

1

INTRODUCTION TO INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS AND EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

Let's start with the origin stories of IFS and Swedenborg, and overviews of their key concepts. These introductions will lay an initial foundation for our later discussions. We will explore everything we touch on here more deeply further on, like an overture for the whole production.

Origin Stories of Internal Family Systems and Swedenborg

Chelsea: I want us to start by talking about what each of these approaches found: Swedenborg through his path and Internal Family Systems through its evolution as a model, and then your own work in it, Bob, specifically.

As an opener on Swedenborg, he was born in 1688 in Stockholm, Sweden, and died in 1772 in London, England, at the age of eighty-four. After studying at Uppsala University (1699–1709), he journeyed to England, Holland, France, and Germany to study with leading scientists in Western Europe. He then apprenticed as an engineer under the Swedish inventor

Christopher Polhem (1661–1751). He was ennobled by Queen Ulrika Eleonora (1688–1741), which gave him an active seat in the Swedish House of Nobility. He was an active participant in the Swedish government throughout his life.

During a transitional phase from 1743 to 1745, in his mid-fifties, he underwent a spiritual awakening, which opened his perception to a dual consciousness of this life and the life after death. He went on to publish eighteen theological titles that draw on the Bible, philosophical reasoning, and his own spiritual experiences.

There are records that he was having spiritual experiences even from a young age, though.²⁰ He was always observing his own consciousness and was curious about it. At the point right before his spiritual awakening, he was an anatomist. He was really interested in trying to find “the seat of the soul” in the body. He was writing a multi-volume work called *The Soul’s Domain*,²¹ about the soul in the body, right before he transitioned to writing spiritual literature. Then the second-to-last work that he published was called *Soul-Body Interaction*.²² This quest to find the seat of the soul, to understand consciousness, was a throughline in his life.

His curiosity led him into states of mind beyond his imagination until it awoke in his consciousness a connection to spiritual realms that lasted for the rest of his life. His interest in finding the seat of the soul and the curiosity that he brought to that feels very similar to the approach of Internal Family Systems and its willingness to plumb the depths of the unconscious, to step beyond our waking, talking life.

20 Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic*, 5.

21 Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom, Considered Anatomically, Physically, and Philosophically*, trans. Augustus Clissold, 2 vols (Bryn Athyn: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1955). A more accurate translation of the title of this work is *Dynamics of the Soul’s Domain*.

22 Emanuel Swedenborg, *Survey / Soul-Body Interaction*, trans. Jonathan S. Rose and George F. Dole (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2022).

In IFS, you might say, “I’m not feeling great,” and then, as you bring curiosity to what is arising in yourself, you go into a deeper level of consciousness, an awareness of this inner realm where you can have dialogues with your parts; and then it can go even further as described in Bob’s book *The Others Within Us*. I see a parallel there, between Swedenborg and the IFS model.

So let’s start with Swedenborg. Passing it to you, Jonathan.

Jonathan: A lot of people see Swedenborg as a scientist—he was a polymath, renaissance man, learning all these different things, especially about anatomy and the brain—who then had a spiritual awakening and dropped all that science stuff and got interested in the Bible and the afterlife. But Anders Hallengren, a Swedenborg scholar from Sweden, has argued that there’s more of a throughline, which was that, from an early age, Swedenborg was interested in thoughts and feelings and where they come from. And this is long before Jung and Freud, obviously; in fact, some people say that the reason for Swedenborg’s popularity in the nineteenth century was that he was *psychology* before it got going, because he was talking about thoughts and feelings and where they come from. There’s a draft work that is lost, but he mentioned it in a document to his brother-in-law. The New Century Edition refers to it as *Lost Draft Method of Analyzing Feelings*,²³ which he wrote when he was only twenty-six years old, long before his spiritual awakening.

So I think, in a way, the connection between the physical world and spiritual world—the soul, the brain, the body—was a lifelong interest for him. Partly what he was interested in was, “What is this whole thing?” He really came to believe that the human mind is thoughts and feelings—that is our soul, that is our spirit, and it transcends death.

23 Jonathan S. Rose, Stuart Shotwell, and Mary Lou Bertucci, eds., *Emanuel Swedenborg: Essays for the New Century Edition on his Life, Work, and Impact* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2005), 448.

Bob: Okay. I think Dick came to this stuff—and most people in therapy-land come to this stuff—from a very different point of view. It's not this vast curiosity. It's more, "Oh, here's this suffering person in front of me. What can I do?"

And I've adopted that point of view too, and I've made it a discipline because I am intensely curious, but when there's someone in front of me suffering, it's my contract and my responsibility to help relieve their suffering and not to use their suffering to advance my research agenda. It takes ongoing effort on my part not to do that.

The things you were saying, Chelsea, about "not knowing," are so important. The reason Dick could discover, or invent—really, he would say discover—IFS is because he was *not* trained in individual therapy. He didn't have a whole raft of theories he had to get rid of. He didn't have this whole framework to look at the world. He was only trained in Family Systems. He often tells the story of how he was doing a study, and in it were a bunch of families with kids with bulimia—kids who eat way too much and then make themselves vomit. His belief—he was a professor and wrote the leading textbook on Family Systems therapy of the day,²⁴ which is still being used—was that if you rearrange the family system, everything's going to be fine. He did an outcome study to prove that this stuff worked, and it didn't work. He sort of jokingly said, "Well, the kids didn't know they were healed." They kept starving themselves to the verge of death and eating a great deal and vomiting.

From a place of ignorance, he brought a lot of focused curiosity to what was going on for them. So I think that *not knowing* was key to his learning what was going on. It's stunning—actually listening to the client. Now, this is a horrible indictment of Western therapy, but that was radical. You listen to these people and believe what they're saying, instead of coming up with

24 Michael P. Nichols and Richard C. Schwartz, *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods* (New York: Gardner Press, 1984).

some fancy theory to explain it away (I'm afraid some of my snarky parts are sneaking in here!).

My basic point is that it comes from ignorance. It all comes from being ignorant and not having the education in all the current theories of the day.

Overview of the Internal Family Systems Model

Bob: I want to lay out in a relatively concise way the basic view of what a human is from an IFS point of view. I studied the history of religions a lot, and we would talk about this as “the anthropology of that religion”; how they saw humans as a spiritual being.

Parts

So the basic idea is that we're made up of parts. We're not one whole mono-mind. That's a terrible myth and very, very damaging. We're much more like a basketball team or a baseball team than a tennis player.

We need all these parts, and we don't want to mush them together. It's like in an orchestra; you want the violins to be violins. You don't want everyone sounding like a piano. You need all these different things. Take artificial intelligence and computers—you need all these separate subroutines which are relatively encapsulated and sparsely interlinked, or otherwise they're not subroutines. So you've got all these parts of people, and they are natural, healthy, and beneficial.

Before Dick's time, most people saw them as the product of trauma. And that's because of how people were noticing these things. They were noticing them in extremely traumatized people. But now it's clear that they're not; this is how we're made, and it's a good thing.

