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Signature:

Adam P. Mathes

Date

Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Modern Religion of Conscience

By

Adam P. Mathes
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
Historical Studies in Theology and Religion

David S. Pacini, Ph.D.
Advisor

Don Saliers, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Jonathan Strom, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Date

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By

Adam P. Mathes
M.Div., Emory University, 2012
B.A., The University of Georgia, 2003

Advisor: David S. Pacini, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Modern Religion of Conscience
By Adam P. Mathes

When read as a variant of Fichte's philosophical psychology and philosophical theology, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1825 *Aids to Reflection* is an exercise in developing a habit of mind that can discern the distinction between freedom of the will and genuine freedom. I argue that freedom of the will is a type of negative freedom qualified as a capacity to choose independent from constraints, which I differentiate from genuine freedom, which is a type of positive freedom qualified as the alignment of oneself with the ordering of God. By guiding the reader through a progressive series of reflective practices, Coleridge assists the reader in moving from a condition of self-estrangement (described as spiritual dearth and aridity) to one of self-acquaintance, (described as richness and wholeness). Coleridge responds to the possibility of relating psychology to faith by fashioning a method of rational self-realization and placing it in service to spiritual cultivation. For these reasons, *Aids to Reflection* stands in the Christian theological tradition that finds knowledge of God related to—if not disclosed through—self-knowledge. Moreover, as a work concerned with the relation of freedom and subjectivity for the sake of religion, *Aids to Reflection* also belongs within the family of discourse described as the modern religion of conscience.

I make this argument primarily through expository readings of Coleridge's major prose and religious writings of roughly 1817 to 1825. Secondly I interpret *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and "The Wanderings of Cain" as illuminating some of the challenges Coleridge hoped to resolve through his method of spiritual cultivation.

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Introduction

*But who that beauteous Boy beguil'd.
That beauteous Boy to linger here?
Alone, by night, a little child,
In place so silent and so wild—
Has he no friend, no loving mother near?*¹
—Prefatory Note, ‘The Wanderings of Cain’

*Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.*²
—Lines 232–35, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

When read as a variant of Fichte’s philosophical psychology and philosophical theology, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1825 *Aids to Reflection* is an exercise in developing a habit of mind that can discern the distinction between freedom of the will, or negative freedom, qualified as a capacity to choose independent from constraints, and genuine freedom, or positive freedom, qualified as the alignment of oneself with the ordering of God.³ By stewarding the reader through a progressive series of reflective practices, Coleridge moves the reader from a condition of self-estrangement, qualified as spiritual dearth and aridity, to one of self-acquaintance, qualified as richness and wholeness. Coleridge sees the possibility of relating psychology to faith by fashioning a method of rational self-realization and placing it in service to spiritual cultivation.⁴

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Prefatory note to ‘The Wanderings of Cain,’ in *The Major Works*, ed. H.J. Jackson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42. Hereafter all references to “The Wanderings of Cain” or *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* will be from the OUP *Major Works* edition and will include page number, for “Cain” and lines for *Mariner*.

² *Mariner*, Lines 232–235.

³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 1825, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), hereafter *AR*.

⁴ By “rational self-realization” I mean the progressive, albeit never completed, capacity of a subject to gain knowledgeable self-relation to the fullest of its possibilities.

For these reasons, *Aids to Reflection* stands in the Christian theological tradition that finds knowledge of God related to—if not disclosed through—self-knowledge. Moreover, as a work concerned with the relation of freedom and subjectivity for the sake of religion, *Aids to Reflection* also belongs within the family of discourse described as the modern religion of conscience.

Yet *Aids to Reflection* is distinct from others, owing not only to the ways in which Coleridge appropriated insights from German Idealism and transported them into the British milieu, but also to his construal of freedom implied by those appropriations. This dissertation examines Coleridge's appropriations of Fichte's early transcendental idealism, especially his theory of subjectivity and philosophical theology, for the development of a pedagogical method that Coleridge employed in *Aids to Reflection*. By integrating Fichtean principles of subjectivity into his scheme of spiritual cultivation, Coleridge sought to advance a new conception of the Christian faith that represents the fullness and perfection of human intelligence. Among the qualities of that perfection is the habit of mind that discerns the difference between a subject's free will (the subject's freedom to choose) and authentic freedom (the alignment of the individual will with God's will). By expositing selections of Coleridge's religious writings and focusing my analysis on the ways in which he mobilizes Fichtean principles of subjectivity for a method of rational self-realization, I conclude that Coleridge's conception of faith implies a positive construal of freedom. By "positive freedom," I mean the ability or capacity to live and act in accordance with, or in pursuit of, a goal or regulating principle, the manifestation of which may be internal or external. That is, the end towards which the individual is free and capable to move, act, or grow may be idealized inwardly, visible and realized only by the subject, or it may be manifest outwardly, intersubjectively verifiable and capable of forming a community around

its pursuit. “Negative freedom,” on the other hand, is simply the capacity or ability to act without restraint. Negative freedom depicts a subject’s capacity to make choices independent of obstructions or restraints. In short, positive freedom is a “freedom *to*” whereas negative freedom is a “freedom *from*.” Coleridge’s religious works imply a construal of freedom that is distinct from other post-Kantian notions of freedom because those others rely upon the freedom of the will and the subject’s capacity to recognize the good to which that will must be directed. My argument challenges or emends established interpretations of Coleridge’s philosophical theology and historiography, especially on the topics of freedom and self-knowledge.⁵

⁵ Scholarship on Coleridge’s construal of freedom and the will is vast and far-reaching. The predominant established line of interpretation stems from Thomas De Quincey’s early accusations of Coleridge’s plagiarism of the works of Kant and Schelling. For an erudite and comprehensive review of the transmission of De Quincey’s criticism through Rene Wellek into the twentieth century, see Thomas McFarland, “The Problem of Coleridge’s Plagiarisms,” in *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1–52. Norman Fruman’s *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (Fruman, *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (New York: G. Braziller, 1971)) is the apotheosis of a long line of critics, beginning with what could be Wordsworth’s derisions of Coleridge’s “dishonourable” “indolence” that “prevents him from endeavouring to ascertain what is his duty” or from “performing it,” in the 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. This criticism accelerated through the writings of William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, and Scottish philosopher, James Frederick Ferrier, in the magazines. Cf. William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 596). Each of these critics and erstwhile friends attributed Coleridge’s interest in freedom and the will to his unrealized desire to overcome his crippling opium addiction, or at least to his inability to control his habit. Coleridge’s addiction compounded the anxiety he expressed in his inability to match Wordsworth’s productivity or fame, epitomized in his poem “Dejection: An Ode,” the shame of which prompted him, according to some, to create an alternative cohesive persona that “dramatizes a self-willed development into a distinct character without having to admit his addiction” (cf. Martin Wallen, “Coleridge’s Scrofulous Dejection,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 99, no.4 (Oct 2000): 556). See also Cooke, who argues that Coleridge and De Quincey used opium as both a means to freedom from pain and freedom to pleasure, and the guilt and self-loathing that pursued Coleridge in spite of it all: Michael G. Cooke, “De Quincey, Coleridge, and the Formal Uses of Intoxication,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 50 (1974): 26–40. According to this scholarly story, with his inferior poetic talent and possessed by a merciless addiction, Coleridge retreated to the crevices of the church and its theology where he could ply his trade in speculative metaphysics within the sympathetic and unchallenging glow of an admiring conservative community. There, his wild ruminations on freedom and the will both accommodated for his deficiencies and merged snugly into theological discourses about original sin and divine redemption. Most recent scholarship on Coleridge, the will, and freedom appears less willing to discard Coleridge altogether as a plagiarist suffering from extreme chemical dependence. Instead, recent scholarship is concerned to trace the influence of Kant or Schelling in Coleridge’s recapitulation of the same, leaving Coleridge looking an awful lot like a British Kant, albeit with less precision or systematicity (cf. Monika Class, *Coleridge and the Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); and Richard Berkeley,

This dissertation examines three aspects of Coleridge's project for spiritual cultivation in *Aids to Reflection*: subjectivity, self-knowledge, and freedom. Here I begin with a summary of Coleridge's project before moving into a summary of the concluding arguments.

First, the dissertation examines what Coleridge means by subjectivity. By reading *Aids to Reflection* and earlier writings against the backdrop of Fichte's theory of subjectivity, I hope to interpret what sort of subjectivity was implied by Coleridge's project for spiritual cultivation. Phrased another way, I answer the question, What constitutes the self who takes up *Aids to Reflection* for the purpose of spiritual cultivation? The notion of spiritual cultivation requires a certain construal of subjectivity wherein cultivation is possible or even necessary. Read in light of Fichte's early transcendental philosophy, it is possible to see how Coleridge appropriated themes and insights from Fichte's theory of subjectivity into his project for spiritual cultivation. Although others argue for the similarity of Coleridge's project with that of Schelling, often going so far as to accuse Coleridge of plagiarizing Schelling, I aim to do something else. I suggest that Coleridge's appropriation of Fichte's principles of transcendental idealism and theory of

Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason (New York: Palgrave, 2007). Jeffrey Barbeau, reading through J. Robert Barth's seminal *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine*, argues for a reading of Coleridge on human freedom that draws deeply from the Augustinian theological tradition where freedom shows forth in the alignment of human and divine will (cf. Jeffrey Barbeau, "The Development of Coleridge's Notion of Human Freedom: The Translation and Re-formation of German Idealism in England", *The Journal of Religion*, 80, no. 4 (2000): 576–594; J. Robert Barth, *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). Although I agree somewhat with Barbeau's conclusions about Coleridge's construal of freedom and the will, Barbeau's interpretation is a mash-up of the two critical traditions already referenced. According to Barbeau, Coleridge—motivated by his desire to overcome addiction—appropriated elements from the practical philosophy of Kant and the natural philosophy of Schelling to create a new formulation that marries a robust voluntarism with a biblical-doctrinal hope for redemption from chemical dependence. By reading Coleridge with Fichte, I diverge from these critical traditions to find that reference to Coleridge's addiction and self-loathing is completely unnecessary to account for his version of freedom, given the structures of self-consciousness, the principle of the active mind, and the drive structures that emerge from them through the imagination. By elucidating Coleridge's conception of imagination within the structures of self-consciousness, I find that Coleridge can move towards a positive construal of freedom, a move that challenges and reframes the critical discourse on Coleridge and the will.

subjectivity distinguish his project from that of Schelling, and moreover, that these principles are essential to the success of his method as he conceives it. The first move of the dissertation is to highlight the ways in which Coleridge appropriated Fichtean principles of subjectivity in order to establish the possibility of spiritual cultivation.

Within the larger question of Coleridge's theory of subjectivity is a concern for the status of the subject before and after it undergoes a change through his catechism. Although there are many ways to qualify the status of the subject throughout transformation, I find the language of 'orientation' and 'disorientation' most fitting for Coleridge's project in *Aids to Reflection*.⁶ Coleridge expects his reader to gain a clearer vision of God by thinking "connectedly" from his exercises in reflection. This implies that the status of the subject prior to engaging in Coleridge's instruction is disconnected in his thinking and impeded from a clear vision of God. By reading *Aids to Reflection* in light of Fichte's transcendental idealism, I find a relation of subject and freedom that offers an alternative trajectory to the early development of the modern religion of conscience. That is, whereas the modern religion of conscience begins with a subject unmoored from traditional truth claims and their concomitant rationalities, a subject who then attempts to move through the language and logic of ordinary consciousness in hopes of attaining health, wholeness, or faith built upon assumptions of its capacity for self-legislation, Coleridge's religion of conscience does something else.⁷ Coleridge interprets the subject's beginning point not so much in terms of suspension and isolation, but rather in terms of existing between coinciding opposites, a creative fulcrum where "extremes meet" and freedom issues from the subject's capacity to become aligned to the divine in creativity, willfulness, and faith. If the

⁶ Within this semantic scheme I find the following terms to be consonant with disorientation: alienation, estrangement, lost, loss.

⁷ In short, the modern religion of conscience has mostly negative conceptions of freedom.

modern religion of conscience begins with a subject who is “neither suspended from heaven nor anchored to earth,” Coleridge’s emendation of the religion of conscience begins with a subject who is *both* suspended from heaven *and* anchored to earth, and equipped with the capacity to live fully into both by the power of its imagination and willful creativity. As I argue in Chapter 5, freedom of this sort is wholly different from other articulations that emerge out of the tradition of the modern religion of conscience.

Coleridge finds the subject to lack orientation before, unless, or until the subject participates in a willful period of spiritual cultivation. I distinguish the phrase ‘lack orientation’ from the term ‘disorientation’ to point up the difference of Coleridge’s strategy from others. The question of whether the subject begins in order or disorder is a long one, and vast intellectual traditions have formed around either point of departure. Coleridge takes up a middle position. He begins from a condition antecedent to either order or disorder and illustrates how subjective awareness emerges out of the accord or discord that follows willful activity.

Taking up the middle position between extremes is a characteristic move for Coleridge. He is early in the post-Kantian movement—and arguably first on the British Isles to form dialectic arguments from perceived relations between extremes as they relate to self-consciousness. Indeed, Coleridge argues that the mental process involved in uniting extremes in some relation is possible because of the power of imagination to unify, and in so doing, to create something new. This is what Coleridge’s neologism “esemplastic power” means: to make into one.⁸ His contributions on this matter are numerous and they resonate with the role of

⁸ “Esemplastic. *The word is not in Johnson, nor have I met with it elsewhere.*” Neither have I. I constructed it myself from the Greek words, *eis en plattein*, to shape into one; because, having to convey a new sense, I thought that a new term would both aid the recollection of my meaning, and prevent its being confounded with the usual import of the word, imagination.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 107. Hereafter cited as *BL*.

imagination in Fichte's transcendental idealism. For the sake of spiritual cultivation, Coleridge mobilizes in new ways his many years of poetic inquiry into the power and function of imagination. Coleridge's concern for—and attentiveness to—the role of imagination within subjectivity leads him to develop a method of rational self-realization in service to spiritual cultivation. The method, my reading of which comprises Chapter 3, engages the subject in a program of progressive or “ascending” reflective practices that culminate in a reimagined construal of the Christian faith. His method exemplifies his life-long commitment to the relationship between self-knowledge, freedom, and God, and constitutes a peculiar variant of the modern religion of conscience.

Third, Coleridge's project hangs upon a positive construal of freedom. Freedom of this sort is distinct from freedom as autonomy, independence, non-intervention, or something else meant to imply individual subjective choice. Here again Coleridge departs from dominant intellectual traditions to do something new. Growing out of his theory of subjectivity, such freedom emerges through the guidance of conscience and is disclosed in faith, but it does so in a way distinct from the manner construed by Kant. The possibility of positive freedom grows out of a Fichtean theory of subjectivity, all of which is a concern in Coleridge's works on spiritual cultivation. For Coleridge, it is not enough for the subject merely to be free from obstruction or constraint. Indeed he says that freedom of this sort—what I refer to as negative freedom—is confusing for the subject.⁹ Rather, Coleridge locates freedom in the capacity to do something. This manner of “doing” is dominant in the Augustinian tradition, where sustaining one's attention in this way yields a new way of seeing that is otherwise obscured by the vicissitudes of life, and

⁹ For more on how the negative mode of liberty can be confusing for the subject, see David S. Pacini, *Through Narcissus' Glass Darkly: The Modern Religion of Conscience* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), hereafter referenced as *Narcissus*.

where the prospect of sustaining this mode of “seeing” is possible only through divine infusions of cooperative grace. For Coleridge, freedom is a qualification of consciousness disclosed through a careful process (or method) of self-realization. That process involves attending to reflective exercises that fully integrate Reason, Understanding, and the Will. He calls this qualification of consciousness “Christian faith.” This section examines Coleridge’s positive conception of freedom through his project for spiritual cultivation as implied by an appropriation of Fichte’s theory of subjectivity.

Throughout the dissertation I refer to “The Wanderings of Cain” and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to describe the conditions of a life characterized by spiritual disorientation, aridity, captivity, and estrangement.¹⁰ Although written nearly thirty years prior to the publication of *Aids to Reflection*, the poems are helpful illustrations of the condition of loneliness and isolation that characterize the intellectual atmosphere of the time.

Before I examine Coleridge’s implied theory of subjectivity and the construal of freedom that comes with it, I first need to establish the context of my reading. I situate Coleridge’s project in a larger family of discourse that considers problems of alienation and estrangement to be features of modernity. By locating the relation of freedom and subjectivity within the larger discourse of religion, it is possible to read Coleridge as contributing to the emergence of the

¹⁰ Although products of Coleridge’s early thoughts on the matter, “Cain” and *Mariner* provide rich material to illustrate certain major themes of the dissertation. “The Wanderings of Cain” is a lesser-known prose poem that anticipates *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In the preamble to the “Cain”, Coleridge recounts some thirty years later that it was written as part of a writing challenge of sorts with his good friend William Wordsworth. The project failed because, as Coleridge recalls it, Wordsworth could not write a word on the topic: “Methinks I see his grand and noble countenance as at the moment when having dispatched my own portion of the task a full-finger speed, I hastened to him with my manuscript—that look of humourous despondency fixed on his almost blank sheet of paper, and then its silent mock-piteous admission of failure struggling with the sense of the exceeding ridiculousness of the whole scheme—which broke up in a laugh: and the Ancient Mariner was written instead.” Coleridge, Prefatory notes to “The Wanderings of Cain” in *The Major Works*, 41.

modern religion of conscience.¹¹ I understand the modern religion of conscience in two ways, first as a legitimate strategy for theological thinking in the Enlightenment, and second as an intellectual trend visible through historical retrospective.

First, the modern religion of conscience is a hopeful reforming movement that emerges out of the Enlightenment that sought to preserve a notion of human freedom within the strengthening forces of scientific rationalism and overweening political institutions. Although the religion of conscience is ancient in its formation, the modern variant begins with Rousseau's attempts to locate the divine within the human subject as revealed through conscience. Kant famously appropriated Rousseau's work on this topic into his Second Critique, and this led to an explosion of philosophical engagement with questions concerning the status and function of conscience in the formation of subjectivity, the possibility of freedom, and the place of religion in civil society. As I discuss later, among other goals the modern religion of conscience sought to secure the individual against the encroachments of external religious powers by turning inward to find guidance from the divine light of conscience in self-consciousness. The conscience emerged from this inward turn with a status of unassailable authority capable of guiding individuals and nations to a freer and more hopeful future.

The second way I understand the modern religion of conscience is as a movement visible in historical retrospective. This perspective, introduced by the work of David S. Pacini, traces the modern philosophical theological engagement with questions relating freedom, subjectivity, and religion from Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant through its iterations and ultimate manifestations of decay in twentieth-century works of Barth, James, and Freud.¹² Pacini identifies the modern

¹¹ My reading of the modern religion of conscience emerges from Pacini, *Narcissus*.

¹² See David S. Pacini, *The Cunning of Modern Religious Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987) and *Narcissus*.

religion of conscience as an attempt to preserve individual liberty from “the encroachments of religious zealotry and fanaticism in terms of the inner tensions of a basic self-reflective unity of consciousness, independent of the orderings of heaven and earth.”¹³ Such a construal of religion depends heavily upon the strength of conscience to impart the word of God to the individual subject, and to do so in such a way that, from the point of view of the subject, no external powers can persuasively contradict it. So aligned with the voice of God, conscience guides the subject authoritatively through the vicissitudes of life when the traditional guides—the orderings of heaven as instructed through ecclesial dogmatics or the orderings of earth as discovered in the laws of nature—prove no longer reliable. To secure its liberty, the subject comes to rely entirely on the voice of conscience disclosed in self-reflection.

In this dissertation I interpret Coleridge from both points of view. I consider Coleridge as participating within the larger family of discourse that is the modern religion of conscience. Accordingly, I assume that Coleridge penned his work as an attempt to secure for himself and other like-minded readers a way of being in the world that respected the relation of the All to the individual as perceived and experienced by the individual. In short, Coleridge was thinking practically about the kind of theological thinking with which he engaged. He was concerned less with theoretical metaphysics of revealed religion than he was with the possibility of achieving an honest qualification of consciousness that relates the totality of human experience to the verve and truth of the Christian faith he held dear. And given his convivial spirit, he hoped not only to achieve this for himself, but also to share it with as many as would follow him through the challenges of self-reflection.

¹³ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 4.

The method by which I have chosen to approach Coleridge's views on faith, freedom, and self-reflection parallels his creative use of an underlying principle that unifies seemingly unrelated elements: the imagination. I take seriously Coleridge's notion of imagination as an animating and living power of perception whose activity is a finite repetition of the infinite and eternal act of bringing order into being. Coleridge employs this trope to link human and divine activities of creativity. I read Coleridge diachronically and in conversation with Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in so doing bringing into view an otherwise hidden coherence among his principal writings. In this way, elements of Coleridge's early poetry appear to be continuous with themes in his later writing. Indeed, read in conversation with Fichte's views on the powers of imagination, Coleridge's distinctive contributions emerge in ways both coherent and surprising. Pursuing these trajectories has uncovered for me the extent to which historical writing is itself a creative act.

Naturally enough, there are divergent ways to assess Coleridge. For Coleridge has been charged with plagiarism, addiction, sophism, and social malfeasance. There is truth in each of these charges, but it is hardly an exhaustive list. Indeed, a review of the reception history of Coleridge interpretation yields a certain "typology" of responses, organized around each of these charges. A deeply disparaging tone imbues each response in this typology. In part this censure originates from Coleridge's contemporary and acerbic critic, William Hazlitt, whose denunciations were astonishing in reach. Following the method of Quentin Skinner, who insists that we can arrive at a proximate understanding of what a person's words mean by placing them in their actual context, I have averted my gaze from Coleridge's detractors and focused instead on his own construal of "poesy," by which he meant "the figured language of thought, distinguished by the unity of all the parts in one thought or idea" (*Poesy or Art*, 1818). His distinctive

development of "poesy" emerged out of his appropriation of, and interaction with, Fichte's theory of the creative power of the imagination.

I am persuaded that reading Coleridge in conversation with Fichte not only aids us in developing a more apt reading of Coleridge's thought, but also serves as a powerful antidote to the excessive myopia of his caviling critics. Indeed, reading Coleridge side by side with Fichte, and placing them in a retrospective conversation, uncovers a sort of poetic resonance. In this way, my act of writing history is its own sort of repetition, a poetic act of creation that I present in the following pages.

Coleridge attained new insights into thinking about self, world, and God. By reading *Aids to Reflection* and participating in its instruction, the reader develops habits of reflection that lend themselves to becoming rightly oriented to oneself and the other (world or God). This dissertation examines how Coleridge proposed to make reorientation possible by relating subjectivity to a positive construal of freedom.

A Note on Thinking 'With' Coleridge

Coleridge's writings are famously difficult to navigate. They seemingly lack systematic order. Rival and erstwhile friend William Hazlitt characterized the quality of Coleridge's mind as "tangential." This was not to be a favorable description of his genius. "Mr. Coleridge has 'a mind reflecting ages past:' his voice is like the echo of the congregated roar of the 'dark rearward and abyss' of thought...[Coleridge's] mind is (as he himself might express it) *tangential*. There is no subject on which he has not touched, none on which he has rested."¹⁴

Hazlitt derides Coleridge's genius: it may be genius, but who can understand it?

¹⁴ William Hazlitt, "Mr Coleridge" in *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825, accessed Jan 25, 2020, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11068/pg11068.html>.

Although not the first of Coleridge's critics, Hazlitt was certainly one of his most acerbic, fierce, and personal.¹⁵ Hazlitt employed his sharp mind and wit to counter and oppose Coleridge at almost every turn. Moreover, Hazlitt did so publicly and for an audience. He was one of the earliest thinkers to leverage the power of public opinion through the emerging tabloid magazines. Largely for this reason, Hazlitt's biting criticism of Coleridge enduringly influenced the shape of criticism that has doggedly pursued Coleridge for years. Many scholars continue to criticize

¹⁵ A sample of Hazlitt's scathing critique is worth including in full. Hazlitt establishes the terms by which generations of Coleridge critics would approach him. Contrasting Coleridge with William Godwin, Hazlitt remarks:

Mr. Coleridge, by dissipating his [mind's attention], and dallying with every subject by turns, has done little or nothing to justify to the world or to posterity, the high opinion which all who have ever heard of him converse, or known him intimately, with one accord entertain of him. (9)

As early as 1825, Hazlitt directly rebuffs Coleridge's emerging legacy, lambasting it as undeserved. Moreover, he says that Coleridge's distracted nature leads him to forfeit the intellectual advantages Hazlitt attributes to him:

Mr. Coleridge's [faculties] have gossiped away their time, and gadded about from house to house, as if life's business were to melt the hours in listless talk...Mr. Coleridge...delights in nothing but episodes and digressions, neglects whatever he undertakes to perform, and can act only on spontaneous impulses, without object or method.

Finally, Hazlitt shows off his own literary talent in the near destruction of another's. Whereas Hazlitt says that Godwin "does not waste himself in vain aspirations and effeminate sympathies," Coleridge

Has flirted with the Muses as with a set of mistresses.

And while Godwin's mind is measured and productive like a "well-compacted steam-vessel,"

Mr. Coleridge's bark, "taught with the little nautilus to sail," the sport of every breath, dancing to every wave,
 "Youth at its prow, and Pleasure at its helm,"
 flutters its gaudy pennons in the air, glitters in the sun, but we wait in vain to hear of its arrival in the destined harbour.

Readers of Hazlitt's influential volume of social criticism come away learning that despite the fame and publicity Coleridge receives as a man of letters, he is scandalously unproductive, wasteful of his God-given talents, and as disorganized as he is verbose. In short, says Hazlitt, Coleridge is unworthy of the recognition and fame that he receives.

Coleridge in the spirit of Hazlitt, ascribing not only rational incoherence but also personal failure to his shortcomings.¹⁶ Coleridge's genius was surely wide-ranging, but according to Hazlitt—and many of those who followed him—his mind was irredeemably “tangential.”

Although biting, Hazlitt's criticism is fitting. For example, to inquire into Coleridge's thoughts on subjectivity is also to find oneself launched into sustained observations on the construction of an ant colony combined with ruminations on the critical philosophy.¹⁷ Virginia Woolf memorably described Coleridge as a “Man at the Gate”: a figure in-between defined spaces, fully occupying neither ‘here’ nor ‘there,’ ‘already’ and ‘not yet,’ and somehow exerting presence and influence in both.¹⁸ Although critical, Woolf omits the bite that made Hazlitt famous. An artist of the first order, Woolf is comfortable reading Coleridge as simultaneously neither and both. Perhaps artists are less scandalized by the absence of order—or by the question of what constitutes order at all. What may appear in Coleridge's writings as logical contradiction or misplaced and unformed thoughts appear to Woolf as honesty: the true representation of the disorderliness of life and thought in motion and transition, the scramble of competing commitments and layers of baleful guilt that issue from an over-burdened self-consciousness. Read in this way, Woolf suggests that Coleridge's disorder redeems the reader from the anxiety of a white-knuckled claim to order by exposing the hubris that precipitates it.

Finding in Coleridge a prototype of Charles Dickens and Henry James, Woolf says that Coleridge anticipates them both and “is the forerunner of all who have tried to reveal the

¹⁶ See especially Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, The Damaged Archangel* (New York: George Braziller, 1971).

¹⁷ *AR*, Spiritual Aphorisms B, Aphorism VIII.

¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, “The Man at the Gate” in *The Death of the Moth, and Other Essays*, 1942, accessed Jan 25, 2020, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks12/1203811h.html>. Woolf borrows the title from De Quincey who much earlier made a similar observation of Coleridge's ability to straddle two worlds, either as a credit to his genius or as a fault of his indecisiveness.

intricacies” and “the faintest creases of the human soul.”¹⁹ Of his language and his playful posture in relationship to it—his “gallop scrawl”—she says, “The great sentences pocketed with parentheses, expanded with dash after dash, break their walls under the strain of including and qualifying and suggesting all that Coleridge feels, fears, and glimpses. Often he is prolix to the verge of incoherence, and his meaning dwindles and fades to a wisp on the mind’s horizon.”²⁰ Neither fully coherent nor entirely opaque, Coleridge is both at once: a bold explorer charting the horizons of the human mind, yet one who does so on the wispy winds of an unseen spirit. Woolf is comfortable appreciating the art that emerges from such a mind, and she sees in his words “tossed up in handfuls” a timely antidote to her “tongue-tied age.”²¹ The fault lies not with Coleridge if he appears “brow-hanging, shoe-contemplative, *strange*,” as Hazlitt criticized.²² Rather, the fault lies with the critic, unable or unwilling to venture with Coleridge into his realm where thoughts like Surinam toads “were always giving birth to little toads that ‘grow quickly and draw off attention from the mother toad.’”²³ Woolf clearly enjoys Coleridge and is willing to happily chase his froggy thoughts with him.

Given that Coleridge’s thoughts are “tossed up in handfuls” and “tangential,” many scholars who pursue Coleridge necessarily draw content from divergent places across his *oeuvre*. A sustained study on any of Coleridge’s single volumes draws from a wide assortment of his writings. Laurence S. Lockridge describes the matter eloquently: “Nobody really *reads* [Coleridge] in any normal sense of the word; instead, one sifts through the brilliant wreckage and salvages bits and pieces...It is exhilarating to discover the way these pieces on any particular

¹⁹ Woolf, “The Man at the Gate.”

²⁰ Woolf, “The Man at the Gate.”

²¹ Woolf, “The Man at the Gate.”

²² Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*.

²³ Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, quoting Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*.

topic build and comment on one another, although one hardly finds total consistency among them.”²⁴ Furthermore, Coleridge hardly ever reached a firm conclusion on any topic. Lockridge therefore advises that “one should not so much write on Coleridge as with him—his was a mind always in motion, always, as he might say, thinking in some direction.”²⁵ As a result, one must qualify almost any interpretation of Coleridge’s writings as provisional, good enough until something better comes along, or until another scrap of Coleridge’s marginalia suggests an entirely different take on the matter. Furthermore, on any given topic there is an exceedingly wide variety of scholarly criticism on Coleridge. There is very little scholarly consensus on anything that Coleridge wrote.

G.K. Chesterton was one who appreciated Coleridge’s expansive intellect. But Chesterton evaluated the challenge of writing about (or with) Coleridge as a categorical challenge: prose criticism can never apprehend a poetic mind. In his collection of essays, “As I Was Saying,” Chesterton brushes aside the criticisms that come out of Coleridge’s opium use and, like Woolf, finds fault not in Coleridge but in the critics’ inability to appreciate or express accurately the virtues of Coleridge’s intellect. He writes, “It seems to me that the central genius of a man like Coleridge is not a thing to be dealt with by critics at all. If they really had anything worth saying about such a poet, they would write it in poetry.”²⁶ For Chesterton, it is not the fault of the poet that his imagination forced itself upon his metaphysics and theology in new and surprising ways. Rather, it is the fault of the critic for refusing to allow such transgressions of categories to take flight and to express themselves in a language that fits.

²⁴ Laurence S. Lockridge, *Coleridge the Moralist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 26.

²⁵ Lockridge, *Coleridge the Moralist*, 27.

²⁶ G.K. Chesterton, “About S.T.C.” in *As I Was Saying* 1936, accessed January 25, 2020, http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/As_I_Was_Saying.html#XIV.

Chesterton advances his reading of Coleridge by acknowledging the distinction between the rationalities that govern mathematics and poetry. Whereas the mathematician “can explain, more or less, why the answer is exactly right,” the “lover of poetry can never explain why the word or the image is exactly right.”²⁷ The two disciplines operate according to different rationalities. According to Chesterton, Coleridge was first and foremost a poet whose “mysterious life of the imagination” is something “much more terrible than an anarchy”—it will be governed by no laws, interpreted by no rules. Although Coleridge contributed to metaphysics and theology to great effect, issuing as the “fountain of some very fine thinking among the liberal theologians of the old school, like Maurice and Robertson,” the critic who is “cursed” to write only in prose will never ascend to say anything truly worthy of Coleridge. Moreover, “it is the specially blighting and blasting curse upon some [critics], that they have to write in philosophical or psychological or generally analytical prose.”²⁸ Again, the fault for such a reader as Chesterton or Woolf is not so much with Coleridge but with the critic who cannot understand Coleridge and the distinct rationalities that he blends or simultaneously occupies.²⁹

Kathleen Coburn recognized this aspect of his work and lamented the lack of system that his expansive genius marshalled into his writing. In the lectures that followed her extensive engagement with Coleridge’s notebooks, she recognized that if it were not for his lack of system, critics would recognize that Coleridge “might have been the greatest thinker, philosopher, teacher, moralist, etc, that England ever produced.” Her response to this expectation is worth quoting in full:

²⁷ Chesterton, “About S.T.C.”

²⁸ Chesterton, “About S.T.C.”

²⁹ Another of Chesterton’s critiques applies: “Much of our modern difficulty, in religion and other things, arises merely from this: that we confuse the word “indefinable” with the word “vague;” from Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, 1906, accessed January 25, 2020, <http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/CD-1.html>.

Yet, suppose he had hewn or hammered himself into a firm, sound, complete structure, would he not have become his own contradiction? He did not even believe in a closed system. He believed in growth, the 'free life', with a deep antipathy to 'the confining form'; he had what he called a 'rooted aversion to the *Arbitrary*'...He preferred 'method' to system, and it will be protested by some that he did not achieve method either. But that depends on what you mean by it. He said somewhere that the shortest path gives one the knowledge best, but the longer way round makes one more knowing. The fragments he left us in such quantities certainly necessitate the longer way round.³⁰

Coburn recognized what so many of Coleridge's religious and philosophical critics do not: Coleridge was purposeful—to some extent—in his avoidance of systematic structure. The product is more verbose, but Coburn acknowledges what Coleridge knew too well: the transformation of mind cannot be rushed; it requires "the longer way round." Freedom to grow implies a freedom from constraint and clarity of vision, and the factors that constrain subjectivity and obscure vision are cunning and enigmatic. Freedom requires artful attention to self, world, and the relations between them all.

As Coburn makes clear, Coleridge pursued method instead of system. Accordingly, what matters in method is that thinking continues and evolves along the way: thinking is transformed by method. System, on the other hand, does not require a transformation of mind, but rather the containment of mind. For a system to be successful, it must contain logical consistency across a wide array of challenges and alternatives. Method is fundamentally different. It implies movement, process, and the transformation that comes with adherence to certain steps. To be sure, had he had greater self-discipline he might have learned something from Schleiermacher's example that scholarly discipline and structure do not of themselves make a system. It is one aim of this dissertation to show how his method coheres in spite of its apparent lack of discipline and

³⁰ Kathleen Coburn, *The Self-Conscious Imagination: A Study of the Coleridge Notebooks in Celebration of the Bi-centenary of his Birth 21 October 1772* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 76.

structure. It coheres around a Fichtean-inspired theory of subjectivity and the construal of freedom it implies.

A peculiar challenge of this dissertation is that it attempts to bring Coleridge more closely into conversation with Fichte. Despite the aesthetic tendencies of each man, and much to Chesterton's chagrin, this thesis is written in prose. What may be said about the instability of Coleridge's writings and the quality of his mind as one that is in motion may be equally applied to Fichte. This is especially the case of Fichte's early works, the primary publication of which was written as a student guide to Fichte's lectures. Whether or to what degree the content of the study guide departed from the content of the lecture is wholly unknown. The same applies to Coleridge's lectures on philosophy and Shakespeare. What is retained and published from these lectures was copied by one who attended them and took notes. The best that can be said in either case is that the documentary evidence reflects the direction of Fichte's or Coleridge's thinking on the topic in the moment. Details are tenuous and often apparently contradictory when compared across time, but the thrust of the content is true.

For this reason, I have attempted an interpretation of Coleridge's religious writings that highlights where Coleridge's method *resonates* with principles drawn from Fichte's early idealism. Although the expository chapters of the dissertation focus on a few major works, I do not claim to be offering the world the final authoritative reading of these volumes, nor do I suggest that this interpretation constitutes the most correct one for the history of Protestant theology. At times, evidence for my argument is drawn from scraps and fragments. Coleridge's *tangential* impulses left a trail across the wide girth of his corpus. In the words of Richard R. Niebuhr, it is Coleridge's "thinking in motion" that has aroused my interest and captured my

attention.³¹ Yet mine is not so much a study of genetic influence—of showing where Fichte’s ideas can be shown to map cleanly onto the writings of Coleridge. Coleridge does not adopt Fichtean principles wholesale; indeed, he rejects Fichte outright in the *Biographia Literaria*. Nevertheless, Fichte’s attempts to complete Kant’s critical philosophy were generative for a wide array of Romantic interpretations of subjectivity, freedom, and art.³² Instead and more modestly this dissertation examines how certain of Fichte’s principles inspired Coleridge in his work to preserve a notion of freedom and spirituality against the rising tides of British empiricism and scientific rationality. It does so by following the advice of Niebuhr and Lockridge to think “with” Coleridge more than about him.

³¹ Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (New York: Scribner 1964), 3.

³² Fichte is widely underrepresented in the English language scholarship on German Idealism and its influences. Allen Wood goes so far as to claim that “Fichte is the most influential single figure on the entire tradition of continental European philosophy in the last two centuries;” Allen W. Wood, *Fichte’s Ethical Thought* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix.

