

Understanding Sickness and Disease through Swedenborg

by John Maitland

Transcript.

An early twentieth-century physiologist Walter Cannon spoke of the wisdom of the body and he coined the term homeostasis to describe a body in balance. One biological textbook writer has put it this way: "In general, the body is said to be in homeostasis when its cells' needs - because fundamentally we're a huge mass of cells - when its cells' needs are adequately met and functional activities are occurring smoothly."

And in one sense when you stop to think about it, right at this moment we are all a seething mass of activity, the blood circulating, the food's being digested, waste products are being made, your brain is processing my sounds at some incredible speed and turning it into meaning. And when we are well we aren't aware of any of it. "Virtually every organ system plays a role in maintaining the constancy of the internal environment. We have to have adequate blood levels of vital nutrients to be continuously present, heart activity and blood pressure are constantly monitored by the bodily system and adjusted so that the blood is propelled with adequate force to reach all the body tissues."

When we tend to get older people start to complain about cold feet and cold hands at the extremities and so on because the blood is not getting through to the distant reaches of the body.

"Additionally wastes must not be allowed to accumulate, body temperature must be precisely controlled to ensure the proper conditions for metabolism. An unbelievable variety of chemical, thermal, the neural factors act and interact in complex ways - sometimes bolstering and some sometimes impeding - to help the body maintain its 'steady rudder'."

So when we're well we aren't aware of any of this. When the systems are operating as they are designed to operate, we are at ease. We're not aware of the seething movement of our functioning systems but when one or more of the systems is out of balance we're in a state of dis-ease or as we say commonly, we are suffering 'disease' which is dis-ease. Systems aren't in sync. Certain states of disease of course are characterized by groups of symptoms and given medical labels. So we can talk about asthma, bronchitis, arthritis, eczema, allergic rhinitis and so on. The number and variety of diseases fill medical dictionaries numbering thousands of pages. I just brought along the Merck Manual 17th edition, almost 3000 pages with a huge number of ills to which we all might fall heir at some stage. Something's wrong with us, we ought to be able to find something in there if we are clever enough. [The puzzle about all diseases however is what causes them.](#) Whenever we seek medical care for serious chronic conditions we rarely fail to ask but what causes.

This is especially so with a disease like cancer for it seems to be no respecter of persons and upon its diagnosis we may be given a timetable for our time on this earth. It's one of those diseases that strikes fear in our hearts. Its diagnosis almost invariably brings questions like - Why me? What's the meaning of this?

Whatever the private beliefs of contemporary medical practitioners, their methods of practice imply that sickness and health are fundamentally material and not spiritual or mental. Larry Dossey, an American doctor whom I find a particularly interesting writer, because he's one of those who seems to actually try to find what implications modern physics has for contemporary medicine in terms of understanding that.

"Health and illness, we're told, are a function of what the atoms and molecules in our bodies happen to be doing at any given time. It would seem that they follow the so-called blind laws of nature, which are inherently meaningless. This implies that meaning in illness is something we read into nature, not something that we can legitimately draw out of it."

So if health and sickness can be explained in purely physical terms, our sufferings have no significance beyond their physical description. When we are diagnosed with a serious illness, it's simply as if we won a black lottery. Time and chance happeneth to all mankind. That's all! If you share this idea with one another in such circumstances it seems almost obscene. We crave more meaning than a materialist philosophy can provide in expounding the nature of sickness. Remember when I went to see the surgeon who had to perform the surgery with prostate cancer and fortunately after six years or so it's doing very well, all the indications showed that, he said to me after six years as far as we can say you're cured. Then he actually used the phrase, he said, John, that if it should return it's as if you've won a black lottery.