There's also direct evidence. Infants recognize human faces. And what they've done is made these stick-figure drawings of a human face, with a little smile and two eyes, and maybe a nose. Infants will orient themselves to that in their first days

of life. They'll turn their face and look at it. And they've even done these experiments with how much of that you can mess up before they won't orient to it—won't recognize it as a face. There is a pre-programmed module that does human facial recognition inside an infant—that's a part!

And this other researcher, Thomas Berry Brazelton, observed that there are four or five discrete states in infants.²⁵ Usually they're considered emotional states, but they're parts!

Noam Chomsky writes about deep grammar²⁶—there is a language-learning module that typically turns on at a certain time, and then, unfortunately for some of us, turns off when we're teenagers. So there are all these parts; these modules of the mind.

This is not new at all. Plato had a multiple model of mind. In one of the dialogues, Socrates is sitting there talking with this other guy, and he says, “Well, the very fact that we can have arguments in our head and say to ourselves ‘I want to do this.’ ‘No, I don’t.’ ‘Yes, I do.’ ‘No, I don’t.’ That proves we’re multiple.” It’s so obvious that it’s trivial. They go on to discuss something else. But this myth of the mono-mind keeps coming back, and it’s really poisonous. We’re made up of parts.

Parts come in several varieties. This was also not new with Dick. He refined it. Another therapist named Pia Mellody, who was an addiction specialist, had the same basic insight. Dick calls them protectors and exiles. Pia Mellody called them “adult-adapted, wounded children,” and “wounded children.” The broad concept is that there are parts who were badly hurt; and the pain they were given was so overwhelming that they had to be hidden away—locked in a basement, encapsulated—so that

25 T. Berry Brazelton and Bertrand G. Cramer, *The Earliest Relationship: Parents, Infants and the Drama of Early Attachment* (Addison-Wesley: 1991).

26 Noam Chomsky, “Deep Structure, Surface Structure, and Semantic Interpretation” in *Foundational Issues*, vol. 1 of *Semantics: Critical Concepts in Linguistics*, ed. Javier Gutiérrez-Rexach (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2003), 154–196.

the person could survive. This happens in childhood; it also happens during combat. This is a repeated dissociative mental process that is actually wonderful. It saves people's lives. It's not a disease; it's a resource.

So there are the hurt ones who are kept in a basement somewhere. And then there are these protectors who are trying to keep that wounded one from being triggered; or they're reacting when that one *is* triggered.

Dick says—and this is, as far as I know, new with Dick—that protectors come in two flavors: managers and firefighters. Managers are proactive. They come before the exile gets triggered, and their whole job is to keep that part safe, where it won't be triggered, so the flames of that overwhelming emotion won't come roaring up. Managers tend to be socially acceptable: overwork, perfectionism, internal criticism, all that kind of stuff. Managers.

Firefighters tend to come up after that exile has been triggered and the flames of that overwhelming emotion are burning the whole system. Firefighters just want to put that out. They don't care about collateral damage. And they're almost never socially approved: addictions are the classic firefighters. Overspending. Overwork can be a firefighter. It depends on how it's used. A lot of things can be used either as a firefighter or as a manager. Alcohol can be used as a manager or a firefighter. So you have to explore with each person.

Most people have a firefighter pyramid. They can do moderate stuff, like eat too much at lunch if they were distressed in the morning, and that's enough. But as it gets worse, they go up and up and up. Well, they have three or four martinis on their way home. They watch porn all night, then they start snorting coke; maybe they start cutting themselves.

The top of the firefighter pyramid is almost always the same. That's suicide. In IFS, we view suicide as some part in there saying, "If this pain gets absolutely unbearable, I can stop it. I will save you. I'm here." That gives us a very different attitude toward suicide. It's not an enemy. We don't make "no suicide" contracts,

except in states where you're required by law to make them. In that case we say, "Well, we're going to work really hard to stop you from killing the body, but we can really appreciate what you're doing here." It really works. Pragmatically, this works.

Parts are what populate our inner world. They're real beings with full personalities and good intentions for the system. They get frozen in time. You can have parts stuck in the past from when you were a two-year-old, and those frozen-in-time parts don't know how old you are in the present. They can appear to be non-human, but Dick says the spirit in them seems to eventually be human. Parts can communicate with us, oftentimes through our bodies.

There was a quote from Swedenborg you shared with me, Jonathan, that fits in perfectly here. *Secrets of Heaven* 4800:

Very few can believe that spirits and angels live in communities, and that everything in a person corresponds to those communities. Few can believe that the more communities there are, and the more members in a community, the better and stronger the correspondence, because there is strength in unanimous numbers.

That's multiplicity. We're communities; we're not an individual.

Burdens

So we've got this two-layered thing of parts: exiles down here, layers of protectors above. All these parts are good. What makes them a problem is they've got burdens on them. You get these exiles who were really hurt in childhood and they're carrying all this terror, self-hate, shame, or overwhelm. You get burdens off these parts, and they're the most tender, the most sensitive, the most innocent. The most playful. None of these parts are bad. They all have treasures in them. The suicidal part is often the most loyal, dedicated being you could imagine inside a person. None of them are bad.

Parts are not their burdens. Parts get a lot of gunk stuck to them, and that's not who they are. That's a major problem with

most therapies. We think the angry part is anger, and we just want to get rid of it. That doesn't work.

Jonathan: My wife was just asking me the other day about IFS and saying, "So the parts are all good." And I said, "Well, as far as I can figure out, the parts are all good, but the burdens are not." The burdens can be suicidal or drug addicted, but that's not the part's true essence. You can experience the part without that.

Bob: Dick has said, "This world is the school, and the burdens are our lesson plan." That's the curriculum, dealing with all that.

Self

Then Dick discovered there's something else inside. He discovered it in his clients. He actually listened to them—like I said, revolutionary. Anyway, they would all come across this thing, and when Dick would ask about it—"What part is that?"—client after client would say, "Oh, it's not a part really, it's different." This different, "not a part" part seemed to be wise and kind; it always came with the same basic characteristics. No matter how traumatized a client was, this wise and kind "not a part" part would eventually emerge. Dick came to call this presence "Self" with a capital S because that's what people usually referred to it as. Every client he worked with would say something along the lines of, "Oh, that's not a part, that's myself." But he gave it a capital S to distinguish it. Dick has come to think that this is the most important aspect of his description of humans.

He characterizes the Self by 8 Cs: curiosity, compassion, creativity, connectedness, courage, clarity, confidence, and calm.

I personally don't think Self is calm. I think Self is full of light. He even admits it—I'm going off topic a little—he said the first time he met Self was in peak experience flow-moments during athletics, when you're performing at your absolute maximum. That's not calm!

So there's Self, and parts, and parts come as protectors and exiles.

