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Coleridge's Philosophies

In conversations recorded by Thomas Medwin, Lord Byron, recalling his reading of the *Biographia Literaria*, expressed a widely shared view that Coleridge's philosophical interests were fundamentally antithetical to his poetic gifts: 'If he had never gone to Germany, nor spoilt his fine genius by the transcendental philosophy and German metaphysics, nor taken to write lay sermons, he would have made the greatest poet of the day.'[1] Coleridge himself accepted neither that poetry and philosophy were opposed to one another, nor that his immersion in German philosophy was superfluous or detrimental to his intellectual development. On the contrary, he insisted that '[n]o man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher' (*BL* II, 25–26), and he explained that his increasing recognition of the inadequacy of the empiricist philosophies of John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hartley had led him to Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy (*BL* I, 140–41, 153–54). But despite his sustained interest in and commitment to philosophical thought from his youth to the end of his life, Coleridge's claim to be considered an original philosophical thinker remains as contested today as it was in his lifetime.[2]

Several factors complicate the assessment of Coleridge's engagement with philosophy: his syncretic use of established philosophers; his deliberate tendency, connected to his religious concerns, to associate thought with feeling; and the tensions involved in his persistent desire, also connected to his religious concerns, to overcome epistemological and metaphysical dualisms (thought/reality, mind/body, self/world) while maintaining moral dualism (good/evil). From his 'Lectures on Revealed Religion' (1795) onwards, his philosophical commitments were inseparable from, if not always conceptually compatible with, his vindication of Christian revelation, even as his understanding of that revelation changed over time. Since the limited space available here forces me to be ruthlessly selective, thus neglecting the important but complex topic of Coleridge's reception of German *Naturphilosophie*,[3] I shall focus on his troubled engagement

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108935555.014 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with three thinkers of especial importance for him – Joseph Priestley, Benedict de Spinoza and Kant – and conclude with a very brief consideration of his use of F. W. J. Schelling in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Because Coleridge's early associationist phase – which he presented in the *Biographia* as an error – reveals preoccupations that persisted for the rest of his life, more attention is given to it than is usual in accounts of his philosophical thought.

While a notoriously monological talker, Coleridge was also a profoundly dialogical thinker, dependent on the intellectual stimuli provided by his reading, as the remarkable extent of his marginalia attests. His translated plagiarisms from such figures as Kant and Schelling are the most obvious manifestations of this dependence, although there is some truth to the claim that 'the more undigested a borrowing is, the more peripheral [...] to Coleridge's real interests' (*P Lects* I, lvii–iii). The account given in Chapter 9 of the *Biographia* of his philosophical journey from David Hartley's associationism to Schelling's transcendental idealism by way of Leibniz, Böhme, Spinoza, Kant and others lends support to Robert Southey's much-quoted verdict that Coleridge embraced and discarded philosophical systems successively without finally settling on any: 'The truth is that he plays with systems, & any nonsense will serve him for a text from which he can deduce something new & surprizing' (*CLRS,* 1479).[4] If his habit of working out his own philosophical positions in response to others' made him an acute critic, it also inhibited him from becoming a systematic philosopher in his own right. Hence the plural of my title.

To be sure, Coleridge long aspired to a kind of system, which he described in 1831 as identifying 'the insulated fragments of truth' in different intellectual disciplines and synthesizing them to 'frame a perfect mirror' (*TT* I, 248). Yet while the reference here to mirroring seems to assume a traditional conception of truth as the correspondence of a mental representation with a reality external to the mind, and hence also the separation of knowing subject from known object, Coleridge persistently denied that reflective self-consciousness and discursive reasoning – the first principles of most Western philosophy from Descartes to Kant – could by themselves arrive at an adequate comprehension of reality and truth.[5] In one of the fragments of the so-called *Opus Maximum*, for example, he argued that 'the inevitable result of all consequent reasoning, in which the Speculative intellect refuses to acknowledge a higher or deeper ground than it can itself supply [...] is [...] pantheism, under one or other of its modes [...] and in all alike [...] practically atheistic' (*OM*, 106–7; cf. *Friend* I, 522–23 n. 1). This ground, being inaccessible to ratiocination, could be disclosed to reason only if reason itself *were* it. Thus in *The Friend* and

elsewhere Coleridge defined reason less as a mental faculty than as an ontological reality in which subject and object were united (as the condition of the possibility of knowledge) and the individual was united with God (as the condition of the possibility of faith): 'it is an organ identical with its appropriate objects. Thus, God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c. are the objects of Reason; but they are themselves *reason*' (*Friend* I, 156; *CL* VI, 600; cf. *CM* I, 239, and II, 1151–52).