Is a materialistic philosophy of health and sickness, the climax of human medical thought? Is the concept simply of matter-in-motion expanded into a vast medical encyclopaedia, the greatest breakthrough in the history of medicine? I put it this way. Is matter all that matters? If so then our craving for finding meaning in our sicknesses is merely an expression of emotional weakness. **But this craving for meaning is so deep within mankind and womankind that it's wise to ask whether there are valid arguments for it, and if so, what form do they take.** We may also note in passing that a materialist philosophy has another question that it really needs to answer, an even more fundamental one. **If matter is all that matters how then do we derive morality from it?** One could spend a lot of time researching these subjects. Presentations such as this one I can only place a little map before you as it were, that points to some destinations and the routes by which they may be reached. It's not possible to describe in detail, I've called it mindscape, rather than the landscape through which we pass on our journey of discovery. In fact, the map itself is so large that I can only place even a small part of such a map before you. **So I'll briefly outline some aspects of contemporary thinking on the subject then I'll examine the understanding Swedenborg's understanding of sickness and health - at this stage I've come to understand - and finally attempt to deduce some of the**

implications of Swedenborg's ideas about the nature of illness and health for healthy living.

Now contemporary thinking. It's helpful to examine whether there's meaning in illness by considering the question as a subset of an even bigger question. Is there meaning in nature? Sir Arthur Eddington, the early 20th century English astronomer, he was one of the first scientists to understand relativity theory and he became a leading exponent of it, wrote amusingly:

"The materialist (and by that he means the philosophical materialist notion that matter is all that matters) the materialist who is convinced that all phenomena arise from electrons and quanta and the like controlled by mathematical formulae, must presumably hold the belief that his wife is a rather elaborate differential equation, but he is probably tactful enough not to obtrude this opinion in domestic life. If this kind of scientific dissection is felt to be inadequate and irrelevant in ordinary personal relationships, it's surely out of place in the most personal relationship of all - that of a human soul to a divine spirit."

Ken Wilber whom some of you will have come across in contemporary thinking and New Age thought and so on, said "whereas classical physics (meaning the physics from the time of Isaac Newton through the 19th century), whereas classical physics was theoretically hostile to religion, modern physics is simply indifferent to it. Physics does not support mysticism, but no longer denies it. It's a monumental and epochal turning point in science's stance towards religion; it seems highly unlikely that this change will ever be reversed."

So if science has no opinion as to whether there's meaning in nature what evidence is available to support the presence of meaning in our sicknesses. A most interesting piece of research evidence comes from a study done in 1991 by a sociologist and an epidemiologist at Yale Medical School. It involved two thousand eight hundred men and women over 65. [The study suggests that how we perceive our health is a better predictor of who will live and die over the next decade than physical symptoms and objective facts and factors such as in-depth physical examinations and laboratory tests.](#) These findings were consistent with five other large studies involving twenty three thousand men and women between the ages of 19 and 94. Apparently how we answer the question: Is your health excellent, good or fair? is a significant pointer to our longevity. Dossey notes, for example, that "people who smoked were twice as likely to die over the next 12 years as people who did not, whereas those who said their health was 'poor' were seven times more likely to die than those who said their health was 'excellent'."

This question is really asking what our health means to us. But it's necessary to emphasize that such findings don't imply that we should give physical examinations of laboratory tests second place in health care. What they do suggest is that our objective diagnoses are a necessary but not a sufficient approach to health care. There are other studies that reveal the importance we attach to meaning in health and

illness. Dossey for example pointed out the findings showed that "the meaning of the relationship with one's spouse is a major factor in the clinical expression of heart disease; that the meaning of a job and one's level of job dissatisfaction can be major predictors of heart attack; that attention to the meaning surrounding heart disease, when combined with dietary discretion, exercise, and stress management, can improve cardiac performance and reverse coronary artery obstructions; that the bereavement and mourning following a spouse's death are associated very often with severe immune dysfunction; that negative perceptions of one's daily job can increase the risk of heart attack; and that for cancer patients, group therapy in which questions of meaning are addressed can double the survival time following diagnosis."