Jonathan: It's cool to hear you describe all this. As Chelsea mentioned earlier, Swedenborg left a journal in Swedish, unpublished at the time of his death. It's known as his dream diary, or *Journal of Dreams*. It chronicles his experiences during his spiritual awakening. Part of his process was noticing that his thoughts would argue with each other.

Bob: That sounds like what IFS calls polarizations. There are ways to work with polarized parts; parts who are at odds with each other.

Jonathan: It's amazing to think about what that must have been like for Swedenborg. What vocabulary did he have to articulate what he was going through? It wasn't something people talked about. He seemed very surprised that his thoughts were arguing with each other.

Chelsea: I happened to be at the Swedenborg House in London, which is the home of the Swedenborg Society, and they had a pamphlet that they had produced a while ago on everything Swedenborg says about "double thoughts."²⁷ He writes about it a lot in his dream diary. I took a picture of one page; it's just a bunch of different excerpts. One from *Spiritual Experiences* 484 says, "I've been endowed with a double thought, one being the inmost, the other interior. So that while I have been in the company of evil spirits, I could at the same time be in the company of good ones and could thus perceive of what quality were the spirits who desired to lead me." Another reads:

27 Swedenborg Society, *Double Thoughts* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2010).

It was wonderful that I was able to have at one and the same time two thoughts quite distinct from one another. The one for myself, which occupied entirely the thoughts of others. And at the side of this, the thoughts of the temptation in such a manner that nothing was powerful enough to drive them away. They held me captive so that I did not know whither to flee for I carried them with me.

(*Dream Diary* 69)

Bob: This is IFS. I've never heard this phrase "double thoughts" before. This is something that really fits well with IFS. In the history of multiple personality in the psychology of the West, they first got to dual personality and then they went, whoops, it's not just two.

Have you seen Henri Ellenberger's book *The Discovery of the Unconscious*?²⁸ Magisterial. He spent his whole life researching psychology in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. I don't think anyone's going to match that volume for scholarship for a very long time to come.

He traces this stuff about the dual personality. Also Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*.²⁹ Steppenwolf knew before he got into the Magic Theater, "Oh, I'm two people. I'm the mild-mannered professor and I'm the wolf." He knew that. And then he gets that book from the Magic Theater, and he starts reading. He says, "Well, it's good you know you're two, but you're not two. You're thousands."

And that was the doorway into his mystical enlightenment.

Jonathan: I think Swedenborg started with that idea of two and definitely came along the way to, like, oh no, there's a lot.

28 Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

29 Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, trans. David Horrocks (United Kingdom: Penguin UK, 2012).

Bob: So that dream diary might be closer to the realm of modern-day therapy stuff.

Jonathan: Some people have looked at it from that angle. Several editions of it exist that are interesting with commentaries on the different dreams, what he sees in the symbolism, and what he seems to be going through psychologically.³⁰

The Locus of Healing

Bob: Going back to IFS, the locus of healing in IFS is *not* the relationship between the therapist, out here, and the client. That's important. The real locus of healing is the relationship between the client's Self and the client's parts. We, or the ones of us who've done this for a while, do everything we can to back off, and instead foreground that relationship. We ask, "How do you feel toward that part? How is it for the part to receive your care?" That's where real, profound healing can occur.

Dick describes Self as a particle and a wave, or field. And I've even heard him theorize that if you get up into that Self, as a field, there might only be one Self that we all participate in.

To complicate things further, he also says that every part is made up the same way we are. Every part has parts and Self. It's fractal—which makes me think of a few concepts in Swedenborg's writings I've heard of like the "grand human" idea and thoughts being human, which I know we'll get into later (page XX).

In IFS, the basic pattern of therapy is to help a person get to a place where they are in Self-leadership, where Self is leading their system and the parts are unburdened, so their true nature can shine forth. And we want an orchestra. We don't want mush. We don't want to put all this in a blender.

30 See Wilson Van Dusen, *Emanuel Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams: The Extraordinary Record of the Transformation of a Scientist into a Seer*, trans. J. J. G. Wilkinson (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1986).

Another important thing here from a therapeutic point of view is that we don't teach grounding skills at all in IFS. We don't do any of that because if there's some part in a person who's all agitated and totally freaked out who shows up in the therapy room, and you start doing a grounding technique, what message does it give to that part? "Go away. You're not welcome here. We can't handle you. Shut up." That's absolutely the wrong message. So we say, "Oh, hi, anxious part. Welcome. Please come in. We want to get to know you. Don't go away." This is very different.

There can be exiled protectors as well; protective parts who get exiled. So it's not all vulnerable little nice guys. For example, women have been culturally trained to exile anger.

There are nested systems, nested isomorphic systems. Parts have parts, and parts have a Self. They have the entire structure of a human. And you can go down one more level. You can keep going forever. I think it's parts all the way down. You can go in the other direction, too. A person is a part of a family system. A family is a part of a community. You can go in either direction. It's all isomorphic in either direction. It doesn't seem to end. There's a wonderful saying that has taken various forms, but the gist of it is that a guy is asked, "What's the world? What does the world rest on?"

The guy answers, "Oh, the world rests on the back of a tiger."

"What does the tiger stand on?"

"An elephant."

"What does the elephant stand on?"

"A turtle."

"What does the turtle stand on?"

He says, "It's turtles all the way down."

Jonathan: I read a book about international diplomacy and it is fascinating the extent to which you can totally think of Russia as one person and China as one person. They have a relationship with each other. You can think of the whole world as having the Russia part and the China part, and how they're interacting

with the US part. It was interesting to read from a diplomat that it sounded like you could actually use that approach—that it's helpful to think that way, even though it aggregates tens or hundreds of millions of people into one thing. But you can usefully think of it that way. There's an interaction there.

Bob: That goes the other way too. I think an idea that comes from politics is very useful in psychotherapy: the idea of colonization and colonialism. I think the Native American therapists are the ones who brought this to the fore.³¹ But if you think about what the ego does, often what the managers do inside our heads is that they try to colonize the rest of the mind. They put out their messages and try to dominate it and colonize the unconscious and get control, and get spirit all walled up in nice little neat containers. I think it's exactly the same process.

Jonathan: They try to put in a whole level of government above the government that was already there.

Bob: Going back to the concept of Self for a minute, Dick says Self cannot be damaged even in the worst trauma. That's a life-saving message for guys like me. Who you really are can't be damaged or even dirtied. No matter how bad the storm is down here, the sun is not affected, and you are the sun. Pema Chödrön is generally attributed as saying something like that. She says, "You are the sky. Everything else—it's just weather."

The Self is undamaged; it can't be damaged. That's very radical. And I think it's also fundamentally a spiritual perspective. And the Self heals; it's the aspect of us that can heal our parts.

Jonathan: If we were just a body walking around having experiences, we would be totally damageable, and the damage would

³¹ David R. Hodge, Gordon E. Limb, and Terry L. Cross, "Moving from Colonization toward Balance and Harmony: A Native American Perspective on Wellness," *Social Work* 54, no. 3 (2009): 211–219.

be what we are. The idea that there's some part that's pure no matter what else goes on—that's transcendent.