Chapter 1: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Modern Religion of Conscience

But I do not doubt that it is beneficial sometimes to contemplate in the mind, as in a picture, the image of a grander and better world; for if the mind grows used to the trivia of daily life, it may dwindle too much and decline altogether into worthless thoughts. Meanwhile, however, we must be on the watch for the truth, keeping a sense of proportion so that we can tell what is certain from what is uncertain and day from night.
 —From the 1802 epigraph to *Mariner*³³

In the Spring of 2018, The Guardian newspaper announced that renovators working on St Michael's Church in Highgate, London, rediscovered the remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.³⁴ They spotted his coffin amidst the rubble of an old wine cellar behind a crumbling brick wall. Although many found humor in the fittingness of the substance-addicted poet lying in rest in a wine cellar, his surviving family members sought to reinter him somewhere more improved and documented. Despite having been buried twice since his death—the first time in the 1834 in the Chapel of Highgate School and again in 1961 at St Michael's Cathedral—it seems Coleridge was not where the public expected him to be. Even the words “Beneath this stone lies the body of Samuel Taylor Coleridge” inscribed on the prominent memorial slab in the church were not enough to ensure his whereabouts. The newspaper reports that the church was surprised to discover his coffin almost directly beneath the stone memorial. Lost and found again, the remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge were buried a third time in the Church at Highgate on June 2, 2018. With much fanfare, applause, and public memory-making, complete with a recitation of “Kubla Khan,” Coleridge was reburied with the hopes that he will be remembered appropriately.

³³ **The quotation is translated from Thomas Burnet's *Archaeologiae Philosophicae* (1692), which Coleridge included with omissions and slight changes. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Major Works*, 49.

³⁴ Maev Kennedy, “Samuel Taylor Coleridge's remains rediscovered in wine cellar,” *The Guardian*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/12/samuel-taylor-coleridge-poet-remains-rediscovered-wine-cellar>.

The public's repeated burials of Coleridge's body serve as a fitting analogy for the varieties of scholarship that pursue his legacy since his earliest publications. Poet, literary critic, metaphysician, social and political commentator, educator, and theologian, Coleridge's genius inspires awe even as it evades scholarly categorization. Although few agree on how and in what ways Coleridge's genius is unique, all agree that his was a mind of uncommon learning, unparalleled creative energy, and captivating charm. Both celebrated and scorned by his admirers for his gravitation towards traditional modes of Christianity late in life, one of the few things his critics agree about is that his memory lies deeply in the church. Be that as it may, consensus evades exactly where in the church the body of his reputation should rest.

This chapter addresses some of this dissertation's preliminary issues of context. It considers the intellectual climate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as one characterized by a competition of rationalities. Enlightenment values of freedom as autonomy, combined with the successes of scientific rationality, proposed significant challenges to religious thought even as they offered new modes of discourse that re-inspired monistic interpretations of the All.

Edward Caldwell Moore, the first of Adolf Harnack's American pupils, remarked that the times changed more in this period than during any other time since the classical era: "The philosophical revolution inaugurated by Kant, with the general drift toward monism in the interpretation of the universe, separates from their forebears men who have lived since Kant, by a greater interval than that which divided Kant from Plato."³⁵ Broadly speaking, this line of inquiry sought to establish the relation of all things—self to self, self to world, and self to God-- in one methodologically monistic effort. Many attempted to do so in terms of ordinary

³⁵ Edward Caldwell Moore, *An Outline of the History of Christian Thought Since Kant* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 5.

consciousness. Accordingly, the authors of the modern variant of the religion of conscience pursued Rousseau's conviction that the voice of God spoke to the individual through conscience, oftentimes in a manner contradictory to the teachings of the tradition or ecclesial authority.

In this chapter, I situate Coleridge's religious writings within the historical context of philosophical modernity and as a variant of the modern religion of conscience as interpreted through David Pacini's *Through Narcissus' Glass Darkly*. Then I read *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and "The Wanderings of Cain" with Weber's notion of disenchantment in mind. In that it signifies a condition of instability that arises from one rationality vying for dominance over another, this notion leads to subjective disorientation. Unmoored from traditional authority centers, the autonomous subject incurs disastrous consequences as a result of its confusion. I conclude by saying that whereas Coleridge describes the movement from autonomy to disaster as a descent, the ascent he proposes through his religious writing is an instance of the modern religion of conscience. Striving to move up out of disorientation, Coleridge engaged works of philosophical psychology and philosophical theology with the aim of developing a method of rational self-realization in service to spiritual cultivation. That is, to build up the spirit, Coleridge engaged the mind. In what follows, I explicate how Coleridge works out the ascent to orientation through a revision of Christian faith within the contours of ordinary consciousness.

A Time of Competing Rationalities

Coleridge lived and worked in a time of competing rationalities. The posture of the philosophies against which Coleridge most passionately contended viewed the individual subject and its interiority as fundamentally passive in its relationship to the world of nature. To them, the subject was largely receptive to nature's forces and exhibited little, if any, active power against

those forces. Questions of creativity or collaborative participation with nature's forces were most inimical to those writings against which Coleridge argued most passionately.³⁶ According to this perspective, nature maintained priority of power and consequence in its dominion over the human subject. This view of nature was totalizing, capable of explaining the cosmos and all of its inner workings. The human being, as part of nature, was not exempt from conforming with nature's laws. The rationality of nature admits no exceptions; the laws that govern the stars also govern the soul. The inner workings of the human soul and mind came to be viewed as conforming in the same ways to the workings of the universe observed outside of the human subject in nature.

Coleridge recognized this kind of rationality at work in what he called the mechanico-copercular philosophies. Coleridge opposed this manner of thinking. Albeit in different ways, philosophies such as Hartley's associationist psychology and Humean empiricism sought to apply scientific modes of observational rationality to the study of human nature and subjective interiority. Coleridge recognized that such mechanical interpretations, when carried into the domain of practical philosophy and ethics, challenged the subject's freedom and the corresponding world of spirit in which he inhabited as a poet. For Coleridge, the scientific rationality that proved successful in so many spheres of society—economics, industry, agriculture, medicine—posed a threat to other modes of rationality. Crucially, Coleridge maintained a commitment to the truth of the spiritual mode of rationality, even as that truth was challenged broadly by the adaptation of Enlightenment rationality into critical modes of literary studies. Not the least of these was the historical criticism of the emerging Higher Criticism

³⁶ Creative participation with nature's forces could be considered alchemical.

advanced by his German teacher Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, among others, that posed one of the most challenging problems to the rationalities of revealed religion.³⁷

Broadly speaking, this kind of explanation of the world manifests in a specific rationality supported by logic that takes as its warrants whatever can be observed and validated between subjects. The scientific rationality of the Enlightenment became totalizing. It sought to expose all “mysteries” to the light of reason and fashion a world according to its own interpretation.

Inevitably the prevailing winds of Enlightenment rationality clashed with other modes of rationality, notably that of revealed religion.³⁸ Religious writers committed to doctrinal interpretations or other modes of knowing dependent upon human access or receptivity to the mind of God in revelation varied in their responses to what they viewed as the encroachment of reason into matters of God. Whereas some attempted to align religion with observational rationality, others advanced the supremacy of revelation with renewed vigor through increasingly popular demonstrations.³⁹ It is possible to assess the array of religious responses to Enlightenment thinking in terms of inwardness and outwardness, subjective and personal or objective and material.

³⁷ See Jonathan Sheehan, “‘Regeneration from Germany’: Culture and the Bible in England, 1780–1870” in *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 241–58.

³⁸ The literature on this topic is expansive. See Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1983); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

³⁹ From Coleridge’s view, Methodism tends strongly towards popular fanaticism, doctrinal Anglicanism fails in accommodating itself to varieties of rationalism, and Modern Calvinism goes too far in the other direction through accommodating itself so comfortably to the mechanical philosophies such that God acts in accordance with Cause and Effect, negating freedom. See also Philip C. Rule, *Coleridge and Newman: The Centrality of Conscience* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 11–40.

As each rationality contended for dominance, each also destabilized and qualified the other's claim for authority, compromising claims for authority. This competition gave rise to a crisis of sorts. The crisis confronting the modern subject that precipitates the religion of conscience and gives rise to its felt need, as Pacini puts it, is this: "scientific rationality confronts religious rationality with a reality of which it cannot speak—an order wholly apart from God. Religious rationality confronts scientific rationality with a reality of which it cannot speak—the order of God and liberty. Both alter the other. In consequence of this, neither rationality can claim absolute authority; each rationality sustains a loss."⁴⁰ A signal feature of the religion of conscience is the loss of a singular coherent rationality whereby life can be successfully navigated.

The Modern Religion of Conscience

The Modern Religion of Conscience broadly characterizes those early modern and modern attempts to preserve individual liberty from "the encroachments of religious zealotry and fanaticism in terms of the inner tensions of a basic self-reflective unity of consciousness, independent of the orderings of heaven or earth."⁴¹ Although religions of conscience are ancient in origination, the modern variant is markedly skeptical toward truth claims that originate outside the self-referential structures of consciousness. Although this skepticism wields far reaching influence over many aspects of religion, its impact is most profound in matters of revelation. The modern religion of conscience appeared as early as 1651 with the publication of Hobbes'

⁴⁰ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 87.

⁴¹ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 4.

Leviathan.⁴² It gained lasting influence through the works of Rousseau.⁴³ Both Hobbes and Rousseau recast religion according to the contours of self-referential structures of consciousness and exemplified the modern variant of the religion of conscience.

Besides conforming to the self-referential structures of consciousness, the writings that comprise this family of discourse are characterized by two additional traits. First, the author of a religion of conscience advances an understanding of liberty as individual noninterference, and “it rests on the claim that God ‘speaks’ to us through the directives of a self-governing conscience that guides moral conduct.”⁴⁴ As the means whereby God’s will is communicated directly to the individual, the conscience gains the status of the voice of God or the Word of God. As the voice of God, its directives are authoritative; as the Word of God, its directives propose the highest ordering principle for an individual and a community. In this way, the modern religion of conscience builds upon the governing principle of self-preservation to inform its notions of

⁴² See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012). *Leviathan* illustrates the self-referential structure of the modern religion of conscience by employing self-preservation as the governing principle to citizenship and statecraft. Accordingly, religion is supposed to support the Sovereign against internal or external threats to its responsibility to govern. As it pertains to religion, the Sovereign is responsible for reading scripture and interpreting religion for the people. Thus, Hobbes construes the (Roman) Church’s claim to authority on scripture and doctrine as a threat to the civil sovereign’s ability to preserve the state. Religious movements within the state that claim divine immediacy pose another threat because chaos ensues when individuals within the society make claims to divine immediacy. Responsibility belongs to the Sovereign to read scripture and interpret the faith.

⁴³ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans., ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979). In “The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,” contained within book four of *Emile*, Rousseau identifies the conscience as the divine spark within, against which no authority—neither church nor state nor nature—ought to oppose: “Everything I sense to be good is good; everything I sense to be bad is bad...Conscience is the voice of the soul,” p. 286; and elsewhere, “All the morality of our actions is in the judgment we ourselves make of them,” p. 287; and “Conscience, conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice, certain guide of a being that is ignorant and limited but intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and bad which makes man like unto God; it is you who make the excellence of his nature and the morality of his actions. Without you I sense nothing in me that raises me above the beasts,” p. 290. The vicar’s confession of faith pointed not to revelation or the mediation of the Church for authoritative guidance in one’s quest to live a good life, but to the “innate principle of justice and virtue”—the conscience—and the immediacy it provides to the sensible subject.

⁴⁴ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 4. Cf. Rousseau, n. 40 above.

liberty.⁴⁵ That which assists the subject to preserve its life and what is good for it is admissible, while that which is harmful to the aims of the subject are construed as out of order, constricting, or otherwise contrary to that which is good.

Expressions of morality and maxims of duty fall under similar arrangements when viewed according to this rubric. The subject guided by conscience finds itself capable of navigating life's moral landscape in accordance with the principle of self-preservation. Accordingly, the subject must be free to exercise its conscience-guided liberty such that it may achieve the good life which it knows itself to be capable of achieving if not prevented by outward interference. If free from obstruction, the subject may find itself living in harmony with others in the society of free and moral citizens, or the commonwealth. If obstructed, the life of the individual and of society generally is characterized by the conflict that ensues when disorder reigns. Liberty, in this sense, is the individual's capacity to pursue self-desired ends free from external interference. In this way, it is possible to describe liberty as "negative," or principally as a *freedom from* as opposed to a *freedom to* do or perform certain things.⁴⁶

This definition of liberty carries with it an important and challenging implication, namely the subject must be confident in its ability to know itself and its desires as worthy of action, and not derivative of something else. Ostensibly, any impulse of desire that can be traced back to an earlier cause is contaminated, carrying with it the interests of another or capitulating to a

⁴⁵ Cf. Hobbes, n. 39 above.

⁴⁶ This construal of negative freedom is operative in Kant's formulation of the relation between the autonomous will and the moral law in the Critique of Practical Reason: "the sole principle of morality consists in independence from all matter of the law (namely, from a desired object) and at the same time in the determination of choice through the mere form of giving universal law that a maxim must be capable of. That *independence*, however, is freedom in the *negative* sense, whereas this *lawgiving of its own* on the part of pure and, as such, practical reason is freedom in the *positive* sense. Thus the moral law expresses nothing other than the *autonomy* of pure practical reason, that is, freedom." Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166.

mechanical skein of cause and effect. According to the proposition of freedom as non-interference, anything that suggests itself to the subject from outside itself falls under the pale of interference. Deemed pure and unadulterated from external interests (political, social, natural), only that which arises from within the structures of self-consciousness and becomes mediated through the prompts of conscience may bear the mantle and authority of self-direction; all else must be treated with skepticism—with one important caveat: Instinct, long regarded as the atavistic drive of animalistic want, although arising from within, is reckoned an untrustworthy guide to freedom. To act on instinct is to descend to a more primitive mode of behavior, one that is controlled by nature and its desires. Although at times this impulse may prove beneficial for the individual, leading it to self-preservation, instinct is a poor governing principle for civil society. The religion of conscience seeks to correct the subject's natural desires by allowing the conscience to redirect the subject's attention to higher authorities in freedom. As I will show below, Coleridge underscores this notion of “descent” by countering it with a method of “ascent” in the progressively assembled reflective practices collected in *Aids to Reflection*. Moreover, because Coleridge locates the method of ascent within the contours of Christian faith, this move further underscores my interpretation of Coleridge's religious writings as a variant of the modern religion of conscience.

Second, the religion of conscience adapts and recasts central features of religion and its intellectual-linguistic framework for the sake of guarding the individual against the “encroachments of religious zealotry and fanaticism.”⁴⁷ In other words, to combat the overreach of traditional religion, the modern religion of conscience adopts the language, manner, and form of religion to advance individual liberty. The authors of the modern religion of conscience

⁴⁷ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 4.

skillfully alter or bend elements of traditional religion in such a way as to turn the thrust and authority of religion in the direction of the subject's favor. Given that the subject is primarily concerned to protect its sense of freedom as non-intervention, the religion of conscience reimagines the intellectual and linguistic architecture of religion in favor of the individual subject. Within the works of the religion of conscience one may expect to encounter familiar religious language used in unfamiliar ways. Whereas other modes of Christian theology would implore the subject to be distrustful of internal desires and to seek compliance with divinely revealed order, the religion of conscience locates the guiding principle for order within the internal ordering of the subject as imparted by conscience. Accordingly, for divine revelation to be admissible to this scheme, it must be found within the scope of the subject's self-relating consciousness, and not somewhere else that may be deemed as arising external to the subject's consciousness (for example, in revelation, scripture, doctrine, or a conciliar decree).

As the subject holds external warrants for belief at arms distance, skeptical of an argument's claim to the subject's autonomy, this inward turn brought with it new modes of reasoning. As inductive, the truth of a religious claim could be discovered through methods of investigation and logic akin to that demonstrating wide success in the realms of science or natural philosophy. Guided by conscience, the subject of the religion of conscience proceeds to interpret religion according to new modes of reasoning.

Within the larger trajectory of the modern religion of conscience exists another subset of thinkers whose contributions may be read profitably to another effect. Inspired by the possibilities for reframing subjectivity informed by German post-Kantian Idealism, yet troubled by what they saw as loose ends remaining from Kant's religious writings, the post-Kantians may be read as forming a subordinate family of discourse within the larger arc of the modern religion

of conscience. The writings of Reinhold, Schulze, Maimon, Fichte, and later those of Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling, contribute directly to the development of the language typical of this family of discourse. Widely read in terms of the development of post-Kantian idealism along the way from Kant to Hegel, these thinkers contributed variously to the emerging language of mind and consciousness as they sought to complete the critical philosophy through unique and sometimes idiosyncratic contributions to a shared conversation.⁴⁸

To the extent that these writings engaged matters of religion, they form a family of discourse within the modern religion of conscience. Indeed, the contributions of these thinkers significantly informed a wide array of nineteenth-century intellectual life. They did so by prioritizing the life of the mind and the structures or boundaries of the rational subject. My argument follows Coleridge’s appropriation of post-Kantian philosophy—specifically that of Fichte—for the sake of religious renewal.

A peculiar—if not unanticipated—consequence of the subordination of religion to conscience-guided reason is the emergence of what Pacini calls a “looking glass religion.” Such an interpretation of self and world, guided as it is by self-referential standards, distorts the vision of what lies outside the self. No longer capable of relying on tradition as a guide for the good life, the subject becomes confused. To truly live into its status as free and rational, it must create for itself reliable moorings to navigate life’s challenges. This is true of religion as much as it is true of civil governance. As Pacini explains, a “looking glass religion” is a “phantasmic religious orientation in which the modern subject sees itself and nothing more.”⁴⁹ In this religion, the subject “[dissociates] itself from the world around it, and what is more, its subsequent

⁴⁸ For more on how the post-Kantians attempted to “complete” the Kantian program, see Dieter Henrich, ed. David S. Pacini, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 13.

transformation of that world into an image of itself.”⁵⁰ The religion of conscience finds the subject relating to a vision of the world that “functions as the self writ large, which means, of course, that for any given individual, the world naturally looks and functions ‘like me.’” Moreover, early architects of the modern religion of conscience, such as Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant, employed the language of the first person singular “I” to new effect: “they deployed the ‘I’ not just as a referential category for a particular person, but also as a kind of glue that bonded ideas together: every concept of thought depended on the ‘I’ for its ordering, function, and meaning.”⁵¹ The religion of conscience defined liberty, religion, the good life and the moral community, and the language of order and disorder in terms of the individual subject and the first-person singular framework. The semantic range for “I” expanded dramatically. The result is a form of narcissism that at once characterizes an entire mode of thinking about religion in the modern era even as it announces its downfall.⁵²

Once the framework for the religion of conscience is established in this way, with its reliance upon the self-referential structure of consciousness and concern for the apprehension of the divine within, it is not hard to see how Coleridge can be read as contributing to it.⁵³

Although Coleridge employs many of the same tactics as the early authors of the modern religion of conscience, he does not pursue the same ends. He differs in how he construes freedom and the means whereby it is disclosed to the subject. Whereas Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant were concerned to preserve a notion of liberty that relies on non-intervention as a preeminent concern, especially on matters of religion and morals, for Coleridge the prospect of freedom is found

⁵⁰ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 13.

⁵¹ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 13.

⁵² The underlying decay and unraveling of the modern religion of conscience as a result of its narcissistic underpinnings is a central topic of Pacini, *Narcissus*.

⁵³ Indeed, Coleridge is not unique on this point. Schleiermacher, Novalis, and the Romantic writers in general may be read profitably as a sub-family within the religion of conscience.

when one's thinking and willing are aligned in faith, the totality and combination of which is properly Reason.⁵⁴ The condition of freedom is disclosed when one is living *Reasonably*. I explicate this further in Chapter 5.

To be sure, a word like "reason" carries a wide semantic range. For Coleridge to hitch his entire project to "reason" (or "Reason") and for it also to be constitutive of a proper understanding of freedom, Coleridge must clarify what he means by the term.⁵⁵ This he did to great effect. Perhaps more than any other British thinker of his time, Coleridge engaged the inner workings of the mind with characteristic obsession. During his life he was maligned, mocked, and caricatured publicly and privately for his ramblings about German philosophy and the subject-object distinctions he drew from its discourse. The ridicule continued even after his death.⁵⁶ Although he never fully consolidated his thoughts on the matter, his writings show him working out the contributions and consequences of post-Kantian philosophy on religion in the Britain, especially as it relates to the mind and its faculties.

⁵⁴ See *AR*, Introductory Aphorisms XXIII, where Coleridge locates Christian liberty, as well as the seat of religion, within the reflecting person. Following a Greek citation of James 1:25 ("But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing"), Coleridge expands on the appropriateness of the verb: "The Greek word, *parakupsas*, signified the incurvation or bending of the body in the act of *looking down into*; as, for instance, in the endeavor to see the reflected image of a star in the water at the bottom of a well. A more happy or forcible word could not have been chosen to express the nature and ultimate object of reflection, and to enforce the necessity of it, in order to discover the living fountain and spring-head of the evidence of the Christian faith in the believer himself, and at the same time to point out the seat and region, where alone it is to be found... That which we find within ourselves, which is more than ourselves, and yet the ground of whatever is good and permanent therein, is the substance and life of all other knowledge." *AR*, 30. When Coleridge refers to the organ of divine perception, "Reason" is always capitalized.

⁵⁵ I take up the specifics of Coleridge's architectonics of mind in another section of the dissertation.

⁵⁶ Thomas Carlyle's portrayal of Coleridge is especially biting, mocking even Coleridge's peculiar manner of speech and pronunciation of "subject" and "object," words frequently heard in his conversation: "His talk, alas, was distinguished, like himself, by irresolution... He had knowledge about many things and topics, much curious reading; but generally all topics led him, after a pass or two, into the high seas of theosophic philosophy, the hazy infinitude of Kantian transcendentalism, with its 'sum-m-jjects' and 'om-m-jjects.' Sad enough." Thomas Carlyle, *Portraits of His Contemporaries*, 1851.

In this section I have tried to situate Coleridge's religious writing within a larger discourse in an effort to show how elements of his works conform and depart from it. The modern variant of the religion of conscience emerged as a pattern of religious discourse as its authors sought to avoid encroachments of external interests (i.e. the state, the Roman Church, and various modes of revelation). Although its authors attempted to preserve something of its control, it also caused confusion in the minds of its subjects. In the next section I link that confusion to the notion of "disenchantment" that captivated Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. That disenchantment, as Weber described it, is an instability in the governing frameworks of mind that arises as the consequence of competing rationalities vying for dominance. Rationalities do not easily cede their influence, and the subject is left confused and ill-equipped to navigate the way to a life well-lived. In the next section I elaborate on the subject's response to the disenchantment it experiences in the wake of destabilized rationalities and the certainties they promise.

Loss and Isolation

What is the subject's response to the experience of the loss of reliable moorings, and what are its consequences? Pacini holds the experience of loss as a central feature of the consequences of the modern religion of conscience.⁵⁷ He draws important connections between the strategies the authors of the religion of conscience pursued and the felt sense of estrangement and disorientation Weber announced in his influential lectures, "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation." Pacini argues that the disenchantment Weber observed is not exclusive to the realm of religion, but is equally applicable to the realm of scientific rationality given how

⁵⁷ For themes of loss and problems of modernity, see especially *Narcissus*, Chapters 2 and 4.

this disenchantment issues as a consequence of the qualifying instability of competing rationalities.⁵⁸ As one mode of rationality emerged to compete with another, each destabilized the other, resulting in an imbalance Weber referred to as disenchantment.

While attempting to hold on to freedom and the creative forces of spirit against the encroachments of religion or nature, the authors of the modern religion of conscience devised a means whereby the subject gains autonomy at the expense of traditional modes of rationality and the certainty that each gained by it. To be free and truly self-legislating, the jurisdiction of former legislating authorities must be abated, its grip and claim on the subject must relax. As a result, to the extent that the realms of religion and nature can be said to adjudicate over the freedom of humanity, both realms suffer loss with the strengthening of the subject's self-legislating actions. This loss of balance and the stability and certainty it conveyed accounts for something of the disenchantment Weber laments. The subject, autonomous yet left to its own devices, asserts its freedom as best it knows how. But asserting this freedom in the context of destabilized

⁵⁸ Cf. Max Weber, "Science as Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958): in addressing the question as to whether or not the "savage" has a lesser understanding of the conditions of life than does the occidental man, Weber vehemently answers "no"—the "savage" lives closer to his tools and knows the effort required to earn his bread: "The increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives," 139. Of note, Weber invokes the language of "orientation" to describe how individuals—occidentals and savages alike—navigate their worlds without fully understanding the warp and woof that make it all possible: "Unless he is a physicist, one who rides on the streetcar has no idea how the car happened to get into motion. And he does not need to know. He is satisfied that he may 'count' on the behavior of the streetcar, and he orients his conduct according to this expectation; but he knows nothing about what it takes to produce such a car so that it can move," 139. Disenchantment enters the conversation when Weber identifies the possibility of learning that undergirds the modern west: although the passenger may not understand how the streetcar works, with a little investigation and effort, the passenger may eventually learn it. Thus "there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play...this means that the world is disenchanted," 139. But Weber is clear that disenchantment is not a sudden thing peculiar to the modern west, rather, "this process of disenchantment...has continued to exist in Occidental culture for millenia," 139. Thus the rationality of progress and science exert a destabilizing influence on—not a wholesale departure from—the rationality of religion, which could be read as aligned with the rationality of primitive societies.

rationalities is confusing, so the subject inevitably makes bad choices, choices that prove disastrous.

Within this problem complex, the authors of the modern religion of conscience recast religion in terms of ordinary consciousness.⁵⁹ This effort simultaneously preserves the subject and its liberties while it also repels what it deems to be harmful or detrimental to self-preservation. Philosophies of ordinary consciousness are not concerned so much with absolute explanations or ‘pure’ theory, but rather locate themselves with the subject as it seeks to live a good life. As everyone is “embroiled in some one or another state of consciousness, as well as a felt need to justify it...the search for some resolution in unity, for some clarification of the final ends towards which we might best move, extends beyond life as we know it in this world.”⁶⁰ Pacini describes one of the most remarkable outcomes of this competition of rationalities—religion emerging as one of many such *heuristic* devices the modern subject employs to navigate the challenges and strife of ordinary life. In this way, religion loses something of its explanatory authority in exchange for an alternative mode of thinking about how the subject may navigate the challenges of life to overcome conflict and regain harmony. No longer ultimate in its claims to authoritative explanation of subject, world, and morality, religion emerges as a helpful and practical means whereby the subject can preserve itself from discord and navigate its way along the path to a good and wholesome life. The transformation in thinking that this shift implies is one in which the subject moves from thinking empirically to thinking theologically.

⁵⁹ For Hobbes, religion emerges from the individual impulses of self-preservation to the benefit of the community, which is also the direction towards which the public conscience commends the subject as it leaves the state of nature. For Rousseau, the conscience is the voice of God, disclosing solemn and simple guidance to the one who will listen and act according to its counsel. For Kant, the conscience redirects the subject’s attention away from its instincts in favor of a universalizable alternative that denotes a virtuous life. In Kant’s practical philosophy, he conscience does not provide content or clue as to what that universalizable alternative may be; it merely corrects against what does not so accord.

⁶⁰ Pacini, *Narcissus*, 66.

As I show in the following chapters, Coleridge's religious writings amount to a peculiar articulation of the religion of conscience. I argue that Coleridge, by emphasizing the confusion the subject experiences when dominant modes of rationality destabilize one another, constructs a religion of conscience that attempts to reconstrue freedom in a way that finds continuity with the Augustinian tradition of grace. That is, in its attempt to regain orientation by regaining alignment with God, the subject finds itself grasped by God, a condition he calls "faith." Coleridge describes the way to faith in terms of "ascent." The subject moves up a progressive series of reflective practices to find a mode of freedom in the Christian faith disclosed through Reason. The problem that moves the subject (and Coleridge) to this method of ascent, however, is the confusion the subject experiences in disorientation and the loss of reliable modes of rationality.

Coleridge expressed this sense of loss in several ways throughout his life: disorientation, alienation, estrangement, isolation, loss of the poetic muse, captivity from addiction, unrequited love and the prevailing sense of un-lovability that follows. The problems of disorientation relate to the experience of estrangement from self, community, and God. Coleridge structures his works in such a way as to point to the eventual reunion of self, community, and God, and in this way he proposes to remedy his experience of disorientation that results from the competition of scientific and religious rationalities through a method of progressively assembled reflective practices collected in *Aids to Reflection*.

Finding himself cut off not only from family and friends, but also from a right acquaintance with himself, disorientation from a right relation to nature and to God, the subject under Coleridge's pen is caught-up in a struggle for reunion. It is the subject's life goal to extend into community, and by extending, be welcomed into the repose enjoyed by one who was lost and recently found. The apotheosis of Coleridge's journey, one might say, is akin to the

experience of a homecoming. It would not be wrong to say that the deep longings of Coleridge's heart may experience something of fulfillment in the warm glow of home and hearth crowded with the welcoming smiles and conversation of loved ones. Religion, under Coleridge's pen, and specifically a particular notion of the Christian faith, provides the hermeneutical framework through which the subject may regain right orientation with God, and thereby also right relation with oneself and neighbor. This rightful orientation qualifies his sense of liberty as a way of being in the world. To grasp God is also to find oneself grasped by God. Freedom is disclosed as rightful orientation, the condition of alignment with God, self, and world, in the life of faith.

As described above, Coleridge clashed with those who would argue for an earth-bound religious sensibility. Such a faith, he would contend, is really a form of captivity, bound as the faithful are according to this scheme to the laws and mechanics of earth and the Understanding. By appropriating key insights from post-Kantian Idealism, Coleridge sought to thread the needle between competing rationalities to propose a new way of seeing Christian faith that maintained important continuities with the divine even as it recast central themes within the religion of conscience.

In the next section I examine themes of loss and isolation as they appear in two of Coleridge's writings from 1797: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and the lesser known prose fragment "The Wanderings of Cain." Through this reading I aim to illustrate something of the quality of confusion that besets a subject unmoored from the confidences provided by traditional truth claims, one who seeks reunion and reorientation in a world not of its own making.

The Mariner and Cain in Disorientation

Coleridge's project is a journey out of an acute sense of loss towards reunion—reunion with self, nature, fellow man, and God. If meaningful relationships offer one way of interpreting loss, then the resolution is found in the reintegration into community. Carried with this reintegration is the implication that the subject is also rightfully oriented to itself and the All.

Coleridge poetically described this sense of estrangement in “The Wanderings of Cain” and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. These poems depict the condition of isolation and remove that ensues as a result of the willful—albeit unknowing—violation of order. Both of these violations beget unwitting consequences of willful self-assertion (also presented as *autonomy*) when it is wrongfully guided. Freedom as autonomy poses an opportunity and a risk to the willing moral agent. From this view, the Mariner's killing of the Albatross is an immoral action, a violent violation of God's order. The action results in the equally brutal separation of the subject from the order of Nature and Spirit.

The actions themselves are deemed to be immoral because of their results. As Lockridge argues, there is nothing inherently evil or wrong about killing the albatross; there is no violation to Christian doctrine.⁶¹ I extend the argument to make a similar judgment about *Cain*: there is nothing in scripture or in Christian tradition to suggest that Cain knowingly presented God with an offering that would be rejected. Cain learns that he has done wrong through his offering only after God expresses favor for Abel's offering. Prior to experiencing God's rejection of his offering, Cain had no awareness of the quality—good or evil—of his actions. Cain sinned when he took up arms against his brother for the favor he perceived God to give Abel. The act of offering was antecedent to moral judgment; the act of killing was a result of moral judgment. Cain's punishment follows his knowingly committing an immoral act.

⁶¹ Lockridge, *Coleridge the Moralist*, 70.

In *Mariner*, Coleridge continues the poetic depiction of the opacity of good and evil. He depicts the Mariner's fateful action of shooting the albatross as one that was shrouded by fog and darkness:

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke
white,
Glimmered the white moon-shine.⁶²

It is possible to read this as a statement about the lack of certainty inherent in free moral actions. At the moment of shooting, it is unclear to the Mariner and his crew whether the bird itself was a talisman of a blessing or of a curse. After shooting the bird, the crew first blames the Mariner for killing the bird of good omen, as if the bird itself was the source of goodness:

For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!⁶³

Then immediately after blaming the Mariner, the crew shifts its judgment. Now, with the fog burning off, it determines that it was right to kill the bird. Now, the crew regards the albatross—not the Mariner's act—as a thing of evil. The crew observes the sun's dissipation of the fog, “like God's own head,” as a blessing imparted directly by the Mariner's bold actions:

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.⁶⁴

⁶² *Mariner*, Lines 75–78.

⁶³ Lines 93–96. The gloss underscores this reading: *His ship-mates cry out against the ancient Mariner, for killing the bird of good luck.*

⁶⁴ Lines 97–102. Again, the gloss supports the reading: *But when the fog cleared off, they justify the same, and thus make themselves accomplices in the crime.*

Here Coleridge describes a challenge of freedom as autonomy as one in which it is possible to be deceived in moral actions. Regardless of whether the action is performed out of respect for the moral law, as Kant would frame it, or in accordance with the divine will, as Coleridge later preferred, or not, the agent does not know in the moment of choosing whether the action is good or bad. One risk to freedom is that the agent chooses poorly or incorrectly and heaps the consequences upon oneself, one's neighbors, and the world generally.

Another risk inherent in this depiction of freedom is the impossibility of certainty. Freedom carries with it the risk that a choice made may be wrong. Coleridge introduces a critique of natural philosophy and utilitarianism in the ways in which each evaluates moral actions. In the moment of choosing, neither natural philosophy nor utilitarianism can rightly orient the moral agent. As regards the Mariner, nature obscured the scene of action: clouds and fog surrounded the ship. Nature, far from helping bring moral clarity in the agent's time of action, only obscured the situation, and with it any clues to help him discern right from wrong. Nature, even though it is an essential and concerned player in the action, is no sure resource for certainty in navigating life's moral seas.

Moreover, the speed with which the crew changed its mind about the goodness of the action shows the feebleness of utilitarian moral assessments. In the short space and time of one poetic line, the crew moves from cursing to congratulating the Mariner for his bold act of killing the albatross. In this moment, the crew represents those moral philosophers who find the virtue of an action based entirely on its outcome, especially as the outcome relates to the benefit imparted to the agent's goals.

As a larger critique of society, Coleridge allows the crew to be read as *hoi polloi* or the unreflective masses, “‘the Many,’ or the ‘*toutos xosmos*’ (*this world*) of the Apostle Paul.”⁶⁵ Without the aid of the light of reason, the majority of citizens are left to navigate their moral world with inferior tools of natural philosophy or utilitarianism. They evaluate morality in terms of physical talismans of unstable meaning. At one moment, the albatross is a good thing, the killing of which begets disaster. In the very next moment, the albatross is a bad thing, the killing of which brings the clarity of sunshine and dissipating fog. In both instances the bird itself is the object of fortune, but its status as good or bad is determined by the results. For the crew, in neither case is the agent’s action (the Mariner’s act of killing the albatross) the problem. The Mariner could kill one hundred albatross and the crew would not mind, so long as they inherit no consequence from his action. The action is value-neutral to the crew until they assess the consequences. Coleridge uses the crew to set up a contrast to the status of the will that he wants to advance.

Whatever may be said of the Mariner’s motive in shooting the albatross, the action has actual, physical consequences. The world is receptive to—and in a way subject to—the agent’s actions, whether they are virtuous or vicious.

Notably, Coleridge relates the subject’s actions to neighbor, nature, and cosmos, suggesting that nothing is exempt from the consequences of a moral agent’s actions. Right and moral living, or proper orientation with self and world, is a totalizing endeavor. As concerns the neighbor, the Mariner’s crew is betrayed and left to die excruciating deaths of starvation, dehydration, and exposure. The Mariner observes the impact of his actions upon his crew:

And I had done a hellish thing,
and it would work ’em woe.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *AR*, 227.

⁶⁶ *Mariner*, lines 91–92.

The “hellish thing” struck the crew physically:

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

...

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

The Mariner observes a ship approaching, and thinking it to be a ship of blessing come to help the crew out of its suffering, instead he finds “the Night-Mare Life-in-Death” sailing to him declaring “The game is done! I’ve, I’ve won!”⁶⁷ “One after one,” the crew curses the Mariner for his wanton actions before they die:

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.

Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.⁶⁸

The Mariner’s actions result in the dreadful death of each of his two hundred crewmen. Freedom to choose, freedom to kill, carries with it the possibility of dreadful consequences to self and neighbor.

There is no singular cause and effect that is narrowly contained to the subject and object. The consequences are shared broadly, and the world receives the actions of the moral agent for blessing or for curse. Coleridge uses the language of curse to describe the effects of the Mariner’s actions on the cosmos:

⁶⁷ *Mariner*, lines 193, 197.

⁶⁸ Lines 214–219.