In his argument that self-consciousness must be grounded in something transcending itself, and his consequent insistence on the limits of discursive reason and on the necessary incompleteness of any philosophical system predicated on the primacy of reflective self-consciousness, Coleridge had affinities with German contemporaries such as Friedrich Hölderlin, Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) and Friedrich Schlegel. But unlike the three German thinkers, Coleridge was not content to postulate an impersonal Absolute or state of Being (*Sein*) as the ground of self-consciousness – an Absolute that the Germans accepted was not directly accessible to cognition.[6] For Coleridge, whether in his early Unitarianism or his later Trinitarianism, the ground of self-consciousness and of reality itself was conceivable only in terms of God. Thus he insisted equally that 'the office and object of philosophy' was to demonstrate the identity of subject and object (*BL* I, 260), and that 'Religion [...] is the ultimate end of philosophy' (*Friend* I, 463; also *BL* I, 283).

Coleridge may have been exaggerating when he told Robert Southey in December 1794, 'I am a compleat Necessitarian – and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself – but I go farther than Hartley and believe the corporeality of *thought* – namely, that it is motion.' For he immediately made a joke of this philosophical position with a mock letter of consolation, usually overlooked by commentators (*CL* I, 137–38). Yet there is no doubt that David Hartley's associationism, especially as radicalized by Joseph Priestley, appealed to Coleridge in the 1790s. Hypothesizing a parallel between natural laws and the principles of mental operations, Hartley explained thought as consisting in the formation and recollection of correspondences between physical sensations and 'ideas' (including feelings). Free will, in the sense of an ability to act without cause or motivation, was therefore illusory. The determinism of this theory was reconcilable with theism insofar as God, by definition benevolent, was assumed to be the ultimate cause of both sensations and the principles by which they were processed in the mind. Hence Coleridge's recommendation of the theory to Southey, also in December 1794, as an antidote to scepticism: 'I would ardently, that you were a Necessitarian – and (believing in an all-loving Omnipotence) an Optimist' (*CL* I, 145).

While Hartley himself, unwilling to abandon the idea of an immortal soul, had resisted committing himself fully in his *Observations on Man* (1749) to a materialist theory of consciousness, Priestley overcame this obstacle by declaring the soul unknowable and therefore philosophically irrelevant. In the introduction to *Hartley's Theory of the Mind* (1775), his abridgement of the *Observations* and again in his *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) – both of which Coleridge almost certainly read – Priestley argued that once matter is recognized to be not inert and impenetrable but active, possessing forces of attraction and repulsion, its apparent difference in kind from the activities of sensation and thought disappears. So it was reasonable to assume that man is composed of a single, uniform substance comprising both material and mental attributes.[7] Having thus dissolved the dualism of mind and body, Priestley proceeded more daringly to dissolve that of God and world, arguing that the 'Divine Being', to which everything owes its existence, could not act on the world if it were not also in some sense material (since otherwise it would require the assistance of an intermediary between the immaterial and the material): 'matter is, by this means, resolved into nothing but the *divine agency* exerted according to certain rules' (Priestley, *Disquisitions*, I, 39). And if 'every thing is really *done* by the divine power, what material objection can there be to every thing *being* the divine power'. The advantage of this scheme, Priestley added disarmingly, is 'that it supposes *nothing to be made in vain*' (*Disquisitions*, I, 40) – including apparent evil, which becomes teleologically explicable as an instrument of divine benevolence. 'Reasoning strictly and with logical Accuracy', Coleridge lectured in 1795, 'I should deny the existence of any Evil, inasmuch as the end determines the nature of the means and I have been able to discover nothing of which the end is not good' (*Lects 1795*, 104). From God's perspective, 'All things are pure, his strong controlling Love / Alike from all educing perfect good' (*CPW* I, i, 177).

In these early years Coleridge expressed his philosophical convictions in poetry as well as prose. Composed in 1794–96 and published in 1796, 'Religious Musings', from which the lines just quoted come, attests to his attraction to Hartley's associationism and Priestley's materialism; and the poem explicitly praises both thinkers (lines 369–77). A note added to the poem in 1797 specifies that lines 39–42, in which Coleridge traces a progression from hope to faith to love and finally to 'consciousness of God', versify Hartley's argument that all human pleasures lead by association to the idea of God as the source of all good (*CPW* I, i, 176).[8] Assurance that this train of thought is ontologically justified follows in lines 126–31, where Coleridge invokes Priestley's conception of divine immanence:

> 'Tis the sublime of man,
> Our noontide Majesty, to know ourselves
> Parts and proportions of one wond'rous whole!
> This fraternizes man, this constitutes
> Our charities and bearings. But 'tis God
> Diffus'd thro' all, that doth make all one whole […]
> (*CPW* I, i, 180)