Bob: Does that fit with Swedenborg?

Jonathan: Perfectly. He says it point blank in *Spiritual Experiences* 2487 (emphasis added):

The innermost and very inward parts of a person cannot be harmed, but only the inward ones.

Since the first human being up until now the Lord has preserved the very inward human parts so they would not be corrupted. This he has done by means of the innermost parts, because these are such that they *cannot be corrupted*. But their inward parts, on the other hand, have been corrupted.

This can be grasped in a spiritual mental image by means of forms, by those who are able to understand what very inward and innermost forms are like. They are such that they can be attached to anything whatever that can possibly exist in the world, can be twisted toward all things, but still conspire from the individual points as centers toward the state of integrity. For while they can most easily be attached to evil and distorted things in the inward parts, yet *from their ability to return to their state of integrity*, which the Lord preserves and constantly restores, *they are not harmed.*

Bob: Dick talks about how once parts open inner space, when the clouds part back, the Self exudes energy—it radiates, pulsates, vibrates. He compares it to prana and qi and the Hebrew word for spirit that also means breath, *ruach*.

Dick sees Self as radiating this. Is there a concept parallel to qi or prana in Swedenborg's work?

Jonathan: He definitely talks in similar terms about after you are reborn. He sees rebirth as an ongoing, eternal process of development. But when you reach the point when love takes

over, he has several beautiful things to say about how transformative that is. The humility, the understanding, the perspective. He says you really are alive for the first time. So he does associate it with life.

Chelsea: What comes to mind for me is what he calls “spiritual substance.” Spiritual substance is the spirit that is alive in our body. The spiritual substance has its own kind of movement to it. It’s the whole nature of spiritual substance that is what’s connecting us to other people, and to the spirits and angels. And it’s on account of the nature of spiritual substance that we receive spiritual light and spiritual warmth as life from the divine. The warmth is love, and the light is wisdom; in his terms, light and heat in this world correspond to the spiritual realities of love and wisdom. So spiritual substance is always streaming into us from the divine, which appears like a sun in the spiritual world. That is our whole life, and we’re made of it. In a word, he calls it inflow (*Soul-Body Interaction 2*). That’s what’s coming to my mind as the closest thing to prana, qi, or the radiance of Self.

Bob: That seems to line up well, how love is warmth and wisdom is light. That could be the qi, the radiance of Self, all of that; all of that lines up quite well.

Jonathan: He describes a long battle that goes on between what he calls the inner self and the outer self. But when the outer self gets on board and is more subservient, there’s this kind of peace and joy, and this life and lightness. He talks about it in terms of waking up. He says that when you go through this process, because a lot of it is interior, you may not feel it in a really loud way in your outer self. But it’s there. He says a lot of it filters down as just a quiet sense of calm and peace, and like, everything’s okay now. But he says after death, that energy gets magnified.

He talks about people after death, particularly when they come into their inner state, if their inner state is good, saying that it’s like waking up out of a sleep. So I think there are things

that relate to that kind of transformation. I think he was someone who had very much experienced that. He was surprised his friends couldn't tell how much had changed in him because he felt completely different, head to toe, on the inside. He comments on the fact that they didn't even seem to notice that he was a completely different person:

But to the end that everyone may believe this, I can earnestly declare by God that I have experienced it so clearly that I am sure there could not be a clearer sensation in these matters. This has lasted now for a period of almost eight months. During this time, by the Divine Grace of the Messiah, my mind has been governed by spirits of His heaven, with whom I have spoken throughout that entire period by day, almost without interruption.

At such times, these spirits streamed into my mind, bringing spiritual light together with the mental images themselves and the least points of thought, and even the actual words themselves, *which no bystander was able to hear*. Their inflow was so plain that I knew I was not thinking anything at all, not the least thing, that was not thus consciously streaming in. I could not produce even one idea by my own effort, even though I was conceded the appearance that I could. Yet all the while, during a period of five months, I was going around as before with friends in my country and with others socially, and *no one noticed that such a heavenly association existed*. (*Spiritual Experiences* 5a, emphasis added)

Even if I am in the company of other people, I speak exactly as anyone else, so that *no one yet has been able to tell any difference in me from my old self*, or from another person. (*Spiritual Experiences* 82a, emphasis added)

Unattached Burdens, Guides, and Legacy Burdens

Bob: There is one other thing I have to talk about. Some things in people are not part of their personal lives. They are not part of their personal histories. These things are in their mind, but they are not part of them. The one that's sort of obvious, and

pretty much everybody has to accept these days, is called legacy burdens. It's stuff you've inherited from your family, your ethnic group, whatever. And the classic example is how Holocaust survivors' descendants show a distinct syndrome of effects, even entire generations later.

Now there is hard science behind the study of epigenetics, which did not exist when I was in school. Part of the stuff that's in our minds that's not part of us is inherited from our ancestors. Everybody has to admit this. I just want to cite one experiment because—there's this thing about the Western academic world: if you can do it with rats, it's real.

We can do this with rats.

Two guys, Dr. Dias from Emory and Dr. Ressler from Harvard, designed these experiments.³² Dias thought that where he came from, which was poor Hispanic slums in Atlanta, Georgia, that mental illness and addictions ran in families. He wondered if there could be something more than just behavioral transmission. So he devised what I think is a brilliant experiment. He took male rats, only the male rats, and exposed them to a smell, which is quite pleasant. It's sort of like cherries or almonds. It's a chemical. And he would pair that with a shock until they had a conditioned startle response whenever they smelled this nice smell. Then he took semen from the male rats and impregnated female rats who had never been exposed to this smell, and who'd never met the male rat. Then when they had the pups, he tested the pups, and the pups had the startle response to that chemical. This startle response went on for generations. That is not a behavioral transmission.

Legacy burdens are a big part of the inner geography of IFS. There is recognition that all these things are in there that are not part of us. It's very parallel to Jung: you go inside, and the first things people usually encounter are the personal unconscious

32 Brian G. Dias and Kerry J. Ressler, "Parental olfactory experience influences behavior and neural structure in subsequent generations," *Nature Neuroscience* 17, no. 1 (2014).

and the complexes, and then the shadow, but when you go further into the archetypal realm, it is no longer yours. It's not even human; it's otherworldly.

Jonathan: Swedenborg describes hereditary evil in a very similar way. He made the point that people inherit tendencies to different kinds of evil from their ancestors and their parents most directly. He says that no one is culpable for what they inherit, but since we have a tendency toward those things, we tend to act them out at some point. And then we've made it our own. That sequence, that pattern, can be broken by what he calls "regeneration."

Bob: Legacy burdens are real. That's one category of things that are in our minds that are not part of our minds. The other one that is quite controversial—and that's the one I've focused on—is what IFS calls "unattached burdens" or UBs. They used to call them critters. These are energies that are in our system. We don't know where they come from.