All in a hot and copper sky,
 The bloody Sun, at noon,
 Right up above the mast did stand,
 No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
 We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
 As idle as a painted ship
 Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
 And all the boards did shrink;
 Water, water, every where,
 Nor any drop to drink.⁶⁹

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
 That ever this should be!
 Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
 Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
 The death-fires danced at night;
 The water, like a witch's oils,
 Burnt green, and blue and white.⁷⁰

The world is turned upside down as a consequence of the Mariner's unthinking action. The Mariner's world is corrupted into a punishing horror. The Mariner views the sea transform into unnatural colors with creatures of terrible kinds crawling upon it. It is unclear what the "slimy things" that "crawl with legs upon the slimy sea" are, or in what way they are real. Until that stanza, the subject of the poem had been the Mariner and crew, and there is no other reference to these slimy walking creatures elsewhere. It is possible to read this as the Mariner imagining himself and his crew to becoming rotten inside and slimy outside. The entire stanza may also be read as an inversion of the miracle of Christ walking on the sea of Galilee. Instead of coming to the aid of the fishermen tossed by the storm, this Christ is rotten in the deep, dead where the

⁶⁹ Gloss: *And the Albatross begins to be avenged.*

⁷⁰ Lines 111–130.

other was alive, and crawling on the water that is like “a witch’s oils” to take the lives of the trespassers. The inversion of the saving work of Christ to a representation of sickly horror is the consequence of the Mariner’s poor exercise of freedom. It may be viewed as a representation of the world’s rejection of the Mariner’s actions.

Coleridge portrays the consequences of the subject’s wrongful actions as culminating in disaster.⁷¹ The subject becomes disoriented amidst the rubble of the world that once was whole, but is now ‘bloody’ and ‘slimy,’ mired by ‘rot.’⁷² In the new world fashioned by the violent destruction of God’s order through the wrongful exercise of freedom, the subject perceives neighbor, nature, and God to be opposed to its progress. The subject yearns for an end to its suffering but relief is desperately out of reach. The soul’s thirst is mocked by the presence of “water, water everywhere” without “a drop to drink.”⁷³

“The Wanderings of Cain” contains similar imagery. Cain’s extended lament animates the feeling of isolated despair that comes from the sense of God’s ceaseless antagonism:

The Mighty One that persecuteth me is on this side and on that; he pursueth my soul like the wind, like the sand-blast he passeth through me; he is around me even as the air! O that I might be utterly no more! I desire to die—yea, the things that never had life, neither move they upon the earth—behold! they seem precious to mine eyes. O that man might live without the breath of his nostrils. So I might abide in darkness, and blackness, and an empty space! Yea, I would lie down, I would not rise, neither would I stir my limbs till I became as the rock in the den of the lion, on which the young lion resteth his head whilst he sleepeth. For the torrent that roareth far off hath a voice: and the clouds in heaven look terribly on me; the Mighty One who is against me speaketh in the wind of the cedar grove; and in silence am I dried up.⁷⁴

⁷¹ In using the term “disaster,” I mean to emphasize its etymological significance as “an ill-starred event” and one that yields undesirable or unfortunate outcomes that force the action’s reconsideration. See Khalip and Collings, *Romanticism and Disaster*, accessed at <https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/disaster/index.html>.

⁷² *Mariner*, “The very deep did rot: O Christ!” line 123; “the bloody Sun,” line 112; “Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea,” lines 125–126.

⁷³ *Mariner*, lines 121–122.

⁷⁴ “Cain,” 43.

Read in light of the competing rationalities of the time, “The Wanderings of Cain” serves as a severe warning against the improper use of the subject’s new-found powers of critical self-determination and moral autonomy. Although autonomous, one’s actions do not happen apart from consequences, even though the status of one’s willful action is unclear at the moment of willing.

From Coleridge’s perspective, the world receives and forcefully rejects the activities of the moral agent. Coleridge depicts the subject to be in a true give-and-take relationship with God and nature, equally capable of *originating* action as receiving reaction or counter-action from nature. Actions that accord with the All issue in harmony and tranquility, while those that cause discord with the All issue in a sense of hostile estrangement and despair. Cain acted against God’s will. As a consequence, he is banished from the realm of God’s will. Aridity, absence of life, aimless and ceaseless wandering discomfited by a dread sense of being pursued characterize the realm into which he is banished. Coleridge suggests that anyone who acts against God’s will, or who improperly wields the modern power of autonomy, experiences a similar experience of the arid and wandering life.

Coleridge depicts the life of the one who finds himself to be a transgressor of the ordained order as one of restless wandering, suffering from an extreme sense of urgency for something that can never be fully satisfied. In “The Wanderings of Cain,” the disorder experienced is redoubled as the endless wandering on scorched sands (the realm of the serpent and the vulture intertwined—a distorted *ouroboros*, the circular symbol of a serpent consuming its tail, the inversion of the symbol of the eternal return of life such that it is the eternal return of

death).⁷⁵ In *Mariner*, it is expressed as “woful [*sic*] agony” and a burning heart that can only be quenched by telling the “ghastly tale”:

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.⁷⁶

The moral agent moves away from the divine order to a life of disorder. By telling his story over and over again, the Mariner experiences a semblance of order, a momentary reprieve from his agony. As I will argue in Chapter 5, the Mariner’s drive to retell his woeful story is an illustration of the experience of being simultaneously free and captive as a particular way of being in the world. It is as a prophylactic against this condition that Coleridge writes *Aids to Reflection*.

Although Coleridge’s Mariner illuminates the consequences of an immature free will—of unwitting willful violation of order—and finds the seafarer caught by the need to tell his tale to whomever he identifies as needing to hear it, the poem also points up a darker possibility: Freedom to choose aright carries with it the possibility and power to choose wrong. Autonomy such as this leaves room for the possibility of willful pursuit of evil. Milton’s Satan looms large on this scene: “Evil be thou my good.”

For Coleridge, isolation and dread—the magnitude of which can only be described as one who understands God to be viciously opposed to him—follow as a consequence of the subject’s unwitting exercise of its autonomy. All relationships are impossibly soured by the subject’s

⁷⁵ “Never morning lark had poised himself over this desert; but the huge serpent often hissed there beneath the talons of the vulture, and the vulture screamed, his wings imprisoned within the coils of the serpent,” 44.

⁷⁶ Lines 586–590. Gloss: *And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land; And to teach, by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth.*

improper use of its moral agency—that of self, other, and God. Life’s journey becomes characterized by the subject’s desperate striving for reunion, reorientation, and repose. It is the goal of *Aids to Reflection* to impart to the reader the means whereby new thinking can emerge on the matter of the subject’s primary relations.

Conclusion

Coleridge was not alone in giving poetic expression to the abiding sense of loss that encompassed the European continent. This loss, succinctly expressed by Kant as a condition of the subject’s being “neither suspended from heaven nor anchored on earth,” gave rise to an anxiety that found poetic and philosophical expression across the European continent and issued in shifting conceptions of religion.⁷⁷ As the rationalities of science and religion were cast as destabilizing one another, each vying for sole authority to explain the relation of the all, the perceptive subject sensed a destruction of past certainty even as it longed for a sense of orientation according to which it could reliably navigate the open waters of liberty. Read against this backdrop, *Mariner* suggests itself as a depiction of the experience of humanity’s willful self-assertion against the moorings given in the order of nature, while ‘The Wanderings of Cain’ suggests itself as a depiction of the experience of humanity’s willful self-assertion against the bulwarks given in religion. In both instances, the subject is found suffering, disoriented, oppressed by guilt and tormented by an urgent need to rectify the wrongs committed, and wholly lacking a guide or instructions whereby resolution may be attained. The will alone is blind. Although it is free, it is blind. Because it is blind, it is equally capable of begetting good or evil.

⁷⁷ Kant as translated by Pacini.

Like his contemporaries, Coleridge sees this play out in the arena of the mind, and he attributes a measure of the disorder to result from its misguided operations. Contrasting a movement to health that he characterizes as an upward ascent through the higher faculties, Coleridge frames the movement towards disorientation as a descent. The misguided operations of the mind lead to descent, and the properly ordered operations of mind lead to ascent. He does not fully outline the hierarchy of faculties, instincts, or feelings constituting human experience, and he occasionally engages the language of Neoplatonism to describe the upward or downward quality of one's journey as it is guided by the faculties. Over-reliance on the lesser powers of mind—or what Coleridge deems the “Understanding”—can issue in a life of self-diminution he names the *hodos Kato*, or *the road downward*.⁷⁸ It is a parched and thirsty landscape—that of the Mariner's antipodal southern seas or Abel's desolate landscape of black rocks and scorching white sands. The way downward is common and wide—“the bare rocks faced each other, and left a long and wide interval of thin white sand” wholly divested of the “influence of the seasons.” Many pass through these caustic corridors and few return.

To escape the condition of wandering, Coleridge conceives of a healing alternative. The ascent to orientation must be achieved through reflection. Reflection is the activity of the

⁷⁸ See *The Friend*, Volume III, Section II, Essay 2, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol 4. Coleridge references a fragment from Heraclitus for the concept of the road downward. He interprets the human tendency to the twin fallacies of unreasonable fanaticism or lifeless rationality as two instances of the road downward. In both instances, the subject is confused in its inward psychological composition, or what I have called the architectonics of mind. The subject that is estranged from itself in this way will trust too much in one faculty or sense at the expense of others and gain a distorted view of the world; it will rely too much on the parts at the expense of the whole. In such instances, Coleridge warns, “the feelings will set up their standard against the understanding, whenever the understanding has renounced its allegiance to the reason” (432). Alternatively, the rightly ordered mind displays faith, a qualification of consciousness that is disclosed through the proper use and balance of the whole mind: “and what is faith, but the personal realization of the reason by its union with the will?” (432). “Above all,” Coleridge is most concerned that “they must not seek to make the mysteries of faith what the world calls *rational*” (433). The subject must not shudder against the mysteries of the faith, seeking to diminish the reality of divine mysteries and their “vivifying influences” by seeking rational explanations dominated by the understanding and its capacity for theoretical speculation (432ff).

understanding that expands self-awareness and ushers in the illumination of Reason, the expansion of self, the alignment of inward faculties, and the disclosure of a right relation with the world. If reflection is performed well, the subject begins to see the world differently as a result of its understanding becoming illuminated by the light of Reason. Notably, at the nadir of the Mariner's journey, Coleridge has the moon rise upon the scene. The "moving moon went up" upon the Mariner, shining its reflected light upon the Mariner's disaster to reveal evidence of an unseen hope that carries him back up north to his home.⁷⁹ The subject's self-knowledge and its knowledge of the world is enriched by an awareness of relation and totality that was previously unseen. Coleridge's method of ascent through reflection is a means to restore primary relations that were damaged through other forms of willful self-assertion.

The theme is played out in *Aids to Reflection* with implications for religion. In Coleridge's review of the doctrines of Original Sin and Redemption he concludes that "CHRISTIAN FAITH IS THE PERFECTION OF HUMAN REASON."⁸⁰ Coleridge, the master teacher, accompanies the kindred spirit (his reader) through "the terrors and the promises of Spiritual Growth" to find not only a community of like-minded individuals known as the 'clerisy,' but also the profound declaration of admittance into the divine order that comes through being forgiven and knowing oneself to be accepted as forgiven.⁸¹ In this way, Coleridge situates active and 'living' Christian faith as the achievement of self-knowledge, the "KEY-STONE" evidence of Christianity.⁸² This insight culminates in the equation of faith with reason,

⁷⁹ *Mariner*, line 263.

⁸⁰ *AR*, 541. See also *Aphorism XI* in *Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B*, 290: "The doctrine of Original Sin concerns all men. But it concerns Christians *in particular* no otherwise than by its connexion with the doctrine of Redemption." As noted by Engell in Cheyne, later editions of *AR* substitute Reason for Intelligence: "The Christian Faith is the Perfection of Human Intelligence."

⁸¹ James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, *Biographia Literaria*, 244.

⁸² *BL*, 244.

doctrine, and Christianity. Although prior to undergoing his catechism these terms were distinct, afterwards they may be seen as synonymous.

As it is with the individual, so too is it for the community. Coleridge's method of ascent mirrors the activity and architectonics of mind whereby subjectivity itself is achieved, and this provides the model for how a cultured society is possible. From this view, one may profitably interpret *Aids to Reflection* (1825) as a handbook for the enculturation of society through the enculturation of its individual citizens. The implications for Coleridge's method extend beyond the individual alone.

In this chapter, I have argued that Coleridge's engagement with German Idealism for the sake of spiritual renewal constitutes an instance of the modern religion of conscience. That is, by appealing to the mind and framing his religious project in terms of ordinary consciousness, Coleridge's religious writings accord with other such efforts to account for religion after Kant. In Coleridge's version of the religion of conscience, Coleridge reimagines the Christian faith as a qualification of consciousness that issues from a habit of mind cultivated through a progressive series of reflective practices. His 1825 volume, *Aids to Reflection*, is the primary collection of these practices. In it he appends notes to selections from his favorite English Divines, especially those of Archbishop Leighton, thereby creating a series of conversations that move in a progressive and ascending manner from topics of prudence and morality to spiritual religion and theology. By engaging these fragments of dialogue, the reader participates in the movement of mind Coleridge sees as essential to intellectual and spiritual maturity. The volume constitutes his most condensed attempt to mobilize his religion of conscience for the benefit of a reader.

In the next chapter I examine the elements of Fichte's idealism as they are introduced in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. These principles appear in other of Coleridge's writings, as

well as notably in “The Essays on the Principles of Method” and *Aids to Reflection*. I argue that these principles are essential to seeing Coleridge’s religious writings as a coherent work within the family of discourse that is the modern religion of conscience, and more, that Coleridge’s method moves the reader to a habit of mind that can discern the difference between freedom of choice, or negative freedom, and positive freedom, where authentic freedom denotes an experience of divine revelation.

Chapter 2 - *Biographia Literaria* and Fichte's Principles of Subjectivity

Where the spirit of a man is not filled with the consciousness of freedom (were it only from its restlessness, as of one still struggling in bondage) all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but even with himself. No wonder then, that he remains incomprehensible to himself as well as to others. No wonder, that, in the fearful desert of his consciousness, he wearies himself out with empty words, to which no friendly echo answers, either from his own heart, or the heart of a fellow being...
—From *Biographia Literaria*⁸³

In recounting his intellectual development in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge commends Fichte for supplying the “key-stone” of the arch that Kant constructed: “FICHTE’S *Wissenschaftslehre*, or *Lore* of Ultimate Science, was to add the key-stone of the arch: and by commencing with an *act*, instead of a *thing* or *substance*, Fichte assuredly gave the first mortal blow to Spinozism, as taught by Spinoza himself.”⁸⁴ Although Coleridge withholds admiration for Fichte’s presentation, saying that “this fundamental idea he overbuilt with a heavy mass of mere *notions*, and psychological acts of arbitrary reflection,” Coleridge does credit Fichte with accomplishing a metaphysical system that contains “the spring and principle within itself.”⁸⁵ The principle of an active mind proved generative for many aspects of Coleridge’s metaphysics. Indeed, Coleridge appropriated the principle into his conceptions of religion to such great effect that James Engell observes that, within Coleridge’s writings, “this foundational Act establishes both the basis of philosophical activity and the beginning and end of religious faith.”⁸⁶

⁸³ *BL*, 168.

⁸⁴ *BL*, 101. The standard translation of *Wissenschaftslehre* is “Science of Knowledge.”

⁸⁵ *BL*, 101.

⁸⁶ James Engell, “Coleridge and Contemplation: The Act,” in Peter Cheyne, *Coleridge and Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 240ff. Engell collates an extensive collection of citations from Coleridge’s *oeuvre* to support his reading of the place Coleridge affords the activity of the mind in the development of his Trinitarian theology.

In this chapter, I introduce the principles of idealism that Coleridge appropriates from Fichte in *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge's writings in 1817 and 1818 show him shifting his attention away from earlier obsessions with nature, the outward forms of spirit, and the truths that may be perceived there, and towards the workings of the inner life and the organs and faculties for perceiving truth.⁸⁷ *Biographia Literaria* illuminates particularly well Coleridge's continuity with Fichte's writings as it is also the work that shows Coleridge's own literary and intellectual development. An examination of *Biographia Literaria* helps set the stage for a closer look at the presence of Fichtean principles of philosophical psychology and philosophical theology in Coleridge's later works. Specifically, Coleridge relies on Fichte's principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to craft a method of rational self-realization in service to spiritual cultivation. This chapter places elements of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* in conversation with Fichte's principles of idealism outlined in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. From there I follow these early Fichtean influences upon Coleridge's later religious writings. My aim is to argue for an interpretation of freedom that issues as divine disclosure in faith.

Principal Themes

⁸⁷ "From the first...his interest in the imagination was dominated by the purpose which inspired all his serious speculation, the purpose of establishing right principles of thought and action; and this primarily by the elucidation of the essential nature of human consciousness, and the distinction of its various constituents, or rather, modes of activity, in respect of their value and authority as instruments of truth. And as with increasing age his sense of aloofness from external things grew stronger, and his inward life gained in vividness and depth, he realized more and more the paramount importance of emphasizing and appealing to the purely spiritual consciousness as a common possession of all men. Thus the imagination, as the faculty of mediate vision, is thrust into the background, while reason, the faculty of direct access to truth, claims a more exclusive attention. Aesthetic experience is subordinated to the experience in which the intuitions of reason find their surest witness, the 'testifying state' of conscience." James Shawcross, "Introduction" in Samuel Taylor Coleridge *Biographia Literaria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1907), lxxxiii.

Coleridge's adaptations of Fichte's theory of subjectivity cohere around three principal themes: the activity of the mind, the structures of self-consciousness, and the role of the imagination in constituting the subject. These themes arise out of Coleridge's encounters with Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Coleridge's most explicit references to Fichte and his ideas are in *Biographia Literaria*, but his engagement with the themes of subjectivity, self-consciousness, and the imagination pervade his works.

Although Coleridge aspired to present these themes in a magisterial systematic theology, reading him in this way omits Coleridge's great concern for the lived experience of faith he hoped to inspire in his readers. His systematic aspirations are evident throughout, and Coleridge can be seen working out the challenges of this project in many of his fragments and marginalia, especially in the prose works following 1817. He variously referred to this aspirational work as the *Logosophia*, the *Magnum Opus*, or the *Opus Maximum*. He hoped to bring his ruminations on transcendental idealism into unity with trinitarian theology in what he called his "Dynamic Philosophy." It is helpful to read Coleridge as always thinking towards this systematic goal, but the reader must never forget the "practical" application to which he was committed. Although he engages the language and methods of the German idealists, he does so for religious and spiritual ends that are not always explicit. Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria* contains a sequence of theses that Coleridge offers as an explicit introduction to the forthcoming "third treatise of the *Logosophia*."⁸⁸ In other places, Coleridge is not so explicit about his purpose for engaging idealist philosophy. Nevertheless, I interpret all of his writings from 1817 until his death in 1834 as carrying him closer to the *Opus Maximum*. I interpret this move as Coleridge's attempt to engage the language and structure of Fichte's idealism in service to spiritual theology.

⁸⁸ *BL*, 180.

Coleridge's theology begins with himself, with biography, and specifically with his *Biographia Literaria*. On this point Coleridge is unusually consistent: Knowledge of God proceeds from self-knowledge. Thus, "We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD."⁸⁹ *Biographia Literaria* is at once Coleridge's autobiography and an account of his intellectual development as a poet and literary critic. It is a work of genre-bending classification rich with distinctly "Coleridgean" excurses. Nevertheless, Coleridge is true to his commitment: theology (and philosophy) begins with "the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF!"⁹⁰

In order to know oneself, one must be clear about what that means. What does one know when one attempts to know oneself? This is a question for which Coleridge seeks answers principally from German Idealism. Coleridge appropriates elements of Fichte's theory of subjectivity to provide an account of what can be known when one looks within to know oneself. To this end Coleridge attempts to name and qualify the several faculties of the mind, the structures of self-consciousness, and the principle of activity that propels the subject towards a meaningful and good Christian life.

He pursues these topics in various places besides *Biographia Literaria*, and he does so always with a distinct sense of urgency. One comes away from these readings convinced that Coleridge's urgency moved in two directions. That is, not only does clarity of mind beget clarity of life, but a disordered mind begets a disordered life. More specifically, for Coleridge it seems that confusion about the constitution of the mind begets confusion about the purpose and meaning of life. Right living depends upon right thinking: "truth is correlative to being."⁹¹

⁸⁹ *BL*, 186.

⁹⁰ *BL*, 173, original emphasis.

⁹¹ *BL*, 180.

By proceeding in this way, Coleridge sets a goal for which he does not seem adequately prepared—as Niebuhr notes when he recommends that one read “with” Coleridge because he is always “thinking in motion.”⁹² If clear thinking about the transcendental structures of self-consciousness and the faculties of mind that coordinate to constitute subjectivity is required for right living, then it would seem that Coleridge is condemned at the outset by the standards against which he hopes to be measured. Clarity is a virtue Coleridge seldom exhibits in his writings, much less in topics as confounding as transcendental metaphysics. All the same, Coleridge is able to capitalize on some of the challenges associated with the goal. Namely, to the degree that self-deception can account for the why’s and how’s of a life poorly lived, Coleridge finds fertile soil for his imaginative engagement. Indeed, the concern for quality life is clear in the full spectrum of Coleridge’s writings.

Coleridge’s poetry provides another way to gain insight into his thinking on the topics of self-acquaintance and estrangement. *Mariner* and “Cain” offer particularly instructive examples for how a subject poorly related to itself finds itself poorly related to the world. For instance, the consequence of Cain’s fratricide is that he finds himself banished to a lonely and desolate desert place where no relief may be found. His experience of the world is one of opposition and oppression. In the case of the Mariner, not only does the entire crew of his ship die an agonizing death of thirst and starvation, but the Mariner is forced to watch each man perish: “Each turned his face with a ghastly pang, / And cursed me with his eye... With heavy thump, a lifeless lump, / They dropped down one by one.”⁹³ Not only does Cain’s fratricide and the Mariner’s neglectful killing of the albatross signal a mind in disarray, but the world also appears to become a place of hostile disarray for the perpetrator. Coleridge’s warning is clear: confusion of mind carries

⁹² Cf. Introduction and n27 above.

⁹³ *Mariner*, lines 214–215, 218–219.

consequences beyond the scope of internal subjectivity. The world and others in it suffer the consequences of subjective confusion. Be that as it may, Coleridge's prose writings are not always helpful to accomplishing his goal of clarifying the internal workings of subjectivity for the sake of clear theology and right living.

All of this is to say that I am pursuing an interpretation of *Biographia Literaria* that emphasizes the ways in which Coleridge appropriates insights gained from Fichte's idealism, in the hope that it will shed light on the larger concern of spiritual cultivation that is at stake in *Aids to Reflection*. Specifically, my interpretation pursues Coleridge's interests in the structures of self-consciousness, the activity of the mind, and the role of the imagination in the constitution of subjectivity, especially as they resonate with Fichte's writings on the same topics. These themes lay the groundwork for the method of rational self-realization that I will examine in the next chapter. In the end I argue that Coleridge's appropriations of elements of Fichte's philosophical psychology and philosophical theology lead him to develop a method of rational self-realization in service to spiritual growth. That is, by moving the mind to increasing capacities of self-acquaintance, and thereby growing in knowledge of the subject's primary relationships (that of self, world, God), Coleridge expects the reader to gain new vistas of spiritual understanding. Principally, Coleridge's method yields a habit of mind capable of perceiving the difference between free will and genuine freedom, where genuine freedom is divine disclosure in faith.

A note on sources: *Biographia Literaria* and the *Wissenschaftslehre*

How does Coleridge engage these themes? Not systematically. Coleridge famously regarded truth as a "divine ventriloquist," suggesting that it matters not from whose mouth truth

proceeds so long as it is fruitful.⁹⁴ This conviction is also suggestive of the way he orders his thoughts. As truth is divine, Coleridge understands truth to arise from a common source. The common source does not seem to require Coleridge's efforts to sequence his thoughts. Coleridge does not cite his sources chapter and verse, nor does he (always) transplant the ideas of others into his own writings, although sometimes he does. He tends to chew on his thoughts. Many times this mastication occurs in the act of writing; again, this is evidence of Coleridge's "thinking in motion." This habit poses challenges to readers who pursue the development of his thoughts from their earliest influences to their mature expression.

Instead, Coleridge does something else. Because he believes that truth is divine, truth may then show forth in many different ways, or from the desks and pens of various people. Coleridge extends to himself the license to pursue and adapt whatever he finds for his project wherever he may find it. *Biographia Literaria* is itself an example of this method. In attempting to account for his intellectual development, Coleridge at times acknowledges his sources and at other times does not.⁹⁵ One way to interpret this dodgy habit is to say that sources matter little if what they offer is truth or insight into how he became the person he knows himself to be. For Coleridge, truth is spirit and spirit knows no boundaries.

⁹⁴ *BL*, 105. See also *The Friend*, I.iv, 192: "Laws obligatory on the conscience, can only therefore proceed from that Reason which remains always one and the same whether it speaks through this or that person: like the voice of an external Ventriloquist, it is indifferent from whose lips it appears to come, if only it be audible."

⁹⁵ Critical studies of *BL* are vast and far reaching and often circle around the topic of Coleridge's failure to cite his sources. See Rene Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England*; G. N. G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism*; Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*; Norman Fruman, *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel*. The introduction to the Collected Works version of *Biographia Literaria*, edited by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (1983), provides a more measured approach to Coleridge's engagement with German philosophy: "Coleridge at times translates or paraphrases from an author who, in turn, was himself quoting or paraphrasing from another writer. Moreover, Coleridge's use of German books and his own marginalia in them was often so fluid and intertwined...that our experience repeatedly confirmed what McFarland calls the 'mosaic' form of composition in Coleridge," cxvi.

Biographia Literaria, published in 1817, is conversational in tone. He is not concerned to document rigorously where or how ideas emerged in his mind, although he does speak about various sources of his thought. More often than not, Coleridge seems to be carried away by his topics as if they had momentum of their own. This is a peculiar feature of Coleridge's writings, and it reflects the movement of a mind that is never still. Coleridge often catches himself at the end of a long parenthetical excursion as if surprised by where his thoughts have taken him.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, *Biographia Literaria* moves forward progressively. He recounts his life story "chiefly for the purpose of giving a continuity to the work, in part for the sake of the miscellaneous reflections suggested to me by particular events."⁹⁷ *Biographia Literaria* contains elements of Coleridge's life story, but the narrative serves more as a vehicle for ideas that nurtured his intellectual life. He says he intended the volume to be read "as an introductory to the statement of my principles in Politics, Religion, and Philosophy, and an application of the rules, deduced from philosophical principles, to poetry and criticism."⁹⁸ Accordingly, one may expect to see Coleridge engaging any number of philosophical principles insofar as each is helpful to attaining his goal.

Coleridge's appropriations of Fichtean idealism is playful and inexact. It is creative, active, and inspired by tangential possibilities. He creates something new through his engagement with them. For this reason, it is difficult to trace genetic influence in Coleridge's

⁹⁶ After one such excursion, carried away from his topic by warm memories of friends, Coleridge remarks, "The feeling of gratitude, which I cherish towards these men, has caused me to digress further than I had foreseen or proposed," *BL*, 98.

⁹⁷ *BL*, 1.

⁹⁸ *BL*, 1.

works, although many have tried.⁹⁹ I aim to show continuity with Fichte's ideas. I then interpret Coleridge's method of spiritual cultivation in *Aids to Reflection*.

Fichte's principles may best be seen in Coleridge's writings in a kaleidoscopic as opposed to telescopic fashion. A view that is telescopic seeks clarity of origins, precision of translation and appropriation, and narrows the field of vision to find limited application of the remote material in the present context. Many of the critics who seek to prove plagiarism in Coleridge's writings (or to defend him against such charges) participate in telescopic readings of Coleridge. They look through his work and its broad application to see in detail elements that may inform it, for better or worse. The narrow view that a telescope gives clarifies certain things while simultaneously obscuring others. Instead, I propose to read Coleridge's engagement with Fichte as through a kaleidoscope. A kaleidoscope brings elements into ever-changing relation with one another to illuminate otherwise unseen qualities of those relations. As a reading method, a kaleidoscopic view seeks to draw out the qualities of relations. For instance, because

⁹⁹ See McFarland (1969); Fruman (1971); Barfield (1971). Notably, Engell and Bate (1983) go further to say that "a strong case" can be made for the centrality of Fichte over Schelling for Coleridge's philosophical thought, but even Engell and Bate defer to personality and Coleridge's sense of insecurity and anxiety to account for why such an argument is not worth pursuing cxxvi–cxxvii: "With few exceptions, Coleridge does not borrow directly from Fichte. Often he turns to the early Schelling instead, to the Fichtean *Vom Ich* for example, a book highly dependent on Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Coleridge's own reading in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Grundriss des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre* unmistakably shows through. Crucial ideas in the 'philosophical chapters'—the deduction of the imagination, the search for a first principle of all knowledge, the idea of self-consciousness, of philosophical 'freedom' and 'spirit'—have parallels in Fichte. A perusal of the notes reveals how often, and at times how specifically, Fichte appears necessary for what Coleridge is saying. The fascinating thing is that one could make a strong case that for much of the intellectual content of Chapters 8–13 Coleridge could have quoted and paraphrased from Fichte and used Fichte's examples. Why, then, did he turn to Schelling in these cases? There is something very telling in Coleridge's reaction to Fichte's philosophy as 'crude egoismus,' and although he knew that this was a harsh judgment, it seems almost certain that Fichte's personality, not only as Coleridge encountered it in Fichte's books, but as he heard about it while in Germany, blocked him from approaching Fichte with the same air of congeniality that he did Schelling... A philosophy like Fichte's, stringently built on the 'I' and on individual will, would attract Coleridge at first. But then, as it seemed to stress unremittingly only the self, it could prey on his self-conscious anxieties, moral conscience, and sense of religious piety. Fichte's logic appeared at times strained and even ridiculous (n. *Collected Letters* II 673–4.)"

both Coleridge and Fichte exhibit commitments to methodological monism, by which I mean they both uphold unity of the all in their philosophical investigations, each principle must somehow be related to the whole. Each of Coleridge's adaptations of Fichte's principles relates to elements of the other. Fichte's principles of subjectivity are of a piece; each principle belongs to the other as each is also a principle of the self in its self-relating activity. That is, to speak of the unity of the mind is also to speak of its activity, the quality of its striving, and the power of imagination in its constitution. One cannot speak well of the activity of the mind without also speaking of its unity, and so on. When viewed this way, Coleridge's writings on the activity of the mind also imply something of the unity of the mind. Turning the kaleidoscope to see again, Coleridge's writings on the unity of the mind also imply something of the power of the imagination. The power of the imagination is essential to the possibility of a self-positing self that emerges from the absolute I AM in its original relation of self and not-self, and so on. By viewing the relations of these principles kaleidoscopically, I aim to illuminate how each principle contributes to Coleridge's scheme of progressive spiritual cultivation, first developed as a method of rational self-realization in "Essays on the Principles of Method," and then deployed in a didactic manner in *Aids to Reflection*.

The Activity of the Mind and the Structures of Self-Consciousness

The first and most important principle Coleridge adapts from Fichte is the idea of the active mind. The mind is neither a thing nor a hermeneutic; it is a self-relating activity.¹⁰⁰ In seeking the "primordial, absolutely unconditioned principle of all human knowledge," Fichte

¹⁰⁰ Allen Wood helpfully distinguishes Fichte from his predecessors on this point: "Fichte's first principle is that it is *not* supposed to be a 'fact' of any kind. The I is not any *object* or *thing* that is theoretically 'given' to us. *Who I am* is who I make myself to be, even who I *ought* to make myself to be," Wood, *Fichte's Ethical Thought*, 49n.

identified the mind and its action as preeminent.¹⁰¹ The first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is “*The self begins by an absolute positing of its own existence.*”¹⁰² The primary principle “is intended to express that *Act*¹⁰³ which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible.”¹⁰⁴ Through the act of positing itself absolutely, the I becomes the I. The mind is an activity.

There are several accounts for how or why Fichte identified the activity of the mind as the grounds of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Although a complete exposition of the development of this thought exceeds the scope of this dissertation, it is worth noting two possible elements. Accounting for the development of Fichte’s thinking on this point, albeit minimally, also sheds light on the structures of self-consciousness and the construal of subjectivity that emerges from it.

First, by grounding subjectivity on the activity of the mind, Fichte aimed to overcome the challenges associated with Kant’s *thing-in-itself* and the dichotomy of subject and object that is the foundation of Kant’s critical philosophy. Fichte observed that for an object to be distinguished from the subject, the subject must first determine a difference between subject and

¹⁰¹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions*, Texts in German Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 93. Hereafter *SK*.

¹⁰² *SK*, 99.

¹⁰³ Daniel Brezeale summarizes Fichte’s coinage of *Tathandlung* in his notes on translation: “In order to expound his new way of thinking, Fichte occasionally coined entirely new terms, the most important of which is the term he invented to designate that original, self-constitutive activity by means of which the I “posits itself.” Fichte’s term for this self-creative act is *Tathandlung*, a neologism obtained by combining two ordinary words: *Tatsache*, which means “fact,” and *Handlung*, which means “act.” A *Tathandlung* is, accordingly, a “fact” that is at the same time an “act.” Or, as Fichte himself explains it: it is “an activity which presupposes no object, but itself produces it, and in which, accordingly, the *acting* (*Handlung*) immediately becomes the *deed* or *fact* (*Tat*)” *SW* I: 468.” Daniel Brezeale, ed., *Fichte, Early Philosophical Writings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), xiv.

¹⁰⁴ Brezeale, *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, xiv.

object. That is, the subject-object dichotomy is itself a product of subjective judgment. The subject determines that the ‘object’ distinguished is not identical to the subject.¹⁰⁵ This moves in two ways. First, the subject-object distinction is a subjective distinction, meaning that the object exists to some degree within the structure of subjectivity consciousness. To maintain his commitment to the unity of reason, the self must contain within itself both subject and object. Fichte advances a notion of the self as entailing the absolute identity of subject and object. “The self is a necessary identity of subject and object: a subject-object; and is so absolutely, without further mediation.”¹⁰⁶

Second, the object, as distinct from the self, is yet a product of the self. The absolute self creates the not-self as a necessary condition of its self-relating activity. There must be an object from which the subject can distinguish itself. It is a necessary condition for the self to be itself. In the Principle of Grounding in the *Grundlage*, Fichte phrases it this way: “*In the self I oppose a divisible not-self to the divisible self.*”¹⁰⁷ The principle of opposition eliminates the principle of identity, and we’re left with nothing. Therefore, there must be something else that allows for self and not-self to be posited and counter-posed within the identical self, without canceling it out. There must be something that enables the synthesis of opposites.¹⁰⁸ This requires a highly formalized notion of subject and object, such that nothing is truly all subject or object, but some

¹⁰⁵ See Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 109; Brezeale, *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 14; Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 167.

¹⁰⁶ *SK*, 97.

¹⁰⁷ *SK*, 110.

¹⁰⁸ “If we abstract from the specific content of self and not-self, leaving only the *mere form of the union of the opposites through the concept of divisibility*, we obtain the logical proposition known hitherto as the *grounding principle*: A in part = ~A, and vice versa. Every opposite is like its opponent in one respect, =X; and every like is opposed to its like in one respect, =A. Such a respect, =X, is called the ground, in the first case of *conjunction*, and in the second of *disjunction*.” *SK*, 110.

divisible quantity (or quality) of each. The forms are grounded in a third thing—that which holds them together unresolved.

Coleridge adapts this manner of thinking in his construal of subjectivity, but he does not go all the way with it. He modifies the notion of the absolute subject, but maintains the dialectical structure. As a result, the ground between extremes between subject and object is the spectrum along which either pole may be realized as antipodal to its opposite. This serves Coleridge well as he is rather taken by the notion of opposites coinciding, speaking and writing often about the phenomenon where “extremes meet.” Indeed, the refrain—“extremes meet”—serves as an organizing principle to many of his writings.¹⁰⁹ I will say more later about Coleridge’s structures of self-consciousness.

By shifting from the empirical fact to the Act, Fichte radicalizes the idealist perspective. That is, the subject gains more centrality and more responsibility in the construction of perceived reality. This occurs first in the subject’s ability to grant authority to itself in making normative claims.¹¹⁰ Fichte builds on this to resolve the Kantian paradox: that Subject and Object are determined to be what they are (have the status of subject and object) because of a judgment that is necessarily made by the subject itself (that A is not B).¹¹¹ That is, Fichte keenly observed that for Kant’s assessment of

¹⁰⁹ See especially *The Friend* I, Essay xv, 110: “Extremes meet—a proverb, by the bye, to collect and explain all the instances and exemplifications of which, would constitute and exhaust all philosophy.” See also its prominent place in the first aphorism of *Aids to Reflection*: “In philosophy equally as in poetry it is the highest and most useful prerogative of genius to produce the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues admitted truths from the neglect caused by the very circumstances of their universal admission. Extremes meet. Truths, of all others the most awful and interesting, are too often considered as *so* true, that they lose all the power of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors.”