Reinforcement of this idea of a providentially organized world, although without a theological inflection, came from Erasmus Darwin's poem *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791), which itself praised Priestley. The juxtaposition in the fourth canto of an account of nature's regenerative tendency (vital winds succeeding pestilential ones) with reports of Enlightenment scientific and technological advancements implied a parallel between nature and human society, such as Priestley hypothesized: 'one great comprehensive law shall be found to govern both the material and the intellectual world' (Priestley, *Hartley's Theory*, xxv).[9] In lines contributed in 1795 to Southey's epic *Joan of* Arc (and subsequently republished in 1817 as part of his own poem 'The Destiny of Nations'), Coleridge elaborated that although God works in diverse ways, all his actions are directed towards the single end of perfection:

> Glory to Thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!
> All-conscious Presence of the Universe!
> Nature's vast ever-acting Energy!
> In will, in deed, Impulse of All to all;
> Whether thy Law with unrefracted Ray
> Beam on the Prophet's purged Eye, or if
> Diseasing realms the Enthusiast, wild of thought
> Scatter new frenzies on the infected Throng,
> Thou both inspiring and predooming both,
> Fit Instruments and best of perfect End. (*CPW* I, i, 223)

In 1795 Coleridge found Priestley's deterministic theism consonant both with the traditional teleological argument for God's existence, or argument from design (*Lects 1795*, 93), and with the idea, which he derived variously from Mark Akenside's poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) and George Berkeley's *New Theory of Vision* (1709), that nature is a kind of divine language. The morally educative value of learning to comprehend this language – that is, recognizing in natural phenomena the operation of divine providence – was a theme that found repeated expression in Coleridge's works of the 1790s, from his 'Lectures on Revealed Religion' (*Lects 1795*, 94 and n. 3) to his contribution to *Joan of Arc* ('For all that meets the bodily sense I deem / Symbolical, one mighty alphabet for infant minds' (*CPW* I, i, 210)) to 'Frost at Midnight', in which he promised his infant son Hartley,

> so shalt thou see and hear
> The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
> Of that eternal language, which thy God
> Utters, who from eternity doth teach
> Himself in all, and all things in himself. (*CPW* I, ii, 572)

Coleridge's desire to interpret nature as God's symbolic self-representation was sufficiently deeply rooted, however, not to require the specific philosophical underpinning of Priestley's ontology of divine immanence – even if it did require an alternative anti-dualist ontology, one that allowed the symbol to be declared the same as, by virtue of itself being or at least participating in, its referent.[10] And although one of the arguments that Coleridge later deployed against Hartley – namely, that his dualism could not explain interaction between the material and immaterial (*BL* I, 117) – was taken from none other than Priestley, in the later 1790s Coleridge began to entertain serious doubts about necessitarianism, particularly on moral grounds. In a letter of March 1796 he observed that the gratuitousness of his wife's pains during pregnancy seemed to contradict Priestley's optimism:

> Other pains are only friendly admonitions that we are not acting as Nature requires – but here are pains most horrible in consequence of having obeyed Nature. Quere – How is it that Dr Priestley is not an atheist? – He asserts in three different Places, that God not only *does,* but *is,* every thing. – But if God *be* every Thing, every Thing is God – : which is all, the Atheists assert.
> (*CL* I, 192–93)

The pangs of childbirth were, according to Genesis (3:16), a punishment for the Fall, and by 1798 Coleridge was distancing himself decisively from Priestley's denial of the doctrine of Christ's atonement for mankind's inherent sinfulness: 'I believe most stedfastly in original Sin; that from our mothers' wombs our understandings are darkened […] that our organization is depraved, & our volitions imperfect' (*CL* I, 396). Having accepted the concept of original sin, Coleridge could no longer adhere to necessitarianism without holding God responsible for the Fall. To admit the existence of evil and the reality of sin was therefore to assume the freedom of the will, an assumption that necessitarianism disallowed. The inexplicability of the death of his infant son Berkeley in 1799 only reinforced Coleridge's discontent with Priestley, as he confided in a letter to his wife (*CL* I, 482); and by 1801 he could inform Thomas Poole that he had 'overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley, and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern Infidels – especially, the doctrine of Necessity' (*CL* II, 706). The following year Coleridge repeated this assertion to John Prior

Estlin, adding that he did not now consider 'Christianity to be tenable on the Priestleyan Hypothesis' (*CL* II, 821).