Whilst on this sort of point, my wife and I have a friend whose wife died of motor neurone disease and shortly afterwards her husband who was a very fit man, played golf regularly, exercise regularly, suffered an extremely severe heart attack within just a few weeks of the death. Now this is just an anecdotal note if you like, but when he recovered and thank God he did, in conversation one day I said to him you know do you think - we'll call him Tom, it wasn't his name - do you think Tom that perhaps you had a broken heart? He said, it's interesting you say that. He said, one of the nurses when he was in Saint George private hospital said, one of the nurses said to me 'I know what's the matter with you Mr. Rix, you're suffering from a broken heart.' And that seemed to make a change in the way he went about his rehabilitation. For him at any rate it was an insight that gave some meaning to what otherwise would have appeared to have been simply a random physical illness. And since that time he's in very good health. Of course he's gotta watch his heart, it was a major heart attack. Of course he's got to be careful what he does but his doctor said to him 'As you feel you can do things physical you keep doing them.' And so far he's going very well.

With a different form of evidence of the importance of belief and mental and emotional context and symptoms in its significance for health care, comes from Nazi concentration camps. The man named Bruno Bettelheim was an inmate of the camps and was a psychologist. He wrote about the experience in a very famous book called '*The Informed Heart*'. He was struck by the fact that physical strength and good health, all other things being equal, were not the most accurate predictors of survival. Big men physically, in good health were quite often the ones who were among the first to succumb to the rigors of the camp. Inmates with lower strength and health levels but who possessed a strongly held set of values such as a religious faith, tended to have a higher chance of survival than those who possessed physical strength and health but lacked a strong value system of beliefs.

What we believe is an important factor in determining our health and these are just a few examples challenging the idea that our health and illness can be explained solely in terms of matter. Now let us come to Swedenborg. He does not seem - he published prolifically, didn't he, incredible. Every time I look at that leaflet that lists in three sections all of his works and you look at the number of pages and you look at his inventions and if you look at the languages that he wrote and spoke and you remember that he wrote everything in Latin and it was already by quill and ink with

candlelight and lamps rather than electricity and computers and all the rest of it. You look at this you find that it just blows the mind away. But interestingly he doesn't seem to have published a specific work on health and sickness. Consequently the immensity of his writings presents us with the problem of how to make a systematic study of his treatment of the subject. We associate illness with the body. Our language expresses this in the phrase 'our bodily ills'. Swedenborg wrote voluminously about the body, the soul and how they interact. In fact it was really the center of his life and the center of his life's work.

But a logical place to begin is therefore with his explanation of the nature of the body. In the '*Classics of Western Spirituality*' series, two of his works were put together. '*Emanuel Swedenborg, the Universal Human and Soul-Body Interaction*' was edited and translated by George Dole. The first part of the volume, about 180 pages, is devoted to excerpts from the '*Arcana Caelestia*'. It included paragraphs 5711 to 5726 headed "*Continuation Concerning Correspondence, here Concerning the Correspondence of Diseases with the Spiritual World*". The second part, just 26 pages, is a complete work which he calls '*Soul-Body Interaction*'. The fundamental concept at the heart of both works is of course the Doctrine of Correspondences that everything soul and spirit has a kind of physical correspondence. The publication dates and the nature of the two works however is significant for me at least. The sections of the *Arcana* were published between 1747 and 1753 but '*Soul-Body Interaction*', this very concise work, was published thirteen years later in 1769 when Swedenborg was 81. Dole describes the *Arcana* excerpts as empirical and the Soul-Body section as philosophical. I suggest that the latter work published so late in his life is a succinct summary of his mature thought of the relationship between soul and body. It is within that relationship that his comments on illness need to be understood.

So in 2996 of the *Arcana* he wrote "The most obscure fact in the world is that everything in the human body has a correspondence with something in heaven. This holds true to the point that there is not the smallest particle of the body that does not have something spiritual and heavenly corresponding to it or - which is the same - that does not have a corresponding heavenly community."

Then he says "these communities exist according to all the categories and subcategories of spiritual and heavenly realities. Indeed, they exist in a design such that they reflect, taken all together a single person. This is why heaven in its entirety is called the Universal Human." And so on. Then he says "this is why it is so often stated that a particular community belongs to this particular region of the body."

