

The Universal Law of Representations

Linking

Myths, Dreams, the Bible and Nature

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Human minds are now probing into the mysterious origins of the physical world and the equally mysterious origins of the human psyche. What for instance, is the origin and meaning of those strange, exciting vibrations we feel when reading some of the old myths, legends and fairy tales that have been handed down for centuries or millennia? Remember Sleeping Beauty wandering alone through the great palace till she opens a tiny door at the top of a tower to be confronted with an evil fairy in disguise? Or how about Bluebeard's wife with the key in her hand to a forbidden room, how our heart beats as she opens the door. Do we not dimly sense the hidden, forbidden doors into our own psyche?

The legendary Greek hero, Hercules, lived with an uneasy conscience for doing evil in a fit of uncontrolled wildness and deliberately sought great challenges to enable him to come to terms with himself. Have we never felt the same as a deep seated, vital urge carrying a sense of great importance to us?

The Emergence of Unconscious Elements

There may well be myths, legends and fairy tales which lack depth and universality, but the age long persistence of so many and the emergence of the same underlying themes in different guises is evidence that they may originate in a deep common level of the human psyche, an unconscious level which must express itself periodically by clothing itself in representational forms from nature and visible human life. Since Freud we have become familiar with the power and drive of the human unconscious to emerge through myths and dreams; and since Jung we have begun to recognise that in these emergent depths may lie not only the repressed urges of man's animal instincts, but also the highest qualities of the human psyche and the ultimate meaning and purpose of human existence.

But how are particular myths and dreams to be interpreted? Any one of them can be given as many interpretations as there are interpreters. Is the unconscious depth in man using a 'secret code', or is it simply playing about meaninglessly with the forms of the imagination? Modern science is rapidly uncovering many of the secrets of the three kingdoms of the external world, but will man ever be able to unfold the secrets of human existence buried in the originating depths in man, particularly if they only reveal themselves in disguises or codes offering an infinity of diverse interpretations?

Swedenborg and the Science of Representations

Two hundred years ago, a modest pious man of acknowledged intellect and international reputation, quietly put into print a key to the 'code' used by the subconscious which was unique in being as universal in its application to the significance of forms as was Newton's theory of gravitation in the realm of mechanics. That man was Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772), a renowned Swedish investigator of the sciences; and the key was found in that most universal of all books, the Bible. Long before Freud and Jung, Swedenborg came to perceive that the Bible was the spiritual psychological history of man's universal spirit and that the ancient myths were other forms of the same thing, modified and sometimes distorted by the various cultures through which they had passed.

But not only the Bible, myths and dreams yielded to this key (which Swedenborg called, the Science of Correspondences, or Representations), but very nature herself, which Swedenborg had previously studied so assiduously in his earlier years. The whole detailed process of evolution and diversification of life forms were seen to clothe and represent the inner development of man's spiritual nature, a work attributable to an Infinite Personal Life Creator.

Swedenborg expressed the relationship between an emergent human drive or perception and its natural representation, as one of cause and effect. So he saw all nature as an arena of effects arising out of an arena of spiritual causes, a spiritual world or cosmos of potential perfect human desires and thoughts. The origin of the contents of this spiritual cosmos was the Divine Creative Mind. Itself inflowing into ever more diverse channels of influx as He evolved ever more potential qualities of finite human affections and perceptions and ever more diverse forms of life in nature. Man's own myths and dreams were themselves streamlets in this endless outpouring of creative life, which ultimate themselves not in a world external to the physical senses, but within man's senses themselves, in his faculty of imagination, that inner sensuous world not bound by space and time. Like Newton's law of gravitation, applying both to the motion of the heavenly stars and planets with terrestrial objects, so Swedenborg's law of representational creativity applies to both man's inner world of imagination and his outer world of fixed natural forms.

Representations and the New Age

So far ahead of its time was this unfolding of the universal law of spiritual creativity (150 years before Freud) that it was noticed by few and understandable and acceptable to even less. But it remained like a seed in wintry ground, awaiting the dawn of a more prepared and hospitable age, a new age in which the staggering part played in man's life by the unconscious would become 'schoolboy knowledge', an age in which a modern myth or fairy tale, Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings', would be written, hailed as a classic and imitated by countless admirers.

Myth, not so long ago dismissed (even defined!) as primitive superstition by a youthful scientific culture whose extraordinarily rapid success in the material technological sphere had gone to its head, is in the process of being reinstated as the respectable vehicle of the unconscious, conveying not primitive understandings of the external world, but man's universal sensing of his own inner world, much of which lies unconscious for most of the time. Thus it is now possible to see the Bible itself as true myth, the vehicle of a revelation of the spiritual psyche in its total development from start to full completion. The fact that actual history has been drawn on in so many parts has proved a 'red herring' for the Bible's true purpose of revealing universally experienced or experiencable inner spiritual states.

