false, and these are spiritual realities. So the ability to intend either good or evil and to think either truth or falsity, the ability to choose one instead of the other, is the freedom I am dealing with here.

The Lord grants this freedom to every individual, and it is never taken away. By virtue of its source it in fact belongs to the Lord and not to us because it comes from the Lord; yet still it is given us along with our life as though it were ours. This is so that we can be reformed and saved, for without freedom there can be no reformation or salvation.

Anyone who uses a little rational insight can see that we have a freedom to think well or badly, honestly or dishonestly, fairly or unfairly, and that we can talk and act well, honestly, and fairly but not badly,

dishonestly, and unfairly because of the spiritual, moral, and civil laws that keep our outward nature in restraint.

We can see from this that the freedom applies to our spirit, which does our thinking and intending, but not to our outer nature, which does our talking and acting, except as this follows the aforementioned laws.

598. The reason we cannot be reformed unless we have some freedom is that we are born into evils of all kinds, evils which need to be taken away if we are to be saved. They cannot be taken away unless we see them within ourselves, admit that they are there, then refuse them and ultimately turn away from them. Only then are they taken away. This cannot happen unless we are exposed to both good and evil, since it is from good that we can see evils, though we cannot see what is good from evil. We learn the good spiritual things we can think from infancy from the reading of the Word and from sermons. We learn the moral and civic values from our life in the world. This is the primary reason we need to be in freedom.

[2] The second reason is that nothing becomes part of us except as a result of some affection of love. True, other things can enter us, but no deeper than into our thought, not into our volition; and anything that does not enter our volition is not ours. This is because thinking is derived from our memory, while volition is derived from our life itself. Nothing is ever free unless it comes from our volition, or what amounts to the same thing, from a particular affection that stems from our love. Whatever we intend or love, we do freely. This is why our freedom and the affection of our love or intentions are one. So we also have freedom in order to be able to be moved by what is true and good, or to love them, so that they do become part of us.

[3] In a word, anything that does not enter us in freedom does not stay with us, because it does not belong to our love or intentions; and anything that does not belong to our love or intentions does not belong to our spirit. The actual reality of our spirit is love or volition - using the phrase "love or volition" because whatever we love, we intend. This is why we cannot be reformed except in a state of freedom.

But there is more on our freedom in the extracts from Secrets of Heaven below.

599. So that we can be in freedom for the sake of our reformation, we are united in spirit with heaven and with hell. With each of us there are spirits from hell and angels from heaven. By means of the spirits from hell we encounter our evil, and by means of the angels from heaven we encounter the good we have from the Lord. As a result, we are in a spiritual equilibrium - that is, in a freedom.

On the presence with us of angels from heaven and spirits from hell, see the chapter on the union of heaven with the human race

600. We need to be aware that our union with heaven and with hell is not directly with them but is mediated by spirits who are in the world of spirits. These spirits are with us, none from hell itself or heaven itself. We are united to hell through evil spirits in the world of spirits and with heaven through the good spirits there. Because of this arrangement, the world of spirits is halfway between heaven and hell and is at the point of balance.

On the location of the world of spirits halfway between heaven and hell, see the chapter on the world of spirits ([421-431](#)); and on its being at the point of balance between heaven and hell, see the last chapter ([589-596](#)).

We can see from this where we get our freedom.

THE AUTHOR

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