When you look at Worcester's work - *The Physiological Correspondences*, you can begin to understand as he talks about the tongue, the mouth, the liver, the lungs, etc begins to talk about these things he says "this particular community belongs to this particular region of the body, another to another, and so on. The reason is that the Lord is the only person, and heaven portrays Him. The Divine Good and the Divine True comes from the Lord is what makes heaven; and since angels are involved in this, they are said to be 'in the Lord'." Here's the interesting part. "In contrast, the

people who are in Hell are outside the Universal Human, and have a correspondence with waste products and disorders."

And of course we need to understand Swedenborg's understanding of hell. I suggest the last statement about those who are in hell points to how Swedenborg seems to understand the nature of illness. It's never easy to summarize Swedenborg's thought for any subject both concisely and accurately. His reasoning is so tight that the omission of even one phrase or sentence may usually result in inaccuracy.

Nevertheless I'll quote from a few paragraphs in an edited fashion in an attempt to highlight, I think, might be possibly the core of his ideas about the nature of illness.

First of all where does it come from? Well he says in Arcana 5712 "Diseases also have their correspondence with the spiritual world; not a correspondence with heaven, with those who are in what is opposite, that is, with those who are in the hells. Diseases have correspondence with those because they correspond - this is the part that drew my attention and interested me and as a homeopath becomes very interesting - diseases have correspondence with those because they correspond to the lusts and passions of the lower mind, which are also their origins; for the origins of diseases are, in general, intemperance, luxury of various kinds, mere bodily pleasures, as also feelings of envy, hatred, revenge, lewdness, and the like, which destroy man's interior things; and when these are destroyed the exterior things suffer, and drag man into disease, and so into death. All this shows that even diseases have correspondence with the spiritual world, but with unclean things there."

Now not unclean in the sense in which we think, bacteria and infection, but unclean in the way in which Swedenborg defines it. "Heaven which is the Grand Man, holds all things together in connection and safety; hell, being opposite, destroys and severs all things."

And of course for Swedenborg hell is associated with love of self and failure to love truth in its most comprehensive sense. So the source of disease. Now I've asked myself 'How on earth do these spirits bring about disease?' and here from a 21st century perspective it reads very strangely. "There once appeared", this is Arcana 5715 "there once appeared a great quadrangular opening that slanted downward to a considerable depth. In the deep was seen a round opening, which presently was closed. From it exhaled a dangerous heat, collected from various hells, and arising from lusts of various kinds, namely arrogance, lewdness, adultery, hatred, revenge, quarrels, strife; for from these arise the hells such heat as was then exhaled."

Now of course we talk about a man with a hot temper, don't we? Their very language begins to point to some of these things. "When it acted upon my body (this is where it gets interesting) when enacted upon my body - that's Swedenborg's body - it instantly brought on disease like that of a burning fever but when it ceased to flow in this semblance of disease at once ceased." But it's true, isn't it? Swedenborg says that it's the influx from the Divine that animates us and comes in and makes us the people

that we are if we only open ourselves to it. "But when it ceased to flow in this semblance of disease at once ceased."

I think interestingly, when he talks about the semblance of disease. As a Homeopath, a way in which we find out what our remedies do is that we prove them. And when I say we prove them, I don't mean that I do this but this has been done over the centuries. What happens is that you find a number of healthy people and you give them a remedy, a particular procedure that you follow and you get them to observe, and others to observe, the effects the medicines have on a healthy person. Because the fundamental homeopathic principle is let like cure like. Whatever symptoms a medicine can cause in a healthy person, it can cure in a sick person. So in a very simple way we know that caffeine is a stimulant. Many people say I can't sleep at night if I have a cup of coffee. One of the remedies that homeopaths uses for sleeplessness, don't think it's the only one, or the one you'll always be prescribed, is Coffea. Let like cure like. A minute dose of Coffea and in some instances, do great work for people who are poor sleepers. So I could make some kind of link with these words of Swedenborg. "When it acted upon my body, it instantly brought on disease like that of a burning fever. When it ceased to flow in, this semblance of disease at once ceased." Because when people prove a homeopathic medicine they don't actually suffer the disease, they suffer symptoms that somehow mirror or mimic the disease.