¹¹⁰ Pinkard interprets Fichte on this move as basing the authority of an identity statement (that A=A) on a prior “inference license” (If A, then A), which is the subject’s (inherent?) authority to render normative statements, beginning first with what is and is not identical. See Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, 113.

¹¹¹ Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, 113–15.

subject and object to be made, the subject must first distinguish itself from what it is not, and the authority to make that distinction normative belongs to the subject itself. It is the subject's judgment that determines that the "thing itself" is not continuous with the subject. Fichte thus radicalizes idealism in this first move: he brings subject and object, A:B, into the construct of the subject itself through the subject's normative activities. It is through action, and specifically the activity of judgment, that the subject becomes what it is. It is by action that self-consciousness is possible.¹¹²

Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria* contains Coleridge's theses towards the deduction of the imagination. The theses illuminate Coleridge's thinking in 1817 on the topic of self-consciousness and the mind's activity.¹¹³ The first thesis contains the succinct statement on the matter of the mind's activity: "To know is in its very essence a verb active."¹¹⁴ This clearly has affinities with Fichte's principle of the activity of the mind as primary to self-consciousness.

As Fichte's move to the Act of the mind is in part a polemical move, so too is Coleridge's. Coleridge argues, contrary to his British opponents, that "intelligence is a self-development, not a quality supervening to a substance."¹¹⁵ This statement summarizes Coleridge's broader disagreement with British proclivities for empiricist epistemologies. By this he means that human intelligence does not depend entirely upon outside influences of matter or substance. Human intelligence is not merely a blank slate written upon by sensations and mobilized by instincts. Rather, human intelligence contains an energy and "spirit" original to its

¹¹² See Breazeale, *Thinking Through*, 39.

¹¹³ See Fruman and McFarland for criticism of Chapter XII. Fruman attempts a side-by-side comparison of Coleridge's writings to those of Schelling and argues that Coleridge plagiarized Schelling. McFarland prefers to interpret the plagiarism as adaptation and is more willing to read Coleridge as already thinking in the same direction as Schelling. My analysis follows McFarland's posture.

¹¹⁴ *BL*, 180.

¹¹⁵ *BL*, 188.

composition. To be a subject is also to find oneself guided or propelled in life's strivings from an inscrutable source within. As I will argue below, Fichte provided Coleridge with a way to speak about a subject's experience of longing and the subject's outward drives. To speak of the subject in these terms is also to speak in terms of teleology: the subject is driven towards an end. The same cannot be said necessarily of an empiricist construal of subjectivity that depends upon mechanistic relations of cause and effect. Coleridge was greatly concerned to maintain a teleological understanding of subjectivity.

Coleridge is especially passionate about countering Hartley's theory of association. He does so in part because he was once passionately persuaded by Hartley's theory. Coleridge named one of his sons Hartley in honor of what he believed was a profound theory of the relatedness of mind and world. Coleridge sought to counter Hartley's public influence by showing how Hartley's reasoning results in the subject becoming a "slave of chances" incapable of freedom.¹¹⁶ His chief complaint is that the theory denies human activity and initiative in judgment, reason, and willing. Hartley's theory diminishes the role of the will to the confluence of material influences.¹¹⁷

One fault he sees in Hartley's works is that they begin with a single point of departure that inadequately accounts for the unity of the all. Consequently, Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria* contains Coleridge's clearest delineation of the two points of departure he sees most commonly employed in philosophical investigation. Those are nature and the self, or object and subject, respectively. He states that "both conceptions are in necessary antithesis" and that

¹¹⁶ *BL*, 80.

¹¹⁷ "Conceive, for instance, a broad stream, winding through a mountainous country with an indefinite number of currents, varying and running into each other according as the gusts chance to blow from the opening of the mountains. The temporary union of several currents in one, so as to form the main current of the moment, would present an accurate image of Hartley's theory of the will." *BL*, 76–77.

“during the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs. There is here no first, and no second; both are coinstantaneous and one.”¹¹⁸ He describes the original unity as “indeterminate” before proceeding to chart how philosophy proceeds from one or other pole: “Either the Objective is taken as the first, and then we have to account for the supervention of the Subjective, which coalesces with it...Or the Subjective is taken as the first, and the problem then is, how there supervenes to it a coincident objective.”¹¹⁹ Owing to the logical necessity of beginning with one pole or the other, Coleridge claims that the world has become confused and has overlooked the original unity.

Coleridge sees Hartley’s theory of association as a prime example of the type of mechanico-corpuscular philosophies he thinks is wrong-headed, and so wants to oppose. Against this point of view, he says, “This then is the problem of natural philosophy. It assumes the objective or unconscious in nature as the first, and has therefore to explain how intelligence can supervene to it, or how it can grow into intelligence.”¹²⁰ Accordingly, from Coleridge’s view, the British empiricists take the object as a given and move from its certainty to the less certain realm of the mind. This approach disparages the impulse to life and creativity he values in the mind, rendering it subject to mechanical laws of cause and effect.

The idealists, on the other hand, move in the opposite direction. For them, the object, or the thing itself, is that which is uncertain. The argument must proceed from the inside out, beginning first with what can be known about one’s consciousness and then proceeding transcendently to the composition of knowledge. From there one can provide an account for

¹¹⁸ *BL*, 174.

¹¹⁹ *BL*, 176, 177.

¹²⁰ *BL*, 175.

how the world is related to the mind. But Coleridge turns away from this approach. He thinks that pure idealism “banishes us to a land of shadows” and “surrounds us with apparitions.”¹²¹ Coleridge prefers to acknowledge the reality of things as they exist apart from human perception. This position he calls “true and original realism.”¹²²

According to Coleridge, both err in that they deny the original unity of subject and object. Coleridge takes a cue from Fichte and does a new thing. Like the idealists, Coleridge begins with the mind. He locates the possibility of unity in the mind such that one can say of Coleridge’s works that the unity of the mind implies the unity of the world. This is also true of Fichte’s idealism. As a polemical statement against the prevailing British empiricism, the mind is not Locke’s *tabula rasa* because it is not a *tabula* at all. It is an activity that is never still and lacks the conditions whereupon content may be written. It is not a thing to be written upon at all; it is an activity. Human freedom and the progress of the moral subject become construed in deterministic frames. From the point of view of the mechanico-corpuscular philosophies, the world becomes a dim and restrictive place. By Coleridge’s estimate, without the activity of the mind, everything is lifeless, static, and subject to the Newtonian laws of cause and effect. Although Coleridge thinks that there are many negative consequences to a society built on a construal of the mind as static, the conclusion Coleridge most fears is that Christianity is not possible under these epistemological conditions.¹²³

¹²¹ *BL*, 179.

¹²² *BL*, 179.

¹²³ “The existence of an infinite spirit, of an intelligent and holy will, must, on this system, be mere articulated motions of the air. For as the function of the human understanding is no other than merely (to appear to itself) to combine and to apply the phaenomena of the association; and as these derive all their reality from the primary sensations; and the sensations again all *their* reality from the impressions ab extra; a God not visible, audible, or tangible, can exist only in the sounds and letters that form his name and attributes.” *BL*, 83.

The impossibility of Christianity under the mechanico-corpuscular scheme means also that Coleridge finds certain essential aspects of the faith to be categorically different from empiricist understandings of the same. The truth of Christianity cannot be revealed by determinative judgment. The Christian faith requires a different sort of proof. Interpreted in this way, the spiritual cultivation intended by *Aids to Reflection* is a means whereby faith proves itself in practice.¹²⁴

Coleridge thought there was another point of departure. This method starts neither with the objective world of nature nor with the subjective world of ideas. Rather, it takes as its point of departure the indeterminate condition of unity that is antecedent to both. It takes as a given that there are things that exist apart from human perception, and that there is an active and living principle of the mind that participates with reality and contributes to the constitution of human perception. By taking this approach Coleridge sought to dissolve the problems posed by natural philosophy and idealism, and to illuminate the unity that he was convinced undergirded the all.

In this, Coleridge is aligned with Fichte. Both speak of the original unity of subject and object as indeterminate. Fichte uses the language of “positing,” i.e., “the self-positing self,” and from it draws out the implications of a self that is active in positing, passive in being posited, and both simultaneously.¹²⁵ Three important points come to focus for this discussion: the indeterminate status of the self-positing self; the oppositional structure of the self presented as its capacity to posit itself as determined or limited by something other than itself; and the power and role of the imagination in creation and mediation between opposites. First, “*the self posits itself*

¹²⁴ See John Beer, ed., *Coleridge's Writings, vol. 4: On Religion and Psychology* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 75.

¹²⁵ SK, 124. Fichte's leading principle of the foundation of theoretical knowledge is “*The self posits itself as determined by the not-self.*” Fichte works out the further implications of this principle through the section of the *Wissenschaftslehre* entitled “The Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge.”

as determined,” which means that the self, before it renders itself (posits itself) as determined (posited), it holds some other status, presumably indeterminate (or in the process of becoming posited).¹²⁶ Accordingly, before the self is posited, it is indeterminate. Fichte describes the indeterminate status as both passive and active, that is, the self is active in positing itself, and it is passive in being posited (and determined) by the not-self. As indeterminate, it is not posited and thus takes no position, no qualities of determination.

Second, Fichte moves from the notion of the self-positing self to infer the notion of opposition as the basic structure of the mind. This is distinct in that it is not a structure of combination, as Kant argued.¹²⁷ Nor is it a structure of indifference, as Schelling advanced. By characterizing the original unity of the self-positing self as oppositional, Fichte introduces dialectical method into philosophy.¹²⁸ According to this scheme, the unity of the mind is not the result of synthesis, but rather is the achievement of the self in overcoming opposition.¹²⁹

Third, the imagination is the power whereby the self emerges as a self determined by the not self. It hovers, or wavers, between the extremes of what Fichte also calls the subject and object, or the thesis-antithesis, oppositional relation.¹³⁰ The imagination is the power that moves

¹²⁶ SK, 124. The self’s ability to posit itself, an activity that implies the positing of a not-self whereby the self becomes determined, points to the principle of identity Fichte uses to inaugurate the entire *Wissenschaftslehre* whereby he deduces the absolute self: “*That whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing;*” and, “*the I am absolutely, because I am*” (see Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge, Part 1, Section 1: First, Absolutely Unconditioned Principle in SK, 93-102). The absolute quality of the self is also implied by the Fact/Act, and Fichte “unfolds” it with a formula: “*I am absolutely, i.e., I am absolutely BECAUSE I am; and am absolutely WHAT I am; both FOR THE SELF*” (SK, 99). It is not difficult to hear the Hebrew name for God beneath or behind Fichte’s use of I AM as the expression of the identity principle from which the self is created.

¹²⁷ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 166.

¹²⁸ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 177.

¹²⁹ “The unity of the mind depends on oppositions that have to be overcome, precisely because they are oppositions. The opposing elements have to be integrated into the structure of the mind, because the structure of the mind is, in some sense, originally unified,” Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 177.

¹³⁰ Fichte introduces the language of subject and object, thesis-synthesis-antithesis, in Part II: Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge; SK, 120–203; c.f. “But all modes of action of the self must originate from a thetic procedure;” and “Both of them—not subject and object as such, but the subjective and objective

the self to posit itself, and it is the power of mind that creates the not-self whereby the self becomes determined. In holding, moving, and creating both self and not-self, subject and object, thesis and antithesis, the imagination is the power and activity where “extremes meet” and “forms the basis for the possibility of our consciousness, our life...our existence as selves;” the act of the imagination “gives us truth, and the only possible truth.”¹³¹

In the sections that follow, I further explicate each of the three inferences listed above—the indeterminate status of the self-positing self, its oppositional structure, and the power of the imagination to mediate and create. The goal of my explication is to relate Fichte’s insights to those of Coleridge, and to draw special attention to the power and work of the imagination in creation, mediation, and representation.¹³²

Where Fichte uses the language of determination, such that the self-positing self posits itself as *determined* by the not-self, Coleridge names the antecedent unity “spirit”: “only in the self-consciousness of a spirit is there the required identity of object and of representation; for herein consists the essence of a spirit, that it is self-representative.”¹³³ By touching and holding opposites, Coleridge’s spirit is akin to Fichte’s imagination. Furthermore, “it has been shown, that a spirit is that, which is its own object, yet not originally an object, but an absolute subject

posited through thesis and antithesis—are mutually determinable by each other, and, merely to the extent that they are so, can be brought together and fixed and held fast by that power of the self (imagination) which is active in synthesis,” *SK*, 186.

¹³¹ *SK*, 202.

¹³² Recall that Coleridge did not systematically account for Fichte’s influence in *BL*. My goal is not to draw those influences into precise focus, as in the manner of reading I describe as *telescopic*. Rather, I read the Fichtean influences within Coleridge’s writings as tumbling with and relating to whatever captures Coleridge’s attention at the moment of writing. By widening the frame and allowing for the movement of ideas in Coleridge’s thinking, I propose that the *kaleidoscopic* manner of reading reveals the presence and influence of Fichte’s ideas on Coleridge’s writings, especially on the topics of subjectivity and imagination in religion. These three elements tumble within the kaleidoscope for this chapter: the indeterminate status of the self-positing self, its oppositional structure, and the role of the imagination in creation, mediation, and representation.

¹³³ *BL*, 184.

for which all, itself included, may become an object.”¹³⁴ Coleridge begins with the original unity of subject and object, which is spirit. Coleridge says of the spirit (which is also the spirit’s self-consciousness) that “it must therefore be an ACT; for every object is, as an *object*, dead, fixed, incapable in itself of any action, and necessarily finite.”¹³⁵ If the first principle of subjectivity were anything other than an activity, it would be a thing, a dead thing incapable of productivity or progression. Only spirit as an absolute subject, can become an object to itself. It does so, however, because it is an act.¹³⁶

Coleridge offers a memorable analogy for the mind’s activity in the illustration of the “water-insect.” Coleridge says it is an apt “emblem of the mind’s self-experience in the act of thinking:”

Most of my readers will have observed a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colors on the sunny bottom of the brook; and will have noticed, how the little animal *wins* its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion.¹³⁷

The water-insect illustrates the fundamental activity of the mind. It also helpfully illustrates the achievement of the mind’s motion as it “wins” its way upstream. The activity of the mind implies movement. The idea of movement brings with it the notion that some distance is overcome; the water-insect moves *upstream*. Coleridge allows the activity of the mind to become the progressive principle of spiritual cultivation.

Moreover, the indeterminate position of the mind takes on a quality of its own. The “fulcrum” that moves the water-insect up-stream from position to position is the imagination. He

¹³⁴ *BL*, 184.

¹³⁵ *BL*, 184.

¹³⁶ “It must therefore be an ACT; for every object is, as an *object*, dead, fixed, incapable in itself of any action, and necessarily finite,” *BL*, 184ff.

¹³⁷ *BL*, 85ff, original emphasis.

says, “there are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive...the IMAGINATION.”¹³⁸ Coleridge equivocates on the status of the imagination. In its most primordial state as the intermediate form between positions of the self-positing mind, he refers to the imagination as a “faculty.” When it is developed more fully, when “this intermediate faculty” is developed “in all its degrees and determinations,” Coleridge refers to the imagination as the “esemplastic” and “living Power.”¹³⁹ Later, I take up the subject of the resonances between Coleridge’s construal of imagination with that of Fichte.

Coleridge shares, and builds upon, Fichte’s notion of the activity of the mind as relating the structures of self-consciousness in the formation of subjectivity. The reflexive activity of mind that Fichte describes as hovering and Coleridge describes as centripetal-centrifugal, or as a dynamic energy polarity, describes not only the way the mind operates, but also the means whereby the subject becomes aware of itself as a subject. The activity is reflexive. It relates the subject and the object as self and not-self and as a totality of both. This reflexive activity is the act that begets the self-conscious subject and provides the core from which all thinking and doing proceeds. This fundamental act is also the “keystone” to his thinking that Coleridge gained from reading Fichte.¹⁴⁰

To describe the activity of the mind as reflexive, Coleridge looks again to analogy. This time, instead of looking down into the world of living things and insects, he looks up to the cosmos. In a “metaphor borrowed from astronomy,” Coleridge likens the activity of the mind to an “indestructible power with two opposite and counteracting forces...we may call the

¹³⁸ *BL*, 86.

¹³⁹ *BL*, 86; 202.

¹⁴⁰ For more on the act that begets consciousness, see Engell, “Coleridge and Contemplation: The Act,” in Cheyne, *Coleridge and Contemplation*, 2017.

centrifugal and centripetal forces.”¹⁴¹ Almost as if to follow Fichte in his order of argument, Coleridge immediately expands on the metaphor into the structures of self-consciousness, saying “the intelligence in the one tends to *objectize* itself, and in the other to *know* itself in the object,” and that this basic principle will fuel pursuit of an articulation of the “fullness of the *human* intelligence” that “will be hereafter my business to construct by a series of intuitions the progressive schemes, that must follow from such a power with such forces.”¹⁴² He continues, “For my present purpose, I *assume* such a power as my principle, in order to deduce from it a faculty, the generation agency, and application of which form the contents of the ensuing chapter.” The “ensuing chapter”—Coleridge’s infamous deduction of the imagination—famously fails, interrupted as it is from “a letter from a friend” before it abruptly ends with Coleridge’s well-known taxonomy of imagination.

Coleridge’s “centripetal and centrifugal” activity closely resembles Fichte’s analysis of the inward and outward directions implied in the mind’s reflective activity. To account for the concept of direction in the activity of reflection, Fichte “borrows” a word from natural philosophy in much the same way that Coleridge “borrows” a metaphor from astronomy: “If I may also be allowed to borrow from natural philosophy a word...the direction, I say, is purely *centripetal*.”¹⁴³ Fichte continues:

The concept of direction is a purely reciprocal concept; *one* direction is none at all, and is absolutely unthinkable. Hence we can ascribe a direction, and a centripetal direction, to the absolute activity of the self, only on the tacit presupposition that we shall also discover as second, centrifugal direction of this activity.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ *BL*, 188.

¹⁴² *BL*, 188.

¹⁴³ *SK*, 240.

¹⁴⁴ *SK*, 241.

Furthermore, Fichte continues from the bi-directional implications of reflection to say that there are two points of view from which the self considers itself: as reflecting and as reflected upon:

As surely as it is a self, it must contain unconditionally and without any ground the principle of reflecting upon itself; and hence, from the beginning, we have the self in a dual aspect: partly, insofar as it is reflective, and to that extent the direction of its activity is centripetal; partly, insofar as it is that upon which reflection takes place, and to that extent the direction of its activity is centrifugal, and centrifugal out to infinity at that.¹⁴⁵

Additionally, Fichte describes the self-positing activity of the mind as *wavering* or *hovering* (*schweben*), and he attributes to the imagination the role of building unity from extremes. On the first point, Fichte puts it this way: “Imagination is a faculty that waivers in the middle between determination and nondetermination, between finite and infinite.”¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere Fichte defines the imagination in a way that sheds light on both the wavering activity and the effort to unite opposites:

The interplay of the self, in and with itself, whereby it posits itself at once as finite and infinite—an interplay that consists, as it were, in self-conflict, and is self-reproducing, in that the self endeavors to unite the irreconcilable, now attempting to receive the infinite in the form of the finite, now, baffled, positing it again outside the latter, and in that very moment seeking once more to entertain it under the form of finitude—this is the power of *imagination*.¹⁴⁷

Read side by side with Coleridge’s description of the water-insect and the centripetal and centrifugal “metaphor borrowed from astronomy,” it is possible to see how closely Coleridge resembles Fichte’s thinking on the status and function of the imagination in the development of subjectivity.

Coleridge moves quickly to the priority of the practical by describing the activity of the imagination in this way. He states with uncharacteristic clarity his intent to develop a series of

¹⁴⁵ SK, 241.

¹⁴⁶ SK, 194.

¹⁴⁷ SK, 193; also cited in Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 211–12.

“progressive schemes” out of the principle of the centripetal and centrifugal activity of the mind until he arrives at his objective which is the “fullness of human intelligence.” Although Coleridge claims that he will provide the exposition of the “fullness of the human intelligence” in Chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria*, he does not succeed. His deduction of the imagination is famously interrupted by a letter from a friend.

Coleridge’s “Essays on the Principles of Method” offer a different approach that is more successful. As I discuss more fully in the next chapter, the “Essays on Method” show Coleridge working towards a method of intellectual cultivation based on the centrifugal and centripetal activity of the mind within the structures of self-consciousness. He thinks that a proper understanding of the mind’s constitution and the basic structures of self-consciousness provide a key to unlocking the possibility of its progressive development. Coleridge builds upon Fichte’s observations into the first principle of subjectivity—that the mind is a self-relating activity—to a method of progressive self-realization. This method is put to work in *Aids to Reflection* as a method of spiritual cultivation. At the root of this project is Fichte’s principle of the self-relating activity of the mind.

Imagination and Subjectivity

Coleridge’s adaptations of Fichte’s theory of subjectivity—the activity of the mind and the structures of self-consciousness—lead to a robust construal of the imagination. For Coleridge, the imagination is the power that animates the subject in the original act of the mind in consciousness, and it is the creative power of the subject that shares continuity with the divine. Coleridge’s construal of the imagination goes well beyond that of Fichte. Nevertheless, by

incorporating the imagination within the structures of consciousness, Fichte provides a door through which Coleridge can pass for his own purposes.

Fichte's commitment to the unity of the mind in its self-positing activities introduces the notion of the oppositional structure of self-consciousness. Fichte's principle of opposition, wherein the subject is originally distinguished from something else, advances the notion of the mind's activity and lends itself to Coleridge's imaginative appropriations. Fichte's principle states that not-A is not equal to A, "*so surely is a not-self opposed absolutely to the self.*"¹⁴⁸ Thus the self, even though it posits itself as subject and object, does not dissolve the distinction of subject and object. ~A is not equal to A. He moves from the language of subject and object to that of self and not-self.

Thus, in terms of Coleridge's water-insect, the activity of the mind that wins its progress upstream is distinct from the type of activity that would overcome the distinction through synthesis, as in Kant's theory of knowledge, or through indifference, as Schelling proposed. Instead, Coleridge follows Fichte's insight into the activity of the mind in self-positing relation as the principle of progress in self-relatedness. Under this scheme, self-relation is the product of the self-positing self in relation to itself as it comes into being through opposition to the not-self. The self is only a self, and comes to know itself as a self, because the self is opposed to that which it is not.

As the indeterminate power of the mind that facilitates the self-positing activity, the imagination, under Coleridge's pen, shares resonance with that of Fichte. Fichte finds that it is by the power of the imagination that the Absolute I AM can conceive of something other than the self in the primordial activity of distinguishing the self from the not-self. The imagination

¹⁴⁸ SK, 104–105.

provides Fichte with an answer to the question of how a self can know itself without reference to something other than itself. The imagination is the power whereby it is possible for the self to create something other than itself before it has even distinguished itself as a self through original distinction of self from not-self. Through this process the self becomes a subject and a moral agent.

Coleridge devotes the greater part of three chapters to the development of Hartley's theory of association from Aristotle through Aquinas to Hume. This leads to the important distinction he draws between understanding and reason, and (in the conclusion to Volume 1 of *Biographia Literaria*) fancy and imagination. Definitions of the latter are central to his literary life. Volume 1 works towards these definitions, and Volume 2 interprets them through literary criticism of Wordsworth. Imagination and fancy are formal terms for Coleridge. The definitions are essential to interpreting Coleridge's use of Fichte's principles:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the FANCY must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ *BL*, 202.

The understanding is the mental faculty that organizes sensory experience., assisted by the power of the fancy. Fancy exhibits its creations through the choices one makes from the materials given through experience by the law of association. Coleridge is clear that the works of the fancy comprise a lesser form of creation.

The creations of the imagination, on the other hand, are continuous with the divine creation. The primary imagination creates consciousness and is reminiscent of Fichte's absolute I AM. Coleridge's poetic sensibility lends itself to find equivocal meanings to terms like I AM and "creation." He gains a lot of ground in this way. The imagination is the vital force that struggles to unify, and in unifying the manifold of experiences with its willful actions, creates a new thing.

Coleridge's construal of the imagination as creating new realities follows closely that of Fichte.¹⁵⁰ In his deduction of space and time, Fichte outlines the process by assigning terms to the self (*A*), the not-self (*-A*), and the ontological category of limitation that mediates between the two (*C*). These terms prove useful for understanding how the imagination functions in the construction of reality within the structures of self-consciousness. As Fichte's thinking moved to the principle of the absolute Self, within which all reality is contained (or better, all of reality *is* the absolute Self) the not-self, the question emerges of how a not-self can exert a limiting force on the absolute Self if it lacks reality. To be limiting and to function as the not-self in the oppositional structure of Fichte's fact/act, the not-self must partake of some reality. Here is where the mediating category, *C*, comes in. As mediating, *C* partakes of the reality that is by definition a quality only of the self, what he calls (*A*), even as it partakes in the not-self (*-A*) and the absence of reality it designates. Since all of reality is in *A*, both *C* and *-A* must receive reality

¹⁵⁰ My reading of Fichte is informed by Henrich, whose attention to the linguistic play within the *Wissenschaftslehre* reveals connections that are helpful for relating Fichte to Coleridge. See especially "Own Meditations on Elementary Philosophy," in Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 187–201.

as it is given by A; they must partake of reality, so A imparts reality to them. The process whereby the Absolute Self, A, imparts reality to the not-self, -A, and the mediating category, C, is properly called transference. The means whereby reality is transferred from Self to not-Self is the activity of the imagination. Through the process of transference, the imagination bestows reality where it previously was absent. Coleridge, long enamored by the creative potential of imagination, found inspiration in Fichte's construal. Moreover, highlighting this function of the imagination underscores its centrality in the development of the self. Indeed, the self becomes a self because of the activity of the imagination that transfers reality to that which is not the self.

To summarize, in order for the self to become a self, the absolute self must be limited by what it is not. The not-self, however, must have some reality if it is going to function in the way Fichte intends by exerting a limiting force on the absolute self. The not-self, by definition, does not partake of reality on its own. Only the absolute self is reality. Thus there is some mediating condition wherein reality is given to the not-self. Fichte calls the act of imparting reality to its absence "transference"; reality is transferred by the absolute self to the not-self.¹⁵¹ The activity of the absolute self is the means whereby transference is possible. Fichte calls the activity of transferring reality "imagination." Imagination transfers reality to unreality. This transference is then called a "representation."

¹⁵¹ A nuanced interpretation of the role of transference in establishing the reality of the not-self exceeds the scope of my argument. To summarize, Fichte synthesizes the outcomes of two modes of reflection to avoid dogmatic idealism or dogmatic realism, both of which concern the possibility of reality transference. The statement of dogmatic idealism is "*all reality of the not-self is simply a transference out of the self;*" and the statement of dogmatic realism is "*there can be no transference, unless an independent reality of the not-self, a thing-in-itself, is already presupposed,*" SK, 160. Fichte's solution to the problem of reality transference is to claim that "Both propositions are to be synthetically united, that is, they are to be regarded as one and the same... That which is activity in the not-self is passivity in the self (in virtue of the principle of opposition)" SK, 160.

A closer look at the German word for imagination, or *Einbildungskraft*, illuminates some of the subtleties of its meaning otherwise lost in translation. The German *Einbildungskraft* is a composite noun made up of three primary components: *ein*, *bilden*, and *Kraft*. It denotes the power (*Kraft*) of imaging or building (*bilden*) images (*ein* from the Greek *eidōs*, or form). The imagination builds an image or form of something. To read the word *image* through its Greek roots is to uncover a wide semantic range. The word is equivocally the “perception and form,” that is, it points up its phenomenological reality as a perception and its ontological reality as a form.¹⁵² The imagination is the means whereby the self builds or constructs an image that has both ontological and phenomenological reality. It is also the means whereby the self represents an image to itself: it sets it before itself. In this way the imagination makes possible the process and the forms of representation and redoubles the possibility of interpretation: “imagination, as the process of the transference of reality, describes what representation is. Imagination not only interprets representation; representation also interprets imagination.”¹⁵³

Fichte’s insight into the function of the imagination in representation offers a point of continuity with Coleridge’s thinking on the imagination. Coleridge’s definition of the imagination as “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” is similar to Fichte’s notion of the absolute Self that transfers reality to the not-self. Both are ascribed the power to create out of nothing, only Coleridge goes further in his explicit alignment of the imagination with the divine, whereas Fichte seems more comfortable alluding to the connection indirectly by his choice of language and the creative function he gives it.¹⁵⁴ On this

¹⁵² Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 199.

¹⁵³ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 200.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. “First, Absolutely Unconditioned Principle” in Part 1: Fundamental Principles of the Entire Science of Knowledge, *SK*, 93–102; and “Hence the act is not a deception, but gives us truth, and the only possible truth,” *SK*, 202.

point, Coleridge is attempting to show how the imagination is continuous with God, whereas the same may not necessarily be said of Fichte.

Coleridge, like Fichte, considered the semantic range of the German word for imagination, *einbildungskraft*, although Coleridge's grasp of the language led him to a somewhat more stilted interpretation. Coleridge interpreted the word as "making into one" and translated it into a new word as the "esemplastic power." Although different from Fichte's use of *einbildungskraft*, Coleridge's interpretation of the function of the imagination in the mind and world in bringing about a new reality into a new thing is clearly resonant with Fichte's construal of the imagination.

Drive Structures

Thus far I have attempted to show how Coleridge appropriates elements of Fichte's theory of subjectivity into his own. Those appropriations cohere around three basic principles: the activity of the mind, the oppositional structure of self-consciousness, and the central power of the imagination. Many of these Fichtean principles are found in his "Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge." Now I aim to show how these principles combine in the subject's engagement with the external world. To do this I rely on principles drawn from the second part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, "Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical." Fichte's practical philosophy is built upon the elements of subjectivity introduced in his theoretical philosophy. The imagination creates the possibility of a not-self to emerge in oppositional relation to the self. The self-positing activity of the mind presents a new opportunity to interpret the quality of human activity. The self-positing self strives to overcome the inherent oppositional structure of self/not-self to

achieve unity, the reward for which is “complete harmony of man with himself.”¹⁵⁵ Moreover, to maintain internal harmony, the self strives “toward the harmony of all external things with his own necessary concepts of them.”¹⁵⁶ What begins as a consequence of the oppositional structure of the self in the activity of self-consciousness provides Fichte with a means for talking about the direction of external human pursuits in terms of longing and striving.¹⁵⁷ This amounts to a general theory of human drives.

As a transcendental condition of self-consciousness, striving is not an object of thought. In the theoretical philosophy, the self’s striving over-against the not-self is inherent to its coming into being. In order to be a self, the self posits itself as determined by something which it is not, i.e., the not-self. Fichte qualifies this fundamental activity of the mind in its primordial formation as striving mobilized by the hovering creative power of the imagination. Nevertheless, Fichte allows for the subject to become conscious of this striving.¹⁵⁸ The subject is aware of its condition of striving as being a drive state. By the power of the imagination, however, the self represents the drive state to itself and supplies content to that representation. The self’s compulsion to reflect upon its striving, both in its theoretical and practical iterations, is one of the “functions of the soul” that “[takes] place according to necessary laws.”¹⁵⁹ This is also to say that the self’s act

¹⁵⁵ Brezeale, *Thinking Through*, 129, quoting *On the Vocation of Man as Such*. See also Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 218: “The self tries to limit the not-self, but it cannot abolish it. The not-self’s limiting activity is opposed to the self’s limiting activity. Construed in just this way, the self’s original practical constitution is a *striving*. Fichte describes this striving as infinite with respect both to its intention and to its extent. This striving is not in any sense limited internally. Nonetheless, as striving, it is *associated* with limitations. Fichte describes this activity in a sketchy way: it is a cause that is not a specific actual cause, but instead a striving that is not limited internally.”

¹⁵⁶ Brezeale, *Thinking Through*, 129.

¹⁵⁷ An account for how innate structures of consciousness become objects of consciousness exceeds the scope of this dissertation. See Brezeale, *Thinking Through*, 124-156; Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 117-171; Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 216-130

¹⁵⁸ “The drive reveals itself through a specific *feeling*, and so this feeling has to be determined,” *SK*, 266.

¹⁵⁹ *SK*, 256.

of reflection is a necessary law. As it pertains to the apprehension of drive structures, through reflection, the imagination supplies to the self a representation of the quality of its longing and striving. It does so by using the form of determinate objects to represent what is indeterminate. The mind's striving becomes qualified by the object of its strife.

Fichte describes the process whereby the self emerges from its self through its striving against the limitations imposed by the not-self. As an entity posited by the self, the not-self takes on the qualities of opposition. From this basic observation, Fichte goes on to say that the quality of the self's outward striving takes on the qualities of whatever it is opposed to, only in its opposite manifestation, such as subject to object, thesis to antithesis, or self to not-self. Of note, this examination leads Fichte to the point where he observes other philosophers falling back into "transcendent dogmatism."¹⁶⁰ For the self to "break out of its own circle" and become a self, "something must be posited outside the sphere posited by the self, which also pertains to the infinite, and to which, therefore, the drive of the self is also addressed."¹⁶¹ In a way, Fichte indicates that the self's drive structure is always, to a degree, directed towards the infinite divine. As the self's fundamental opposite (perhaps the absolute not-self?), the divine is the entity against which the self strives, and over which it seeks to regain unity. Here again, Hebrew Bible themes of struggling with God and Augustinian themes of self-development in relation to God appear with fruitful resonance. Accordingly, the drive structures are the self's essential and indissoluble restlessness.

One example of how the mind takes on the quality of its striving is in the act of theorizing. Fichte observed that theorizing is implicit to what it means to be a mind. Any account of the mind must also account for the mind's theorizing. Theorizing, then, may be included as

¹⁶⁰ *SK*, 255.

¹⁶¹ *SK*, 257.

one way in which the mind extends itself outward.¹⁶² Therefore, it may be said that the subject is determined and constituted by drives.¹⁶³ This notion provided rich soil for the seeds of the Romantic mind.

Moreover, as a matter of practical concern, the subject as moral agent knows itself to be in the world but not of the world. Striving for unity implies a lack of unity, or opposition to unity. The self, in striving for unity, attempts to overcome the limitations imposed on it by the not-self. It longs to overcome the opposition the world poses to its primordial desire to find unity and rest in overcoming the world's opposition.

Here again the Augustinian notion of the restless mind provides an interesting corollary. Such an interpretation does two things. First, it relates Fichte's construal of the mind's activity as the restlessness of the human condition. To read Fichte in this way is to find that one being in restless contest with God is fundamental to being a self. It also means that one's basic self-acquaintance always points to the absence and opposition posited against it from an infinite ground. More simply, the self is grounded by the infinite outside itself. Second, the imagination is essential to the entire system, and the entire system can only be properly understood by the imagination. In a lengthy and spirited appeal, Fichte breaks from his methodical deduction to address the listener (and reader) directly. He exhorts his audience to grasp (or be grasped by?) the spirit of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and not be captivated by the letters of it alone.

The Science of Knowledge is of a kind that cannot be communicated by the letter merely, but only through the spirit; for its basic ideas must be elicited, in anyone who studies it, by the creative imagination itself; as could not, indeed, be otherwise, in a Science that penetrates back to the ultimate grounds of human knowledge, in that the *whole enterprise of the human spirit issues from the*

¹⁶² Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 18.

¹⁶³ *SK*, 264–270. See also Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 18–19: “Being determined by drives is a form of being acquainted with oneself...we *are selves* by being determined by drives, by longing, by dreaming, and so on.”

*imagination, and the latter cannot be grasped save through the imagination itself.*¹⁶⁴

By reading the activity of the mind in this way—as a continuation of the Augustinian tradition and as an account of the ways in which the mind sees and makes sense of the quality of its striving through the spirit and power of the imagination—it is possible to understand how Fichte moves to a practical philosophy from his theory of subjectivity. A life well-lived takes on the content of the striving. Such a construal of the activity of the mind in its practical application in freedom is richly rewarding grounds for the interpretation of Coleridge’s poetry and thought.

To strive for unity is also to be aware of division. Although the primary principle of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* proposes the subject to be a self-positing unity, Fichte frequently refers to the status of the subject as divided. He thinks of this as one of the most fundamental and salient conditions of humanity. Brezeale describes the perception of the divided self as an awareness of being torn between the “practical certainty of one’s own freedom (or moral vocation)” and “the equally undeniable feeling of constraint attendant upon one’s empirical awareness of oneself as part and parcel of the natural world-order—divided between moral obligation and *la force des choses*—in which all human beings suffer.”¹⁶⁵

The primary distinction between self and not-self manifests in longing, which in turn is qualified by the content of the life’s strife. As the self becomes a subject in moral strife, freedom is achieved over the deterministic order of nature. Brezeale suggests that this awareness carries

¹⁶⁴ SK, 250. My emphasis. Of note, Coleridge shares with Fichte the appeal to spirit as a requirement for proper understanding of philosophy and for the proper execution of philosophy; “it is this power which determines whether or not we philosophize with insight,” SK, 250. Immediately preceding the quotation above, Fichte says that all people have a basic capacity of the imagination, but not all people “have it at their command, to create therewith in a purposeful manner, or if, in a fortunate hour, the required image should visit their minds like a flash of lightning, to seize it, to examine it, and to register it inerasably for any use they wish,” SK, 250.