Light and Heat as Universal Representations

So universal and so 'natural' is the method and language of representations or correspondences, that it comes as no surprise to find how much man has been making use of it in daily life. For example, consider the concept of 'light'. The physical eye sees objects by light from the sun. But we talk of the mind 'seeing', meaning in ideas or thoughts. Thus the mind observes a whole world of mental objects and we find ourselves talking about warm or cold hearts, fiery natures, burning desires and so on. In fact the temperature of the body is often adjusted to correspond to or represent the 'temperature' of our feelings. In the science of correspondences it is a universal truth that loves (or desires) in the spirit, correspond to heat in the physical world and perceptions (or insights) in the spirit, correspond to light in the physical world.

Representational Colour

The field of representations is of course, not colourless, (remember that extra vividly coloured dream you had the other night?) The representations of affections or desires take on the 'warm' colours of Red, Orange and Yellow (the sun's colours). Such colour is bright and lustrous when the represented desires are spiritually good and wise, but dull or fiery when the desire is evil. Cool colours, such as pure white, blue and green, reveal cooler ideas and perceptions, which are not yet linked with the psyche's central drives (i.e. as yet unemotional). The series rich Red, through Orange to deep Yellow represents a decreasing level (not quality) of love or desire, and the series bright White, through Blue to deep Green represents a decreasing level or plane of truth.

Schematically this may be set out as follows



Bright rich Purples and Scarlets partake of both warmth and luminosity, and represent that fulfilling union of desire and perception, or love and its consort wisdom, which the psyche longs to attain.

The Rainbow

One of Nature's most striking and beautiful representations is the rainbow arch. Here the dark rain cloud background shows man's fallen earthly state, somewhat dark and menacing, (Freud's id). The brightness within the arch is the general influx of inner light from the Divine Source (the sun we cannot view directly). The beautifully coloured rainbow arch itself represents the inner light transforming man's knowledges of life into various forms of truth and goodness. For example, when we look at nature in all its natural beauty and intricacy, it can become wonderfully lit up in our minds with the wonder and beauty of its Divine origin end evolution, and its manifestation of Divine Love and Creativity at work. When the atheist looks at nature he looks into a spiritual darkness or void. For him there is no rainbow, but merely blind Nature churning out meaningless forms. But for those receiving the inner light, a spectacular spiritual rainbow arches across their sky, which reflects the wonderfully diverse facets of Divine Creative Life, both its shades of love (Red to Yellow) and its shades of wisdom (Green to Indigo)

Parables as Representational Stories

The intangible world of the spirit makes use of the tangible world of nature to convey its forms and meanings in special stories. It forms 'parables' from nature with the use of representations that mirror its own inner forms. Of Jesus himself it is said that he never spoke without a parable, to express the spiritual truths he wished to convey. When He talks of a sower scattering seeds which fell into shallow soil and sprang up too quickly with poor roots and were scorched by the sun when it rose, we instinctively latch on to his representations - God the sower, the seeds of truth, the soil of our spirit (shallow when we don't root truths firmly into our very way of life), and the burning sun of selfish passions. And whether we agree with Jesus' words or not, who can mistake his meaning when he says ("I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life")

Nature's Three Kingdoms as Representations

The living mind is beautifully presented in the three kingdoms of nature. The mineral kingdom contains the representations of the 'building blocks' of the mind, the strong, constant factual elements that are a necessary basis for any thought or developing wisdom. The vegetable kingdom represents the mind developing with living thoughts, often reaching great heights and branching out in all directions like great beautiful trees and multiplying indefinitely, as one thought leads to another. Finally the animal kingdom mirrors forth the mind teeming with warm blooded affections and desires which move out to touch other persons in a living way.

The following diagram illustrates the theatre of the mind

Kingdom	Mind's Contents	Mind's Development
Animal	Affections	Affectionate Feeling, wise living
Vegetable	Thoughts	Understanding, perceptions
Mineral	Facts	Memory, knowledge

So when we read in the book of Genesis, for example, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, we recognise the representation. And in the beguiling serpent we recognise our sensual faculty which 'hugs' the physical world as the serpent's body hugs the dust of the ground. So the serpent's temptation is for us to understand and explain everything of life solely in terms of what we can see or touch, to reduce life to mindless matter.

