

Jacob Boehme, *Aurora: Morning Glow Ascending* (1612)

Abstract

The preface starts with Jacob Boehme's (1575–1624) discussion of the two natures of the universe (good and evil). As the selection proceeds, Boehme states that the source of knowledge of God and the Spirit is the good nature of the universe. He contrasts his simple and unlearned account with that of the learned, who, as he theorizes, will scorn his work. Boehme, a shoemaker from Görlitz, was indeed attacked by orthodox theologians. Nonetheless, he had a far-reaching and lasting influence on German theosophy and (later) Romanticism. Boehme claimed divine illumination as the source of his knowledge of the mysteries of the universe.

Source

Morning Glow Ascending. That is The Root or Mother of PHILOSOPHIA, ASTROLOGIA, and THEOLOGIA, on the True Foundation.

or

A description of nature: how all things were and came into being in the beginning; how nature and the elements became creatural; and of the two qualities of evil and good; from whence all things had their origin; and how it all abides and acts now; moreover, how things will come to be at the end of this age; as well as about the constitution of God's kingdom and the realm of hell; and how human beings react as creatures to either one. All diligently composed based on a true foundation, in the knowledge of the spirit, under the sway of God, By Jacob Boehme in Görlitz in the year 1612, etatis sue. 37 annorum In die. ♂ Pentecostal. Anno 1612^[1]

[...]

Kind, reader, this is a short report of the two qualities in nature from beginning to end: how two realms have arisen from them, a celestial one and an infernal one; and how in the present time, they hold sway and war with one another; and how things will be arrayed in them in times to come.

*I have given this book the title, the mother or root of *Philosophia*, *Astrologia*, and *Theologia*. But so that you should know what this book treats of: in terms of *Philosophia*, it treats of the divine power: what God is; and of how it is that in the being of God, nature, stars, and elements are constituted; and of whence all things have their origin; of how the heavens and the earth are constituted; as well as of angels, human beings, and devils; of heaven and hell, and everything that is creatural;^[2] and finally of what the two qualities in nature consist: all of this upon a true foundation, in knowledge of the spirit, at the urging and under the sway of God.*

*In terms of *AstroLogia* it treats of the forces^[3] of nature, the stars, and elements; of how all creatures have arisen from them, and how these forces effect all driving force and governance in all things; and of how evil and good are effected through their agency in human beings and animals, from which it arises that evil and good prevail and exist in this world; and finally, of how hell and heaven abide in the same.*

It is not my purpose to describe the course and location of all the stars or their designations, or to discuss their annual conjunctions of oppositions or quadrants or that sort of thing, nor what it is that they effect in a year or a

day, all of which has been understood by means of extensive annual study by exceedingly wise and clever, intelligent men, by assiduous observation and notation, through subtlety and computation. I have not studied nor learned such things and leave them to the scholars. Rather, it is my intention to write by way of spirit and reflection[4] and not by observation.

Theologia treats of the realm of Christ, of how it is constituted, how it is opposed to the realm of hell, how it also struggles and fights in nature with the realm of hell; how human beings can overcome the realm of hell through faith and the spirit in divine power in order to attain eternal bliss and achieve a victory in the battle; and finally, how the human being may by the action of the infernal quality bring about his own ruination; and how both qualities will turn out in the end.

The uppermost title, Morning Glow in ascent,[5] is a secret and *mysterium*. Concealed from the clever and wise ones in this world, though they will soon find out for themselves what it means. Yet to those who read this book in simplicity, with longing of the Holy Spirit, who place their hope in God alone, it will soon cease to be a mystery and become instead plain knowledge.

I do not choose to explain the title, but rather prefer to offer it for the good judgment of the unpartisan reader who struggles with the good quality in this world.

When Master Smart Aleck, who manifests himself in the *fierce quality* comes upon this book, he will contend against it, just as heaven and hell hold sway and are set against one another. First of all, he will say that I have gone too far up in the divinity; and that doing so is not proper for me.

Next, he will say, I am boasting of the Holy Spirit: I would have to live accordingly and prove that it is true by working miracles.

Third, he will say that I am doing this out of a desire for fame.

Fourth, he will say that I am not learned enough for such things.

Fifth, the great simplicity of the author will aggravate him, for it is customary in the world to respect only what is high and to be aggravated by simplicity.