"When a man contracts a disease by his manner of life, an unclean sphere corresponding to the disease forthwith attaches itself, and is present as a fomenting cause. That I might be certain of this, there have been spirits with me from a number of hells, through whom the spheres of exhalations thence was communicated; and according as it was allowed to act upon the solid parts of my body, I was seized with oppression, pain, even with the corresponding disease, which ceased in an instant when those spirits were driven away; and that no room for doubt might be left, this has been done a thousand times."

Quite strange yet given Swedenborg's sanity and the clarity of mind it's really interesting. We've had one statement about the source of disease, one statement about how - what he describes as the hells is connected to it and then he uses the concept of inundation. And this is where it's really interesting because he links this to the right and left sides of the brain. "An inundation is twofold, one of lusts, and the other of falsities. (We might call it roughly feelings and ideas) That of lusts belongs to the will and is on the right side of the brain." Which of course is correct. The right side of the brain is the emotional side, the creative side of the brain. Swedenborg's writing this in the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century.

"When a man who has lived in good is remitted into selfhood, thus into the sphere of his own life, there then appears as it were an inundation; and when he is in this, he is indignant and angry, thinks restlessly and desires impetuously. This takes place in one way when the left side of the brain where there are falsities is inundated, and in another when the right side where there are evils is inundated. But when a man is kept in the sphere of life which he had received from the Lord by regeneration, he is there entirely out of such an

inundation, and is as it were in a serene and sunny, cheerful and happy state, thus far away from indignation, anger, unrest, lusts and the like."

Finally, he provides an account of how he believes illness first manifests itself in the body. Here he focuses on the blood and blood vessels. He says that the source of death is sin and since sin is contrary to Divine order evil closes, he says,

"the very smallest and invisible vessels, of which are composed the next larger ones, these also being invisible; for the vessels which are smallest of all and wholly invisible are continued from man's interiors. Hence comes the first and inmost obstruction, and hence the first and inmost vitiation of the blood. When this increases, it causes disease and finally death. If a man had lived a life of good, his interiors would be opened to heaven and through heaven to the Lord; and so too would the very least and most invisible little vessels. In consequence man would be without disease, and would merely decline to extreme old age, until he became again a little child, but a wise one; and when the body could no longer minister to his internal man or spirit, he would pass without disease out of his earthly body such as the Angels have, thus out of the world directly into heaven."

I must say, when I read all this, and try to make sense of it in the 21st century, you ask yourself - Is this where one really parts way with Swedenborg? **How helpful are these ideas in understanding illness in the 21st century?** A medical researcher today would not receive funding for research into diseases based on Swedenborg's account of the nature and source of illness. Yet his own life illustrates his thinking. I do not think Swedenborg's long life was just chance. Swedenborg has successfully as any human being, appears to have resolved the polarities of living that we all face. His sanity, his serenity, his grace, his goodness are the marks of health. The manner of his death is that of a man at peace with himself and the world. If one reads his biographers carefully it's possible to discover some of the tensions that he had to resolve during his life. The absence of anger and fear in his writings is remarkable. I don't think I know of any other writer and I'm a reasonably well-read person having been, you know, a major in English literature and read and read. As I often say to people who don't know me very well, above all I'm a bookie, not of the betting kind. I know literature reasonably well and history and so on and I can't think of any writer in whom there is less anger and less fear than Emmanuel Swedenborg. So there's something here.

Question is, can we unravel it in any form that might be useful to us? First of all, his accounts of the nature of disease in various parts of the body as emanating from the variety of spirits in Hell is unusual and certainly controversial. From our perspective in the 21st century, this is my solution at the problem — I think we can say that Swedenborg's attempt to identify the causes of symptoms mixed philosophical understanding with physiological descriptions and thus led to what we consider to be strange statements. Given his belief that the source of life is The Lord who is Love and Wisdom, that heaven and spirit find expression in matter and the body, his account of disease is logically valid. Even if you don't agree with all the terminology. In *Heaven and Hell*, for example in 128 he wrote "For the mind which is spirit, acts, and the

body, which is matter, is acted upon." It says it all. But if that's true, it must have implications for health and illness. If we accept these accounts of the nature of sickness it seems valid to say that illness in a strange way probably does have a moral dimension.