Most cultures call this spirit possession. Dick was nervous about my using the term "spirit possession" in the subtitle to my book because he was afraid it would lose him academic respectability.³³ I like to put it this way: there is a basic bio-psychological dynamic that we have records of in pretty much every culture we know about and every era of history; the metaphor used to describe this is spirit possession. It can have profound effects for good or ill, and it deserves our study. It's one of the most widely spread cultural features.

This is where I go a little beyond IFS, and I think it might be where I fit in with Swedenborg the best. Not only is the mind multiple, it's also porous.

Things come in; things go out. Thoughts are not ours. They come in; they go out.

33 Richard C. Schwartz, foreword to *The Others Within Us*, by Robert Falconer (Great Mystery Press: 2023), xiii–xx.

We'll discuss the whole idea of porosity and how crucial that is in future conversations (see page XX). Suffice it to say for now, I think our belief that we have this impervious citadel mind is a poison that underlies many of our modern disasters and problems.

Chelsea: This seems like another feature of how IFS makes a point to listen to the client, and in the same way a person might say, "Oh, that's not a part, that's my Self," that's how you've come across this phenomenon as well. It's not that you're saying, "Hey, maybe there's spirit possession going on here" in a client. You're saying, "Oh wait, what is this person telling me? And let me actually listen."

Bob: Yes. It is also super important that I learn the client's language. I don't want to be teaching them these IFS terms. I never would mention the IFS names unless the client really wants them. I do not mention any of this stuff.

Jonathan: You know better than I do that so much of therapy has seemed to be, "Let me tell you: this is your inner child," or whatever. As if it's just about conveying this knowledge rather than learning from the client.

Bob: Knowledge alone doesn't do anything. If I'm working with someone of the Islamic faith, I talk about jinn, because that's their name for spirit, and they have a whole bunch of beliefs about it. And I respectfully try to learn that. I try to use whatever language the clients bring me.

There is a magnificent story about Dr. Milton Erickson, who was one of the greatest healers of the last century. Throughout most of his career, he was involved with inpatient treatment of psychosis—in his early career, before he became a very famous guy. And this one guy was standing in the hallway, and he would just talk word salad—nonsense that sounds as though it might be a language. He'd been doing this for years. The nurses would

take him to bed, give him a meal, and he'd stand in the hallway and talk word salad. Totally in his own world for years. Dr. Erickson goes up and stands beside him and studies the word salad and starts transcribing parts of it and has it typed up. He studies it, and he learns it. And then he goes and stands next to the guy and starts talking word salad back to him with the same kind of rhythm and stuff. Only two, three days later in the middle of his word salad, the guy turns to him and says, "Cut it out, Doc," and then is right back in word salad.³⁴ But that's all it took! Just learning the man's language broke a multi-year, total isolation. To me, that's respect. So I really, really try and listen to what my clients are telling me and get my arrogant little theories well back.

Swedenborg's Anthropology of the Human

Chelsea: So, Jonathan, would you then speak to Swedenborg's model of the human?

Jonathan: It's wonderful to listen to you, Bob. It's a real privilege. The fact that you have spent a lifetime trying to help people and understand what this geography is and what's going on inside people is so great. In my world, I'm looking at Latin, studying the language, and translating and editing Swedenborg's works, so trying to summarize what Swedenborg says about what a human is—trying to put together a picture—is a bit of a different process, but let me see.

The Human Form

Swedenborg says that the soul or the spirit is in the complete human form; that when we die, we lose nothing. Our consciousness transitions. This was his experience of many years

34 Milton H. Erickson, "The Use of Symptoms as an Integral Part of Hypnotherapy" in *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 8, no. 1 (1965): 57–65.

of duality, being in the afterlife and in this world at the same time. There'd been so much discussion about the questions, "Is the soul in the pineal gland?" or "Is it in the heart or is it in the liver?" or "Where is it?" And he said: it's everywhere. Any part that doesn't have it in it just dies. It's contiguous with your whole form.

The Layers of Our Being

We are multi-layered beings. That's terribly, terribly important to Swedenborg. He writes in New Testament terms about there being an inner self and an outer self (see Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:9–10; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Romans 7:22–23). But he acknowledges that this is a gross simplification of what's really going on. There's an inner self within the inner self, and another inner self within that, and so on. So when you were talking about fractals, I get very much of a fractal feeling studying Swedenborg. I don't know how people thought about this stuff before fractals came along to give us a container for these kinds of thoughts.

Our Innermost, Undamaged Part

There is a part in us that's the highest and purest part. Swedenborg's words sometimes fail him as he's trying to put into language what he is experiencing directly. He says it's just a highest or an innermost something (*Heaven and Hell* 39). It's just a something which is absolutely undamageable. No matter what you've been through.

Let me disclose a particular secret about the angels of the three heavens that people have not been aware of until now because they have not understood levels. It is this, that within every angel—and within every one of us here—*there is a central or highest level, or a central and highest something*, where the Lord's divine life flows in first and most intimately. It is from this center that the Lord arranges the other, relatively internal aspects within us that follow in sequence according to the levels of the overall design.

This central or highest level can be called the Lord's gateway to the angels or to us, his essential dwelling within us. . . . It is why we can receive intelligence and wisdom, and talk rationally. It is also why we live forever.

However, what is arranged and provided by the Lord at this center does not flow into the open perception of any angel, because it is higher than angelic thought, and surpasses angelic wisdom. (*Heaven and Hell* 39, emphasis added)

I'll mix Swedenborg with my own analogies to try to communicate it. I think in terms of computer programming: everybody who writes a program leaves a back door for the programmer so you can get back in there, and the back door for God is this highest part of us. It's the closest to God and cannot be wrecked. You can think of it like a modem, where this divine energy flows in. That's what allows God to be connected with everybody, no matter what's happened to them or what they're going through, or how evil or good they are. It comes through that highest level.

The Will and Intellect

Swedenborg talks a lot about the mind, and it's quite, quite complicated. But within these different levels—we'll talk in terms of two levels—one very important thing to say is that they have two sides to them; I think of it like the left and right half. But given the analogy of the human body, he says it's basically like the circulatory system; the heart and the lungs. Swedenborg ties in the lungs with the nervous system, because he talks about the fact that if you're unconscious, your heart can still be beating, but your conscious mind is gone—like if you get the wind knocked out of you, or the state you're in in the womb. The heart and lungs correspond to what's been called the will and the intellect—the two parts of the human spirit—a really basic duality there.

The will and the intellect are what we might call the heart and the mind. Love belongs to the will, whereas understanding belongs to the intellect. I've often thought of what he says about love as also being values. The Swedish word *väljer*, which is cognate with value, is to choose. It's the choice. The will is the part of us that can make a choice of purpose or a strategy. So when he's talking about love, I think he's talking about the *choice* of, "I wish to love my fellow beings in this way," or "this is how I want to contribute to others."