To the partisan smart alecks of this sort I will reply that the patriarchs in the First World[6] were also insignificant disdained people, against whom the world and the devil curses[7] and rages. In the times of Enoch,[8] when the holy patriarchs first began preaching of the Lord's name, they did not ascend bodily into heaven in order to regard everything with their own eyes. Rather, the Holy Spirit revealed itself in their spirit. Later, we see this in the Second World with the holy arch fathers, patriarchs, and prophets: they were altogether but simple folk, some of them mere shepherds of livestock. Moreover, as Messiah Christ, the hero in the struggle of nature, became human, although he was a prince and king of human beings, he maintained himself in this world in great simplicity, and was no more than a housemate of the world. Moreover, his apostles as well were but despised fishermen and little people. Indeed, Christ himself thanked his heavenly father for keeping him hidden from the clever and wise ones of this world and for revealing him instead to those who cannot speak for themselves.[9] Moreover, one sees how they too were but poor sinners and had both the evil and good impulses of nature within them. But that they preached against the sin of the world, indeed, against their own sin, castigating it, this they did at the urging of the Holy Spirit, and not because of any desire for fame. They had nothing on account of their own powers and capacities, nor could they teach of the secrets of God. Rather, everything they did happened at the urging of God.

I can therefore say, claim, or write nothing at all about myself other than that I am a simple man and indeed a poor sinner who must pray every day, "Lord forgive us our sins," who repeats with the apostles, "O Lord, you have saved us by your blood."

Nor have I ascended into heaven to see all the works and creatures of God. Instead that very heaven has been revealed in my spirit so that I recognize in the spirit the works and creatures of God. Nor is the urge to do this my natural will, but the urging of the spirit. What is more, I have had to suffer many an assault of the devil in this.

However, the spirit of the human being does not proceed solely from the stars and elements; rather, a spark from the light and power of God is concealed in it. It is no empty word that states in Genesis, "God created the human being in his image. Truly, in the image of God he created him."^[10] For this means that the human being was created out of the entire being of the divinity. The body is created from the elements and for this reason must have elemental nourishment. But the soul has its origin not solely from the body. Even though it originates in the body, and though its first beginning is the body, yet it has its source from outside as well through the air. Therefore, the Holy Spirit prevails within it, in the same way that the spirit encompasses all and everything abides in God, and God himself is all. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit in the soul is creatural in accordance with its being the property of the soul, it searches into the very divinity and into nature. For it takes from the being of the Entire Divinity its origin and source. When it is ignited by the Holy Spirit, it can see what God its father does, just as a son sees in the house of his father what the father does. It is a member or child in the house of the celestial father. In the same way that the human eye sees clear to the stars from which it has its origin, so, too, the soul can penetrate the Divine Being in which it lives. Yet since the soul also has its origin from nature, and in nature is both evil and good, and since the human being by way of sin has been cast into the fierce realm of nature so that every day and hour the soul is stained by sins, its knowledge is piecemeal, for the fierce realm in nature rules in the soul as well. But the Holy Spirit does not proceed into the fierce realm but instead prevails in the source of the soul which abides in the light of God and struggles against the fierce realm in the soul. For this reason, the soul cannot arrive at a perfect knowledge in this life, not until the end, when light and darkness separate, when the fierceness is consumed along with the body in the earth; at that point the soul sees clearly and perfectly into God its father. Nevertheless, if the soul is ignited by the Holy Spirit, it triumphs in the body, as when a great fire flames up and the heart and kidneys tremble for joy. Yet this is not immediately a great and deep knowledge in God its father: it is the love toward God its father which triumphs thus in the fire of the Holy Spirit.

But the knowledge of God is nonetheless sown in the fire of the Holy Spirit; and it is at first as small as the mustard seed to which Christ compared it: afterward it is as great as a tree and extends itself in God its Creator. In the same way, a little drop of water cannot make much of a wave in the sea, but when a great stream enters in, it can do rather more.

In truth, however, what has happened, what is now, and what is to come, no less than the breadth, depth, and height, the near and the far in God are a single thing, a single substantiality, and the holy soul of the human being sees this too, but only in a piecemeal fashion in this world. Often it is lost sight of and nothing is seen. For the devil resists it violently in the fierce source in the soul, thereby stifling the noble mustard seed. For this reason, the human being is always caught up in struggle.