¹⁶⁵ Brezeale, *Thinking Through*, 133.

the quality of suffering. It is worth noting that this mode of suffering is akin to the condition of homelessness that Pacini identifies as a condition out of which the modern religion of conscience emerges. At home neither in the world of nature nor in the realm of heaven, the subject must make its way in a world not of its own making, and equipped only with tools it provides for itself. Fichte introduces another way of speaking about freedom. According to his scheme, the quality of longing for unity and knowing oneself to be divided suggests a way of being in the world that is simultaneously captive and free. The subject is free in its striving and is captive to its constitutive condition of being self-relating. The self, to be a self, must be in opposition to the not-self. In striving to become itself, it contends against division—division between heart and head, heaven and nature, practical and theoretical reason, subject and object, self and not-self.

Painfully divided between heart and head, Fichte's subject is familiar to the reader of Coleridge. Coleridge frequently engages a notion of subjectivity that perceives itself to be divided. For both Fichte and Coleridge, the question of practical philosophy, and of the status of freedom, concerns how the subject is to realize the freedom of its original unity by overcoming the division that haunts its awareness.

According to Fichte, if one does not recognize oneself as divided, it is not because one is an exception to the human species; rather, it is because one lacks moral education. Rightly instructed, each will encounter himself as being caught in between worlds: theoretical and practical, natural and spiritual, head and heart. Proper moral education is the means whereby one becomes aware of oneself as caught, captive, or divided. Without the beginnings of moral awareness, freedom is impossible. The subject lacking moral education and self-awareness will not know oneself to be a moral agent with the possibility of freedom, and this is what it means to be free.

From the point of view of moral development, under this scheme the immature person is the one who does not know oneself to be divided between two worlds striving for unity. The one for whom the world appears whole and within whom no dualistic antagonism is perceived is not mature. Such a one lacks proper self-understanding. This is evaluated as not good. It is accurate to describe this person as immature, young, uneducated, ignorant, and it is also possible to describe this person as *unmündig*, or immature in the political sense, as Kant famously pronounced in his essay, *What is Enlightenment?*¹⁶⁶

In describing the unfree person as immature, Kant introduced the notion of immaturity as a state of being that precedes thinking for oneself. Such a construal of freedom looks to conscience for its direction, seeing as how it rejects or treats as skeptical any direction given from another authority. For Kant, to think for oneself was most important in matters of religion. Indeed, he says it is necessary “chiefly” on matters of religion. Thus, the one for whom the guidance of the church, state, or any other entity on matters of religion is authoritative is also immature, young, ignorant, unenlightened, unfree, captive. Phrased negatively, to not know oneself as divided is to be captive to the world of necessity or self-deception.

Alternatively, Fichte (and Coleridge after him) leaves room for the reality of self-deception. Although self-deception is possible in his theory of subjectivity, on the matter of doublemindedness, if one does not perceive oneself to be caught between two worlds, it may be because the subject is deceived. This comes from a “willful refusal to be honest with oneself and about oneself. As Fichte ruefully noted, there are always those who would rather think of themselves as ‘a piece of lava on the moon’ than as ‘an I.’”¹⁶⁷ To pursue something other than the unity of the self achieved in freedom is to participate in modes of self-deception. Because a

¹⁶⁶ “Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit.”

¹⁶⁷ Brezeale, *Thinking Through*, 133.

self requires the not-self to become itself, which is a relation that is grounded in the infinite (the divine), any attempt by the self to strive to become itself that does not consider the infinite (the divine) in its striving is fundamentally missing or avoiding that which is required for it to realize its goal. In omitting the divine from its formulations of selfhood and life's strivings, the self engages in a mode of self-deception. Moving further from its source to find itself, the self becomes estranged to itself.¹⁶⁸

To know oneself as torn between worlds and to be divided heart from head is to have the awareness that carries the weight of "suffering". Fichte's language is that of pain: one is "torn" between two worlds, "divided" heart from head, "suffering" from doublemindedness.¹⁶⁹ Ignorance may be bliss, though it be unfree. Freedom, however, is also a realm of suffering.

This freedom emerges from an awareness of unity that must be attained by the self's striving to overcome its divergent drives. The task of philosophy and of the moral agent is to overcome doublemindedness through practical application. Fichte easily moves to religious language to set apart or underscore the existential quality of this human need. Breaking the metaphysical boundary to address God on matters of freedom enacts the original sin which is evident in all humanity through the awareness of captivity between two worlds. One must save oneself through right living guided by practical philosophy.¹⁷⁰

Pacini uses the language of achievement to describe the progress of self-relation in the self-positing activity of self-consciousness.¹⁷¹ Thus, in its intentional striving to become itself,

¹⁶⁸ This notion recalls the language of Augustine in *Confessions*, II.x. (18): "I became to myself a region of destitution."

¹⁶⁹ Brezeale, *Thinking Through*, 133.

¹⁷⁰ See the full quotation from Fichte's August 30, 1795 letter to Jacobi printed in translation in note 49 p.136ff. It is also printed in Brezeale, *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 412.

¹⁷¹ See Pacini, "Life without enigmatic remainder," in *Narcissus*; and "Theories of Imagination and Longing," in Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*.

the self “achieves” increasingly higher and stable modes of self-relation that take on the quality of health and maturity. As the next chapter describes thoroughly, this model of the progressive self-positing activity of the mind is essential to Coleridge’s method of spiritual cultivation.

Coleridge relies on the imagination to relate the activity of the mind to the structures of self-consciousness in the constitution of subjectivity. His early articulation of this construal of imagination was narrowly ascribed to the realm of poetic genius. In evaluating the essence of Wordsworth’s genius, he says “it was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed.”¹⁷² Even in this early construal, Wordsworth’s genius relied upon the power of the imagination to unify opposites, in this case “deep feeling with profound thought.” his instance of the esemplastic power creates something singular and new from the disparate parts of heart and head. Where many perceive distance and discontinuity between the world of sense and the world of thought—of the heart and of the head—the poetic genius sees and knows their inherent unity. The imagination is also the power whereby the poetic genius is able to communicate the unitary reality of heart and head to others less endowed. This insight suggests it is possible to help others to see the world in the same way by illustrating how a mind might think when it is functioning correctly. Although Coleridge eventually gives up the notion that imagination is a power owned exclusively by the rare genius, trading it instead for a more universal notion of conscience, he does not move far from the conviction that the masses require the upbuilding instruction of the few.¹⁷³ *Aids to Reflection* is one such example of Coleridge providing essential tutelage to those unable to tutor themselves.

¹⁷² *BL*, 59.

¹⁷³ This notion of the peculiar access to the creative imagination is similar to Fichte’s referenced above.

Phrased another way, the distinction between heart and head is also the distinction between practical and theoretical reason.¹⁷⁴ However, Coleridge does not engage either one as the lone point of departure. Rather, by beginning with the “heaven descended KNOW THYSELF,” Coleridge emphasizes the task of philosophy to be “neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of BEING altogether.”¹⁷⁵ As antecedent to reason and understanding, Coleridge initiates his philosophy of being from its “primary ground” as “neither merely speculative or merely practical, but both in one.”¹⁷⁶ Coleridge is committed to the view that “all knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject.”¹⁷⁷ This is possible because of the original unity of the subject and object in the absolute subject of spirit: “during the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs.”¹⁷⁸

Coleridge’s two-part definition of imagination in *Biographia Literaria* is insufficient to accomplish the goals he lays out for *Aids to Reflection*. To guide the reader to new depths of spiritual cultivation, Coleridge calls on the conscience to do some of the work he ascribes to the imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. I will illuminate how he does this in the next chapter. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge thinks of the imagination as a power that animates the living soul and that creates new things by its ability to draw out the unity that underlies opposites. Coleridge ascribes the quality of genius to the one who perceives the unity of opposites—subject and object, reason and understanding, practical and theoretical reason—and then can

¹⁷⁴ For this reason Coleridge is profitably interpreted from the point of view of the pantheism controversy. See McFarland, whose magisterial work is the point of departure for many spin-off inquiries into Coleridge’s place in the legacy of the pantheism controversy.

¹⁷⁵ *BL*, 173–174.

¹⁷⁶ *BL*, 174.

¹⁷⁷ *BL*, 174.

¹⁷⁸ *BL*, 174.

communicate them in such a way that others can glimpse that unity for themselves. The move to conscience from imagination allows Coleridge to go beyond the realm of exclusive genius in poetry to the (nearly) universal realm of spiritual cultivation in religion.

Conclusion

Reading Coleridge's late prose writing in light of Fichte's theory of subjectivity yields great reward. Coleridge's adaptations of Fichte's principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre* show up especially well around three themes: the activity of the mind, the structures of self-consciousness, and the function of the imagination in the formation of the subject. These resonances help to illuminate three key trajectories in Coleridge's writings of this period.

First, it illuminates how and in what ways the concept of the self-relating activity of mind sets the stage for subject-subject and subject-world relations that prove essential to Coleridge's larger project in *Aids to Reflection*. As a self-relating activity, the self is already structured to engage the not-self in its efforts to become itself. The imagination is essential to the construal of the object against which the self strives and longs for unity. Coleridge moves quickly through these 'achievements' of the mind in Chapter XII of *Biographia Literaria*, but he begins with the principle of knowledge of God proceeding from self-knowledge: "We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ See Thesis V for the necessity of a third term that unites subject and object; Thesis VI for self-relation as self-consciousness; Thesis VII for implications of the activity of mind as a will; Thesis VIII for the Coleridgean contribution of spirit-object/life-death polarity that gives way to the "process and mystery of production and life"; Thesis IX for the beginning of self-knowledge (by way of the self-relating activity that gives way to self-consciousness) that leads to knowledge of God (and Coleridge's stated objective of a principium cognoscendi). *BL*, 186.

Second, Coleridge's infamous deduction of the imagination (infamous because it is incomplete) may be interpreted as the introduction of the conscience in Coleridge's emerging theory of subjectivity. The imagination's creative power emerges out of the self-relating activity of the mind within the structures of self-consciousness. Coleridge announces that this is the beginning of the imagination. Yet his deduction goes no further, interrupted as it is by the letter from a friend. Shawcross interprets the interruption as Coleridge's break with Schelling.¹⁸⁰ Besides Shawcross, this chapter of Coleridge's has prompted many other critical responses. The conscience emerges in Coleridge's works as the regulative force (and synthesis of the centripetal and centrifugal forces of the mind's natural activity) to guide the subject in the way of rightful orientation as expressed in its choice of drives (or how it directs its longing). As such, it is a quality of Reason that is continuous with the divine. As we will see in *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge introduces doctrine and a notion of Christian faith as the right interpretation of the subject's drive structures. This notion of the Christian faith also constitutes freedom, he says.

Finally, Coleridge's move from the language of imagination to that of conscience indicates a greater shift to the practical emphasis underway in his writings of this period, culminating in the *Aids to Reflection*. Coleridge's interest is less in what makes the poetic genius remarkable and more in what constitutes the human subject for a good and Christian life.

Harmonious self-relation issues from proper self-relation. Proper self-relation emerges from the quality of the mind's striving, and the achievement of the self in relating to itself through relation with the not-self. To achieve healthy self-relation, the self must achieve a

¹⁸⁰ "As to the imagination, it seems at first sight, from the close coincidence of Coleridge's statement with that of Schelling, that he had accepted Schelling's system wholesale and with it his account of that faculty. But the sudden termination of the argument, and the unsatisfactory vagueness of the final summary, in which he does not really commit himself to Schelling's position, suggest that that position was not in fact his own." *BL*, lxix.

healthy relation through strife with the not-self. This is a transcendental principle of consciousness that cannot become an object of consciousness. Even so, Fichte extends the model to a way of speaking about practical philosophy.¹⁸¹ Thus the language of transcendental idealism merges with that of the practical philosophy that stems from it. From this observation it is not hard to see how Fichte's idealism proved so engaging and fruitful for Romantic poets and philosophers with aesthetic sensibilities.¹⁸²

Over the course of many years, Coleridge addresses these relations in several of his writings, most of all in "Essays on the Principles of Method." Published in "The Friend," the "Essays" situate Coleridge well for his project for spiritual cultivation in *Aids to Reflection*. Next I will introduce the "Essays," their scheme and structure, and interpret them as constructive towards a notion of spiritual cultivation as rational self-realization. In the end, Coleridge's method develops in the reader the habit of mind that is capable of discerning freedom as God's self-disclosure, or revelation, in the coordination of the individual will and the divine will. Obedience to God's will as disclosed in consciousness through conscience is authentic freedom. By contrast, Coleridge recognizes a construal of freedom that relies on the individual's ability to choose freely between alternative ends a variant of captivity resulting from overreliance on one or more of the mind's limited faculties of perception acting out of harmony. The project of rational self-realization is to gain awareness of one's inward faculties as comprising a whole, and

¹⁸¹ Fichte "proposed to develop a philosophical theory from the perspective of the living mind that directly reflected the actual life of the mind," Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 16.

¹⁸² See "Theories of Imagination and Longing and their impact on Schlegel, Novalis, and Hölderlin," in Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*. See "Disfiguring the Soul," in Pacini, *Narcissus*, for a model of how to describe the figurative use of language that necessarily accompanies the prospect of describing that which cannot be described. The cycle of positing self and not-self and reflecting back on self from the point of view of not-self comprises a distortion of the self. Yet the self retains a fundamental familiarity with itself prior to its representation in reflection such that the self recognizes itself in reflection as itself and not something else. This says something about an original composition inherent to the subject that is well acquainted with itself.

to act from the whole in pursuit of God's will. This is authentic freedom as it issues from the qualification of consciousness that is faith.

Chapter 3—Rational Self-Realization as Spiritual Cultivation: The “Essays on the Principles of Method”

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn yet still move onward; and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.
—Mariner, lines 263–6, with gloss

“The head will not be disjoined from the heart, nor will speculative truth be alienated from practical wisdom. And vainly without the union of both shall we expect an opening of the inward eye to the glorious vision of that existence which admits of no question out of itself, acknowledges no predicate but the I AM IN THAT I AM.”
—“Essays on the Principles of Method,” 519

Coleridge concludes his Second Section of the 1818 edition of *The Friend* with a spirited declaration of faith as the fundamental principle of life: “there is but one principle, which alone reconciles the man with himself, with others and with the world; which regulates all relations, tempers all passions, and gives power to overcome or support all suffering; and which is not to be shaken by aught earthly, for it belongs not to the earth—namely, the principle of religion, the living and substantial faith ‘which passeth all understanding.’”¹⁸³ The sort of faith Coleridge hopes to inspire in his reader, and the aim of the capstone collection of essays in *The Friend*, issues from the principle that reconciles heart and head, reason with the will. It is a “principle

¹⁸³ *The Friend*, Vol. 1, 523.

deeper than science, more certain than demonstration, and is a “form of BEING.”¹⁸⁴ Faith such as this is the achievement of rational self-realization through a process that Coleridge calls METHOD.

Coleridge proposes that by attending to the method contained in the treatise the subject may arrive at a mode of being or a qualification of consciousness wherein head and heart, or speculative and practical reason, are united. This mode of being is faith, for “what is faith, but the personal realization of the reason by its union with the will?”¹⁸⁵ Read in this way, it is possible to see the “Essays” as providing Coleridge with a propaedeutic for his didactic work of spiritual cultivation in *Aids to Reflection*. The method that Coleridge charts in the “Essays” is based on reflective practices that begin with the subject and progressively expand into the world. Through these practices, the subject becomes rationally oriented to itself in such a way as to grasp the unity of self and world. This insight is achieved through a rigorous method of self-examination that seeks self-understanding. By becoming well-acquainted with oneself, the subject may become well acquainted with the world (or the other).

This third chapter examines the method of spiritual cultivation that underlies *Aids to Reflection* through a review of the “Essays on the Principles of Method” published in the 1818 edition of *The Friend*. The “Essays” show Coleridge charting a method of rational self-realization that is built upon Fichte’s theory of subjectivity as appropriated through *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge continues writing on the themes of the mind’s activity, the unity of the All, and the role of the imagination in constituting the subject, only in the “Essays” Coleridge goes a step further to examine how the subject can grow in maturity, a process he calls “cultivation.” Coleridge’s method is a process of rational self-realization that relies upon insights gained from

¹⁸⁴ *The Friend*, 523–24.

¹⁸⁵ *The Friend*, 432.

Fichte's theory of subjectivity. His method culminates in spiritual cultivation and the qualification of consciousness that is faith, which is the individual capacity to attend to the unity of self and world as it is disclosed in the alignment of the individual will with the divine will.

Instability in the "Essays on Method"

Although essential to the development of Coleridge's religious writings, the "Essays" are not without problems. First, the treatise suffered significant but necessary revision between its first and second publication. The "Essays on the Principle of Method" were originally published as the "Preliminary Treatise on Method" in January 1818 as the General Introduction to the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana*.¹⁸⁶ As was characteristic of Coleridge's relationship with publishers, because he was unable to produce a coherent version of the work in a timely manner, the publisher made significant edits without Coleridge's review or consent. Coleridge was so "bedeviled" with the modifications that he all but disowned his involvement in the work. As a result, Coleridge republished his essays without the editor's modifications in the 1818 edition of *The Friend*.

¹⁸⁶ A thorough exploration of the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* exceeds the scope of this dissertation. It is worth noting the central place Coleridge occupied in the origination of the encyclopedia, not only because of the weight of his reputation, but more because of the direction the project took in its development over the course of its near thirty-year life. Of particular note is the second "revised and corrected" publication of 1849, for it included an introduction in which the system of alphabetical organization is heavily criticized in favor of one that gathered information more closely in alignment with the spirit of the "ancient" understanding of the word "Encyclopedia:" "It was really *Instruction in a cycle*, i.e. the cycle of the seven liberal Arts and Sciences." Under the modified scheme, metaphysics and theology is catalogued under the "Pure Sciences" along with pure mathematics, geometry, calculus, as well as grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Notably, theology enjoyed the status of being a "Real Science" alongside Law, Politics, and Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy, as distinct from the works of "Experimental Philosophy" such as Electricity, Meteorology, Heat, Light, and Chemistry. The project initiated by Coleridge and followed through by his successors leaves no doubt that by 1849 theology was a thorough-going science, practical for both the scholar and the businessman.

Be that as it may, the initial purpose of the work remains imprinted in the treatise. As an encyclopedic project, Coleridge aimed to organize the breadth of human productivity in arts and sciences under the unifying scheme of moral intelligence: “The first pre-conception, or master-thought, on which our plan rests, is the *moral origin and tendency* of all true science; in other words, our great objects are to exhibit the Arts and Sciences in their philosophical harmony; to teach Philosophy in union with Morals; and to sustain Morality by Revealed Religion.”¹⁸⁷

Coleridge’s General Introduction to the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* was to be a monistic system guided by a single interpretive device.

Not satisfied with what became of his concept in the encyclopedia at the hands of his unwanted editors, Coleridge revised and republished his work in another volume. Later the same year, Coleridge modified and collated the “Treatise” differently for the *rifacimento* of *The Friend*.¹⁸⁸ Renamed the “Essays on the Principle of Method,” the writings comprise the larger share of the third of the three-volume November 1818 publication of *The Friend*. Coleridge was convinced that the structures of self-consciousness could also provide the guiding principle for a methodologically monistic system. Coleridge identified in the basic structure of self-consciousness a compelling governing principle that effectively gathered up the varieties of human learning under the principles of human intellectual activity, or what he often termed “human intelligence.” The structures and activity of the mind became the model for organization and method.

All the same, the original General Introduction to the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* strongly influenced later criticism of the “Essays.” This is especially so given that the

¹⁸⁷ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804–1834* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 461.

¹⁸⁸ Alice D. Snyder, “Coleridge and the Encyclopedists,” *Modern Philology* 38, no. 2 (1940): 173–191; J. H. Muirhead, review of *Review of S. T. Coleridge’s Treatise on Method as Published in the “Encyclopaedia Metro-politana,”* by Alice D. Snyder, *Philosophy* 9, no. 36 (1934): 485–486.

Encyclopedias was published in 1849, thirty-one years after *The Friend* (1818) and fifteen years after Coleridge's death. With Coleridge dead and unable to defend himself, the editors and publishers of the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* used Coleridge's name and reputation with broad license. The inauthenticity of Coleridge's signature on the 1849 Introduction is patently obvious. His characteristic voice is all but purged from the publication that bears his name. Still, the volume gained significant attention from critics and scholars of Coleridge, especially those who sought to chart his general influence in the Victorian era.

Second, the "Essays on Method" lacks the rigorous account of terms typical of works attempting to be systematic and comprehensive. Although this is a common criticism of Coleridge's philosophical writings, it is significant here in that it contributes to the general confusion critics encounter in their attempts to make sense and find place for this work in Coleridge's larger *oeuvre*. Of greatest consequence, perhaps, is that its lack of systematicity obscures Coleridge's aim to show the reasonableness of Christian faith at a time when clarity and systematicity were the very hallmarks of what counts as "reasonable." The reader finds Coleridge appropriating principles from other writers without accounting for their provenance or how they square with his use. Because of these difficulties, interpretations of the work vary widely and lack consensus, and Coleridge's stated purpose for the work is obscured.

Third, and finally, the piece lacks a compelling account of conscience on which its success depends. It is evident that Coleridge intends for the conscience to guide and govern the subject's progressive ascent to wisdom, maturity, and religious morality, but he does not fully account for it. He concludes the essays by pointing to the necessity of the will to navigate what logic cannot—namely, morality. Coleridge may have noticed the need for a more robust construal of conscience to guide and regulate the subject along the route of method. Because of

this gap, I look to other places in *The Friend*, the “Essay on Faith” (1820), and selections from *Aids to Reflection* for insight into how Coleridge may have recast the conscience as essential for navigating moral issues. I take up a full evaluation of the status and function of conscience in Coleridge’s method of rational self-realization in the next chapter.

Each of these problems points to a characteristic lack of clarity in the composition that contributes to confusion among his interpreters and obscures Coleridge’s aim, which is to show the reasonableness of the Christian faith, and what the reasonableness of faith means. In the end, although rich with characteristic intellectual musings, the “Essays on the Principles of Method” ultimately falls short as a stand-alone manifesto for rational self-realization. It does, however, provide a helpful rehearsal of principles of self-development that Coleridge mobilizes more fully in *Aids to Reflection*, and when read in combination with others of his works, shows coherence in his thinking on the topic of subjectivity and Christianity.

To read the “Essays” as a bridge to *Aids to Reflection*, and as a way of “thinking with Coleridge,” I begin with a few preliminary considerations about Coleridge’s project at the time of its writing. Because Coleridge’s prose writings are notoriously “tangential” it is helpful to orient oneself to his thinking with a few balancing assumptions.¹⁸⁹

First, Coleridge did not have a mature and stable theory of subjectivity at the time he wrote the “Essays on the Principles of Method.” What I refer to as his theory of subjectivity was constantly being revised. This quality is not peculiar to Coleridge alone. Almost all other Romantic and Idealist theories of subjectivity were undergoing revision; it was an era of explosive intellectual creativity and productivity. Like others during his time, Coleridge’s thinking about the mind and its faculties and subjectivity was provisional. As I read the

¹⁸⁹ See Introduction: “A Note on Writing ‘With’ Coleridge.”

“Essays,” they show Coleridge working out the idea of a progressive method of rational self-realization based on the ideas of mind and subjectivity that he recounts in *Biographia Literaria*, but he does not rigorously attend to any uniformity of thinking over time. Coleridge makes discoveries in the process of writing and freely incorporates new ideas into his project. One such discovery is the centrality of “relation,” in the sense of its standing as a *tertium quid*, in any such examination. Indeed, by prioritizing the place of “relation” in education, discoveries of every kind present new opportunities for relations that previously were impossible.

As I argued in the previous chapter, Coleridge appropriates essential principles from Fichte’s theory of subjectivity into his own. Principally, these show up in themes concerning the activity of the mind, the structures of self-consciousness, and the role of the imagination in the formation of the subject. Coleridge continues these themes in the “Essays on the Principles of Method.”

Coleridge cultivates in his reader a reflective habit of mind that stimulates an ethical and religious mode of being that he sees at risk in British society. In *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge presents a method for spiritual cultivation that incorporates principles introduced in *Biographia Literaria*, illustrated in the “Essay on Faith,” and treated more fully in the “Essays on the Principles of Method.” Thus, to gain entry into *Aids to Reflection* with proper understanding, it is helpful to know how Coleridge worked out his method of rational self-realization in the “Essays on the Principles of Method.”

What is Method?

The “Essays on the Principles of Method,” consist of six essays contained in “Section the Second” of Volume Three of the revised *Friend*. These essays establish the interpretive

framework operative in *Aids to Reflection* and point to the possibilities of its fruitfulness across a range of intellectual endeavors. Functioning as the capstone of *The Friend*, the “Essays” are contained in a section entitled, “On the Grounds of Morals and Religion, and the Discipline of the Mind Requisite for a True Understanding of the Same.”

Method, in Coleridge’s scheme, is the comprehensive nexus of relations whereby the subject ascends, through careful self-examination solicited by reflective practices, to increasingly complex and totalizing apprehensions of self, world, and the divine.¹⁹⁰ As a totalizing endeavor, Coleridge begins and ends with the mind and the structures of self-consciousness: “For be it not forgotten, that this discourse is confined to the evolutions and ordonnance of knowledge, as prescribed by the constitution of the human intellect.”¹⁹¹ His construal of mind and subjectivity relies upon Fichte’s theory of subjectivity. As I argue in this chapter, the human mind and its composition provides Coleridge with the model and means by which the subject can achieve self-knowledge and knowledge of God, and the means by which it can attain a consciousness that perceives the inherent unity and relation of all things. Coleridge’s method is a form of rational self-realization that takes the mind as its model.¹⁹²

With the mind as the point of departure for his theory of rational self-realization, Coleridge builds the “Essays” on the principle of mental activity he casts as the dynamic polarity principle illustrated in the astronomical analogy of *Biographia Literaria*. The principle of the

¹⁹⁰ “The dialectic Intellect by the exertion of its own powers exclusively can lead us to a general affirmation of the Supreme Reality, of an *absolute* Being. But here it stops.” (522 n1) see also 511: “It is the idea of the common centre, of the universal law, by which all power manifests itself in opposite yet interdependent forces...that enlightening inquiry, multiplying experiment, and at once inspiring humility and perseverance will lead him to comprehend gradually and progressively the relation of each to the other, of each to all, and of all to each.” And 458: “RELATIONS of objects are prime *materials* of Method.”

¹⁹¹ *The Friend*, 512.

¹⁹² Cf. *The Friend*, 108: “But what are my metaphysics? Merely the referring of the mind to its own consciousness for truths indispensable to its own happiness!”

active mind may be found throughout Coleridge's metaphysical and religious writing.¹⁹³ From this principle Coleridge claims "that the dialectic Intellect by the exertion of its own powers exclusively can lead us to a general affirmation of the Supreme Reality, of an *absolute* Being."¹⁹⁴ This is to be another expression of Coleridge's conviction that knowledge of God proceeds from the "heaven descended KNOW THYSELF."

Coleridge's Method is a science. It is a "science of sciences" akin to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*—the Science of Knowledge.¹⁹⁵ Whereas Fichte wants to account for all knowledge and wisdom in a single system, Coleridge looks to the active mind and its dialectic mode of relating opposites as the governing principle of his science of method.

The progressive principle of subjectivity, based on the activity of the mind in self-consciousness, develops the subject in such a way that it perceives the relations of things in a new way. He says, "RELATIONS of objects are prime *materials* of Method."¹⁹⁶ Where physical sciences take objects of nature for its prime materials, Coleridge's science of method takes relations of object; the relation itself becomes the *tertium quid*. In so doing, Coleridge's method

¹⁹³ The principle of the active mind, by which I mean Coleridge's adaptation of Fichte's Fact/Act, although implicit in Coleridge's early poems—see "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797) and "Frost at Midnight" (1798)—shows up explicitly in *Biographia Literaria*, for instance: "Let us consider what we do when we leap. We first resist the gravitating power by an act purely voluntary, and then by another act, voluntary in part, we yield to it in order to light on the spot, which we had previously proposed to ourselves. Now let a man watch his mind while he is composing; or, to take a still more common case, while he is trying to recollect a name; and he will find the process completely analogous." *BL*, 85. A person leaping is analogous to the *schweben* or hovering mind in its activity of self-positing, a theme Coleridge builds from Fichte's work on the same.

¹⁹⁴ *The Friend*, 522 n 1.

¹⁹⁵ My interpretation of Coleridge's Science of Method follows closely that of Schlutz. See Alexander M. Schlutz, *Mind's World: Imagination and Subjectivity from Descartes to Romanticism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009). But where Schlutz goes on to examine the shifting function of imagination for subjectivity after Kant for its implications in Coleridge's later political philosophy, I consider Method as rational self-realization and read it as propaedeutic to *Aids to Reflection*.

¹⁹⁶ *The Friend*, 458.

contains within it the science of empirical things, governed as they are by relations of cause and effect, as well as the practical sciences of moral philosophy.

As monistic, one of the goals of the “Essays” is to account for and overcome the dualisms against which Coleridge contends in the categories of heart and head or speculative and practical reason. As is evident in *Biographia Literaria*, *The Friend*, and other writings of the time, Coleridge builds on his claim that a principle of dialectic activity can account for the formation of the subject in the structures of self-consciousness as effectively as it can be useful for interpreting politics, education, and physical sciences. Coleridge’s dynamic polarity principle may fruitfully interpret all forms of knowledge and modes of reasoning.

One example of such an application is in Essay VII of the “Essays on the Principles of Method.” In this essay Coleridge defines his method as a principle of progression: “all Method presupposes A PRINCIPLES OF UNITY WITH PROGRESSION.”¹⁹⁷ He references the progress of electrical sciences over that of magnetic sciences as evidence for the success of the dynamic polarity principle. He finds that electricity and its principles have developed progressively over time in contrast to those of magnetism which have not. He asks why and discovers that the theory that governs electricity is its basic polarity, or “the manifestation of one power by opposite forces,” or “the idea of *two—opposite—forces*.”¹⁹⁸

Not only is the principle evident in electrical sciences; it is also evident elsewhere. He extends this observation into the realm of other sciences: “These are the sole factors of the calculus, alike in all the theories. These give the *law*, and in it the *method*, both of arranging the phaenomena and of substantiating appearances into facts of science.”¹⁹⁹ Coleridge’s method is

¹⁹⁷ *The Friend*, 476, original emphasis.

¹⁹⁸ *The Friend*, 479, 478; original emphasis.

¹⁹⁹ *The Friend*, 478.

monistic and is organized around the dynamic polarity principle he introduces in *Biographia Literaria* as the principle of self-consciousness emerging out of the activity of the mind. The principle applies across all sciences.

Method as Alternative to Popular Mechanical Philosophies

Coleridge situates his treatise as an alternative mode of reasoning to the Mechanical Philosophies that had gained prominence in England since the revolution of 1688. He intends his “Essays on the Principles of Method” to be the “basis of my future philosophical and theological writings, and as the necessary introduction to the same.”²⁰⁰ At the outset of this project, he establishes the thrust of his work to be in contest with the “Mechanical Philosophy, hailed as a kindred revolution in philosophy, and espoused, as a common cause, by the partizans (*sic*) of the revolution in the state.”²⁰¹

Coleridge clarifies the connection between theoretical reason and practical reason by illustrating how mechanical thinking in science and natural philosophy carries over to mechanical thinking in morality and interpersonal relations. Coleridge has political consequences in mind. He briefly summarizes the consequences that beset England after it embraced mechanical philosophy as an achievement won alongside and through the English Revolution. First, it established a “system of natural rights instead of social and hereditary privileges.” Coleridge derided this shift because it “openly stormed or perilously undermined” the “true historical feeling, the feeling of being an historical people, generation linked to generation by ancestral reputation, by tradition, by heraldry.”²⁰² Although this can be read as a Toryist

²⁰⁰ *The Friend*, 446.

²⁰¹ *The Friend*, 446.

²⁰² *The Friend*, 447.

preference for the order provided by tradition, it is better to read it as an appeal to origins in the formation of identity. In this case, Coleridge derides the assimilation of mechanical philosophy into political theory because it compromises English cultural identity, which he sees as growing out of the “historical feeling” of the people, of which ancestry and heraldry are two components. By analogy to individual identity, which is rooted in the self’s creative power of the imagination—which is spirit—community identity is similarly rooted in the community’s “spirit.” Coleridge argues against the assimilation of mechanical thinking into politics because he fears it inadequately represents the English spirit.

The English Revolution issued an alternative mode of reasoning derivative of the mechanical philosophy that inverted or canceled values he understood to be continuous with the English tradition. He saw that mode of reasoning showing up in the subordination (or entire eradication) of the primary human faculties to lesser ones: “Imagination excluded from poesy; and fancy paramount in physics; the eclipse of the ideal by the mere shadow of the sensible—subfiction for supposition. *Plebs pro Senatu Populoque*—the wealth of nations for the well-being of nations, and of man!”²⁰³ Revealing his conservative politics, Coleridge lamented that the prevalence of mechanical philosophy brings with it the elevation of common people and their less sophisticated manner of thinking. Such thinking, Coleridge argues, relies upon the lower faculty of fancy instead of the imagination, and this reliance devalues the achievement of the English people gained over generations of sophisticated thinking in poetry, government, and philosophy.

Not only does Coleridge lament the impact this shift in thinking had on England and her people, but also on America and France. Lambasting the American revolution and its new

²⁰³ “Commons taken for Senate and People” or “The Mob taken for the Parliament and the People,” *The Friend*, 447 and n2 447.

constitution, which gave way to “Despotism! Despotism! Despotism!”; “of presumption and overweening contempt of the ancients in individuals!”; and the “FRENCH REVOLUTION!— Pauperism, revenue laws, government by clubs, committees, societies, reviews, and newspapers”; Coleridge says, “thus it is that nation first sets fire to a neighboring nation; then catches fire and burns backward.”²⁰⁴ All of this, Coleridge argues, flows from the English Revolution and the mechanical philosophy that it made popular among the English people.

To address this, Coleridge recommends reeducating the population, or better, reestablishing the existence and influence of an educated class of people. He says, “Statesmen should know that a learned class is an essential element of a state—at least of a Christian state.”²⁰⁵ This is distinct from an educated populace as a whole, against which he argues, “You begin with the attempt to *popularize* learning and philosophy; but you will end in the *plebification* of knowledge.”²⁰⁶ Contrary to such public education, Coleridge states that “A true philosophy in the learned class is essential to a true religious feeling in all classes.”²⁰⁷ To conclude, he says religion “is and ever has been the moral centre of gravity in Christendom, to which all other things must and will accommodate themselves.”²⁰⁸

The “Essays” point back to the moral center of the nation that Coleridge sees as deficient. His work aims to rectify that by showing how all elements of the nation’s thinking and being are related. The nation’s proclivity for empiricist philosophy and natural science influences its thinking on natural rights and citizenship, which in turn casts a shadow on the nation’s history, traditions, and culture, and with it, its sense of direction and purpose for the future. This mode of

²⁰⁴ *The Friend*, 447.

²⁰⁵ *The Friend*, 447.

²⁰⁶ *The Friend*, 447.

²⁰⁷ *The Friend*, 447.

²⁰⁸ *The Friend*, 447.

rationality will not do. To achieve the full integration of human intelligence and to overcome the oppositional dichotomies of faith and experience, Coleridge proposes a different manner of thinking that perceives the antecedent unity of all things.

Although the opening remarks to the “Essays” read like a hoary laundry list of complaints about the state of the nation, through it Coleridge intends to illuminate how a nation’s thinking and philosophical commitments influence culture, conceptions of history, and visions of a people’s destiny. He warns that modes of rationality that may prove useful in one sphere of application can prove detrimental in others. Although the mechanical philosophies show success in the realm of natural science, they undermine the essence of the nation when adopted into practical or theological frameworks. Coleridge insists that there is another ground for all thinking and being that is antecedent both to the practical and theoretical realms of philosophy.

As antecedent to practical and theoretical philosophy, Coleridge’s method purports to contain the “full exposition of a principle which is the condition of all intellectual progress.”²⁰⁹ Through this exposition, Coleridge works towards what he hopes to be a monistic system capable of accounting for the breadth of human knowledge. Coleridge is promoting a mode of rationality that he thinks undergirds all science and that also leads to faith:

And what purpose of *philosophy* can this acquiescence answer? A gracious purpose, a most valuable end: if it prevent the energies of philosophy from being idly wasted, by removing the opposition without confounding the distinction between philosophy and faith.²¹⁰

Coleridge’s goal is for the reader to think connectedly about faith and reason.

²⁰⁹ *The Friend*, 446.

²¹⁰ *The Friend*, 519.