He goes against his time period very strongly with this. He's seen as a forerunner of the Romantic movement, against the enlightenment, because of the primacy that he puts on love.³⁵ Again, using my own analogies, think of the ideal of a Spock on *Star Trek*, or Sherlock Holmes, who will just set all that emotion nonsense aside and can supposedly enter this glorious world of pure thought because you have this ideal of a sparkling intellect. That insane fantasy was something that Swedenborg went against a lot. Even though he was an extremely well-educated European white male, he said really the heart is in charge. The will is the real you. It may be harder to access, because it's easier to see what you're thinking than it is to feel what you're feeling, but it's in the driver's seat.

And he talks a lot about how feelings will manifest in your thoughts, and then you can kind of see what's going on. But don't be fooled into thinking that you are your thinking; your thinking totally comes from your will, your heart, your values. That's the real you in the court of the mind. The heart is in charge. The intellect can advise—it can make suggestions, and it can give information. It does not make decisions. It's not in charge. And it gets run over a lot.

He says that the intellect is such that it can be lifted up into a kind of light. He talks a lot about the light and heat of the spiritual world. Heat having to do with love, and light having

35 Bernhard Lang, introduction to *Heaven and Hell* (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), 45–49.

to do with wisdom or truth, as we said. The intellect can be lifted up into a light that's higher than where your heart is. Our heart could be not very developed yet, but we're salvable because our mind can go someplace that our heart can't go yet. And the mind can guide us, even though it doesn't make the final decision. It can be lifted up even into the light of heaven and can have a kind of transcendent perspective.

Swedenborg's Pairing of Essential Aspects of the Divine	
Love	Wisdom
Heart	Lungs
Circulatory system	Nervous system
Right	Left
Will	Intellect
Heat	Light

The Inner and Outer Self

Then, in terms of the inner and outer self, he writes about how a lot of people in his day thought of the inner self as being your mental and emotional states, and your outer self as just being your physical body. He said, no, I'm not even talking about that. The outer self is the *you* that you present to the world. It's your most conscious part of yourself. In other words, you're closest to it, and it is closest to the flesh, so you mostly know what's happening on that level. But there is an inner level, and the two are independent. He cites things from Paul's epistles about how

our inner self and outer self can be and will be at war with each other (see Romans 7:22–23).

When you talk about different parts, Bob—absolutely. He makes the same argument you cited earlier of being able to see what you're thinking and wonder, “What am I thinking? Or why would I say that? What am I doing?” (see *Divine Providence* 104:2; *Secrets of Heaven* 5127:2). Those kinds of things show that there's a higher level looking down on that lower level. And there are multiple levels. It's not simply that there's one unit that can look at the other unit. It's that the two units can entirely disagree. And he called them, which the New Testament does too (see 2 Corinthians 4:16), “the inner man,” (*homo* in Latin, just a generic term) meaning that there's an entire self in the inner level and an entire self in the outer level. And they don't have the same agendas. They have their own memories. They have their own everything. And for much of our lives, they're at war with each other. It's kind of a life and death struggle for dominance.

There is an inner and an outer person as distinct from each other as heaven and the world. They must become one if the person is to be truly human. (*Heaven and Hell* 356:15)

Bob: Excuse me, Jonathan, do both the inner self and the outer self have their own heart, will, and intellect?

Jonathan: I believe they do, yes. I don't find that Swedenborg overtly speaks of an inner and outer will and intellect, but he does speak of inner and outer desires, inner and outer thought processes, and an inner memory that is completely separate from our outer memory.

Bob: Is the outer self how we are in the external world?

Jonathan: What a great question.

Chelsea: Yeah. It's not an easy answer.

Jonathan: Yeah. Certainly by the way Swedenborg uses the term “the outer self” sometimes. When he talks about hypocrites or flatterers, he might say the outer self is what they present to others. And then the inner self is what they’re really thinking about when they’re by themselves and they don’t feel self-conscious.

What Is Inner Organizes What Is Outer

One of Swedenborg’s key concepts, which again, is in the Bible, is that it’s a radically honest world after death (Luke 8:17; 12:2–3; *Heaven and Hell* 505, 507; *Divine Providence* 224:3; *Revelation Unveiled* 294:1). So who you really are on the inside comes out. So the thing that’s really effective for change is this kind of innermost-to-outer process—the divine inflow, just like Self in IFS, coming in and becoming central. He talks a lot about organizing things in our minds. So when the inner thing flows in, it is as though you’re under new management and it says, “This is valuable, these things that I’ve learned. This is worthless. That’s not great. This is bad. Make this central,” and so on. The huge change that we need to go through, the rebirth that the Bible talks about, is quite a substantial rearrangement of who and what is in charge.

Bob: Do you guys know about predictive coding? It’s a theory of perception. A lot of the psychedelic researchers believe psychedelics work by modifying this. Basically the idea is there’s raw sensory data coming up, and there are a bunch of predictions about what data has any value. These predictions are all based on valuing, which is this idea of choice and purpose. What is of value? What is going to be meaningful? Many of these predictive coding schema have six or twelve gates. If it doesn’t seem significant enough, it doesn’t get through, so your value structure or your love actually determines the universe you live in. It determines your perceptual universe.

Jonathan: This is very much Swedenborg’s message. One example he gives is from the Bible, when Joseph is unrecognized by

his brothers, and they're all astounded when he seats them all in the right order of their age at the table to eat because, as far as they know, he's just some Egyptian overlord or something. But he gets them all in the right order (Genesis 43:33). And Swedenborg has a field day with how Joseph represents love there, and he's organizing all the thoughts—the brothers—all these truths and insights and saying, “Okay, you're down at that seat, and you're over here.” This is the order they all go in (*Secrets of Heaven* 5704). I love that because I find that even when I'm doing a simple thing, like preparing to give a talk, the first thing I'll do is draft what I call the pieces, because these various pieces have been floating in my head. Here's one, here's another, here's another, and so on. And then I try to get into that mode of letting love or purpose organize. “Well, this would be central. This other thing, it's cute. It's funny. I could use it or not use it; this is really important; that's really peripheral to what I'm talking about here. That's maybe another talk.” That's the function of that will or love or purpose—to organize.

Bob: You've got a value system built into how you perceive the world. The question is not whether you have one or not; it's whether or not you're conscious of it.

The Importance of Choice

Jonathan: And so basically there are battles between the inner and outer self, and there's a part of us that has a choice. Really, all we are is a choice. So we're kind of witnessing the battle; in some of his analogies, we need to pick up a sword and fight for one team or the other. So if we join up with that outer self, the spirituality goes away. And that's what we are. We're just an external person, and self-centered.

Chelsea: I just want to connect choice to what Swedenborg says about freedom for a moment. When we are in what we love, when we get to express our love, that is when we feel like we have freedom, because we're getting to express our love; but love

also wants to accomplish something. Love, apart from wisdom, has no power. It can't get done the thing it wants to get done. So it needs means, a channel, and a form, which it gets through wisdom—in partnership with our intellect—and then it finally gets to do something. He says love and wisdom together are nothing apart from their manifestation, apart from being able to come down into action and result. So us using our choice in that flow is a big part of our process here.