In this manner, in this sort of knowledge of the Spirit, I intend to write in this book of God our father in whom everything abides and who is himself all. I intend to treat of how all things became separate and creatural and of how all things are propelled and moved in the entire tree of life.

Here you will see the true ground of the divinity, and how all was One Being before the time of the world; and how

the holy angels were created, and out of what. Moreover, of the horrible fall of Lucifer together with his legions, and of what the heavens, the earth, stars, and elements arose, as well as the metals of the earth, the stones, and all creatures; how the birth of life came about, and the corporeality of all things. You will also see what the true heaven is in which God and his holy beings dwell; and what is the anger of God and the infernal fire, and how all things became ignitable. *In summa*: what, or how, the being of all beings is.

The first seven chapters treat quite simply and comprehensibly of the being of God and the angels by means of likenesses, so that the reader may proceed from one topic to the next and at last to the deep meaning and true ground itself. In the eighth chapter the depth in the Divine Being begins, and so on, the further, the deeper. Many a species is frequently repeated and described ever deeper for the benefit of the reader's dense comprehension and my own.

Furthermore, what you might not find sufficiently explained in this book, you will find lucidly and clearly presented in the second and third ones; for on account of our ruination, our knowledge is piecemeal and never complete all at once. Nevertheless, this book is a wonder of the world which the holy soul will indeed understand.

With this, I commend the reader to the gentle and holy love of God.

NOTES

[1] The autograph, thought to have been committed to paper during the first six months of 1612 by B. "in his thirty-seventh year" and signed "on Tuesday after Pentecost, 1612" (June 12), is a fair copy. In all likelihood it incorporates the earlier draft attempts alluded to in *Aurora* (A 19:14-16; cf. *Ep.* 12:10) and expands on another shorter version of the work that also circulated in his lifetime (see pp. 5-6, note 2).

[2] "Creatürlich" refers in this context not to discrete creatures or kinds, but to everything created, in this case encompassing heaven and hell as well as the earth and heavens.

[3] Note that the prime specification for philosophy and astrology are the same word, used respectively in singular and plural: "krafft/ krefften." B.'s "astrology" could be called "astronomy": the two were not clearly distinguished in his time. B.'s delimitation of the theme that follows suggests that measurement is as familiar, and as acknowledged and admired by him, as prognosis. See Intro II B2, 3, 3a, 4.

[4] "Nach dem Geist vnd Sin": in the context of this passage and the work as a whole, the second term suggests "die geistige, intellektuelle, verstandesmäßige seite des menschen" (Grimm, "Sinn" 9). The intellect is active rather than passive ("Geist" as the Holy Spirit); it is reflective rather than observational ("ahn Schawen") and, given the topics to which it is applied, it is appropriately rendered by "reflection." "Searching" gives rise to B.'s theories, though not to their authority. If "Geist" qualifies B. as a mystic illuminated by God, "Sinn" characterizes him as a philosopher.

[5] The original German title, translated by B.'s friends into the Latin equivalent *Aurora*, soon found the acceptance of the author himself, with the result that the Latin and German titles have coexisted with comparable validity.

[6] In this passage, the first and second worlds are before and after the Flood respectively.

[7] B.'s "wittet" is presumably roughly as in Grimm, "wetter" 4, "fluchen, schimpfen, poltern, drohen."

[8] The point is that Enoch and the patriarchs pleased God with their faith, as in Heb 11:5, not by their knowledge.

[9] A marginal reference to Mat 11, refers to verse 25: "Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.'"

[10] Gen 1:27, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.” (Luther: “Vnd Gott schuff den Menschen jm zum Bilde / zum Bilde Gottes schuff er / Vnd schuff sie ein Menlin vnd Frewlin.”) The implicit creation of the singular man or humankind, yet also of the double male and female human being, soon openly attracts B.’s speculation.

Source: Jacob Boehme, *Aurora (Morgen Röte im auffgang*, 1612) and *Ein gründlicher Bericht* or *A Fundamental Report (Mysterium Pansophicum*, 1620). With a translation, introduction, and commentary by Andrew Weeks and Günther Bonheim in Collaboration with Michael Spang as Editor of *Gründlicher Bericht*. Aries Book Series: Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism, volume 16. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013, pp. 104–15. © Brill. Reproduced with permission.

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