Method, Religion, and Faith

Coleridge's monistic method, based on the principle of the dialectic activity of the mind in consciousness, requires an absolute for its highest principle in order to avoid self-referential solipsism. This is how Coleridge brings the comprehensive science of sciences under the banner of religion:

Religion therefore is the ultimate aim of philosophy, in consequence of which philosophy itself becomes the supplement of the sciences, both as the convergence of all to the common end, namely, wisdom; and as supplying the copula, which modified in each in the comprehension of its parts to one whole, is in its principles common to all, as integral parts of one system. And this is METHOD, itself a distinct science, the immediate offspring of philosophy, and the link or mordant by which philosophy becomes scientific and the sciences philosophical.²¹¹

In this way Coleridge moves from principles of subjectivity to an all-encompassing "science of method" whose foundation is the structures of self-consciousness and whose principle of progression is the capacity of the mind to arrive at religion.

To attain this point of view, which Coleridge's science of method ultimately endorses, the individual must realize its access to divine Reason. As Schlutz interprets, "it demands of the philosopher an act of faith."²¹² Faith of this sort, however, is the achievement of the method as rational self-realization as much as it is a requirement of its coherence. Faith enables the subject to go beyond the admissible boundaries of Kant's critical philosophy and find the divine reason to be continuous with the subject's Reason; and faith is what the subject achieves by pursuing Coleridge's method of rational self-realization.²¹³

²¹¹ *The Friend*, 463. Cited in Schlutz, *Mind's World*, 223.

²¹² Schlutz, *Mind's World*, 222.

²¹³ Not only does Coleridge exceed the boundaries of Kant's critical philosophy, he requires it. See Schlutz, *Mind's World*, 216–30.

This self-development is not solely a matter of perception, although the subject's perception is a central feature of what Coleridge aspires to influence. Nor is this self-development merely a collection of knowledge, although it involves a high degree of self-knowledge. The ignorant are not likely to attain it. Nor is it a matter purely of education, although it is a quality that grows in the manner of one being educated. No: the self-development that Coleridge charts in the "Essays on Method" is a form of rational self-realization that results in faith.

Faith, for Coleridge, is the qualification of consciousness and mode of reasoning that emerges from the unity of speculative and practical reason in purposeful (willful) activity, grounded in conscience. Coleridge alternatively refers to these two modes of reason as "heart" and "head."²¹⁴ Expressed formulaically, faith might look like this:

$$\frac{\text{Faith} = \text{Heart} + \text{Head} + \text{Will}}{\text{Conscience}}$$

—where Imagination is represented by the creative power of the mathematical formula and Conscience is the foundation of it all. The activity of the mind animates the formula so that faith is never a dead or static product churned out by mathematical determination, but is always a new creation in the living moment as the subject pursues a life well-lived and guided by conscience.²¹⁵ As an achievement, it is the product of willful self-realization, a process similar to education.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ "The head will not be disjoined from the heart, nor will speculative truth be alienated from practical wisdom," *The Friend*, 519.

²¹⁵ Depicting faith in this way shows its dependence upon conscience for its grounds. Chapter 4 argues that the conscience, as empty of content of itself, takes on the quality of the object for which it leads the subject in longing. As the longing of the mind takes the quality of the object of its longing into itself (see Chapter 2), the self becomes something of the object of its longing. As freedom is the status of living in conscience, freedom by this account is positively construed.

²¹⁶ Such a formula might suggest that faith is the product of education, catechism, doctrinal orthodoxy, and pious actions.

The “Essays” show Coleridge applying principles from his earlier theory of subjectivity found in *Biographia Literaria* to the realm of religion and religious discourse. Coleridge needed the subject to refer to something other than itself to avoid solipsism or pantheism. To do this, Coleridge locates the “inward eye” of the conscience as the grounds for self-consciousness and as continuous with the divine.²¹⁷ Coleridge relies upon the conscience and the self-conscious activities of the subject to direct its attention purposefully to the relation of all things.

In this way, conscience follows imagination. Whereas the imagination is the power of mind to make into one (*einbilden*), and whereas through poetic expression the imagination assists others to see the unity of the All, Coleridge now looks to the conscience to guide the subject to a mode of attention that grasps a unified world. Coleridge is reminiscent of Kant on this point: the unity of the mind implies the unity of the world. Only in Coleridge’s terms the conscience, which shares continuity with the divine, guides the subject to see in a new way that discovers unity in and relation of all. This way of seeing is called faith.

Coleridge’s final aim is to cultivate in his reader the ability to see self, other, and the world with the vision of one whose heart is unified with the head. This mode of seeing, which is also a qualification of consciousness and a mode of attention, begins neither with the fideisms of doctrinal orthodoxy nor with the precepts of scientific rationalism. Rather, it begins with a construal of subjectivity that relies upon central principles of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, especially with regard to the activity of the mind, the structures of self-consciousness, and the role of the imagination to create a new reality.

²¹⁷ *The Friend*, 519.

Rational Self-realization and Education

Coleridge begins the essays with an account of the relation between education and culture. He distinguishes between two sorts of men: those who are educated and those who are not. He observes the differences in how these two types of men perceive the world and shape their language to tell about it. He argues that language provides the window to the mind and soul, for in the selection of words and structure of grammar meaning is formed and communicated inter-subjectively. How one intends to impart meaning to another implies something of the structure, activity, and maturity of that person. Coleridge moves freely between analogies of language in literary criticism, leaning most heavily upon examples from thinkers such as Plato, Bacon, and Shakespeare, and topics such as political theory in discourse on the difference of nations according to the minds of the people resident there, and physical sciences generally. The reader comes away seeing the connectedness (the *relation*) of all things: as it is in language and literature, so it is in science, philosophy, statecraft, and religion.

For example, Coleridge points to Plato and Shakespeare as exemplifying method in their works. Plato, the “poetic philosopher,” and Shakespeare, the “philosophic poet,” both “establish the sources...evolve the principles, and exemplify the art of METHOD.”²¹⁸ Coleridge observes in each “that the EDUCATION of the intellect, by awakening the principle and *method* of self-development, was [the writer’s] proposed object, not any specific information that can be *conveyed into it* from without.”²¹⁹ In contrast to a construal of education that is defined by the acquisition of information, Coleridge argues that it is “not to assist in storing the passive mind with the various sorts of knowledge most in request, as if the human soul were a mere repository

²¹⁸ *The Friend*, 472.

²¹⁹ *The Friend*, 473.

or banqueting-room.”²²⁰ Without the dynamic polarity principle, and its concomitant method of rational self-realization, the mind would be a “banqueting-room” full of dead information. This is not education as Coleridge, following Plato and Shakespeare, would have it. Education, rightly understood, entails “awakening the principle and *method* of self-development.”²²¹

Even as there is similarity in relation across subjects and topics of inquiry, so too there is difference. Coleridge finds difference not in subjects or topics, but in degrees of competence or maturity, which he interprets as a difference of culture. The cultured person is capable of perceiving meaning beyond what is merely given in experience. Thus, although all subjects can speak of the same topics (assuming a modicum of intellectual capability), the difference between an ignorant person and a well-educated person is measured by the ability to perceive unity and purpose in any given experience or topic. This ability denotes that the educated person has a “cultivated mind,” whereas the ignorant person’s mind is uncultivated. The potential for cultivation may be there, although it is not a universal quality: not all persons are capable of obtaining cultivation.²²² For the purposes of his essays, Coleridge first wants to distinguish between the ignorant and the well-educated as one of culture as demonstrated in the ability of the educated mind to participate in the fashioning of meaning beyond that which is given in causality or experience.

The ignorant man, he says, is capable only of repeating what he experienced. “For the absence of Method, which characterizes the uneducated, is occasioned by a habitual submission of the understanding to mere events and images as such, and independent of any power in the

²²⁰ *The Friend*, 473.

²²¹ *The Friend*, 473, original emphasis.

²²² Coleridge expands on the notion of ‘person’ in Section the First, Essay iv on Rousseau’s theory of government and economics: “Every man is born with the faculty of Reason; and whatever is without it, be the shape what it may, is not a man or a PERSON, but a THING,” *The Friend* 189.

mind to classify or appropriate them. The general accompaniments of time and place are the only relations which persons of this class appear to regard in their statements...this constitutes *their* leading feature.”²²³ Absent the “power of mind to classify or appropriate” experiences in any way other than how they are given, the ignorant man can do nothing more than retell the experience sequentially and chronologically. The only relation he can make between events in experience is told in connecting words such as “*and then,*” “*and so,*” or “*and there.*”²²⁴ The uneducated lack the ability to synthesize a larger meaning or purpose to events. They only retell events as they happened, using simple connecting phrases.

The educated man, on the other hand, anticipates a larger meaning in his experiences and synthesizes his telling with a purpose: “It is the unpremeditated and evidently habitual *arrangement* of his words, grounded on the habit of foreseeing, in each integral part, or (more plainly) in every sentence, the whole that he then intends to communicate. However irregular and desultory his talk, there is *method* in the fragments.”²²⁵ The educated man demonstrates the ‘power of mind’ to fashion a whole out of given parts, for he anticipates a relation that is not given in experience. The purposeful assembly of language indicates a purpose the mind imposes on the experience. A well-cultivated reason is responsible for anticipating the whole, and the mind may be said to give to the parts a relation of its own. “METHOD, therefore, becomes natural to the mind which has been accustomed to contemplate not *things* only, or for their own sake alone, but likewise and chiefly the *relations* of things, either their relations to each other, or to the observer, or to the state and apprehension of the hearers.”²²⁶ The educated man sees purpose in the telling, the ignorant man receives only what is given and cannot see relation of

²²³ *The Friend*, 451.

²²⁴ *The Friend*, 449.

²²⁵ *The Friend*, 449.

²²⁶ *The Friend*, 451.

events—or words for that matter—beyond how they appeared to him in experience (space and time).

Whether or not method is evident in a person’s thinking or in a work of literature, art, philosophy, or any intellectual endeavor, depends upon the evidence of the progressive principle in the work. Coleridge wrote, “For Method implies as *progressive transition*, and it is the meaning of the word in the original language. The Greek Methodos, is literally *a way, or path of Transit*.”²²⁷ And, “all Method supposes A PRINCIPLE OF UNITY WITH PROGRESSION; in other words, a progressive transition without breach of continuity.”²²⁸ Without evidence of progress in relation, or purposive direction, the relation remains at the level of the understanding alone, “a mere dead arrangement” of events, information, or words and sentences.²²⁹

Coleridge believed deeply in the inseparable relation of thinking and language: how one assembles language depends upon, and reveals something of, how one thinks. He illustrates this in the “Essays on the Principles of Method” by answering a question he poses at the outset of Essay IV: “What is that which first strikes us, and strikes us at once, in a man of education?”²³⁰ It is the individual’s use of imagination or fancy in the formation of his thoughts. That is, the man of education assembles his thoughts according to a foreseen or anticipated principle visible through the power of imagination, whereas the uneducated man simply describes his thoughts according to memory and the assembly of sense perceptions according to the work of the fancy. Of the educated man Coleridge says, “It is the unpremeditated and evidently habitual *arrangement* of his words, grounded on the habit of foreseeing, in each integral part, or (more

²²⁷ *The Friend*, 457.

²²⁸ *The Friend*, 476.

²²⁹ *The Friend*, 457.

²³⁰ *The Friend*, 448.

plainly) in every sentence, the whole that he then intends to communicate.”²³¹ The imagination is the power of mind behind this capacity to reflect and create a whole out of disparate parts according to a principle or idea. The educated man’s speech is qualified by his ability to relate thoughts and experiences to ideas or principles of reason. On the other hand, as evident in the speech of the ignorant man, the fancy is the capacity of mind that assembles and rearranges impressions according to time and space. The ignorant man’s speech is qualified by his descriptions of events, unrelated to principle or ideas, connected merely by sequence of occurrence. Of the ignorant man, Coleridge says, “his memory alone is called into action...the objects and events recur in the narration in the same order, and with the same accompaniments, however accidental or impertinent, as they had first occurred.”²³² The ignorant man’s speech is further recognizable by the “necessity of taking breath, the efforts of recollection, and the abrupt rectification of its failures,” and the overreliance upon connecting words “*and then*,” “*and there*,” “*and so*” to construct a story. This describes Coleridge’s commitment to the view that one’s use of language reveals the quality of one’s thinking.

This then implies another deeper relation antecedent to the formation of language. The presence of method requires a certain activity of mind fueled by a power of mind resident in all but cultivated in the few. Method in thinking is a universal potential but actualized and practiced only in a few, specifically in those who are educated and cultured, as exemplified in the poet. Coleridge describes the life lived in faith according to the achievement of method, “this alone belongs to and speaks intelligibly to all alike, the learned and the ignorant, if but the *heart* listens. For alike present in all, it may be awakened, but it cannot be given.”²³³ Once awakened,

²³¹ *The Friend*, 449.

²³² *The Friend*, 449.

²³³ *The Friend*, 524.

however, “method in thinking” becomes embodied through habit. The goal of cultivating method in one’s thinking is to become so conformed to its ways that life exhibits the virtuous habit of character as second nature.

Coleridge identifies an activity of mind that can be improved through education. That activity, I argue, grows directly out of the dynamic principle of mind introduced in *Biographia Literaria*. That is, the complimentary and counteracting forces of mind—the fundamental inward and outward vacillation of mind, the centripetal and centrifugal forces—may produce a middle point, or something of a harmonic mean between the two poles, and this mean is imagination. Later, in the “Essay on Faith,” the mediating power of mind is named the conscience. From the mediating power emerges “method.” It is the appearance of a progressive, unifying principle that is not present in the fragment but is visible through the process of mind stimulating reflection: “Method, therefore, must result from the due mean or balance between our passive impressions and the mind’s own re-action on the same.”²³⁴ The astronomical analogy here provides the basis of the *Science of Method*, and in turn serves not only as a statement of the mind’s structure, but also as the model and form of right thinking (mature, cultured, and educated thinking).

Accordingly, as method issues from the middle point between the active and passive activity of mind, between what the mind receives through experience and what it grasps by its own *origination*, Coleridge presents a dialectic which yields different results depending on the measure of activity the mind depends upon. Thus, it is possible to be over-educated in one direction even as it is possible to be undereducated in the other.

The mind that relies too heavily on experience, or on the passive activity of mind (in this case what Coleridge refers to as the ignorant mind), is evident in its lack of generalization: “the

²³⁴ *The Friend*, 453.

uneducated and unreflecting talker overlooks *all* mental relations, both logical and psychological; and consequently precludes all Method, that is not purely accidental.”²³⁵

Although the ignorant mind shares in the basic and fundamental activity of mind illustrated in the astronomical analogy, Coleridge saw it lean too heavily on what is given, on the passive or receptive aspect of mind, stunting the reflective capacity that makes generalization beyond cause and effect possible. “Hence, the nearer the things and incidents in time and place, the more distant, disjointed, and impertinent to each other, and to any common purpose, will they appear in his narration: and this from the want of a *staple*, or *starting-post*, in the narrator himself; from the absence of the *leading Thought*, which, borrowing a phrase from the nomenclature of legislation, we may not inaptly call the INITIATIVE.”²³⁶ Such a one who demonstrates “sterility of mind...wanting the spring and impulse to mental action, is wholly destructive of Method itself.”²³⁷ Ignorance or overreliance on the passive aspect of mind does not merely degrade method, it destroys it entirely.

On the other end of the dialectic is the mind that tends in excess, or what Coleridge refers to as the “exuberance of mind” producing an excess of generalization. The one who overindulges in generalization may be highly educated, and Coleridge uses Hamlet as an illustration of a mind that interfered with method “by the surplus of its own activity...His discourse appears like soliloquy intermixed with dialogue.”²³⁸ Whereas a mind over-reliant on the passive activity of mind will confuse “things and incidents in time and place” because of a lack of mental “initiative” that would distinguish them into an order or form coherent to a larger purpose, the exuberant mind will “attend too exclusively to the relations which the past or

²³⁵ *The Friend*, 454.

²³⁶ *The Friend*, 454ff.

²³⁷ *The Friend*, 454.

²³⁸ *The Friend*, 454.

passing events and objects bear to general truth, and the moods of his own Thought,” and so will overlook the necessity of considering the interlocutor to ensure understanding.²³⁹ Thus, according to Coleridge’s rubric, for one to be successful in method and in education, one must find the mean between an exuberant and a sterile mind.

As it is for the individual, so it is with society. Attending to method improves not only the individual, but also society. Coleridge draws an idiosyncratic distinction between civilization and cultivation, or between material and moral progress. Without fully comprehending that “a HUNGRING AND THIRSTING AFTER TRUTH” is “the appropriate end of our intelligential, and its point of union with, our moral nature,” society will never understand the distinction between cultivation and civilization and will be doomed to become over-civilized.²⁴⁰ Coleridge laments that individuals will become “perilously over-civilized, and most pitiably under-cultivated” all from “inattention to the method.”²⁴¹ To become civilized by education alone is insufficient if one is not also cultivated through inward reflection. Culture is the goal of progress.²⁴²

The question remains: How does one come by a mind that exhibits Method? If education alone may lead either to gross generalizations or to rigid and mechanical captivity, what is missing from education, or what else must one do to attain the qualification of consciousness that

²³⁹ *The Friend*, 454.

²⁴⁰ “Never can society comprehend fully, and in its whole practical extent, the permanent distinction, and the occasional contrast, between cultivation and civilization; never can it attain to a due insight into the momentous fact, fearfully as it has been, and even now is exemplified in a neighbor country, that a nation can never be a too cultivated, but may easily become an overcivilized, race.” *The Friend*, 494. For a more thorough examination of the distinction between civilization and cultivation, see Ben Knights, *The Idea of the Clerisy in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

²⁴¹ *The Friend*, 500.

²⁴² Cf. Kant *Critique of Judgment* section 83, where culture is the second ultimate end of nature as a teleological system.

Method begets? The answer to these questions is found in a close consideration of Coleridge's construal of conscience, which is examined in the next chapter.

Conclusion

From this assessment it is possible to say that where Coleridge was giving an account of the subject in *Biographia Literaria* by relying on principles of Fichte's theory of subjectivity, similarly he is giving an account of the All in *The Friend*.

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge examined the faculties and function of the mind to account, somewhat, for how the subject comes to be and know itself as the subject. We saw that he relies upon insights gained from Fichte's idealism, especially with regard to themes of the activity of the mind, the structures of self-consciousness, and the role of the imagination in constituting the subject. The imagination overcomes the subject/object distinction to constitute the self. To do this, the imagination (and the faculties of mind peculiar to self-consciousness) requires a ground or foundation. Moreover, to avoid either solipsism or pantheism, the grounds must be something other than itself. Coleridge identifies the grounds of the self-constituting activity of the imagination as the Reason. He variously refers to Reason as the conscience, the I AM, or the will.

In *The Friend*, especially in the capstone treatise "Essays on the Principles of Method," we see Coleridge apply a similar mode of thinking to the realm of knowledge in general. In this way his ambition to develop a "science of sciences" is akin to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. The "Science of Method" he develops in the "Essays" is intended to account for the totality of human rationality as a unified endeavor that finds head and heart, speculative and practical reason, nature and faith as systems within a unified larger system, "as harmonious parts of one great

complex miracle.”²⁴³ To “see” the unity of the whole in this way requires the subject to attain a point of view, or a mode of being, which I call a qualification of consciousness, that is cultivated by attending to the teleological principle of faith. Being progressive, the principle of faith emerges from the activity of the mind that, as we saw in the previous chapter, overcomes the subject/object distinction in the constitution of the self. In this case, the principle of the active mind, manifest in the will, extends itself outward to attain the qualification of consciousness in faith that perceives the unity of the All, which is “the divine idea which we have learnt to contemplate as the final cause of all creation, and the centre in which all its lines converge,” the “one great complex miracle,” the “I AM IN THAT I AM!”²⁴⁴

Phrased somewhat differently, Coleridge is also saying that to behold the world as a unity when otherwise its parts show themselves to be opposites to one another, is to behold a miracle.²⁴⁵ Such a “beholding” requires the vision of faith.²⁴⁶ Although the prevailing

²⁴³ *The Friend*, 519. See also 517 for a prosaic exposition of the relation of the parts to the whole: “If then in all inferior things from the grass on the house top to the giant tree of the forest, to the eagle which builds in its summit, and the elephant which browses on its branches, we behold—first, a subjection to universal laws by which each thing belongs to the Whole, as interpenetrated by the powers of the Whole; and secondly, the intervention of particular laws by which the universal laws are suspended or tempered for the weal and sustenance of each particular class, and by which each species, and each individual species, becomes a system in and for itself, a world of its own—if we behold this economy everywhere in the irrational creature, shall we not hold it probable that a similar temperament of universal and general laws by an adequate intervention of appropriate agency, will have been effected for the permanent interest of the creature destined to move progressively towards that divine idea which we have learnt to contemplate as the final cause of all creation, and the centre in which all its lines converge?”

²⁴⁴ *The Friend*, 517, 519.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *The Friend*, 516: “Look around you and you behold everywhere an adaptation of means to ends. Meditate on the nature of a Being whose ideas are creative, and consequently more real, more substantial than the things that, at the height of their *creaturely* state, are but their dim reflexes: and the intuitive conviction will arise that in such a Being there could exist no motive to the creation of a machine for its own sake; that, therefore, the material world must have been made for the sake of man, at once the high-priest and representative of the Creator, as far as he partakes of that reason in which the essences of all things co-exist in all their distinctions yet as one and indivisible. But I speak of man in his idea, and as subsumed in the divine humanity, in whom alone God loved the world.”

²⁴⁶ Beholding the world as a unity is also the outcome of the function of reason that grasps the reality of the supersensuous.

mechanico-corpuscular philosophies of his day would refuse the possibility of the miraculous in favor of the experiences given through nature, Coleridge turns on its head what counts as evidence. Instead of looking to the world for proof of the reality in which it participates, Coleridge looks to Reason as the seat of self-consciousness, the “mother of conscience,” and the “life-ebullient stream.”²⁴⁷ Coleridge’s “Essays on the Principles of Method” outlines how it is possible for a subject to attain self-realization by attending to the relations of the parts to the whole. The process of attention simultaneously cultivates in the subject the power of vision, which is also a qualification of consciousness, that sees the unity of the All in faith. According to this scheme, it is religion that is the “ultimate aim of philosophy” and the “copula” of science and philosophy.²⁴⁸

In the formation of the individual subject and in the apprehension of the unity of the All in faith, the imagination plays a central role. As the power of the human intellect is also an echo of the creative power of the divine, the imagination is the means whereby the subject extends beyond itself to conceive of something other than itself (in Fichtean terms, the absolute self produces the not-self), and whereby it renders comprehensible that which is otherwise beyond human comprehension. Imagination is the power of representation that is also the power of mediation. By the power of the imagination, the subject can do what otherwise the human ought not to be able to do if the human were entirely a product of mechanical nature. If the human were totally nature-bound and determined, there would be no way for the subject to attain self-hood in self-consciousness.²⁴⁹ The human would remain a mere brute: *scious* but not *conscious*. This is

²⁴⁷ *The Friend*, 519.

²⁴⁸ *The Friend*, 463.

²⁴⁹ Cf. “Essay on Faith”: “It appears then, that even the very first step, that the Initiative, of this Process, the becoming conscious of a Conscience, partakes of the nature of an *Act*. It is an *Act*, in and by which we take upon ourselves an allegiance: & consequently, the obligation of *Fealty*. And this Fealty or Fidelity implying the power of being unfaithful is the first and fundamental sense of Faith. It is likewise the

an element of the insight Coleridge hopes to impart to his reader through attending to the method of the will that he sees culminating in faith.

Method is also the natural outgrowth of the active mind and gives way to progress. It is the process whereby the subject comes to discover the relation of heart, head, and will in the pursuit of a life of faith. The progressive principle of subjectivity proceeds from the reflective activity of mind that finds a purposeful whole amidst parts, ultimately producing a renewed vision and a cultivated spirit. As purposeful, the life of faith is a pursuit. As an achievement of the pursuit, the cultivated spirit is the result of the method. The final aim of the whole to which the progress aspires is the reconciliation of the practical reason with the theoretical reason in the moment of one's willing, as guided and illuminated by the "inward eye" of conscience.

The concluding paragraph of *Biographia Literaria* shows Coleridge confronting the boundaries of language and raising the question of the status of reason as one that presents opportunities for reinterpretation for matters of faith:

This has been my Object, and this alone can be my Defence—and O! that with this my personal as well as my LITERARY LIFE might conclude ! the unquenched desire I mean, not without the consciousness of having earnestly endeavored, to kindle young minds, and to guard them against the temptations of Scorners, by showing that the Scheme of Christianity, as taught in the Liturgy and Homilies of our Church, though not discoverable by human Reason, is yet in accordance with it; that link follows link by necessary consequence; that Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and that Faith is then but its continuation.²⁵⁰

Coleridge claims that his entire literary life has been devoted to discovering the accord between reason and faith. Here he describes faith as the continuation of reason after reason has reached its

commencement of Experience, and the condition of all other *experience*—in other words, *Conscience* must in this, its simplest form, be supposed in order to *Consciousness*, i.e. to human Consciousness. Brutes may be and are *scious*; but those Beings only who have an *I*, *scire* possunt hoc vel illud una *cum* se ipsis. *Conscire*=*scire* aliquid *cum me*; or to know something in its relation to myself, and in the act of knowing myself as acted on by that something," *Shorter Works and Fragments II*, 836–837.

²⁵⁰ *BL*, 218.

limits. As we will see in *Aids to Reflection*, the transformation of vision achieved through the Method he outlines in the “Essays on the Principles of Method” leads the subject to a qualification of consciousness wherein the Christian faith is known to be the perfection of human reason.

Chapter 4 - *Aids to Reflection*: The Christian Faith is the Perfection of Human Intelligence

Though the heart once gone from God turns continually further away from Him, and moves not towards Him till it be renewed, yet, even in that wandering, it retains that natural relation to God, as its centre, that it hath no true rest elsewhere, nor can by any means find it. It is made for Him, and is therefore still restless till it meet with Him.

—From Aphorism XLVII, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms, Aids to Reflection*²⁵¹

In the first essay of the second section of the 1818 edition of *The Friend*, Coleridge recounts a conversation he had with a neighbor. Coleridge asked “an old man of humble estate,” who was a life-long iron miner, about the significance of his trade, saying that it must be a “pleasant thought, that in providing the scythe and the sword you are virtually reaping the harvest and protecting the harvest-man.” The miner, displaying the folksy truth-telling status of the common person made famous by Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, responds with a telling insight. The ore, when it is mined, is not yet fashioned for either good or evil, although it maintains the potential for both:

Ah...out of all earthly things there come both good and evil—the good through God, and the evil from the evil heart. From the look and weight of the ore I learned to make a near guess, how much iron it would yield; but neither its heft, nor its hues, nor its breakage would prophesy to me whether it was to become a thievish pick-lock, a murderer’s dirk, a slave’s collar, or the woodman’s axe, the feeding ploughshare, the defender’s sword, or the mechanic’s tool.²⁵²

Much as the iron, as a product of the earth, must undergo purposeful transformation at the hands of a smith, so too must the young mind undergo purposeful transformation.

²⁵¹ AR, 128.

²⁵² *The Friend*, 131.

With *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge, the master teacher, intends to take into his workshop the raw iron ore of a young man and develop it into something good. Whether or not the reader becomes “the feeding ploughshare” or the “murderer’s dirk” depends upon the reader’s capacity to cultivate a “*habit* of reflection” and to think “connectedly.”²⁵³ The most important connection Coleridge wants his reader to see is the relation of faith and reason. If that relation is considered correctly, the subject experiences goodness and freedom.

Guided by Coleridge’s collection of aphorisms, the reader performs the cultivating work of reflection inwardly, through the reflective capacity of the reader’s mind with the creative activity of the imagination. The volume’s aphoristic structure combined with progressive content stimulate the activity of the mind within the structures of self-consciousness for the sake of the subject’s intellectual cultivation. Given Coleridge’s commitment to thinking “connectedly” about faith and reason, intellectual cultivation is also spiritual cultivation.

For the transformation to be possible and not merely a solipsistic exercise of introspection, Coleridge locates the divine within the realm of subjective interiority. The person, as an “intelligential soul...is itself the nature of truth.”²⁵⁴ To be transformed, the person must imbibe the truth of which it is already a part. It is not enough for the subject to reflect on merely anything. The content of the subject’s reflection—in *Aids to Reflection*, the content of the aphorisms—drives the subject’s progress. From prudence and morality to spiritual religion, the content of the aphorisms collected in *Aids to Reflection* is organized to carry the reading subject higher in its reflective capacity to matters of spiritual concern.

What is the outcome of Coleridge’s tutelage? At multiple points in *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge makes the bold and somewhat puzzling claim that “The Christian Faith is the

²⁵³ *AR*, 10; 3.

²⁵⁴ *The Friend*, 131.

Perfection of Human Intelligence.”²⁵⁵ By attending to Coleridge’s method as exhibited in *Aids to Reflection*, the reader will come to the insight that faith and reason are one. This chapter seeks to understand what Coleridge means by this assertion and how he structures *Aids to Reflection* to elicit the same conviction from his reader.

From Disorientation to Orientation

I read *Aids to Reflection* as Coleridge’s most comprehensive attempt to counter the prevailing British sentiment that reason is opposed to faith. Such an opposition offended Coleridge’s sensibilities and went against his deepest intuitions concerning human subjectivity, creativity, community, and religion. To read *Aids to Reflection* in this way is to discover Coleridge’s crafty and indirect approach to solving the problems of the faith-reason antagonism. One may see Coleridge navigating a way through the confusion. The end to which he aspired was proper morality, faith, and religion. Coleridge solves the faith and reason antagonism by dissolving it: faith and reason are one, he says.

The separation of faith from reason (and its concomitant manifestations ascribed by the oppositions of speculative and practical, heart and head, church and state, heaven and earth), Coleridge proposes, was a consequence of a mind that is poorly acquainted with itself. Thus, the problem was not that faith is unreasonable, or that reason has no place in the realm of faith, but that the subject, in whom the realms of faith and reason come together, is poorly acquainted with itself. As poorly acquainted, the subject confuses the status and function of the faculties that partake in the realms of faith or reason, and, in turn, the subject embarks on a confused life. Such a life attempts to find evidence for spiritual truth within the faculties of material sensibility. It

²⁵⁵ *AR*, 6.

rejects the mysteries of faith because it cannot comprehend them in material terms. It conflates the creative power of the divine spirit with the mechanical consequences of cause and effect. Because it cannot conceive of them as related, the confused mind considers them to be opposed to one another.

Coleridge was convinced that the disorientation he experienced and that he observed in others in the social, political, and religious calamities of his day issued from the minds of those who were strangers to themselves. He believed that the solution to those problems existed within the subject's own mind: untangle the mind, resolve the problems. *Aids to Reflection* may be read as Coleridge's larger attempt to integrate the elements of subjectivity he adapts from Fichte into a program for spiritual cultivation. The manner in which the subject gains orientation depends upon insights he gained from Fichte's theory of subjectivity. That is, a rightly oriented mind, according to *Aids to Reflection*, looks like Fichte's description of a subject becoming itself through its striving.

For Coleridge, the solution could not exist within the realm of human subjectivity or the human being alone. Although much of Coleridge's theory of subjectivity resonates with that of Fichte, he faulted Fichte's larger *Wissenschaftslehre* for its overreliance on the subject's absolute capacities.²⁵⁶ By Coleridge's reading, Fichte's science of knowledge ascribed its foundations to the individual subject without appeal to anything beyond the individual. This, he concluded, leads only to solipsism.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ See *BL*, Chapter IX.

²⁵⁷ Although this is a dubious reading of Fichte, Coleridge is not alone in reading Fichte in this way. In the August 30, 1795, letter to Jacobi, Fichte specifically challenges this reading: "My *absolute I* is obviously not the *individual*, though this is how offended courtiers and irate philosophers have interpreted me, in order that they may falsely attribute to me the disgraceful theory of practical egoism." Breazeale, *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, 411.

In much the same way, Coleridge feared that establishing grounds outside the subject would lead to materialism or pantheism. Thus, a persistent challenge for Coleridge was to establish a legitimate grounds beyond the subject that cannot be construed as pantheistic. Coleridge accomplishes this through the conscience, which exists as both the grounds of self-consciousness and as the point of continuity with the divine. According to Coleridge's scheme, the subject looks within to find the grounds of his moral being, and those grounds extend beyond the individual subject to universal grounds in the divine.

A confused subject—one who cannot perceive his continuity with the divine—is problematic for the broader pursuits of religion and morality. Coleridge feared that a subject who is confused about the formation of its own subjectivity would be confused about the nature and origins of good and evil and the manner in which one could pursue a moral life. Pursuing the moral life is impossible for the one who cannot distinguish the moral from the mechanical. Most important, perhaps, is the confused subject who suppresses his capacity to discern the presence and power of the divine, and as a result, lives a life bereft of the animating quality of the spirit. Not only is morality impossible for a subject with a confused mind, so too is religion when reason is thought to be in opposition to faith.²⁵⁸

This sentiment is most clearly evinced early in the *Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B*. Aphorism III opens with a statement from Burnet's 1683 history of the Reformation that could stand as a shorthand for Coleridge's definition of religion:

That Religion is designed to improve the nature and faculties of Man, in order to the right governing of our actions, to the securing the peace and progress, external and internal, of Individuals and Communities, and lastly, to the rendering us capable of a more perfect state, entitled to the Kingdom of God, to which the

²⁵⁸ See *Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B* III and comment, *AR*, 188–190. In evaluating the status of doctrine and dogma for the faith of a Christian, Coleridge asks, “Will the belief tend to the improvement of any of my moral or intellectual faculties? But before I can be convinced that a Faculty will be *improved*, I must be assured that it *exists*.”

present life is *probationary*—this is a Truth, which all who have truth only in view, will receive on its own evidence.²⁵⁹

Religion is intended to improve the “nature and faculties of Man” so that the individual can live correctly, in peace and progress, both inwardly as an individual and outwardly as a citizen. Such a quality of living is preparatory for the Kingdom of God. Read the other way, religion that does not improve the “nature and faculties of Man” is not religion.

In his comment on Aphorism III, Coleridge applies his definition of religion to the status of doctrine, dogma, and miracle, three stones over which many imbalanced minds stumble. Of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination or the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, Coleridge levels a question that effectively serves as litmus test for religious beliefs: “Will the belief tend to the improvement of any of my moral or intellectual faculties?”²⁶⁰ That is, by Coleridge’s measure, doctrine rises or falls based on its ability to improve the subject’s intellectual or moral faculties. If a doctrine is elaborate, elegant, and historical, but fails to improve the moral or intellectual faculties of the faithful, then the doctrine is anathema.

The question, then, and the burden of evidence by which the question may be answered, shifts from the status of the doctrine itself to the clarity and status of the intellectual or moral faculties of the individual. This shift is crucial to understanding Coleridge’s approach to religion and morality. By shifting from the status of doctrine to the status of the subject’s intellectual or moral faculties, Coleridge is able to turn to Fichte and the post-Kantians for tools to expand his argument for a new construal of faith and reason. After these faculties become clear to the introspective subject, then the subject must discern how the doctrine improves the subject’s

²⁵⁹ AR, 188. Of this aphorism Coleridge notes, “*Extracted with slight alterations from Burnet’s Preface to Vol. ii. Of the History of the Reformation.* See AR, n1, 189: “From Burnet *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (2 vols 1683, Dublin 1730) II preface p xviii.”

²⁶⁰ AR, 190.

intellectual or moral faculties. Reflection is the method whereby the subject's intellectual or moral faculties can become enriched by the doctrine.

Coleridge adds a caveat: "Before I can be convinced that a Faculty will be *improved*, I must be assured that it *exists*."²⁶¹ Coleridge's lengthy and scattered examinations into the status and function of reason, understanding, imagination, conscience, and the will follow from this simple observation: for religion to be effective, and for an individual to be capable of living a truly moral and spiritual life preparatory for the Kingdom of God, one must be clearly acquainted with one's intellectual and moral faculties—or what is the same, one must know oneself.

Thus to the shades of doctrine Coleridge replies: "On all these dark sayings, therefore, of Dort or Trent, it is quite sufficient to ask, by what *faculty, organ, or inlet* of knowledge, we are to assure ourselves that the words *mean* any thing, or correspond to any object out of our own mind or even in it."²⁶² The measure Coleridge establishes is clear: a doctrine is true only if it improves the quality of one's moral or intellectual faculties. Even more simply, Coleridge wants to know whether or not the words of the doctrine make sense—do "the words *mean* any thing"?²⁶³ If not, the doctrine is nonsensical and a distraction to true religion, an impediment to moral living, and an obstacle to cultural progress.

Method of Ascent

How does the subject move from disorientation to orientation? In what manner does *Aids to Reflection* move from its beginning to its end? According to Coleridge's method, there are three primary requirements for spiritual growth: 1) to know the principle components of the

²⁶¹ AR, 190.

²⁶² AR, 190.

²⁶³ Of note, Coleridge remarks that transubstantiation does not improve his faculties, not even the "faculty of Articulation" whereby he can think and speak such a concept.

human subject; 2) to reflect on the components and perceive the relation of each to the whole; 3) and to willfully pursue the divine. The reader must attend to the sequence to attain the perfection of human intelligence.

The first requirement of self-knowledge is to know what faculties and organs constitute the self. As I argued in the previous chapter, Coleridge relies upon insights gained from Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and theory of subjectivity to supply the answers to that question. They are, chiefly, the Reason, the Understanding, conscience, will, and imagination. How each interacts with the other, or emerges from within the structures of self-consciousness, is also informed by Fichte's theory of subjectivity.