Coleridge's rejection of Priestleyan materialism marks the beginning of what was to be a lifelong challenge of reconciling an attraction to monism, as the solution to the problem of dualism, with an insistence on metaphysical libertarianism – that is, the supposition that humans are capable of choices that are neither causally determined nor random, and that they are therefore responsible for those choices – as the solution to the problem of evil. This challenge certainly conditioned his reception of Spinoza. Coleridge's interest in the Dutch philosopher may have been stimulated in Göttingen by the prolonged furore following the posthumous revelation, in 1785, of the self-professed Spinozism of the much-admired playwright and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, of whom Coleridge considered writing a biography. The revelation was scandalous because Spinoza's radical monism, according to which reality consists of a single, infinite substance that is equally God and nature, was widely regarded as atheistic – a view justified insofar as he rejected the personal God of the Bible, but reductive insofar as he did not (*pace* Pierre Bayle's influential caricature) equate God merely with the totality of the physical world.[11] That Coleridge frequently discussed 'the doctrines of Spinoza' during his months in Göttingen in 1799 was recalled disapprovingly nearly four decades later by Clement Carlyon, an Englishman who had met him there. But the version of those doctrines that Carlyon attributed to Coleridge sounds suspiciously like Priestleyan materialism (even if Priestley himself had explicitly dissociated his philosophy from Spinoza's): 'the great principle of Spinozism is, that there is nothing properly and absolutely existing but matter, and the modifications of matter; among which are even comprehended thought, abstract and general ideas, comparisons, relations, combinations of relations.'[12]

After returning from Germany, Coleridge informed Southey in late September 1799 that he was 'sunk in Spinoza' (*CL* I, 534) and three months later (albeit jokingly) that he was himself a Spinozist (*CL* I, 551). To be sure, it is unclear how much first-hand knowledge Coleridge had of Spinoza's writings before November 1812, when he borrowed his friend Henry Crabb Robinson's set of the *Opera omnia* for a year (returning it heavily annotated: *CM* V, 199–220). But notebook entries of November 1799 and October 1803, in which he sketched the idea for a poem on Spinoza, suggest that Coleridge found in the philosopher's conception of a single substance of which all finite things are 'modes' a compelling explanation of the possibility of 'multeity' in unity, and hence an alternative – though still anti-dualist – to Priestleyan materialism:

> I would make a pilgrimage to the burning sands of Arabia, or &c &c to find the Man who could explain to me there can be *oneness*, there being infinite Perceptions – yet there must be a *one*ness, not an intense Union but an Absolute Unity[.] (*CN* I, 556, also 1561)

By 1810, having in the meantime read Kant's three *Critiques*, Coleridge affirmed Spinoza's monism and Kant's transcendental idealism to be the 'Only two *Systems* of Philosophy – (sibi constantia [self-consistent]) possible' (*CN* III, 3756), the former 'ontological' or realist (proceeding from reflection on existence) and the latter 'anthropological' or idealist (proceeding from reflection on self-consciousness). Subsuming the entire Western philosophical tradition under this distinction, Thomas McFarland argued that Coleridge's spiritual and emotional commitment to Christianity enabled him finally and definitively to reject Spinozism and all other forms of 'pantheism' for Trinitarianism; and this was certainly the impression that Coleridge sought to convey when, for example, he assured Robinson in November 1812 that he believed in the Trinity despite his interest in Spinoza.[13] In the *Biographia*, taking comfort in Kant's 'pre-critical' argument of 1763 that God's existence is necessarily prior to his possibility (since nothing would be possible and nothing could be predicated of him if he did not exist) – an argument in which Kant criticized Spinoza for having conflated God's existence with his essence and effects – Coleridge asserted that a conviction of faith neither provable nor disprovable by rational demonstration had enabled him to resolve the competing claims of Spinoza's infinite substance and Christianity's personal God (*BL* I, 201–2; also *CM* I, 242).[14] Yet his repeated special pleading on Spinoza's behalf, not merely to defend him from the charge of atheism but even to claim his proximity to Christianity, betrays a more complex and less resolute attitude.

Since Coleridge, after rejecting Priestleyan necessitarianism, conceived free will to be the essence of personhood and the foundation of morality, he naturally objected to Spinoza's denial of free will, which followed from his definition of God as necessarily self-caused (*Ethics*, pt. 1, prop. 32): 'Assuredly, the defect in Spinoza's System is the impersonality of God – he makes his only Substance a Thing, not a Will' (*CM* III, 855; also *CM* IV, 226; *SWF* I, 707–8; *CL* IV, 849). This objection ought to have been decisive, but Coleridge sought to mitigate it, claiming variously that Spinoza's philosophy was merely the 'Skeleton' of a system that required elaboration and refinement (*SWF* I, 62; *CM* III, 123; *CL* IV, 548, 775), that it was not '*in itself* and *essentially* […] incompatible with religion, natural or revealed' (*BL* I, 152; *SWF* I, 557) despite Spinoza's denial of miracles and inspired prophecy (as Coleridge knew: *CN* I, 1379), that 'it was pantheism, but in

the most religious form in which it could appear' (*PLects* II, 578), that its errors were of omission rather than commission (*SWF* I, 609).