Simplistic Nature of Representations in Myth and Legend

In the modern classic fairy tale, 'Lord of the Rings', we recognise a representation of the great existential themes of spiritual forms of good and evil opposed to one another and meeting each other in conflict on the ground of man's spirit and life, and man's ultimate quest or mission to defeat the evil powers with special aid from the heavenly forces of good. The characters are simplistic compared to those of almost any modern novel, play or film. They line up on the side of good or bad, or stay on a neutral ground in between. Also they tend either to act in a regular, reliable way or to act unpredictably. The personae of myth and fairy tale are relatively fixed points on a good-evil axis. However some personae may take a discrete jump from one character location to its opposite, as in the case of Saruman in Lord of the Rings, or Lucifer in Milton's 'Paradise Lost'.

Now the complexity of the individual human psyche is better seen and grasped if its diverse facets can be spread out, as it were, under separate distinctive representations. So man's higher spiritual elements are often projected in myth and legend as good fairies or goddesses, and his baser elements are projected as wicked fairies, goblins, giants or gods. The psyche's natural (neutral) elements turn up as jelly or dour characters, such as Tolkien's hobbits who represent the outer characteristics of personality. The same projection under the representation of 'black and white' characters occurs throughout the Bible, each representing one facet of the universal human spirit.

An influx of evil may be represented as growing darkness, storms, colour changes towards murky, putrid looking yellows, greens and browns, or sometimes just as a foreboding atmosphere. Many examples are to be found in 'Lord of the Rings', but a particularly striking and direct one is to be found in the well known fairy tale of the fisherman's wife who, granted a series of wishes by an enchanted fish, wishes for greater and greater power and pomp for herself. As her ambition grows greater, so the colour of the sea changes from clear blues to murky greens to black turbulence as a storm gradually brews, which threatens all the little ships on the water. So also storms on the Sea of Galilee in the Bible, are representations of storms of passion in the mind.

A heavenly influx on the other hand, reverses the trend, causing bright, fresh gardens and glades to flourish and happiness to abound. Special help from above is given to hero figures (who have accepted the great mission), to enable them to defeat great monsters (representatives of great lusts or ambitions), which otherwise would be impossible for them. So the universal battle of the conscience spreads itself out in pictorial form in the various myths and tales that have been passed down from antiquity, for example, Hercules and his labours, or David and Goliath. The general pattern and meaning is clear; but for the detail. (as long as they have not become altered or distorted out of recognition like a rationalised account of a strange dream sequence), we need the universal key, the science of representations found by Swedenborg to give detailed spiritual meaning and significance to the whole Bible, and to human existence in general,

Misuse and Loss of the Science of Representation

Somewhere along the line, mankind allowed this knowledge to degenerate into primitive magic and into superstitious use (using it to affect the physical world magically rather than the mind spiritually), and nearer our own day modern science swung the focus of interest from the subjective and internal to the objective and external aspects of existence. As civilised man begins now to turn back to his own spiritual resources, now he is beginning to find scientific technology bankrupt as a source of deep happiness and fulfilment, so he needs to rediscover and develop the age old phenomenon of spiritual representation, which in itself has never ceased to operate in nature and in man's dreams. With the rediscovery of this fundamental truth he will once again be in touch with and begin to comprehend the source of life in general and his own life in particular, and so find that meaning, purpose and fulfilment which is perhaps the one fundamental drive of the psyche which underpins all his aspirations and endeavours.

Further Reading

For the representations of the spiritual psyche in the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis, see '*Heavenly Secrets*' Vol. 1 by Swedenborg. Especially interesting is the way these chapters reveal how the mind has a tendency to degenerate the knowledge and use of representations, till they cease to reveal any

of the deeper truths of the psyche at all. Also the book *'Heaven and Hell'* by Swedenborg should be consulted, particularly chapters 12 and 13, for a description of the law of creative representation at work in man's eternal spiritual world.

The following are extracts from Swedenborg's *"New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrines"*. The numbers refer to paragraphs.

230. THERE are two elements that constitute our spiritual life: love and faith. Love constitutes the life of our will and faith constitutes the life of our understanding. A love of what is good and a consequent faith in what is true make up the life of heaven, and a love of what is evil and a consequent faith in what is false make up the life of hell.

231. Love for the Lord and love for one's neighbor constitute heaven. Faith, too, constitutes heaven, but only to the extent that we lead our lives according to it. Further, since both love and the faith that goes with it come from the Lord, we can see that the Lord himself constitutes heaven.

232. For each of us, heaven is within us to the extent that we accept love and faith from the Lord; and if we accept love and faith from the Lord while we are living in this world, we enter heaven after death.