The second requirement of self-knowledge is indirect and turns on the subject's capacity for reflection. Out of this capacity emerges the realization that to know oneself is also to know oneself to be a unity. It is possible to read this insight in continuity with Kant's principle of the transcendental unity of apperception and in the self-positing activity of Fichte's Absolute Self. As may be expected, Coleridge does not account for the unity of the self in the same way as his German forebears. In *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge relies upon the reflective capacity of reason to see a whole in given fragments. The fragments of the self—what he terms the Reason, the Understanding, the primary and secondary imagination, the fancy, the will, and so on—are each components of a larger whole. Examined individually, each implies a whole, the whole of which is the self.

Coleridge makes an argument for the qualification of consciousness that accompanies a self that is living as a whole, whose parts are engaged in harmonious strife for the divine will. The third requirement for Coleridge's method to perform spiritual cultivation is for the subject to pursue it intentionally. That qualification of consciousness is Faith. And as I will contend in the

next chapter, the qualification of consciousness that issues in faith is freedom; anything other than this mode of being is a form of captivity. Coleridge variously characterizes the fragmented life as disoriented, captive or enslaved, nightmarish, or even daemonic. To achieve a whole is to overcome these characteristics and to live in faith and genuine freedom.

Transformation requires an act of the will, though by no means is the subject entirely self-determining: “Therefore, not *by* Will of man alone: but neither *without* Will.”²⁶⁴ Coleridge threads the needle between two expressions of Calvinism he sees as failing because of either “a captive and enslaved Will, and *no* Will at all.”²⁶⁵ By attending to Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*, the reader will learn to discern the will of God and to engage the will towards it in such a way that it is not impotent, wholly reliant upon something external to make it right, nor captive and incapable of moving itself in the direction of remedy. Alignment of the personal will with the divine will constitutes the “Redemption of the Will from Slavery” and the “restoration of the Will to perfect Freedom,” which is the “*end* and consummation of the redemptive Process, and the...entrance of the Soul into Glory, *i.e.* its union with Christ.”²⁶⁶ This is the true message of the gospel, according to Coleridge, and it is distinct from a gospel that points to free will as inadequate or completely uninvolved in the way to salvation.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ AR, 158.

²⁶⁵ AR, 160.

²⁶⁶ AR, 160.

²⁶⁷ Coleridge reads Jonathan Edwards and the “doctrines of Modern Calvinism” or the “new-England System” as “Calvinistic,” interpreting in that movement a free will dominated by divine election as a fallacious interpretation of the gospel. Coleridge prefers a theology that involves the individual will as it is joined to the divine will in conscience: “Therefore, not *by* Will of man alone: but neither *without* the Will,” AR, 158. Instead, Coleridge favors Luther’s interpretation of gospel, namely of seeing the individual will redeemed from slavery and restored to perfect freedom. Such a redemption and restoration would find the will capable of being joined to the divine will in conscience: “‘At that day ye shall know that I am in my father, and ye in me,’ John xiv. 20: the freedom of the finite will being possible under this condition only, that it has become one with the will of God,” AR, 160.

Coleridge ascribes preeminence to the role of the in forming the subject into a unity and advancing it along the way to spiritual transformation. It is the topic of his first spiritual aphorism.²⁶⁸ The activity of the will unifies the composite faculties of the self by drawing them together in pursuit of an object or deed.²⁶⁹ The will emerges from the mind's basic activity. Coleridge wants the will to be guided by conscience to the will of God. If the will is directed anywhere other than to the will of God, it is engaged in a form of entrapment and is not free. For Coleridge, only the will that is conformed to the will of God is free. This points up the distinction between the condition of negative freedom and genuine freedom. Where negative freedom denotes a condition of the will free from external constraints from which the subject is able to move in the direction of the divine will, genuine freedom (or positive freedom) is what occurs when one's will is aligned with God's will. Faithfulness to God's will is disclosed as authentic freedom.

The subject who does not live in the fullness of self-knowledge lives a fractal or fragmented existence and cannot achieve unity of self, and thus cannot achieve unity of self with Christ. Coleridge aspires to cultivate a whole and free self in his reader through reflective practices mediated through aphorisms. Coleridge's approach to resolving this lack of self-knowledge begins and ends with the principle of the unity of reason, and it requires the active principle of the mind in the will to mobilize the subject to an end beyond itself. It advances a view of the world that finds no separation of faith and reason, but rather comes to view the world from the point of view that knows the Christian faith to be the perfection of human intelligence.

²⁶⁸ See Aphorism I in *Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B*, *AR*, 157–160.

²⁶⁹ Cf. *The Friend*, 16: "the analysis of our primary faculties, and the investigation of all the absolute grounds of Religion and Morals, are impossible without energies of Thought in addition to the effort of Attention."

The Structure and Overview of *Aids to Reflection*

Coleridge wants to show the truth of the Christian Faith—its rationality or accordance with Reason—when the world is viewed from the perspective of subjectivity that he reveals through his tutelage. That perspective depends upon the status of conscience for determining or guiding right conduct in the world (as freedom), and finally for the possibility of the world’s receptivity to the conscience’s guidance. The cultivated subject relies upon the promptings of conscience to guide it through the snares of the world, to “keep himself pure from the world” and to love his fellow men as himself.²⁷⁰

The structure of *Aids to Reflection* illustrates something of Coleridge’s adaptations of Fichte’s structures of self-consciousness. The aphoristic structure elicits the self-positing and self-referential activity of the mind, and the creative power of the imagination, central to Fichte’s insights concerning the formation of subjectivity. The self overcomes the not-self in its self-positing activity, issuing as a drive-structure. In striving to overcome the not-self, the self gains the condition of alterity necessary to distinguish itself from what it is not, and so consolidates itself as that which is distinct from what it is not. In striving to become itself over against what it is not, and through the power of imagination to reflect on itself as a whole, the self becomes the self. The aphorisms, by positing fragmentary thoughts before the reader’s attention, elicit the mind’s activity through the creative power of the imagination in a way similar to the striving inherent to subjective formation. But because the reading subject already exists—that is, it does not need to form itself again in the original and absolute sense—the problem that is to be overcome in the reader’s act of reflection is not one of origination, but of self-estrangement. The self strives to overcome self-estrangement, and by becoming reacquainted with itself in the

²⁷⁰ AR, 40.

exercise of reflection, the self renders itself whole.²⁷¹ Similarly, the self strives, through reflection, to see the whole from the part that is given in the aphorism. Thus, by collecting a volume of aphorisms on prudence, morality, and spiritual religion, Coleridge intends for *Aids to Reflection* “to form the human mind anew after the DIVINE IMAGE,” a task that carries with it the requisites of “the prudential, the moral, and the spiritual.”²⁷²

In this way, Coleridge reframes the Christian theological concept of the *imago dei*. Under Coleridge’s pen, the *imago dei* is not a static representation of the human in relation to God, nor is it merely the capacity of mind to think in terms of self-consciousness. Rather, it is *creative activity*, expressed in all of its manifestations, and powered by the imagination.²⁷³ Here Coleridge relates the aphoristic structure of *Aids to Reflection* to the cultivation of the divine image, or the *imago dei*, in the reader. That is, practicing thinking in the way depicted in *Aids to Reflection* leads to rational self-realization, spiritual cultivation, and the restoration of the *imago dei* in the subject’s creative activity.

In addition, the structure of the volume carries the basic requirement that the subject have enough self-awareness and self-acquaintance to know that these requisites are beneficial to its self-preservation. Through the self-reflective activity elicited by the aphorisms, the reading

²⁷¹ This may also be phrased passively, as in, “the self *becomes* well-acquainted with itself through the act of reflection.” For the sake of my argument concerning freedom, I find it necessary to point up the limitations of the self’s striving to achieve a certain outcome, when the thrust of Coleridge’s insight is in fact that self-acquaintance, as with the revelation of God’s will, right orientation, and genuine freedom, is disclosed by way of the activity of self-consciousness.

²⁷² AR, 25.

²⁷³ I will discuss this further in the section on the Pentad of Operative Christianity, where the divine image is expressed as a series of dialectical relations issuing from God through the Holy Spirit to the Preacher, with the relations of scripture, Holy Spirit, and the church on a corresponding axis. See Conclusion below. Similarly, J. Robert Barth, S.J., argues in “The Redeemer, Redemption, and Justification,” in *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969) that Coleridge interprets the redemptive work of Christ as restoring to the human will its original pattern of conformity to the divine will: “the finite will is capable of conforming itself anew to the Absolute Will only because that Will was its original pattern,” 128.

subject turns on itself to become better acquainted with itself. Simultaneously, by reflecting on the content given through the aphorism, the subject becomes acquainted with itself as a part of an implied whole—a community; the means by which the community preserves itself are disclosed by prudence, morality, and spiritual religion. By Coleridge’s estimate, the reader’s mind needs to be formed “anew” because, over-reliant upon the sensible world of the Understanding, the mind is formed incorrectly towards the realm of the sensible. As directed to the subject’s sensibility, the Understanding emphasizes an *individual* sensibility, a good peculiar only to the individual without regard for the community. A system of ethics built upon individual sensibility emphasizes an exclusive good at the expense of a common good, the preservation of the one over against the preservation of the whole. Such a selfish system is unacceptable to Coleridge.²⁷⁴ Instead, because the mind is an activity, Coleridge’s progressive sequence of aphoristic exercises elicits the type of mental engagement that he believes is necessary to strengthen the faculty of mind that is necessary to moral living in community.

His ideal reader is one who is already interested in—and perhaps predisposed to—the type of mind that is receptive to his tutelage. The reader, who for him is always male, is a young man aspiring to clergy or the “clerisy” broadly. Coleridge’s writings amount to a series of exercises that stimulate reflection upon increasingly “spiritual” aphorisms that increase in wisdom or merit as the subject’s faculties increase in capability. Progress may be tracked

²⁷⁴ See Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion A, Aphorism VI and Comment: “When every man is his own end, all things will come to a bad end,” and, “Selfishness is common to all ages and countries. In all ages Self-seeking is the Rule, and Self-sacrifice the Exception.” Cf. *The Friend*, “Our fancy inspirited by the more imaginative powers of hope and fear enables us to present to ourselves the future as the present: and thence to accept a scheme of self-love for a system of morality,” 424. Alternatively, Coleridge seeks an ethic that forms a “habit” of “actions diverging from self-love as their center” which are “precisely the same as those produced from the Christian principle, which requires of us that we should place our self and our neighbor at an equi-distance, and love both alike as modes in which we realize and exhibit the love of God above all,” 425.

according to the fundamental and guiding principles of mind: that the mind is an activity, and that subjectivity is a self-relating relation. Coleridge allows for the inscrutable origins of Reason to be filled with the content of revealed religion. What is inscrutable to the mind of man is not to the mind of God. Coleridge believes that the reader will be educated and fundamentally changed through the exercise of reason that his works elicit. His is a pedagogical aspiration built upon key insights of subjectivity gained through post-Kantian idealism.

It is important to address the place and function of reflection in *Aids to Reflection*.

Reflection is the means by which the person rises above its animal nature to become a human subject, to become prudent and moral, but also to become fully Christian.²⁷⁵ Through reflection, one discovers that evidence of Christianity springs from the believer himself, and that the subject is the very seat and region where faith may be found.²⁷⁶ If the reader wants to understand the force and strength of the Christian faith, he must begin with introspection, find himself to be in need of health, and move step by step to full freedom, guided by conscience, towards keeping himself clean of the world and loving neighbor.

It may be said, accordingly, that the aphorisms stimulate modes of reflection that reveal a manner of being in the world which issues in freedom. The subject discovers itself freed from its former unreflective condition (a condition which Coleridge compares to that of the animal nature,²⁷⁷ infirm,²⁷⁸ or nonsensical and disordered, as in a word without the guidance of consonants and vowels. Interpreted in the other direction, Coleridge is making a claim for freedom as proper human consciousness, health, orientation and right-ordering. Freedom of this sort is faith. Faith is proper human consciousness, health, right-ordering, and gainful orientation.

²⁷⁵ AR, 9–10.

²⁷⁶ AR, 30.

²⁷⁷ AR, 30.

²⁷⁸ AR, 38.

Because Coleridge aligns these notions of freedom with the capacity for reflection, there is also a sense in which reflection is a kind of seeing that makes it possible to see what it means to be *imago dei*. To be reformed in the image of God means to see in a way that is cultivated through reflection.

Aids to Reflection contains three primary sections of aphorisms that follow a brief collection of introductory aphorisms: prudential aphorisms, moral and religious aphorisms, and aphorisms on spiritual religion. The intention “to form the human mind anew after the DIVINE IMAGE” has three “requisites...the prudential, the moral, and the spiritual.”²⁷⁹ The aphorisms Coleridge draws from the writings of Archbishop Leighton, Jeremy Taylor, and occasionally his own writings. Nearly every aphorism Coleridge follows with a comment. The aphorisms are intended to stimulate the reader’s reflection. Coleridge’s comment following the aphorism redoubles the dialogic structure of the volume, expanding the possibility for the reader to find reflective unity. Not only does the reader take into his thinking the fragment provided in the aphorism, he also takes up Coleridge’s relation of the fragment with his own words. Coleridge creates a sort of reading community by structuring the volume in this way.

The collections of aphorisms are progressive. Coleridge carries his reader from prudence, to morality, to religion, and finally to spiritual religion. He wants the reader to understand that these topics are related sequentially and progressively. To attain the insights of spiritual religion, one must first be cultivated by prudence and morality. Conversely, prudence and morality are lesser modes of rationality that also contains religion. By sequencing the topics in this way,

²⁷⁹ AR, 25.

Coleridge challenges any interpretation of ethics and morality that does not include religion: there is no morality apart from religion.²⁸⁰

The introductory aphorisms establish how Coleridge intends the aphorisms to function. He notes that aphorisms help the mind to understand truths that they might not understand without that help. The mind can do this because “the understanding and the intellectual graces are precious gifts of God.”²⁸¹ Moreover, warns Coleridge, “he is scarcely a Christian who willfully neglects...to cultivate the one and to acquire the other.”²⁸² Becoming a Christian requires an act of the will, and it requires the habit of mind cultivated through reflective practices.

Nevertheless, faith is not an achievement of one’s own by one’s own efforts alone, although one’s efforts are required. Faith is not merely virtuous living. Coleridge is opposed to this notion of faith, not so much because he has a robust notion of grace, but rather because it diminishes the human subject’s primary relation to the divine. If faith equates merely to virtue, then one must overcome aspects of oneself, and subordinate the role of feeling to moral reason. Coleridge does not like any system that pits one faculty against the other, or any construal of righteous living that divides one against oneself. Coleridge is committed to a unifying construal of reality that does not denigrate basic aspects of humanity. Such a construal of faith would not be “the perfection of Human Intelligence.” He does not want to diminish the importance and place of higher Reason, nor does he want to discard it entirely he feelings and emotions that vivify life and animate experience. He wants faith to be animated by feeling and feeling to be

²⁸⁰ See *AR*, 407: Coleridge blasts the proponents of the mechanico-corpuscular philosophy who diminish the spiritual religion into mere morality. Coleridge reverses the logic to say that morality includes all spiritual religion. “ ‘All this means *only* MORALITY!’ Ah! how far nearer to the truth would these men have been, had they said that Morality means all this!”

²⁸¹ *AR*, 17.

²⁸² *AR*, 18.

elevated by Reason. The way he wants to achieve this is through a construal of the subject that finds unity to be an achievement of the self-relating activity of the mind through the representative power of the imagination.

As a foil for what life looks like in its lesser and under-cultivated manifestation, Coleridge frequently references indigenous or “uncivilized” or “uncultivated” people, especially in India.²⁸³ Coleridge regards the Indians as civilized, but not cultivated to the degree of Christian nations like Britain. Yet Coleridge does not believe that the Indians are incapable of being cultivated. Coleridge is committed to the universal appeal of Christianity: all human beings may become Christian, but it requires adequate reflection. Protestant Christians have the greatest advantage because they are already inclined to reflection.

Coleridge warns that if Britain continues in the direction it is going, then it will become like the Indian Brahmins, owning an overly developed understanding and deficient in reflection. His argument is based on an (indirect) observation of other cultures, assumes a developmental and progressive possibility of reality in comparative cultures, and establishes the differences not on race or civilization but on the cultivation of mind. It is a universal possibility to achieve cultivation of mind and society, but it requires reflection—an act of the will that is a component of conscience united with Reason.

²⁸³ Mazumder argues that Coleridge’s fascination with Indian culture, conveyed especially through references to Vishnu, inspired appropriations that distorted the Indian cultural significance even as they propagated a mystical allure to his poetic themes of creation and destruction. Mazumder credits Coleridge for introducing Indian cultural and religious themes to the broader English Romantic movement. Notably, Mazumder identifies continuity between Hindu references to the “boundless ocean” and the abysmal depths of creativity with water symbolism in Coleridge’s poetry, suggesting both a commonality between Hindu and Jewish and Christian creation mythology and Coleridge’s interest in themes of creation and destruction and water. See Aparajita Mazumder, “Coleridge, Vishnu, and the Infinite,” *Comparative Literature* 30, No. 1 (1993): 32–52.

Human Intelligence

The aim of *Aids to Reflection* is spiritual cultivation. Coleridge directs his work to anyone who is “desirous of building up a manly character in the light of distinct consciousness,” but especially to the “studious Young at the close of their education or on their first entrance into the duties of manhood and the rights of self-government.”²⁸⁴ Of this class of reader, he hopes especially to reach the young reader who desires to go into ministry or who will one day have responsibility in teaching and instructing the population in matters of morality or religion.²⁸⁵ The place of this occupation could be in the schools and public offices as much as it could be in ministry, but the location and status of the clergy in England’s state church makes the matter especially profound.

Coleridge was long concerned about the health of the Anglican Church and was critical of its theology. He saw Anglican theology as capitulating to forms of intellectual captivity akin to those he saw in the varieties of “mechanico-corpuscular” philosophies.²⁸⁶ The type of spiritual cultivation to which *Aids to Reflection* aspires is intended in part to counter the trend he sees in Anglican theology that he believes leads to intellectual captivity. He wants to do this by training a class of people who will one day make up the ranks of church leaders and who think the way that Coleridge thinks. Their new way of thinking will shape the state and the church to a more hopeful theology.

Coleridge’s version of spiritual cultivation relies upon insights gained from German idealism. For Coleridge, spiritual cultivation is also a form of rational self-realization, “by which

²⁸⁴ *AR*, 6.

²⁸⁵ *AR*, 6.

²⁸⁶ See Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

is meant the determination of the agent's will in accordance with his internal purposes as a rational being."²⁸⁷

Coleridge's method of self-realization relies upon a robust notion of conscience. His construal of conscience emerges out of his work on the imagination in the constitution of subjectivity. As I previously noted, Shawcross first identified a shift in Coleridge's language from emphasizing the imagination to emphasizing the conscience.²⁸⁸ After 1818, Coleridge largely gave up writing about imagination and the poetic faculties and turned instead more exclusively to matters of conscience and religion.

To understand Coleridge's construal of conscience requires an understanding of the other chief components of the human intelligence. Confusion about the constitution of subjectivity and the human intellect amounts to the greatest obstacle to "an intelligent Belief of the *peculiar* Doctrines of the Gospel, of the *characteristic* Articles of the Christian Faith, with which the Advocates of the truth in Christ have to contend; the evil *heart* of Unbelief alone excepted."²⁸⁹ Borrowing from Kant, Coleridge distinguishes these faculties as the Reason and the Understanding. The Reason is the faculty, or sometimes the "organ," through which the human subject attains insight into truth. It is spiritual and reaches beyond the sensible into the world of ideas, and is in this way capable of grasping the supersensual. The Understanding, on the other hand, is sensible and tied to the world of experience. The Understanding in the human mind is similar in kind, though not degree, to the instinct of the animal.²⁹⁰ The Understanding partakes in

²⁸⁷ Gunnar Beck, *Fichte and Kant on Freedom, Rights, and Law* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), 3.

²⁸⁸ See Shawcross in *BL*, lxxxiii.

²⁸⁹ *AR*, 250.

²⁹⁰ "INSTINCT in a rational, responsible, and self-conscious Animal, is Understanding;" and "Instinctive intelligence co-existing with Reason, *Free* will, and Self-consciousness...becomes UNDERSTANDING;" *AR*, 248. See also 250: "differing in *degree* from Instinct and *in kind* from Reason."

truth only insofar as the truth is already in the sensible world. When the Understanding extends itself “beyond the sphere of possible Experience,” misbelief and unbelief results.²⁹¹

Although Coleridge writes often of the Reason as the higher faculty, there is a sense in which the faculties are of equal importance: to be human, the human subject needs the Understanding just as much as it needs the Reason. Presumably only angels and spiritual beings exist apart from the realm of the sensible world of the Understanding. Thus, it is possible to speak of Coleridge’s subject as contending with a familiar problem. Whereas Kant depicted the subject as “neither suspended from heaven nor anchored to earth,” and conceived a peculiar sense of homelessness as a result of this estranged condition, Coleridge construes the relation positively: the subject is both suspended from heaven and anchored to earth. By Coleridge’s estimate, problems ensue when the subject neglects one aspect of its composition over the other, the English of his time overwhelmingly favoring the reliability of earth’s anchor over the cords of heaven. The goal of his tutelage is to restore the subject to healthy balance of its faculties through the habit of reflection. In this way, the subject will regain the capacity of Reason that grasps the supersensual even as it continues to thrive in the sensible realm through the use of the Understanding as it is guided by the light of Reason. The life that emerges from this balanced engagement of mind is characterized as Christian faith, the perfection of reason.

Because overreliance on the Understanding diminishes the subject’s capacity for faith, Coleridge focuses his efforts on restoring the status of Reason to the awareness of the reading subject. To do this, he writes about Reason and its attributes as if it were his true love.

Coleridge’s writings are frequently punctuated by extended meditations on Reason’s joys,

²⁹¹ “Wherever the forms of Reasoning appropriate only to the *natural* world are applied to *spiritual* realities, it may be truly said, that the more strictly logical the Reasoning is in all its *parts*, the more irrational it is as a *whole*,” *AR*, 254.

benefits, strengths and graces, and the wealth of opportunities found within its company, all with the lyric posture of a poet. One such paean to Reason is found in the 1818 edition of *The Friend* in a section titled “On the Principles of Political Knowledge.” Here Coleridge attempts to relate Reason to the social state by way of a system as inaugurated by Rousseau.²⁹² I include it here to illustrate my point and to draw from it certain key distinctions to which Coleridge commits when he speaks of Reason and conscience in this way:

REASON! best and holiest gift of Heaven and bond of union with the Giver! The high title by which the majesty of man claims precedence above all other living creatures! Mysterious faculty, the mother of conscience, of language, of tears, and of smiles! [~~without which~~ but for Thee, we (? roam/become) like the Brutes of the Field, ~~were~~ goaded on by lawless Desires, or ~~chained-down~~ driven round in the unvarying circles of Instinct! and through ~~which~~ Thee we are <made> but a little lower than the Angels”]²⁹³ Calm and incorruptible legislator of the soul, without whom all its other powers would “meet in mere oppugnancy.” Sole principle of permanence amid endless change! in a world of discordant appetites and imagined self-interests the one only common measure! which taken away,

Force should be right; or, rather right and wrong
 (Between whose endless jar justice resides)
 Should lose their names and so should justice too.
 Then every thing includes itself in power,
 Power into will, will into appetite;
 And appetite, an universal wolf,
 So doubly seconded with will and power,
 Must make perforce an universal prey!²⁹⁴

Thrice blessed faculty of Reason! all other gifts, though goodly and of celestial origin, health, strength, talents, all the powers and all the means of enjoyment, seem dispensed by chance or sullen caprice—thou alone, more than even the sunshine, more than the common air, art given to all men, and to every man alike!

²⁹² This essay also includes Coleridge’s adaptation of Kant’s categorical imperative as an apology for why he cannot betray the edicts of his conscience nor commit an act that “laws of God have forbidden me to do,” *AR*, 194. If God’s commands were not enough to ensure obedience, conscience and the moral law provide Coleridge with stronger, more certain force.

²⁹³ I include the bracketed materials that are found in the Forster manuscript and stricken from other versions. See *The Friend*, 190 n.2.

²⁹⁴ Quoting Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, I iii 122–29. See *The Friend*, 191, n1.

To thee, who being one art the same in all, we owe the privilege, that of all we can become one, a living *whole!* that we have a COUNTRY! Who then shall dare prescribe a law of moral action for any rational Being, which does not flow immediately from that Reason, which is the fountain of all morality? Or how without breach of conscience can we limit or coerce the powers of free agent, except by coincidence with that law in his own mind, which is at once the cause, the condition, and the measure, of his free agency? Man must be *free*; or to what purpose was he made a Spirit of Reason, and not a Machine of Instinct? Man must *obey*; or wherefore has he a conscience? The powers, which create this difficulty, contain its solution likewise: **for *their* service is perfect freedom.** And whatever law or system of law compels any other service, disennobles our nature, leagues itself with the animal against the godlike, kills in us the very principle of joyous well-doing, and fights against humanity.²⁹⁵

From this tribute, we find several of Coleridge's core definitions of Reason and its functions. Reason is a universal feature of humanity, a gift from God that elevates humanity from the animals due to its continuity with the divine, and its capacity to grasp the supersensual. Reason situates humanity just below the angels. Reason supplies humanity's continuity with the Divine; more, it is what distinguishes humanity from its industrial counterfeit, a "Machine of Instinct." Reason is the "bond of union" with the divine and the "fountain of all morality," apart from which no freedom can be found and only entrapment to an animal-like existence is possible, and against which no law shall be prescribed for any rational beings. Reason is the "mother of conscience"—a figure of the Mother of God—by which freedom is born into the world.²⁹⁶ Laws or systems of law that go against the dictates of conscience do more than contradict a mere human desire, they diminish human stature, rebel with animal aggression against the divine order, and "[kill] in us the very principle of joyous well-doing." Societies that adopt such laws, Coleridge warns, eliminate the spark of humanity that makes life worth living.

²⁹⁵ *The Friend*, 190–91, my emphasis.

²⁹⁶ Cf. "Essay on Faith" (1820): "But the Will of God, which is one with the Supreme Intelligence, is revealed to Man thro' the Conscience."

Finally, as a warning, Coleridge makes clear that societies have a choice as to which sort of life they want to build in their communities. Society has the ability either to legislate laws and systems of laws that counter the blessings of Reason in willful action guided by conscience, or to establish institutions capable of cultivating spiritual religion that issues in authentic freedom. The danger is real and imminent and will depend upon what choices are made. The Understanding is the faculty that deals with sense perceptions, matters of cause and effect, and the realm of things. It is possible for an individual to have an over-developed Understanding and for that person to think that he has achieved freedom. Coleridge warns that this is a form of self-deception. The “inward eye” of conscience is not yet awakened, so it is impossible for such a one to live in true freedom.

Conclusion

In what sense is faith the perfection of human intelligence? As I argued in the previous chapter, faith is the achievement of a method of rational self-realization. It is not a static-state achievement; it is a mode of being, a qualification of consciousness by which the self, the world, and its relations may be viewed correctly. All the same, this qualification of consciousness is the product of rational self-reflection and grows from self-knowledge. Coleridge emphasizes this point to make a polemical argument. Faith issues from within. It is unlike truths of empirical reality in that it does not arise out of an experience of the world. It cannot be based on an accident of human history. The mechanico-corpuscular philosophies and the new Higher Criticism and historical critical methods depend upon a system of truth that begins with the factual status of an object first.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Coleridge echoes Lessing in this mode of reasoning: “Reasoning from *finite* to *finite*, on the basis of truth, also, reasoning from *infinite* to *infinite*, on a basis of truth, will always lead to truth, as intelligible as

Rather, as an outcome of Coleridge's method, it is a qualification of consciousness through which the subject and world are perceived correctly. That is, the subject finds a mode of seeing self and world that issues from reflection, and it is from this that it becomes clear that it also is the *imago dei*. This mode of seeing finds the relatedness of all things and the persistence of the creative spirit in all things. The relatedness of all things begins first and foremost with the self and its concomitant parts, faculties, and powers. In other words, to perceive the world as a whole, the subject doing the perceiving must first become a whole and know itself to be a whole. Moreover, in knowing oneself to be a whole, one may acquire the means to become whole. This means the composition of the subject must be clear. A clear whole requires discreet parts, parts whose status and function the subject understands.

Most important, however, is an active component. Thus, Coleridge can say:

FAITH subsists in the *synthesis* of the Reason and the individual Will. By virtue of the latter it must be an energy, and, inasmuch as it relates to the whole moral man, it must be exerted in each and all of his constituents or incidents, faculties and tendencies:--it must be a total, not a partial—a continuous, not a desultory or occasional—energy. And by virtue of the former, that is, Reason, Faith must be a Light, a form of knowing, a beholding of Truth.²⁹⁸

The energy of the mind's activity, directed by the subject's will, is essential to its ability to create a whole out of discreet parts. The whole is a creation of the mind. It issues in faith when it is properly oriented and properly balanced. As such, it is an outgrowth of Coleridge's construal of the imagination as the creative power of the mind. Once the alignment of the subject's power of creativity, unity, and subjectivity is clarified, it is not hard to go with Coleridge into the realm of explicit religious discourse:

the basis on which such truths respectively rest. While, reasoning from *finite* to *infinite*; or from *infinite* to *finite*; will lead to apparent absurdity, although the basis be true: and is not *such* apparent absurdity, another expression for 'truth unintelligible by a *finite* mind?'" AR, 167.

²⁹⁸ *Literary Remains*, vol. iv, 437.

In the incomparable words of the Evangelist, therefore,— *Faith must be a Light originating in the Logos, or the substantial Reason, which is coeternal and one with the Holy Will, and which Light is at the same time the Life of men.* Now as *Life* is here the sum or collective of all moral and spiritual acts, in suffering, doing, and being, so is Faith the source and sum, the energy and the principle of the fidelity of Man to God, by the subordination of his human Will, in all provinces of his nature, to his Reason, as the sum of spiritual Truth, representing and manifesting the Will Divine.²⁹⁹

For Coleridge, faith issues seamlessly from the subject's self-development through reflective practices designed to stimulate the faculties and powers of mind that, because of their creative power, have continuity with and are finite recapitulations of the divine.

In the next chapter, I examine the structure and consequences of this scheme, especially as regards the relation of freedom and captivity.

²⁹⁹ *Literary Remains*, vol. iv, 437.

Chapter 5: Freedom and Captivity

*Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
 With woful agony,
 Which forced me to begin my tale;
 And then it left me free.*
 —*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, lines 578–581

“At that day ye shall know that I am in my father, and ye in me,” John xiv, 20: the freedom of a finite will being possible under this condition only, that it has become one with the will of God.

—From Comment to Aphorism 1, Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B, *Aids to Reflection*³⁰⁰

Thus far, I have been interpreting Coleridge’s religious writing as being constructed on principles of Fichte’s idealism. By reading his work in this way, it has been possible to see Coleridge engage in the larger project of using the language and methods of German idealism, and most notably those of Fichte, in the service of religious and theological themes through several of his major prose works. Put another way, through insights gained from Fichte’s philosophical psychology, Coleridge develops a method of rational self-realization in service of spiritual cultivation. Through the work of reflection, the subject who accompanies Coleridge will come to discern the difference between free will, as choice, and freedom, as the alignment of the individual will with the divine will.

Reading Coleridge in this light brings into view two remaining points I propose to discuss: the presence and role of God in the formation of subjectivity, and the implications for construing freedom it implies. This chapter compares Coleridge’s strategy to link the individual

³⁰⁰ AR, 160.

self to the divine with Fichte's strategy to do the same, and then seeks to interpret the type of freedom that is implied by Coleridge's method of rational self-realization.

Reason as the Light of Faith

Coleridge's scheme of rational self-realization relies upon Fichte's theory of subjectivity and functions within its structures of self-consciousness. The idea is that by clarifying the faculties of mind, and then exercising each according to its proper capacity, the subject may experience inward orientation through attentive self-awareness. Faith is the outcome of the sustained reflective practices inasmuch as those practices yield clarity of self-understanding and an alignment of the individual will with the divine will as conveyed by conscience and illuminated by Reason. Phrased somewhat differently, Coleridge's method of rational self-realization is to be read in service to spiritual cultivation, that is, faithful living. In the process of attaining that goal, Coleridge acknowledges that the subject can be confused by the varieties of impulses, desires, and appetites that arise out of its sensible nature in the Understanding and points to a nonsensible (or supersensual) alternative in the Reason. As Faith is the qualification of consciousness that manifests when the subject gains adequate self-awareness in its relation to the divine, it is antecedent to all of the subject's thinking and doing. Coleridge uses the language of illumination and draws from the Pauline/Augustinian theological tradition to convey how it is that faith (and Reason) precedes understanding (and the Understanding).

While working within the contours of Fichte's theory of subjectivity and philosophical psychology, Coleridge insinuates elements of Kant's practical philosophy into his discourse on spiritual religion. He does this most clearly when trying to account for how a supersensual "light" illuminates the sensible realm of the Understanding in such a way as to be recognized as

an object of the will. Following this section, I argue for a positive construal of freedom as it emerges out of the transcendent Reason's reliance upon the Conscience to bind the individual will to the divine will.

In the 1820 fragmentary "Essay on Faith," Coleridge interprets *faith* as the subordination of the individual will to the divine will according to the terms of his developing theory of subjectivity. Similar definitions of faith are contained in *The Friend* and *Aids to Reflection*. The "Essay on Faith" is the most dense and terse of Coleridge's attempts to define faith, and for that reason I find it most helpful to illustrate my point. Coleridge's final definition of faith (in that essay) relates Reason, the Conscience, and the Will in subordination to God's Will:

Faith the source, and the Sum, the Energy and the Principle, of the fidelity of Man to God by the subordination of his human Will in all provinces of his Nature to his Reason, as the Sum of spiritual Truths, representing and manifesting the Will of Divine.³⁰¹

I understand this to mean that the subject must accomplish two things to become faithful. First, the subject must gain the self-awareness to know that it is comprised of several faculties that are also powers or energies. This is the first achievement of reflection: to know oneself as comprised of a teeming assembly of competing energies, faculties, and drives, and not solely as a passive receptor to outside influences of sensory data, or as a mechanical slave to one's appetites. Second, the subject must gain proper understanding of those faculties and energies and the roles that each plays in the individual's willful activity of life. The subject must gain clarity about its constituent faculties in order to live well. Inward confusion begets outward confusion regarding morality, ethics, and religion. Freedom is impossible for a subject ill-acquainted with itself; confusion is captivity.

³⁰¹ Coleridge, *Shorter Works and Fragments*, vol. II, 844.

To rectify this situation, the subject must begin by clarifying the distinction between Reason and Understanding, one of Coleridge's life-long pursuits. Next, the subject must clarify the role of its individual will as it relates to Reason. The "Essay on Faith" contains the best examples of Coleridge trying to clarify each of these terms in service to his definition of faith. All of these attempts to distinguish one element of the mind from the other through distinction and definition coalesce in his larger project of spiritual cultivation seen at work in *Aids to Reflection*, in which Coleridge ultimately assists the reader to see the relationship of faith to Reason.

Perhaps the most important outcome of this method is to see the relation of faith to reason in a new way. That is, as a qualification of Reason, faith is not a qualification of the Understanding: faith has less to do with the material and the empirical than it does with the spiritual and ideal. In another fragment of 1820 entitled "On St Paul's Definition of Faith," Coleridge emphasizes that faith is not in service to the understanding, nor is it a qualification of the realm of the understanding at all.³⁰² In that essay, Coleridge advances an Augustinian interpretation of faith that precedes understanding: one must have faith in order to begin to understand what faith means.³⁰³ Riffing on a familiar passage from Hebrews (attributed to Paul), Coleridge says "Faith is the evidence (i.e. not a mere probable conclusion from a chain of inductions, but an evidence, or intuitive Assurance) of things that cannot be seen by the bodily Eyes."³⁰⁴ As such it belongs to the realm of Reason as it engages in the activity of life: "Faith

³⁰² See "On St Paul's Definition of Faith," *Shorter Works and Fragments*, vol. II, 845. There Coleridge interprets Hebrews 11:1 ("Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen").

³⁰³ See fragment "On Christianity", *Shorter Works and Fragments*, vol. II, 865, where Coleridge quotes from Augustine's sermon *De verbis Domini 57*: "Sic accipiter, sic credite, ut mereamini intelligere: Fides enim debet praecedere intellectum, ut sit intellectus fidei praemium." This theme of faith preceding understanding, "so that understanding may be the reward of the faith," features prominently in *Aids to Reflection*.