Coleridge's dilemma was this: what was most objectionable in Spinoza's metaphysics, the demonstration of the logical necessity of the single substance, was also most appealing, for it seemed to dissolve the dualism of subject and object definitively. Thus he contested, when one might have expected him to endorse, F. H. Jacobi's argument that Spinoza's consistent rationalism, assuming the universal applicability of the principle of sufficient reason, was atheistic by virtue of its determinism.[15] (This was, after all, essentially the same argument that Coleridge himself had directed against Priestley.) In the margin of Robinson's copy of the *Ethics*, Coleridge identified a possible loophole for free will in the principle of finite causality, according to which every finite thing is determined by a series of finite causes:

> If these finite Causes can be said to act at all, then that on which they act has equal power of action – : and even as tho' all in God *essentially*, we are yet each *existentially* individual, so we must have freedom in God in exact proportion to our Individuality. […] I cannot accord with Jacoby's assertion, that Spinosism as taught by Spinosa, is Atheism […]. It is true, he contends for Necessity; but then he makes two disparate Classes of Necessity, the one identical with Liberty (even as the Christian Doctrine, 'whose service is perfect Freedom') the other Compulsion = Slavery. (*CM* V, 207–8)

Referring to part I, proposition 28, of the *Ethics* (a passage that continues to exercise commentators), Coleridge distinguished between what, as the effect of the infinite cause, could not be otherwise (the *essential*) and what, given a different series of causes, could in theory be otherwise (the *existential* or contingent). If the infinite and eternal actualization of the universe (i.e. God) did not directly determine the temporal and finite actualization of events, then individuals (as finite modes of the universe) would have a kind of freedom to actualize themselves. Still, this interpretation applied only to individuals. And as Coleridge realized, the more fundamental problem was that the *Ethics* denied both free will to God and the existence of evil. In 1815 he lamented to the publisher John Gutch that Spinoza's God was a world with a single pole and no equator: had he proceeded from either the objective pole (nature) or the subjective (mind), he would necessarily have concluded with their identity in 'The Living God […] the originating Principle of all dependent Existence in his Will and Word' (*CL* IV, 548). However implausible, the belief that Spinoza *might* have arrived at a Coleridgean idea of God was consistent with Coleridge's inability for three decades either fully to accept or fully to reject the Dutch philosopher's monism.[16]

Coleridge was equally, if less explicitly, ambivalent towards the philosophical system he considered the only viable alternative to Spinoza's. Given his avowal in the *Biographia* that Kant's works 'took possession of [him] with a giant's hand' and 'invigorated and disciplined [his] understanding' (*BL* I, 153), 'it is surprising how few of Kant's key concepts and ideas he was willing to accept unaltered'.[17] His difficulties, which can be examined only briefly here, had primarily to do with the consequences for metaphysics of Kant's transcendental method – that is, his examination in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, revised 1787) of the possibility of a priori cognition. Because, Kant argued, objects of knowledge must conform to the conditions of knowledge, namely the forms of sensory representation and principles of conceptual organization inherent to the human mind, things as they are in themselves (*Dinge an sich*), reality outside the mind, cannot be known. Thus he excluded traditional metaphysical issues from the realm of knowledge. Although it is rational, Kant maintained, to *assume* the existence of God, the freedom of the will and the immortality of the soul – and hence to act *as if* all are true – these assumptions are incapable of proof.

As with Spinoza, Coleridge sought interpretively to mitigate what he found unpalatable in Kant's critical philosophy, both by extracting hopeful signals from it and by reinterpreting some of its central concepts. Thus, for example, Kant's argument for the indemonstrability of God's existence was taken to imply also the indemonstrability of God's *non*-existence (*BL* I, 201–2) – an inference Kant allowed (A 641/B 669) – while his insistence on the unknowability of noumena, or things in themselves, was taken to indicate that he must have meant more by them 'than his mere words express' (*BL* I, 155) – a supposition entirely groundless (though shared with Schelling), but permitting Kant's 'doctrines on the limits of our knowing power [to] become a sort of back-door through which the whole of traditional theology is admitted'.[18] Whereas Kant proceeded from the unity of consciousness (without which determinate objects could not be presented to consciousness in an orderly way (A 105–10)), Coleridge thought that the unity of consciousness could itself proceed only from the prior unity of subject and object. He therefore redefined the term *a priori*, which Kant applied to what is not only independent of experience but the condition of the possibility of experience (A 2, 22/B 3–5, 36), to what, having been revealed *through* experience, 'we then know […] must have pre-existed, or the experience itself would not have been possible' (*BL* I, 293; *Friend* II, 105–6n). In this interpretation, a priori truths perform the same function that Coleridge, looking out the window in April 1805, had sought in natural objects: empirical confirmation of 'something within [him] that already or forever exists' (*CN* II, 2546; *LS* 72). The contrast with Kant, who argued

that the mind imposes the unity of nature as it appears to us (A 125)[19], could hardly be greater.