233. The people who accept heaven from the Lord are the ones who have heaven within themselves, because heaven is within us. This is what the Lord teaches us:

They will not say, "*See, the kingdom of God is here!*" or "*See, it is there!*" Behold, the kingdom of God is within you. ([Luke 17:21](#))

234. The heaven that is within us is in our inner self. It is present in our willing and thinking from love and faith. As a result it is also present in our outer self, in which we act and speak from love and faith. Heaven is not, however, present in our outer self apart from our inner self; after all, every hypocrite can do and say good things without willing and thinking good things.

235. When we arrive in the other life, which happens immediately after death, others can see whether heaven is within us, though this is not visible while we are living in this world. You see, what shows in this world is our outer self, not our inner self, while in the other life our inner self appears because then we are living as spirits.

236. Eternal happiness, which is also called heavenly joy, is given to people who live and walk in a love for the Lord that comes from the Lord and a faith in him that comes from him. This love and faith have heavenly joy within them. If we have heaven within ourselves we come into heavenly joy after death; until then it lies hidden in our inner self.

There is in heaven a sharing of everything that is good. The peace, intelligence, wisdom, and happiness of all are shared with every individual there, though the individuals' capacity for it is determined by the amount of love and faith they have accepted from the Lord. This shows how much peace, intelligence, wisdom, and happiness there is in heaven.

237. Just as love for the Lord and love for our neighbor constitute a life of heaven for us, so love for ourselves and love for the world, when they are in control, constitute a life of hell for us, because these latter loves are the opposites of the former. So people whose love for themselves and love for the world are in control are incapable of accepting anything from heaven. What they accept comes from hell. Whatever we love and whatever we believe comes either from heaven or from hell.

Some extracts from Swedenborg's *"Heaven and Hell"* follow. The numbers refer to paragraphs.

87. There Is a Correspondence of Everything in Heaven with Everything in the Human Being

People today do not know what "correspondence" is. There are many reasons for this ignorance, the primary one being that we have moved away from heaven because of our love for ourselves and for the world. You see, people who love themselves and the world above all focus on nothing but earthly matters because these provide gratification to their more outward senses and pleasure to their moods. They do not

attend to spiritual matters because these offer gratification to their deeper senses and pleasure to their minds. So they set such matters aside, saying that they are too lofty to think about.

The early people behaved differently. For them, knowledge about correspondences was the pearl of all knowledge. By means of it, they gained intelligence and wisdom, and by means of it those who were of the church had a communication with heaven. Knowledge about correspondences is in fact angelic knowledge.

The earliest ones, who were heavenly people, did their thinking from correspondence like angels, so they could even talk with angels. Further, the Lord was quite often visible to them, and taught them. Nowadays, though, this knowledge has been so completely lost that people do not know what correspondence is.

88. Now, without some grasp of what correspondence is, nothing can be known in clear light about the spiritual world or about its inflow into the natural world, nothing at all about what the spiritual is relative to the natural, nothing in clear light about the human spirit that is called "the soul" and how it affects the body inwardly, nothing about our state after death. Because of all this, I need to define it and explain what it is like. This will also pave the way for matters that are to follow.

89. First, I need to state what correspondence is. The whole natural world is responsive to the spiritual world - the natural world not just in general, but in detail. So whatever arises in the natural world out of the spiritual one is called "something that corresponds." It needs to be realized that the natural world arises from and is sustained in being by the spiritual world, exactly the way an effect relates to its efficient cause.

By "the natural world," I mean all that extended reality that is under our sun and that receives its light and warmth from it. All the things that are sustained in being from that source belong to that world. The spiritual world, in contrast, is heaven, and to that world belong all the things that are in the heavens.

90. Since a human being is a heaven and a world in least form in the image of the greatest, there is a spiritual world and a natural world within each of us. The deeper elements, which belong to our minds and relate to our intelligence and volition, constitute our spiritual world, while the outer elements, which belong to our bodies and relate to our senses and actions, constitute our natural world. Anything that occurs in our natural world (that is, in our bodies and their senses and actions) because of our spiritual world (that is, because of our minds and their intelligence and volition) is called something that corresponds.

91. We can see in the human face what correspondence is like. In a face that has not been taught to dissimulate, all the affections of the mind manifest themselves visibly in a natural form, as though in their very imprint, which is why we refer to the face as "the index of the mind." This is our spiritual world within our natural world. Similarly, elements of our understanding are manifest in our speech, and matters of our volition in our physical behavior. So things that occur in the body, whether in our faces or in our speech or in our behavior, are called correspondences.

92. We can also see from this what the inner person is and what the outer person is, namely, that the inner is the one that is called the spiritual person, and the outer the natural person. We can also see that they are as distinct from each other as heaven and earth, and that everything that happens and comes forth in the outer or natural person does so from the inner or spiritual one.