Three Basic Categories of Love

Jonathan: Swedenborg organizes things in terms of categories of love: love for God; love for the neighbor; and then love of the world, which has to do with money and possessing things; and then love of self, which is egotistical or even narcissistic the way he describes it. It's not like taking good care of yourself. It's the view that "everybody exists to serve me"—that kind of attitude. And those last two loves need to be subordinated to the other two; they are identified in his system with the outer self. When those more altruistic, compassion-based loves dominate, they perfect you. When that happens, even the love of self on the outer level becomes a good thing. The love of the world and love of self become good things if they're prioritized in the right order.

In *True Christianity* 394, he writes, "There are three universal categories of love: love for heaven; love for the world; and love for ourselves." He describes what these three mean, that,

Love for heaven means love for the Lord, and also love for our neighbor. Love for heaven could also be called love for usefulness Love for the world is love for wealth and possessions Love for ourselves is not only a love for respect, glory, fame, and status but also a love for seeking and getting high positions and becoming a leader. (*Ibid.*)

The House of the Mind

One helpful way Swedenborg gives to think about all of this is the idea that our minds are like a three-story house. It's an amazing description because he says that in our basement, there are demons or evil spirits living down there; on the main floor are people of the world, and on the top floor are angels. If we get our floors in the right order, then we can go up and down at will, which he presents as crucial. If your basement is your most important part, it's hard for you to get upstairs because it's at the wrong part of the house; your house is in effect upside down.

He says that the goal is to be an angel among the angels, or when you go downstairs to the main level, to be an angelic person among the other people of the world. Or if you go into the basement, to be a person of the world and to tame and reprove the evil spirits down there. It's very Christian eighteenth-century language, but it's fascinating that he would describe the mind as having all these beings in it. And ideally, you'll function at a higher level than whichever level you're on. You're coming down from above onto that level. We'll dig deeper into the dynamic between the levels later on (see page XX).

He describes these levels in the same section on the categories of love (*True Christianity* 395). He says,

These three categories of love are in each one of us from creation and by birth; when they are prioritized in the right way they improve us, but when they are not prioritized in the right way they damage us. At present it is enough to mention that these three loves are prioritized in the right way when our love for heaven plays the part of the head; our love for the world, the part of the chest and abdomen; and our love for ourselves, the part of the lower legs and feet.

Then he immediately says,

As I have mentioned several times before, the human mind is divided into three regions. From our highest region we focus on God; from our second or middle region we focus on the world; and

from our third or lowest region we focus on ourselves. Because our mind has this structure, it can be lifted up or can lift itself up to focus on God and heaven; it can be spread out or spread itself out in every direction to focus on the world and its nature; and it can be lowered down or can lower itself down to focus on the earth and hell. In these respects physical sight emulates mental sight—physical sight too can look up, around, and down. The human mind is like a three-story house with stairs that provide transitions between levels. There are angels from heaven living on the top floor, people of the world on the middle floor, and demons on the bottom floor. People for whom these three categories of love have been prioritized in the right way can go up or down whenever they want. When they go up to the top floor, they are like angels among the angels there. When they go down to the middle floor, they are like angelic people with the people there. When they go even farther down, they are like worldly people with the demons there—they give the demons instructions, confront them, and tame them.

And he says, “When these three categories of love are properly prioritized in us, they are also coordinated in such a way that the highest love, our love for heaven, is present in the second love, our love for the world, and through that in the third or lowest love, our love for ourselves.” We all get organized in that way.

Bob: Houses in dreams are a classical symbol of the person's personality structure. So when people have these dreams of a house, it's very often about their personality structure.

Jonathan: What does it say that I often dream that I'm in houses that are falling down?

Bob: Actually, that can mean that you're changing rapidly.

Jonathan: There you go. That's good.

And Swedenborg also says, when he's talking about Biblical imagery or dream imagery, that the house in particular represents our will. It's really the core of who we are. Then sometimes when he talks about the house as being the whole mind, the memory or your outer self might be like a front hall where you can interact with people, but then you've got your private chambers, which is where what really goes on inside you happens, which you may not show the world.

Swedenborg's Cosmology

Jonathan: In Swedenborg's cosmology, there is a whole heaven and a whole hell, and the only people in the spiritual world are people who used to live in this material universe and have now passed on. He does not believe in reincarnation *per se* (see our conversation on this topic on [page XX](#)). In other words, life here is "one and done." You're born here and die here—you can't turn a pickle back into a cucumber—once you go through the process, you're in the afterlife and you stay there.

Through the choices that you've made in this world, and also the choices you make when you're in the "world of spirits"—which is a kind of clearing house midway between heaven and hell—you really decide: Okay, you've got all these different aspects to you. What's your favorite? What comes out on top? What's the main thing? What's your dominant or ruling love? What's the most important thing to you? And there's every effort to turn people around to help them to heal. But there are some people who decide, no, I'm just with the darkness. It matches what's in my heart, and I can breathe there. So that's how you end up with these beings in hell. There are multiple levels of hell, and some are worse than others.

Bob: In Dante, I think it is the deepest—the moderate levels of hell are fire and burning realms, but the deepest levels are all ice and freezing. Is it like that in Swedenborg?

Jonathan: Interesting. In a way, Swedenborg has it both ways. He talks about how heaven is in touch with reality. And so the light and the warmth that you feel in that realm are real. Hell is kind of an upside-down world, so the fire, the hellfire that the Bible talks about, is really these lusts or passions. If your chief desire, what you love, is to torture people, that's like a burning that you just can't resist. When it's useful, the light and heat of heaven will flow in, and then that will reveal what anything there is really like. When that flows in, evil spirits are just freezing. But when that light and heat withdraw, they are comfortable again.

He says they're like an iceberg (see *True Christianity* 385). He had done a lot of sailing in the North Sea, and he says you shiver when that iceberg goes by; it chills you to the bone. Some of these beings that he encounters are like that. There's a profound cold that radiates from them. So they have their own sort of itchy heat but in the presence of true love, it's freezing.

The Spiritual and Physical World Connection

Bob: William Blake believed that the sun was a conscious being. Where's Swedenborg on this idea that all these other things are conscious beings too?

Jonathan: One thing that he says quite a lot is that if you could see the physical world as it is in itself, you would see that there is a deadness to it. But he says that it's nevertheless full of the spiritual world. The spiritual world is what makes every flower, every blossom happen. In *True Christianity* 12:9, he says, "Everything occurring in nature is produced by God himself through the spiritual world."

There was a lot of materialism in the world in his day, and in science in particular. There were people who believed that the sun was the origin of the world and everything in the universe and all this wonderful life. And so he was going against that to say the sun is just a ball of fire. There's a spiritual sun in the spiritual world that animates the physical sun and animates all

of nature and all human beings. He even goes so far as to say that it's because of the spiritual world that human beings have the body temperature that they have; that's from an inflow of heat from the spiritual world that animates us. He says that you look out and you think, well, the trees are blooming now because it's warmer than it was, but that's just because physical circumstances got to the point where that new growth became possible, while in wintry conditions, the spiritual life is still flowing in, but the vessel or whatever you want to call it, is not able to respond to that energy right now.

