

The Swedenborgian House of Studies and The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences
present

The History and Philosophy of Astrobiology
(with references to Swedenborg and his work *Other Planets*)

Prof. David Dunér

History of Science and Ideas, Lund University, Sweden /
Centre for Cognitive Semiotics, Lund University, Sweden

November 13, 2014

7 p.m.

‡*Chapel of the Great Commission*‡

Pacific School of Religion

1798 Scenic Drive, Berkeley CA 94709

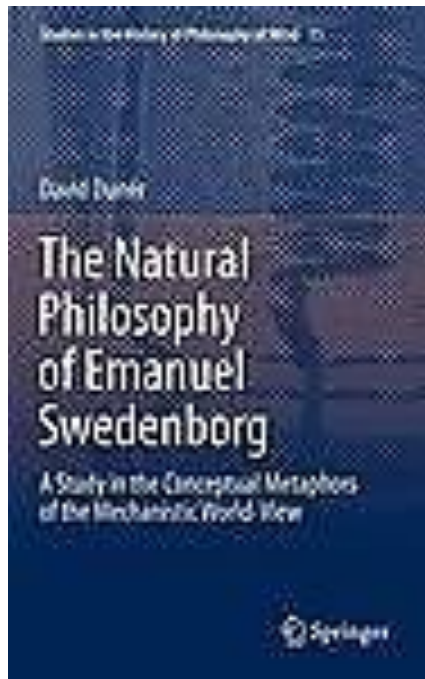


There are things we know. Even though life might not exist in outer space, it is we human beings with our brains, bodies, and cultures who are searching for it. The history and philosophy of astrobiology is centred on humans, or more specifically, the scientific endeavour's dependence on the human mind and the human culture. Astrobiologists have brains, for sure; they are using cognitive tools that are a result of the bio-cultural co-evolution of human cognitive abilities. Certain cognitive processes are at work when astrobiologists encounter unknown things, when they interpret their observational data, and when they gather and classify it. This does not go on in subjective isolation. Astrobiologists live in a culture, in a certain time in history, in a specific research environment, and collaborate with other thinking beings.

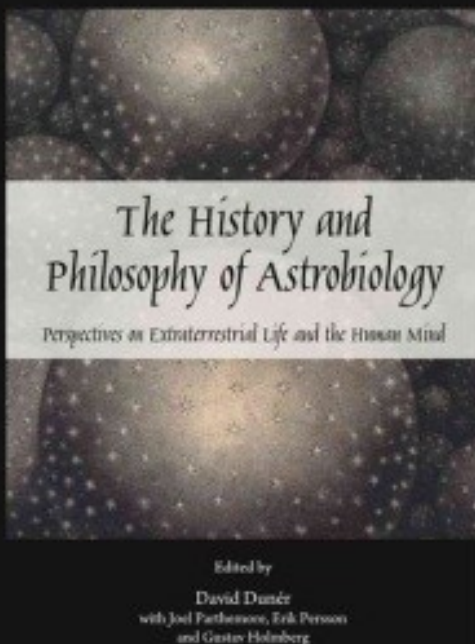
If we find extraterrestrial life, we can be sure that this will change our way of thinking and how we perceive the world and our place in the living Universe. It will change our culture and science. Should the day arrive when we find extraterrestrial life on another planet in our Solar System, or on an exoplanet or exomoon orbiting another star, then that shall begin the new history of astrobiology. That occasion will be a historical turning point in our persistent search for life. The greatest discovery of all for a human in her life and for mankind itself in the history of its civilisation, would be the encounter with another thinking being.

This talk aims to present some answers to why history and philosophy are important for the self-understanding of astrobiology. It will discuss how it has developed and what deeper fundamental problems it faces.

Admission to the Lecture is free of charge—Street parking is available around the campus—if you have questions please email Francesca M. McCrossan at fmccrossan@shs.psr.edu or Melissa Moritz at melissam@ctns.org



Although Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) is commonly known for his spiritual philosophy, his early career was focused on natural science. During this period, Swedenborg thought of the world as a gigantic machine following the laws of mechanics and geometry. This volume analyzes this mechanistic worldview from the cognitive perspective by means of a study of the metaphors in Swedenborg’s texts. The author argues that these conceptual metaphors are vital skills of the creative mind and scientific thinking, used to create visual analogies and abstract ideas. This means that Swedenborg’s mechanistic and geometrical worldview allowed him to perceive the world as mechanical and geometrical.



***The History and Philosophy of Astrobiology:
Perspectives on Extraterrestrial Life and the
Human Mind***

Editors: David Dunér, Joel Parthemore, Erik Persson, Gustav Holmberg

David Dunér is Professor of History of Science and Ideas and Researcher at the Centre for Cognitive Semiotics, Lund University, Sweden. He was director of the research group “Astrobiology: Past, Present, and Future” at the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies at Lund University. Dunér is the main editor of this volume.