It's important to remember how Swedenborg came to these conclusions. His religious upbringing, his scientific education, his first visit to England, his work as Mines Assessor in Sweden, all combined to stimulate his imagination and led him to seek the chain of causes behind the visible world. He sought to account for the origin and structure of matter. These studies led to his formulation of the Doctrine and Series of Degrees and to the conclusion that living matter could only assume its multitudinous forms as a result of a positive directing force. This was the soul for Swedenborg. He quoted Grotius with approval: "As well might we believe that stones and timbers come together by chance into the form of a house or that an accidental concourse of letters produces a poem." There is a guiding force.

Homeopathy, the founder of homeopathy, Samuel Hahnemann used the term vital force which has parallels with some of Swedenborg's ideas. Toksvig whose biography of Swedenborg I find particularly interesting; personally I think she writes as well as anybody I've ever read on Swedenborg, I think she has a wonderful facility for understanding his work, being able to make his scientific work and all its complexity, comprehensible to the ordinary reader. Her summary of the issue I think is both succinct and striking: "The body is something that is fabricated by the soul for its own purposes. Once the body is made, it has a certain reciprocal relationship with the soul, but the soul, besides being the manufacturer, is the maintainer and repairer of the body as long as the thing is repairable."

Now, what's interested me about all this, is that Swedenborg reaches these conclusions after exhaustive studies of the blood, the brain, the heart, with the leading anatomists of the day and after a detailed study of the embryo of the chicken. He concluded that the directing force of the body's development was within the very embryo itself. I found it interesting that in the work of Toksvig, she has a wonderful chapter on the book he called *'The economy of the Animal Kingdom'* but she points out should truly have been translated *'The organization of the Soul's Kingdom, that is, the body.'* And this is her description of the work. "This work is a bridge. It's colossal arches span most of the distance between the mining engineer and the mystic. The latter can be understood by those predisposed in his favor even if they do not try to understand Swedenborg's science and philosophy and skip chapters 9 and 10 of this biography, but if they give up this effort they will certainly have to be content with a house that has no foundations."

This is what I'd like to point out to us tonight, particularly those of you for whom Swedenborg is an extremely important center of your life. His scientific thinking was the pathway through which he reached his conclusions about the nature of the soul and spirits and God as Wisdom and Love. It's interesting to speculate, if he were alive today with the far greater understanding of how the body functions that we enjoy, whether he would account the origins of disease in terms of spirits in Hell which

destroy and sever all things, in contrast with the Grand Man who holds all things together in connection and safety. If we were suffering severe oppression and pain in the abdomen or numbness in the joints, how helpful is the following account in relieving the condition? And this is Swedenborg writing in Arcana 5723. He said

"There were spirits with me who induced so severe an oppression in the abdomen that I felt as if I were dying. The oppression was so great that with others it would have brought on a swoon. But they were removed, and then it at once ceased. I was told that these spirits in the life of the body had been devoted to no serious pursuit, even a domestic one." (For those of you who understand what Swedenborg means by spirits and having a life before they become spirits and so on.) "I was told that in the life of the body, they've been devoted to no serious pursuit, (that is they didn't love wisdom, didn't have love, they didn't have wisdom) but solely devoted, solely to pleasure and besides had lived in foul idleness and sloth, and had not cared anything for others. Moreover, they had despised their faith. In short, they had been animals, not men. Their sphere produces numbness in the members and joints of the sick."

Well when we're slothful, joints and muscles atrophy but do they necessarily go numb and why would such spirits cause severe abdominal discomfort? [But I suggest that Swedenborg's central idea that physical symptoms have their origin at the spiritual level has very strong support from many sources both medical and non-medical.](#) A few examples were given at the beginning of the paper. We may reject his detailed account of how symptoms manifest in the various bodily systems while accepting the core insights which he provides on the subject.