I'm very drawn to the idea that the physical planet is alive. I'm so stunned by everything that's been found out in the last thirty or forty years about the life in plants and how they respond to and help each other. So I think partly Swedenborg was perhaps overstating the deadness of this world a bit to fight against materialism by saying it's not just the sun; there's this other layer flowing through physical matter. But he also says that even inanimate objects such as stone, metal, and sand have something analogous to free choice (*True Christianity* 491, 499).

Bob: I thought that he had said that if it wasn't for the constant inflow from spirit or God, nothing would exist.

Jonathan: That's right. That's correct. He repeats this phrase several times that I think was prominent in philosophy from his time. I don't think he coined this, but that "continued existence is a perpetual creation." Things are created every moment. And I think there again, he's speaking against the deists who believe that God wound up the clock, and then it's just going to run and whatever happens, happens.

I like the potential for healing with this idea, since if your body's being created every moment, yes, there's a continuity with the past, but it could change, too. And if it weren't for that inflow from the spiritual world, nothing would be happening.

Chelsea: One of the main things that Swedenborg describes about how the spiritual world is connected to the material world is through *correspondences*. Correspondences is a term he applies to describe the inflowing from the spiritual into the physical; the connection is accomplished through correspondences. He writes that the correspondence can be more misaligned or aligned. When this world becomes aligned with the spiritual world, then the correspondence is as good as it can be and that's when you have this amazing amount of inflow happening between the spiritual world and this world. But we can be off kilter with spiritual reality, and in that case there's still a correspondence but it's not as aligned.

What It Means To Be Distinguishably One

Chelsea: Forwarding Swedenborg's thought to what we understand now, to me, the whole idea of consciousness is such a resonant term with how Swedenborg describes the divine. He describes the divine as the spiritual sun that is full of light and heat, which is love and wisdom. That is consciousness itself. The "I am"; the one being. And it's not just love and wisdom as two separate things, but Swedenborg describes them as being distinguishably one.

There's this eternal interplay between love and wisdom, which, in yogic scriptures, is described as a pulsation, *spanda*; this eternal dance between Shiva and Shakti. It's amazing to think about consciousness, love and wisdom itself, having a correspondence with light and heat in the physical world. I think that there's so much you could explore in terms of how that correspondence is playing out, when you understand there's this love and wisdom interplay happening spiritually, and then wonder how what's happening on the physical level is a reflection of that. That alignment is gaining more depth the more and more we understand the nature of light and heat and the electromagnetic spectrum. Light and heat are one thing, but they are distinguishably one.

Bob: I think the idea you mentioned of “distinguishably one” is super important. That’s a big bridge between IFS and Swedenborg, because you could say parts are distinguishably one. I think that’s a key to how it can all be one and you can have multiplicity, and they’re not contradictory. That’s a helpful way to understand the relationship between parts and Self.

Chelsea: Parts and Self being distinguishably one in a similar way with how love and wisdom are one aligns even more because Swedenborg says that love itself is unity. It is one thing, and it is always and forever one thing. It creates unity out of diversity. But truth by nature is multiplicity. Truth by nature is infinite. Truth is all the infinite ways that love can be expressed in form. You can almost line up Self as love and parts as truth, which are vessels for love. Love needs truth and truth needs love. They both go together. This dynamic aligns with how we have a Self who holds this unity—a wholeness—out of the multiplicity of parts who are all the different aspects of ourselves or our subpersonalities.

Bob: That’s magnificent. I love it. Yeah. There’s another level to that. As Dick says, Self is both a particle and a wave, or now he’s saying, which I think is even better, Self is a particle and a field.

So as a particle, Self is a single entity; we each have our own Self, but in a bigger sense, we are all part of a field of Self. We’re all different waves in this. If you take that level of Self, it is wanting everything to become one, but in a distinguishably one way, which is such a useful term.

What you’re saying also lines up brilliantly with Iain McGilchrist’s analysis of the hemispheric function of the brain. The right hemisphere would be like love; it perceives everything as one united thing. Everything is always in context. It sees the big picture, it sees value, and it scans the whole world. Whereas the left brain picks out individual things—understands things by slicing them up into smaller, smaller pieces, and is more

language oriented and all these other things. And he says that we need both.

Chelsea: It's remarkable that Swedenborg is the first person we know of, predating even the field of neuroscience itself, to make that hemispheric distinction—that there are two hemispheres of the brain that have the love and wisdom pairing. He writes about it in *Secrets of Heaven* 644, published in 1749, and he also writes about it in *Divine Love and Wisdom* 384 and 432, published in 1763. So we had Paul Broca and Carl Wernicke in the 1860s and 1870s,³⁶ and Roger Sperry and Michael Gazzaniga in the 1960s,³⁷ but you had Swedenborg saying so back in the mid-1700s!³⁸

Jonathan: He talks about the hemispheres quite a lot. He also talks about the cerebrum as opposed to the cerebellum, which is another pairing with a similar relationship. And what it brings to mind is where Swedenborg says that you can shape individual sounds, but the fact of sound is uncreatable; in other words, there's this vibration everywhere that allows sound to happen. And you could never get rid of that; that's infinite and eternal. He uses the term “uncreate” to mean it was built in from the beginning.

Chelsea: Swedenborg is acknowledged in the field of neuroscience for having had this advanced understanding. We made a video for the *Off The Left Eye* YouTube channel on what Swedenborg writes about the brain, and in the video, we had to put

36 Nina F. Dronkers, Maria V. Ivanova, and Juliana V. Baldo, “What Do Language Disorders Reveal About Brain–Language Relationships? From Classic Models to Network Approaches,” *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society* 23, no. 9–10 (2017): 741–754.

37 Michael S. Gazzaniga, “The Split Brain in Man,” *Scientific American* 217, no. 2 (1967): 24–29.

38 Emanuel Swedenborg, *Secrets of Heaven*, vol 1 (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2008), 414, n. 356.

together a quick summary about it. People don't know what to make of it, but they can't deny that Swedenborg was describing things that weren't discovered for another hundred years. He describes neurons before that was a coined term. He made up his own word for them: cerebellula!³⁹

Bob: Iain McGilchrist has a book on this called *The Master and His Emissary*.⁴⁰ He's astoundingly brilliant. His books are difficult and very long. His feeling is that the left brain, with its particulate multiplicity focus, was supposed to be the emissary for the holistic visionary right brain, but it's usurped and taken over. That's what's wrong with our culture, and it's killing us. If we don't get a balance back, we're going to destroy ourselves and the planet.

39 *Off The Left Eye*, “The Spiritual Link Between the Human Brain and Consciousness,” *Swedenborg and Life*, YouTube video, 26:32, November 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iu8VeM1Dm0A>, 4:51.

40 Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).