Similarly, Coleridge could not accept Kant's restriction of ideas of speculative reason, or concepts of which no corresponding object is accessible to experience (A 337/B 384), to a purely 'regulative', as opposed to 'constitutive', role (A 509, 616–20, 644/B 537, 644–48, 672). For Kant, concepts such as that of a supreme intelligence have a heuristic value, for example in guiding how we think about nature and pursue the knowledge of it, but they reveal nothing about how the world is really constituted (A 671–74/B 699–702). In the fifth appendix to *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), Coleridge identified as 'the highest *problem* of Philosophy' the question of whether the ideas of reason are indeed regulative (serving an epistemological function) or constitutive (conveying an ontological truth), 'and one with the power and Life of Nature' (*LS* 114; also *CL* v, 14–15). Aligning Kant and Aristotle on one side and Plato and Plotinus on the other, he left little doubt which side he favoured.

To grant ideas constitutive status, Coleridge had to modify another distinction that he clearly appropriated from Kant (even if he claimed otherwise in the *Biographia*: *BL* i, 173), that between reason and understanding. While following Kant closely in defining understanding as 'the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phænomena of perception: that faculty, the functions of which contain the rules and constitute the possibility of outward Experience' (*Friend* i, 156; *CL* ii, 1198; *LS* 59; cf. Kant A 51/B 57), he departed from the German philosopher radically with respect to reason. Of the two functions that Kant assigned to reason, the 'logical' one of systematizing and directing empirical inquiry by means of inferences drawn from the conclusions and judgements of understanding, and the 'pure' one of forming concepts of non-empirical objects (A 299–309/B 355–66), he regarded the second warily on account of its tendency to make unverifiable metaphysical claims (such claims being justified, in Kant's view, only in relation to their 'practical' application in ethics). As G. N. G. Orsini remarked,[20] the distinction between the two mental faculties corresponds to that between traditional metaphysics and Kant's own transcendental idealism, and the purpose of the first *Critique* was precisely to limit the pretensions of reason. Because Coleridge, however, could not accept Kant's argument that the concepts of God, free will and the soul's immortality must be denied to theoretical reason in order to be preserved for practical reason (B xxx), he sought to reverse Kant's separation of reason's metaphysical and moral functions – which he criticized as arbitrary (*CM* v, 756) – by conceiving the faculty to contain within itself the objects it reveals to consciousness.[21] Or to put it another way, 'Practical reason must become cognitive,

and noumena or things-in-themselves must be acquaintable through this enhanced practical reason.'[22]

Thus in *The Friend*, contrary to his characteristic desynonimizing practice, Coleridge presented reason – in the passage quoted earlier in this chapter – as essentially coterminous with God, will and being itself. Reinforcing the point in the 'Essays on the Principles of Method' at the end of *The Friend*, he exhorted his readers 'to bear in mind, that all true reality has both its ground and its evidence in the *will*', without which ratiocination is empty (*Friend* 1, 519–20). As its own ground, reason offers its own evidence: 'Reason is the Power of universal and necessary Convictions, the Source and Substance of Truths above Sense, and having their evidence in themselves' (*AR*, 216; *LS*, 60–61 n. 1). It is likely (though this is debated in the scholarship) that in elaborating reason in this decidedly un-Kantian way, Coleridge availed himself of the concept of reason that he would have encountered in seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists such as Henry More, Ralph Cudworth and John Smith: a faculty not only discursive but intuitive, not only formal but substantive, endowed with innate and self-evident principles.[23]

As we saw earlier, Coleridge criticized Spinoza for beginning from neither the objective pole nor the subjective to arrive at his idea of God. One attraction of Schelling's philosophy, as far as overcoming Kantian dualism was concerned, was its argument that these opposed approaches – deriving mind from nature and nature from mind – are actually parallel, in that the goal of either is to establish the fundamental identity of subject and object. So much Coleridge affirmed in Chapter 12 of the *Biographia*, translating without acknowledgement from Schelling's *Treatises on the Elucidation of Idealism* (1796–97) and *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) (*BL* 1, 254–60 and nn.). Having thus replaced Kant's unknowable thing-in-itself with 'the real and very object' (*BL* 1, 263), Coleridge proceeded to elaborate, again through Schelling (and now adding *On the I as a Principle of Philosophy* of 1795 to the mix of sources), ten 'theses' preparatory to a promised 'deduction of the imagination, and with it the principles of production and of genial criticism in the fine arts' (*BL* 1, 264). This deduction was theoretically necessary, for Coleridge, as we know from *The Statesman's Manual* – and following Schelling – attributed to imagination the crucial role of mediating between reason and understanding, between the absolute and the finite, thus allowing the ideas of reason to be perceived empirically (if indirectly): 'that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of Sense […] gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*' (*LS* 29; also 69, 72–73).[24] It was characteristic of Coleridge that, even while