Philip Groves, well known to the Sydney Society, provide some examples of how the emotions manifest in physical symptoms. In a paper that he called '*The diagnosis of Health*' he wrote "Emotional life (it's almost like Swedenborg) emotional life is rooted in the visceral organs and is regulated by the autonomic nervous system, the limbic system, the hypothalamus in the brain and the endocrine glands. Many chronic ailments arise from the chronic action of powerful emotions upon various organs and body segments."

I have to say to you incidentally that in my very very modest and limited experience, I don't think I've seen one person with a serious deep-seated chronic condition who when you say to them can you identify when this began - and often they can - and then you say to them "tell me what was happening in your life, the six to twelve months before that time." With almost without exception, there's a trauma, death in the family, loss of job, breakdown with relationship, children on drugs etcetera. It's as if the mind and the emotions are the beginnings of the problems and the physical symptomatology is almost an outworking of it in our total system.

So Philip Groves gave that description and he said here are some examples. Throat trouble. I had a lady who illustrated this perfectly. "Pharyngitis and stricture of the throat are often the result of anxiety. The very word 'anxiety' in its origin means 'to clutch at the throat'. It is also the outcome of long-lasting unresolved grief. (Which is why some people lose their voice in mourning.) In some people the pharyngeal plexus

is repressed by emotional forces which try to prevent a person talking about various things which is supposedly forbidden."

Gall Stones, Philip Groves suggest, are "quite often are associated with states of jealousy or resentment and especially chronic feelings of being imposed upon. Rheumatism, he wrote, is commonly associated with a number of long-standing emotional states." I believe this. "There is often chronic setting of muscles, tendons, and ligaments to acts of resentment which, for reasons of moral conviction, or fear, are never performed. There is also cynicism, criticism, and antagonism. Not infrequently these are repressed states that do not show up in consciousness. Indeed, many of these patients are mild-mannered, quiet and inoffensive people, but they are victims of unresolved emotion." They carry the resentment, they carry the pain, they carry the humiliation, the desire to hit back for a long long time.

I'll give one further modern example. Dethlefsen and Rudiger Dahlke in the Foreword to their stimulating book *'The Healing Power of Illness'*, said

"this book deprives people of illness as an alibi for their unresolved problems. We propose to show that the patient is not the innocent victim of some quirk of nature, but perhaps even the author of their own sickness. From this viewpoint symptoms are seen to be bodily expressions of psychological conflicts, able through their symbolism to reveal the patient's current problems."

Sounds a very simple way. You might have someone with arthritis in the shoulders who would say to you quite unconsciously and unaware in the course of a consultation 'You know, I feel I've got the weight of the world on my shoulders'. Our language tells it over and over again so often if you just have the ear to hear and the mind to attend.

Their discussion of high blood pressure illustrates their claim. Blood has several important characteristics. First of all it symbolizes life. Want to talk about the taking of life, we talk about the shedding of blood. It is both the physical vehicle of life and is the expression of our individuality. Every drop of blood contains the whole person. Blood pressure is an expression of our dynamism and involves two elements in tension - the flow of blood and the resistance it meets in the walls of the blood vessels. It's the resistance provided by the walls of the blood vessels symbolize the limits that we set ourselves in our lives. In Hypertonia or high blood pressure, we have a phenomenon in which thinking about an issue can raise our blood pressure as well as the increase in pressure caused by physical activity. So if I've got to dig in the garden and get out a big rock, go away with the pick, the blood pressure will go up. But don't we also say, when someone makes us angry, 'My word, it raised my blood pressure.' It's true. "The raised blood pressure has its physiological justification precisely in temporarily supplying more energy so that the tasks and conflicts facing us can be dealt with more efficiently and energetically. If this happens, the applied solution uses up then the excess energy and the pressure goes back to its normal level. But those with high blood pressure fail to resolve their conflicts and the result is that the excess pressure is not used up. Rather do they take refuge in superficial 'busyness' very often, attempting through great external activity to divert both

themselves and others from the challenge actually to get to grips with the conflict." It's true. You can see it very often and you can see also why it is that for such people if they're told to take it easy, and they take it easy, it makes no difference because what is causing that pressure to rise hasn't been released. Hasn't been dealt with, hasn't been solved.