insisting that reason is its own evidence, he sought to assure himself of the possibility that its principles could be manifested empirically in some way: the evidence of things not seen was insufficient.

In the event, the deduction did not materialize, its absence explained away by a fictive exhortation from a friend not to publish it on account of its difficulty (*BL* I, 302–4). Instead, appropriating and compressing Schelling's three *Potenzen* or powers of imagination – unconscious sensory perception; conscious and synthetic perception; and self-conscious and productive perception, used in creating art (III, 350–51, 426, 610–11, 626–27)[25] – Coleridge simply asserted that the imagination consists of a 'primary' and a 'secondary' power. While the former (corresponding roughly to Schelling's second *Potenz*) is the 'prime Agent of all human Perception', the latter, 'co-existing with the conscious will' (and corresponding more closely to Schelling's third *Potenz*), transforms its objects: 'it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create' (*BL* I, 304). In contrast to Schelling, whose *System* culminates by appealing to art as philosophy's necessary complement, representing objectively what theoretical reason can contemplate only subjectively, the 'original identity' of the subjective and objective,[26] Coleridge broke off at this point without considering art as a product of the secondary imagination. Christoph Bode remarks that, in forgoing his deduction, Coleridge in effect performed what Schelling articulated, 'the ontological gap between the philosophy of art and its object'.[27] But in the succeeding chapters of the *Biographia* Coleridge did address art, more specifically Wordsworth's poetry. Even if he did not affirm, as Schelling did, that art is 'the true and eternal instrument [*Organon*] of philosophy',[28] he perhaps implied as much by declaring Wordsworth capable of producing the 'FIRST GENUINE PHILOSOPHIC POEM' (*BL* II, 156). Adverting to *The Recluse* (which Wordsworth had announced in the preface to *The Excursion* in 1814), Coleridge evidently envisioned the projected poem on nature, mankind and society as the (vicarious) fulfilment of philosophy in a work of imagination, synthesizing thought and feeling (cf. *CL* II, 1034, and IV, 574).

No less significant is what Coleridge *added* to his appropriations from Schelling. In a scholium to his Thesis VI, he argued that individuals can explain their existence by referring to God's existence: 'sum quia deus est' ('I am because God is') and 'sum quia in deo sum' ('I am because I am in God'). Thus incorporating the individual into 'the great eternal I AM', he concluded – in explicit defiance of Schelling[29] – that the grounds of being, knowledge, and ideas are identical (*BL* I, 274–75). And in Thesis X he inferred a divine 'self-conscious will or intelligence' (*BL* I, 285) from Schelling's position that natural philosophy 'places the sole reality in […]

absolute identity of subject and object'.[30] Where Schelling spoke of self-consciousness as a principle of nature, Coleridge spoke of it as an attribute of the personal God of Trinitarianism.[31] Finally, in Chapter 13 of the *Biographia*, he defined the primary imagination not only as the power of human perception, as quoted above, but 'as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM' (*BL* I, 304). The kind of repetition that Coleridge meant here is not itself artistic activity, although it is necessarily entailed in that activity. Because he conceived the imagination as mediating between reason and understanding and hence between religion and empirical reality, he was especially concerned to establish, even if by sheer assertion, a connection between the individual mind and God.

These theistic interpolations, incongruous with Schelling but consistent with each other, are as illustrative of Coleridge's relationship to philosophy generally as is his substitution of practical criticism of imaginative works for a deduction of the imagination as such. Critical of a blind faith, he sought to anchor his religion in philosophy; fearful of succumbing to a pantheistic monism, he sought to anchor his philosophy in religion; conscious of the limits of discursive thought, he appealed to the imagination to make the truths of reason intuitable. The unconventional outlets of most of his philosophical writing – letters, notebook entries, marginalia, fragmentary treatises, occasional essays, the 'immethodical miscellany' of the *Biographia* (cf. *BL* I, 88) – are testaments not to a failed systematicity so much as to the conviction that, finally, truth and reality exceed any system by which the mind would seek to contain them. The 'total and undivided philosophy' (*BL* I, 282) that Coleridge sought could not, by its very nature, find total and undivided expression in a conventionally philosophical form, or indeed any form.