And these two authors suggests that hypertonia is a sign of frustrated aggression. It's more common in men. The real hostility to stuck at the conceptual level and the extra energy is not appropriately discharged. People with high blood pressure are often people who place great emphasis on self-restraint. The aggressive impulse raises the pressure but the blood vessels contract to keep the pressure under control if the extra energy is not discharged. Swedenborg would have understood this account of the meaning of high blood pressure. In fact, he probably provided the explanation. Of course, if high blood pressure is more common in men, low blood pressure is more common in women because they tend to be more accepting, more passive, etcetera. One is not saying it in any sense as a joke or a criticism. It's just very interesting the way in which these two phenomena illustrate our genders and the way in which we work.

I want to say to you just one other, one that just happened to me just a week or so ago. A young Muslim man comes to me and is very impressive. Not because he's a muslim, well in one sense perhaps, not because he's a muslim but the way his religion affects his life. It's quite a devout family. They talk very much about what Allah means. They are great readers of the Quran. In fact next Saturday they leave for what they call the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. And this young man is terribly frustrated. His sexual drives are very great. In the culture of which he is a member, family does not want him going out with young women. The only way in which he can see a solution along those lines is to marry. He wants to marry, his father doesn't want him to marry as yet. So amongst other things he is immensely frustrated. So what does he do? Well, his mother says to me, "he gets very angry. I don't think he means anything but he gets very angry with me." He says to me, "yes I do, I do get angry. I don't want to." So what does he do? He goes to the gym. So what happens when he goes to the gym? The reason he comes to me is because he says, him lifting weights, "I've hurt my shoulder. In doing my exercises I hurt my knee." What's he doing? I'm suggesting to you that what he's doing is that he's turned the anger on himself. And he is slowly destroying himself. I put this proposition to his mother and she said I think your right. So she put the proposition to her son. He said, "No! Mr Maitland has got it wrong. I hurt myself and that's what makes me angry." That's in total contrast to what a Swedenborgian view would be. Which comes first? A physical problem or the anger? What makes him work so hard in the gym that he keeps destroying himself?

These descriptions of how emotion and physical symptoms are related to one another give both meaning to our illnesses and demonstrate the primacy of mental and emotional states in many instances over their physical manifestations. If we've fallen over and broken a leg going down the steps etcetera, well we say we've just broken a leg, or we are opening a tin and we cut ourselves. But if you went a bit deeper you

might find that we've cut ourselves opening the tin because we're in a hurry to come and give the lecture tonight. You know, how far can you go in this? Well you probably go further than we generally think we can. Why is it that we lose concentration so that we trip down the step?

They also point to the presence of a moral dimension to much of illness. We may not follow Swedenborg uncritically in his account of the mind-body relationship, especially with regard to illness and source in the illness and so on, but his wonderful analysis of the nature of that relationship and the doctrine of degrees and correspondences provides us with a pathway to the discovery of meaning in our illness. If we discover that meaning early enough, it may enable us to attain healing and not just change in physical symptoms. [Swedenborg understood the universe as the expression of love and wisdom emanating from the Lord. He taught that when we express love and find wisdom for their own sakes we are healthy. When we pursue them, not for their own sakes but for other uses, we are ill.](#)

Psalm 139 reminds us that the one from whom we have our being knows us in the greatest intimacy. We cannot hide from him. [To seek the Lord above all else is the first step towards health.](#) "For it was you before my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother's womb." This might be Swedenborg writing of human beings since he understood the embryo of the chicken. "I praise you Lord for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance, in your books were written all the days that were formed for me when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts oh God, how vast is the sum of them. I tried to count them. They are more than the sand. I come to the end. I am still with you."