Notes

1 Thomas Medwin, *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted during a Residence with His Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822* (London, 1824), 175–76. Coleridge's knowledge of Byron's comment is confirmed by a letter of 8 April 1825 to his nephew John (*CL* V, 421) and by a notebook entry of 1829 (*CN* V, 6116).

2 On Coleridge's role as a conduit of German philosophy to nineteenth-century anglophone readers, see, for example: René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1838* (Princeton University Press, 1931), chap. 3; Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800–1850* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), chap. 1; and Monika Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

3 On which see Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

4 Letter to William Taylor, 11 July 1808.
5 See also Tim Milnes, 'Through the Looking-Glass: Coleridge and Post-Kantian Philosophy', *Comparative Literature*, 51 (1999), 309–23, at 309, for a valuable interpretation of Coleridge's characterization of his 'system' in the *Table Talk* report.
6 On Hölderlin, Novalis and Schlegel in this context, see Nicholas Halmi, 'Romantic Thinking', in *Thought: A Philosophical History*, eds. Panayiota Vassilopoulou and Daniel Whistler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 60–74.
7 Joseph Priestley, *Hartley's Theory of the Mind, on the Principle of the Association of Ideas; with Essays Relating to the Subject of It* (London, 1775), xix–xxi; *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, 2nd edn. (London, 1782), I, xix–xx. For Coleridge's probable knowledge of these works, see *Lects 1795*, lviii–lix, and *BL* I, 110.
8 Cf. David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 3 vols (London, 1791), I, 114 (chap. 1, prop. 22, cor. 4).
9 On the significance of Darwin to Coleridge in the 1790s, see H. W. Piper, *The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets* (London: Athlone Press, 1962), chap. 2; and Ian Wylie, *Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 68–77.
10 See Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (Oxford University Press, 2007), chap. 4; and 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford University Press, 2009), 345–58.
11 Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Rotterdam, 1697), II, 1090 n. 1. On Spinoza's German reception, see David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1984).
12 Clement Carlyon, *Early Years and Late Recollections* (London, 1836), 194; cf. Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 112–16; and Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions*, I, 42 (a passage added to the second edition).
13 Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 227, 251; Henry Crabb Robinson, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, ed. E. J. Morley, 3 vols (London: Dent, 1938), I, 112.
14 See Immanuel Kant, 'The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God', in *Theoretical Philosophy 1750–1771*, ed. David Walford (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 107–202, esp. 119–20, 134–35.
15 F. H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, ed. Marion Lauschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), 118. For Coleridge's annotations on the 1789 edition of Jacobi's book, see *CM* III, 75–92.
16 For more extended accounts of Coleridge's engagement with Spinoza, see Richard Berkeley, *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), chap. 3; and Nicholas Halmi, 'Coleridge's Ecumenical Spinoza', in *Spinoza beyond Philosophy*, ed. Beth Lord (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 188–207.
17 Christoph Bode, 'Coleridge and Philosophy', in Burwick, *The Oxford Handbook of Coleridge*, 588–619 (594). Bode's chapter and G. N. G. Orsini's *Coleridge and German Idealism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969),

chaps 2–5, analyse Coleridge's reception of Kant more fully than is possible here. While his intensive reading of Kant began in 1800 or 1801, Monika Class's *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England* establishes that he was almost certainly exposed to the philosopher's ethical and political thought through various intermediaries in the 1790s. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is cited, as is conventional, by the page numbers of the first (= A) and/or second (= B) editions.

18 Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England*, 115.
19 Quoted by Bode, 'Coleridge and Philosophy', 515.
20 Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism*, 84.
21 Cf. Milnes, 'Through the Looking-Glass', 316.
22 Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic* (London: Continuum, 2007), 94.
23 See Frederick Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 165–68. On Coleridge's reception of the Cambridge Platonists (though not with specific reference to reason), see James Vigus, '"This is not quite fair, Master More!"', in *Revisioning Cambridge Platonism: Sources and Legacy*, eds. Douglas Hedley and David Leech (Cham: Springer, 2019), 191–214.
24 Cf. F. W. J. Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 14 vols (Stuttgart, 1856–61), III, 327–634, at 558–59. For a full exposition of Schelling's concept of imagination, see James Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), chap. 20. On Coleridge's use of Schelling more broadly, see Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism*, chaps 8–9.
25 Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 306–8.
26 Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, III, 628.
27 Bode, 'Coleridge and Philosophy', 616–17.
28 Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, III, 627.
29 Schelling, *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, I, 149–244, at 164–65, 168–69n.
30 Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, III, 355–56.
31 Friedrich Uehlein, *Die Manifestation des Selbstbewußtseins im konkreten 'Ich bin'* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982), 110.