³⁰⁴ "On St Paul's Definition of Faith," 845.

subsists in the Synthesis of the Reason and the Individual Will.”³⁰⁵ The emphasis comes at the end of the fragment: “From all this you may see how impossible it is that Faith in the scripture sense should be seated in the Understanding only—and how different it is from mere Belief, or acquiescence in the Truth of a thing.”³⁰⁶ Coleridge argued against a position that allowed for material evidence of Christian truth: if faith belonged to the Understanding, then evidence for it may be found in the sensible realm. But because faith is not of the Understanding alone, it must have its proof elsewhere (or as Coleridge reads Paul, faith is its own evidence). Faith is the coincidence of the individual will and reason, and as such it is “the perfection of human intelligence.”

What then is Reason? How may the subject align its will to Reason? Or by what means can the subject *know* the edicts of Reason such that it can direct its will toward them? This question is all the more challenging when Reason, as Coleridge defines it, is “*supersensual*” and “*supersensuous*,” meaning pertaining neither to the “objects of Appetite” nor to “LUST OF THE EYE.”³⁰⁷ Denied sensory input, or access to anything belonging to the realm of possible experience, the Reason, with which the subject is to align its individual Will, is empty of content. Without content provided by the Understanding, how can the subject recognize the influence of Reason such that it can align its Will with its guidance?

Early in the “Essay on Faith,” Coleridge provides a somewhat exhaustive attempt at defining what Reason is not. Coleridge defines Reason four ways negatively, on each point identifying the “several Powers, or Forces, belonging or incident to Human Nature” that stand opposed to Reason. A proper ordering of the human life subordinates these “forces” to Reason.

³⁰⁵ “Essay on Faith,” 844.

³⁰⁶ “On St Paul’s Definition of Faith,” 846.

³⁰⁷ “Essay on Faith,” 839.

That is, he tries to define Reason, void as it is of content, by saying what it is not and by clarifying the powers or forces of human nature the subject must subordinate in order to be loyal to Reason. They are as follows:

§1. The Reason and the proper Objects of Reason are wholly alien from *Sensation*. Reason is *Supersensual*: and its Antagonist is *Appetite* with the Objects of Appetite, = THE LUST OF THE FLESH.

§2. The Reason and its Objects do not appertain to the World of Senses, outward or inward—i.e. they partake neither of Sense nor of Fancy. Reason is *supersensuous*: and here its Antagonist is the LUST OF THE EYE.³⁰⁸

§3. The Reason and its Objects are not things of Reflection, Association, Discursion... The Reason is *superfinitive*: and in this relation its Antagonist is the... UNSUBORDINATED UNDERSTANDING, or MIND OF THE FLESH.³⁰⁹

§4. and last. The Reason as one with the *absolute* Will, (“In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.”) and therefore for man the certain *representative* of the Will of God is above the Will of Man, as an individual Will. We have seen in §3. that [?]it is above *all* Particulars; but here stands in antagonism to all mere individual interests as so many *Selves*, to the personal Will as seeking its Object in the manifestation of itself for itself...—whether this be realized with adjuncts, as the Lust of the Flesh and in the lust of the Eye, already enumerated in §1. and §2. ; or without adjuncts, as in the Thirst and Pride of *Power*, Despotism, egoistic ambition... The fourth Antagonist of the Reason then is the Lust of the Will. COROLLARY—which might perhaps have not improperly formed a 5th §; but is however deducible from §4... he who even permits his emotions towards individuals to an equality with the universal Reason, is in enmity to that reason. Here then Reason appears as LOVE OF GOD: and its Antagonist is Attachment to Individuals, whenever it exists in diminution of or in competition with the Love which is Reason.³¹⁰

The selections above show Coleridge defining Reason negatively as it stands opposed to some compelling quality of human nature he describes as lusts, i.e. the lust of the flesh (the appetites),

³⁰⁸ On this Coleridge notes, “I use this phrase, in imitation of Scripture, as a *Pars pro toto*. It is scarcely necessary to remind the Reader, that the phrase is meant to include all the forms of all the Senses, real or imagined, objective or subjective, as far as the Desire of the same & the Delight therein are made prae- or co-ordinate with the Reason.” “*Essay on Faith*”, Note, 839

³⁰⁹ For clarity, I omit a lengthy albeit important excursus that Coleridge embarks upon in his Third Definition of Reason. I return to the omitted statements on the representative faculty and the imagination’s role in the “DISCOURSE OF REASON” through its reflection upon “Truths contained in the Infinite.” “*Essay on Faith*,” 840.

³¹⁰ “*Essay on Faith*,” 838–43.

the lusts of the eye (the desires or passions), or the lust of the will (selfishness or pride). In one instance, the antagonist of Reason is the “mind of the flesh,” which is the conformity or conflation of Reason to the lower faculty of Understanding. In Chapter 1, I described this condition as a manifestation of disorientation or confusion. In each definition of Reason, Coleridge leads the reader to see that the qualities of the Reason, which are void of sensible content, must somehow supersede all other desires or inclinations that compete for the subject’s willful allegiance, even those—or especially those—that belong to the sensible realm. That is, the subject must somehow discern the guidance of Reason in an environment of antagonistic competition. In other words, it is not easy for the subject to attend to Reason properly. It is far easier for the subject to attend to the sensible realm alone and forfeit the freedom that comes from faith. How then is the subject to discern the voice of Reason in its willing?

Coleridge uses the language of light and illumination to convey how the subject can perceive or come to know the sensible realm anew. To describe a qualification of consciousness, Coleridge uses the imagery of light. Thus, “Reason appears as the LOVE OF GOD” or as “Light, a form of Knowing, a Beholding of Truth,” or “Life originating in the Logos,” the “LIGHT of Men.”³¹¹ Coleridge explains what Reason is not in order to distinguish it from other (lesser) instincts or inclinations. Reason is a mode of seeing, beholding, or knowing that performs a guiding function for the subject to navigate away from lesser modes of being. Drawing from the Pauline and Augustinian traditions, Coleridge moves his reader to regard Reason and Faith as “preceding understanding” and as “evidence of things unseen.”

How is the light of Reason mediated to the understanding? And in what ways can faith be evidence of things unseen? To answer this question, Coleridge looks to Kant, whose philosophy

³¹¹ “Essay on Faith,” 844.

seized him “as with a giant’s hand,” and to the role of conscience that Kant employed within his practical philosophy.³¹² Coleridge introduces elements of Kant’s practical philosophy (a thinly veiled reference to the categorical imperative and the role of conscience in announcing the morality of a maxim) into his larger argument for spiritual religion:

That I am conscious of a somewhat within me, peremptorily commanding me to do to others as I would that others should do unto me—in other words and in a more scholastic form, “a categorical (i.e. primary and unconditional) IMPERATIVE...that the *Maxim* (= *Regula Maxima* or Supreme Rule) of my Actions both inward and outward should be such as I could, without any contradiction arising therefore, will to be the Law of *all* moral and rational Beings.³¹³

Reading Coleridge’s appropriation of Kant, one would think that Kant was referring specifically to Christ’s Golden Rule when he wrote about the categorical imperative. Coleridge capitalizes on the compatibility of Kant’s language with his own work in spiritual religion. Coleridge’s examinations of Reason are in service to a larger discussion about faith, and Coleridge easily assimilates elements of Kant’s practical philosophy into that discussion.³¹⁴ Although Coleridge concludes the essay by defining faith as the “Synthesis of the Reason and the Individual Will,” he begins the essay saying that “FAITH may be defined as = *Fidelity* to our own Being as far as such Being is not and cannot become an object of the sense.”³¹⁵ The examination of Reason is in

³¹² *BL*, 99.

³¹³ “Essay on Faith,” 834–35.

³¹⁴ Although relatively new—and arguably the first on the British Isles—Coleridge’s move to appropriate Kant’s practical philosophy into the contours of the Christian religion for the sake of Christian theological or doctrinal claims is hardly the first of its kind. Some of the earliest and most noteworthy scholars to do so were Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling—also known as the “Tübingen Three”—who were roommates while studying at the Tübinger Stift. These three took particular offense at what they perceived to be Professor Gottlobb Christian Storr’s attempts to assimilate, and so subordinate, elements of Kant’s critical philosophy into an argument for doctrinal Christianity. For more on this topic, and for a challenge to the interpretation of Storr’s engagement with Kant, see Stiles Ajax Alexander, “Gottlobb Christian Storr’s Transfiguration of the Kantian Letter” (PhD Diss., Emory University, 2017. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. For more on Coleridge’s contribution to English awareness of Kant, see Class, *Coleridge and the Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817*; Berkeley, *Coleridge and the Crisis of Reason*.

³¹⁵ “Essay on Faith,” 834.

service to a definition of faith that relies primarily on a notion of faithfulness as morality as set out in Kant's practical philosophy.

Although Coleridge relies on Kant's notion of the universal moral law to guide his thinking on the relation of Reason to faith, the project is shaped by his reliance on Fichte within his larger theory of subjectivity, as I have portrayed them throughout this dissertation. This highlights two important features of Coleridge's thinking on this topic: the status and function of conscience in the subject's pursuit of faithfulness, and the construal of freedom that this implies. I begin with an examination of the status of conscience before moving to an interpretation of Coleridge's construal of freedom.

Coleridge's Speculative Theology

Recall that Coleridge defines Reason apophatically by delineating the ways in which it is opposed to other of the subject's faculties and powers that compel the subject to act in certain ways. Being devoid of sensible content, Coleridge defines Reason negatively. Nevertheless, the subject must align its individual will to the edicts of Reason. This is supposed to mean that the subject can behave morally when it acts in accordance with the standards of Kant's categorical imperative. To the extent morality equates to faith, the subject may live faithfully when it acts in accordance with Christ's Golden Rule. In this way Coleridge situates Kant's moral philosophy within his larger method for cultivating spiritual religion and an authentic faith: by attending to the categorical imperative the subject may also be living faithfully.

Although Coleridge readily aligns ethics with scripture, the structure and movement of *Aids to Reflection* clarifies that Coleridge does not entirely equate faith with morality. Even though Coleridge situates Kant within his work on spiritual religion, he does not go all the way

with Kant to equate Kant's version of morality and freedom with that of his own. Coleridge departs from Kant on the crucial matter of the status and role of conscience, and on the relation of morality to faith. For Coleridge, faith is a higher form of morality.³¹⁶ According to Coleridge's organization of the materials, one can be moral without also being faithful, but one cannot be faithful without also being moral. Faith is higher than morality and subsumes morality into it.

As occupying a lesser status, morality is a helpful teacher and guide for those in pursuit of faith. Coleridge places ethics in service to faithful living. Furthermore, ethics provides language to a speculative understanding of faith. Coleridge's ruminations on the status, function, and role of Reason, Will, Conscience, and the Understanding are always in service to a larger definition of faith and what might be described as a speculative theology.

On this point it is essential to highlight the apophatic grounds that support the whole. Reason is the faculty from which both morality and faith proceed, but it is also formally devoid of content. This means that one must use indirect language when one speaks of the place, status, and function of Reason. This is all the more pronounced when that which is unspeakable is given the responsibility of guiding the subject into morality and faith. This means that whatever is said of Reason is a placeholder for that of which nothing can be directly said. As it pertains to God, this mode of reasoning proceeds from a long tradition of apophatic theology. Because Coleridge uses the language of German idealism within this tradition, Coleridge's speculative theology most closely resembles that of Fichte. Before I can argue how this is the case, however, I must examine how Coleridge attempts to tie the individual subject to the divine within the terms he employs.

³¹⁶ Cf *BL*, 135, "religion, as both the cornerstone and the key-stone of morality, must have a *moral* origin."

The question remains: How does the subject know or recognize the guidance of Reason such that it can align its individual will with its commands? The burden of this important responsibility falls to Conscience. Coleridge defines Conscience in several ways: as the “grounds of self-consciousness,” the “root of all Consciousness,” and the basis of individual identity. On this last point, Coleridge engages the now-familiar structures of self-consciousness that he gained by reading Fichte. Namely, the self becomes the self in positing itself as distinct from the not-self. In a meandering little passage from the “Essay on Faith,” Coleridge engages the emergence of identity from the self/not-self distinction that highlights the responsibility of the Conscience in the subject’s formation:

This is a deep meditation, tho’ the position is susceptible of the strongest proof—namely that there can be no *I* without a *Thou*, & that a *Thou* is only possible by an equation in which *I* is taken as equal to *Thou*, yet not the same. And this again is only possible by putting them in *opposition*, as Correspondent Opposites or Correlatives; in order to this [*sic*], a something must be affirmed in the one which is negative in the other: and this something is the *Will*. I do not *will* to consider myself as *equal* to myself—for in the very act of constituting myself *I*, I take it as the *same*, & therefore as incapable of *comparison*, i.e. of any application of the *Will*. If then *I* - *Will* be the *Thesis*, *Thou* + *Will* must be the *Antithesis*; but the equation of *Thou* with *I* by means of a free Act, negating the sameness in order to establish the equality is the true definition of *Conscience*.³¹⁷

Coleridge freights the Conscience with even more responsibility in the formation and future development of subjectivity. The conscience is the root of consciousness and is the grounds of self-consciousness exhibited in the act of the self-positing self as it constitutes itself as opposed to the not-self. It both brings the subject into being through its original opposition to that which it is not, and it guides the subject to morality and faithfulness in its relations to others in life. Phrased more formally, it is both the grounds of the self/not-self identity and the grounds of the I/Thou relationship.

³¹⁷ “Essay on Faith,” 837.

In this capacity the Conscience also serves to guide the subject in its willing. This is similar to the role ascribed by Kant, but Coleridge maintains a significant distinction. Whereas Kant's conscience directs attention away from instinct, Coleridge's conscience directs attention towards the edicts of God as disclosed by Reason and informed by Christian doctrine. That is to say, the subject knows the guidance of Reason and can discern the "Love of God" and the "Light of Men" by way of the Conscience.

Coleridge aligns the Reason with the Conscience as both signifying the highest and most inscrutable faculties of the human subject. As such, both are well-suited for service within his method of spiritual cultivation. According to his scheme, the Reason is empty of content. Thus, nothing can be said directly of it and its influence. Whatever *is* said of these faculties must engage in metaphor; its qualities are indirectly attributed to it by way of the Understanding. Alternatively, Reason and Conscience may be described negatively or apophatically. Coleridge engages in both forms of discourse: Reason is the "Light of Man" and Conscience "partakes of the nature of an *Act*."³¹⁸ Inasmuch as they are inscrutable and suited to apophatic ascriptions, the Reason and Conscience are well disposed to Coleridge's appropriation of the terms in service to a method of spiritual cultivation.

By equating self-realization with spiritual cultivation, Coleridge engages in the compatibility of language that supports aligning the inscrutable boundaries of Reason with those of the Divine.³¹⁹ This allows him to use the language of reason and the language of faith

³¹⁸ "Essay on Faith," 836.

³¹⁹ See §1–3 on Reason above where the powers of subjectivity are equated in biblical terms, i.e., "Appetite with the Objects of Appetite = THE LUST OF THE FLESH," etc. 839. This is most profoundly relevant in his ascription of the Reason as the "Logos", 835. Many critics follow Coleridge in this direction to attempt to read out his explicit and implied *Logosophia*. Clayton reads Coleridge's alignment of Reason and Logos as Love through the Johannine tradition; see James W. Clayton, "Coleridge and the Logos: The Trinitarian Unity of Consciousness and Culture," *The Journal of Religion* 70, no. 2 (1990): 213–240.

interchangeably. As a feature of a program of rational self-realization, Coleridge could leave the status and qualifications of Reason and conscience as inscrutable. Stopping short of explanation honors the boundaries of critical philosophy established by Kant. The project of rational self-realization does not need an account of Reason beyond what is already provided in the critical philosophy. Yet as a feature of a method of spiritual cultivation, Coleridge is free and comfortable using God as the source and subject of the inscrutable grounds of Reason. Indeed, it makes sense within Coleridge's Christian project to align God with the Reason and to move comfortably between the lexicon of Christianity and that of the critical philosophy or of Fichte's idealism.

By situating God as the inscrutable grounds of self-consciousness, Coleridge's method of spiritual cultivation aligns with Fichte's speculative theology to profound effect. Before this is evident, one must understand that a goal of post-Kantian idealism was to establish a robust philosophy of freedom that lived up to Jacobi's programmatic slogan of being a "Spinozism of Freedom."³²⁰ By this was meant a formal philosophical system reminiscent of Spinoza's *Ethics* that was also a philosophy of freedom. Not only would such a system resist the efforts of autocratic political regimes to consolidate power, it would also reject all modes of determinism. In addition, it would begin with the self as the point of departure, and subordinate everything in service to freedom.³²¹ A philosophy that achieved the status of a Spinozism of Freedom teaches that God is not so much the external cause of the world who continues to exert control on us

³²⁰ See "Jacobi and the Spinozism of Freedom," in Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*.

³²¹ "My system is the first system of freedom. Just as France has freed man from external shackles, so my system frees him from the fetters of things in themselves, which is to say, from those external influences with which all previous systems—including the Kantian—have more or less fettered man. Indeed, the first principle of my system presents man as an independent being" (Draft of a letter to Baggsen, April or May 1795, in Daniel Brezeale, ed., *Fichte, Early Philosophical Writings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 371).

through revealed commands and dictates. Instead, God dwells inside us and imparts guidance inwardly.³²² Locating God within the self allowed the post-Kantians to align their desires for an elegant monistic philosophical system with the political force of Kant's critical philosophy, while also bringing freedom within the contours of subjectivity: Self, God, and freedom align. It is little wonder that the poetic-minded post-Kantians found inspiration in the new construal of divinely appointed personal freedom.

Fichte's idealism, like that of Coleridge who followed him, includes God as the ground of self-consciousness. That is, he attempts to respect the critical boundaries established by Kant while also allowing for the unspeakable to exert influence in the self's formation. To respect the boundaries of the critical philosophy means to withhold speech about that which is unspeakable. In this case, if God is unknowable, then descriptions of God that engage knowledge (in the Kantian sense of intuition-concept synthesis, i.e. God owns the personal attributes of the God of the Christian faith) betray the boundaries and are therefore dishonest, dogmatic, or otherwise immature expressions of an unfree mind. Even so, Fichte attempts to respect this boundary by simply saying that God (or the divine, the infinite, the absolute self or the absolute I) is the ground of the mind and that consciousness is constituted by it as a device.³²³ Viewing the relation between the two in this way allows one to speak of God in terms of the mind.

³²² As Henrich describes it, "If God is acting at all, God is acting inside of us; and if we are free, it must be possible to think that our freedom is not simply in contradiction with, but something that is already essentially a part of the life of God," Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 94ff.

³²³ In his August 30, 1795, letter to Jacobi, Fichte relates the concept of God to the concept of the absolute I as a single concept from two different points of view, where the speculative point of view sees "the standpoint of the absolute I" and the practical viewpoint sees the point of view of the individual. The God seen from the practical point of view is "pure I posited outside of ourselves," EPW, 411. The pure I—the ground of the self and not-self ("My absolute I is obviously not the *individual*... Instead, *the individual must be deduced from the absolute I*")—is aligned with God as viewed from the practical point of view.

In the 1792 *Critique of All Revelation*, Fichte describes the concept of God as assisting the imperfect human to achieve moral behavior in accordance with the moral law, where the notion of the moral law approaches the likes of Kant's definition.³²⁴ Using the terms of the August 30, 1795, letter to Jacobi, such a concept denotes a practical perspective, which may also be a practical theology: religion and the concept of God assist the individual, as an individual, for the sake of morality. In the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte approaches a speculative theology by circumscribing the concept of God within the bounds of the primary identity principle, the absolute I AM, or the absolute I. Accordingly, God serves only as the inscrutable grounds of the self-positing self that posits itself as determined by the not-self. In deducing the possibility of this principle, Fichte attributes the power of creation and the activity of positing to the inscrutable grounds, or the absolute I, which, as I have presented, is also a speculative concept of God. Thus, according to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, anything that can be said of God must be limited to the mind, the self-grasping structures of self-consciousness, and the energy of creative power that fuels the drive structures in centripetal and centrifugal motion (as self-grasping and outward striving). Nothing else can be said about God in the world or outside the mind while also respecting the critical limits.³²⁵

The effect of this definition is twofold. First, by attempting to be consistent with the critical philosophy, Fichte's respect for the unspeakable nature of the divine accords with the apophatic theological tradition. What becomes Fichte's speculative theology is shaped by the necessity to reject received knowledge of God humbly as contrary to the primary principle that God cannot be known. Whatever one thinks one knows about God must be skillfully unlearned

³²⁴ See Fichte, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. Garrett Green (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³²⁵ Henrich summarizes Fichte's speculative theology as the possibility to "express God's essence with reference to the mind *only*." Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 274.

as a provisional utterance: only at the limits of knowing does learning about God occur. Second, the definition of God as the ground of self-consciousness means God may be qualified as spiritual life.³²⁶ To speak of living “spiritually” or as attending to something Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* refers to as “spiritual religion” is also to speak of the quality of the self’s acquaintance with itself as it is grounded by God. Under this arrangement, faith becomes a qualification of consciousness: if self-conscious life is grounded by the divine, then faith, as a life lived in allegiance to those grounds, is appropriately construed as a qualification of consciousness.

In these two ways, in structure and form Coleridge’s scheme follows Fichte’s speculative theology closely on these two counts.³²⁷ Even so, Coleridge is willing to go further. His project is not constructed to be a Spinozism of freedom, per se, but is intended to mobilize a certain mode of rationality in service to spiritual cultivation. In this way, the later sections of *Aids to Reflection* that engage the doctrines of original sin and salvation are not necessarily evidence of the dogmatic orthodox commitments that many believe him to hold.³²⁸ Instead, Coleridge recasts Christian doctrine in such a way that it maintains authoritative status while it also bends to the place of God as the ground of consciousness. This distinction carries interesting implications for

³²⁶ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 274.

³²⁷ In his discussion of Fichte’s speculative theology, Henrich remarks that Fichte’s combination of a Spinozism of freedom with a theology of spirit is exceptionally rare: “Apart from Hegel, there is nothing similar to this outlook in the history of philosophy or theology,” 275. My reading of Coleridge challenges this assertion. Moreover, although a thorough exploration of the topic exceeds this dissertation, my argument suggests that Fichte’s insights found fertile soil beyond German-speaking lands, especially in the poetic-minded Romantic circles where ideas were shared as a form of love, even in Britain. Coleridge’s willingness to equate faith and love in the essay fragment, “On St Paul’s Definition of Faith,” supports this interpretation.

³²⁸ This view of Coleridge is prevalent most in the criticisms of those who typically do not interpret his religious writings as authentic expressions of faith, but rather as a low-ball attempts to run from his drug-crippled will and inability to complete manuscripts as promised to, and funded by, donors. Despite being introduced as a cynical slight by his erstwhile friends and competitors (De Quincey, Hazlitt, and to an extent, Wordsworth), the tenor of this critique is evident in some interpreters today.

his construal of freedom and, in turn, assists in interpreting others of Coleridge's most important writings, notably "The Wanderings of Cain" and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

To qualify God in terms of spiritual life implies a mediation of some sort. Despite being unknowable, God exerts influence on the realm that is knowable. By taking on the design of a Spinozism of freedom, the influence is evident first in the self.³²⁹ Responsibility for this influence falls most profoundly on the conscience. Coleridge ascribes to the conscience the role of divine mediation within the contours of self-consciousness. This is what he means when he describes conscience as the light or voice of reason, which is also the voice of the logos, or the word of God, i.e. Christ. Even so, the subject maintains the ability to ignore and neglect its guidance. The conscience is the "grounds of self-consciousness" and the "root of all consciousness." It is the means whereby the subject can know or access Reason, which is also the "Logos", the "Light of Men", and the "Love of God."³³⁰ The conscience discloses the Reason through the Will, although the subject may choose to act against its "*Commands, or Dictates.*"³³¹

Thus, God speaks to the subject through the voice of the conscience. The subject may, however, ignore this voice and follow the path of its own choosing, pursuing its own will in directions other than those to which the conscience would guide it. If the subject ignores the voice of conscience when it "speaks," thereby making itself "deaf" to the commands of Conscience, then the subject effectively renders the "*Conscience* dumb till at length [the subject becomes] unconscious of [its] Conscience."³³² The subject can nearly negate the influence of the conscience by ignoring it to the point of silencing its directives.

³²⁹ More precisely, the accident of the influence is known, but the substance *qua* substance remains unknown.

³³⁰ "Essay on Faith," 835, 837.

³³¹ "The Conscience is essentially connected to the *Will*;" "Essay on Faith," 835.

³³² "Essay on Faith," 835.

This scheme implies a distinct notion of freedom. When the subject ignores the directives of conscience, it chooses to pursue its own will in accordance with another direction. Under such circumstances, Coleridge describes the conscience as “suspended” or “drowned in the inundation of the appetites, passions and imaginations.”³³³ Coleridge’s language implies that the correct path is the one on which the conscience is not drowned, but engaged and followed (perhaps obeyed?). When this happens, the subject abandons “‘*Free* will’ in favor of a will ‘resigned’ to the instincts: making use of my Will in order to abandon my *Free* will.”³³⁴ The free will under such an arrangement is the will that conforms to conscience, which, as we have seen, is also the voice of God, or the Logos. In summary, the status of the subject as free or captive is determined by the status of the will: the free subject is the one whose will accords with the will of God as disclosed by the conscience. To pursue a life so ordered is to become spiritually cultivated. This is the same as living faithfully, which is also freedom.

Alternatively, should the subject too frequently neglect the voice of conscience in favor of the other (lesser) inclinations, the subject incurs more dire consequences. The conscience can be “utterly *destroyed*” leading to the “passage of Wickedness into *Madness*...in which *Reason* is lost.”³³⁵ The subject that surrenders itself to its appetites or instincts relinquishes its free will for one that is captive to those desires. Coleridge describes such a will as “wicked.” As the will goes, so goes the subject: the wicked will begets a wicked subject. Eventually the wicked subject may succumb to madness, which is a human condition in which the subject loses all connection with its reason, its will being fully conformed to its Understanding or lesser sensible appetites.

Madness, in this case, denotes the complete loss of Reason.

³³³ “Essay on Faith,” 836.

³³⁴ “Essay on Faith,” 835.

³³⁵ “Essay on Faith,” 836.

Coleridge construes freedom as a condition in which the subject conforms its will to the divine will. The divine will is known through the voice of conscience that imparts directives, which are also divine commands. To be free, the subject must realize this arrangement and choose to will in accordance with the guidance of conscience. This carries a few other important implications. First, the status of the subject prior to willing is indeterminate. The subject is neither free nor unfree, good nor wicked, before it wills one way or another. This is an important deviation from the tradition of Rousseau, who argued that the status of the subject was originally good. Under Rousseau's arrangement, the child is good and must retain (or rediscover) something of its original goodness in order to remain free in adulthood. Rousseau advanced a position that found the original goodness to be retained in Reason and disclosed by conscience.³³⁶ Coleridge's position is also distinct from that of Kant, who understood the status of the human as originally corrupt or incapable of freedom on its own. For Kant, the subject must come of age and think for itself in order to realize its freedom.³³⁷ Coleridge, following Fichte, finds the status of the subject as originally indeterminate. This comes from the basic condition of the self as self-positing, which is at once an action and a determinate result, simultaneously free in the action of positing and captive in the status of being posited.³³⁸ The subject becomes determined as free or captive according to the alignment of its will.

³³⁶ See the "Creed of a Savoyard Priest," in Rousseau, *Emile*.

³³⁷ See "An answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784) in Mary J. Gregor, trans. ed., *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), thinking for oneself is most important "chiefly" in matters of religion, 21. For Kant, the subject realizes its freedom when, in pursuing a life ordered by reason, it follows its conscience away from instincts of nature or the edicts of dogma. Coleridge inverts this arrangement so that freedom becomes conformity to the voice of God in conscience, which manifests in the Christian faith complete with its traditions and doctrines. Whereas Kant begins with the subject and moves through the conscience away from the directives of revealed religion to attain freedom, Coleridge begins with the subject and moves through the conscience towards the directives of revealed religion to attain freedom.

³³⁸ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 263.

Although originally indeterminate, the subject does not remain that way in life. Because the subject is constantly navigating freedom and captivity with its every willful choice, its status follows. Henrich interprets this status as one in which the subject is simultaneously free and captive.³³⁹

In life, as the self strives to become itself, it experiences periods of freedom and captivity. Coleridge appropriates this condition into his poetry as a condition of wandering. As I will demonstrate, this is illustrated especially well in “The Wanderings of Cain.” There is a little phrase tucked into Coleridge’s description of the subject who becomes wicked or mad through neglect of the conscience that helps make sense of the status of freedom under such an arrangement of the conscience: “making use of my Will in order to abandon my *Free* will.”³⁴⁰ For Coleridge, the free will is the will that conforms to the commands of God as disclosed by conscience. The subject who chooses to neglect conscience is not free. As we have seen, the status of the subject follows the allegiance of the will. This arrangement is shown in terms of faithfulness, as well: “FAITH may be defined as = *Fidelity* to our own Being.”³⁴¹ Moreover, it is by the act of the conscience that the subject becomes allied with an impulse or command of conscience: “[Conscience] is an Act, in and by which we take upon ourselves an allegiance: & consequently, the obligation of *Fealty*.”³⁴² Alternatively, the subject that bears allegiance and fidelity to “other Impulses besides the Dictates of Conscience,” to the “Powers within us & without us ready to usurp the throne of Conscience & busy us in tempting us to transfer our allegiance,” is one who has “brutish” and animalistic instincts.³⁴³ The status of the subject as

³³⁹ Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 263.

³⁴⁰ “Essay on Faith,” 835.

³⁴¹ “Essay on Faith,” 834.

³⁴² “Essay on Faith,” 836.

³⁴³ “Essay on Faith,” 838.

free or captive is determined by its allegiance, be it to God in freedom or to something else in captivity.

Freedom and Captivity in *Mariner* and “Cain”

When read against the backdrop of this argument, themes of freedom and captivity come to focus in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and “The Wanderings of Cain.” To interpret the status of the subject as simultaneously free and captive is to acknowledge a deep and fearsome truth of human experience: there is no escape apart from death. Resonances of Augustine’s *Confessions* loom large on this point: the heart is restless until it rests in God. The best one can do is sustain one’s experience of freedom, however that is possible. The predicament highlights the need to introduce different language to accommodate the experience. The language of orientation, cultivation, and sanctification imply sustained commitment over time and indicate a hope for a real if subtle improvement that may be imparted by it. It is to this understanding of faith as sustained attention, and of salvation as the means whereby that faith can access rest, wisdom, and the temperament to withstand life’s predicament that Coleridge turns.

By considering Coleridge’s poetry in this light it is possible to see the theme introduced early in his life. Although he was assisted by his exposure to German philosophy, it is evident that Coleridge already struggled with the experience of being simultaneously free and captive. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and “The Wanderings of Cain” offer two such examples of his early engagement on the topic.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner begins with the Mariner taking someone captive who will be “constrained to hear his tale”:³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ *Mariner*, Gloss, lines 13–16.

It is an ancient Mariner,
and he stoppeth one of three...
He holds him with his skinny hand,
'There was a ship,' quoth he.³⁴⁵

Despite the wedding guest's protests, "Hold off! Unhand me, grey-beard loon!" the Mariner

holds him with his glittering eye--
and the wedding guest stood still,
and listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.³⁴⁶

The Mariner captures the wedding guest's will with the beginning of his tale.

At this moment, by embarking on the retelling of his journey, the Mariner again experiences a sort of freedom through his memory. He retells his tale, which is a retelling of his original act of freedom, captivity, and redemption. This is a theme that is at once programmatic for the origination of self-consciousness within his theory of subjectivity (the self-positing self) and for the Christian redemption story of the fall, captivity to sin and death, and salvation.

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With woful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.³⁴⁷

It is not difficult to hear Fichte's influence undergirding the shape of the poem's engagement with themes of freedom and captivity.

The Mariner's narrative binds the memory of action into a whole, and his identity becomes the story that is told through its telling. It is a story of the Mariner and his crew being blown to the antipodes and back by the wind, ushered out by the "storm-blast...tyrannous and

³⁴⁵ *Mariner*, lines 1–2; 9–10.

³⁴⁶ *Mariner*, lines 14–16. Gloss: "The wedding guest is spell-bound by the eye of the old sea-faring man, and constrained to hear his tale."

³⁴⁷ *Mariner*, lines 578–581.

strong” and returning on a “swiftly...softly...sweetly” blowing breeze, winds that indicate the spirit.³⁴⁸

It is possible to read this introductory scene as an occasion that occurs repeatedly in the life of the Mariner. The wedding guest, we presume, is not the first innocent bystander to be held captive by the Mariner’s tale. The scene conveyed in the poem is probably merely one of many such encounters.³⁴⁹ It is an instance of an action that is repeated indefinitely. Indeed, the poem is saturated with themes of repetition, both as a poetic device accompanied by alliteration and as a theme suggestive of more philosophical themes, the most prominent of which is in the formation of the self. The self journeys to overcome the not-self (its antipodal representation) in its absolute manifestation of self-consciousness.³⁵⁰ To become a self, the self must relate to what it is not. This process is repeated continuously in the theory of subjectivity Coleridge builds from exposure to Fichte.

To capture a listener and tell the tale of the Mariner’s voyage to the antipodes models something of the basic activity of self-consciousness. In this way it follows the emergence of identity from the repetitive action of the self-positing self. Endlessly repeating its positing, the self emerges from the self-positing self in the structures of self-consciousness to become a subject. In this way the self emerges from the endless repetition of its self-positing activity. Similarly, the Mariner experiences freedom in the retelling of his tale, which requires the captivity of a listener.

³⁴⁸ *Mariner*, lines 11; 12–15.

³⁴⁹ It is not hard to hear a parody of Coleridge himself, who, as an overbearing conversationalist, was known to buttonhole listeners for hours.

³⁵⁰ Frances Ferguson reads Coleridge’s use of verb tenses as achieving a stalled sense of time: “he so thoroughly compounds the past with the present tense that the action or progress of the poem hovers in a temporal limbo: “The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast, / Yet he cannot choose but hear; / And thus spake on that ancient man, / The bright eyed Mariner.” Lines 37–40.

Coleridge relentlessly underscores the theme of repetition throughout the poem.

Repetition is tightly knit into the poem's structure, eliciting a hypnotizing drumbeat whose rhythm carries the reader ceaselessly forward. The poem's meter is its very heart beat:

The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
for he heard the loud bassoon...
The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear.³⁵¹

Although evident in almost every stanza, repetition as a poetic device stands out particularly memorably in a few lines, oftentimes assisted by alliteration:

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!³⁵²

And,

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! Said they, the bird to slay
That made the breeze to blow!³⁵³

These lines are paired with the repetitive consequences of killing the bird "that made the breeze to blow." The act of killing the bird is now judged to have brought darkness: "that brought the fog and mist...that bring the fog and mist."³⁵⁴ The consequences repeat with the loaded imagery of water, signifying the chaos of creation and anticipating the salvation of birth and baptism:

Water, water every where
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water every where
Nor any drop to drink.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Lines 31–32; 37–38.

³⁵² Lines 59–62.

³⁵³ Lines 91–96.

³⁵⁴ Lines 100, 101.

³⁵⁵ Lines 119–122.

Or,

Alone, alone, all, all alone
Alone on a wide wide sea!

Coleridge's use of repetition within each stanza and throughout the poem performs many functions, not least of which is to underscore the drumbeat of the self-positing self in the activity of self-consciousness.

As Fichte identified, to be at once free and captive is a way of being in the world, and one that emerges from the very construct of one's subjectivity. The self-positing self is simultaneously free and captive: free in its positing, captive in its being posited. The self's striving to overcome the limiting and determining imposition of the not-self amounts to what Henrich identified as a proto-drive. The Mariner animates this point by paying penance for the sin of killing albatross and being caught in this new life that is vivified by unseen spirits that leave no physical trace or evidence of their existence:

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears.
Yet it felt like a welcoming.³⁵⁶

The spirit frightens the mariner, recalling the presence of angels in Scripture and their admonition, "Do not be afraid!," that is also the sign of welcome:

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sailed softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Lines 452–455.

³⁵⁷ Lines 460–463.

The evidence of the spirit is personal and real, although it is real in a different sense. It moves the ship but no one else may perceive it.

Nevertheless, the ship could not move apart from it. Similarly, the personal will (the Mariner's will) could not move the ship even though its fixed position results in the death of friends and shipmates. Once the spirit blows, however, he is delivered from the land of death ruled by the sun to the seas of home where the moon sits beside the refreshing rainclouds that bring new life.

The moon signals reflection, which is a mode of seeing the world that refreshes what the world governed by the sun alone kills, and which borrows the form of repetition. The light of the sun is the analog of the Understanding and theoretical reason, the moon's reflection, and the spirit that moves the ship is reason tapped into its divine energy. Following this line of interpretation, the consequences of the Mariner's actions—killing the Albatross—are clearly seen by the moon's reflected light. What was previously unclear to the Mariner and his crew under the light of the noon-day sun is now utterly clear:

And I had done a hellish thing,
and it would work 'em woe:
for all averred, I had killed the bird
that made the breeze to blow.³⁵⁸

Continuing the theme of repetition, upon the Mariner's return, Coleridge has the hills echo the destruction of the ship. Destruction, like creation, echoes in the physical world. The echo is a repetition, as specified explicitly in the definition of the primary imagination in *Biographia Literaria*: "The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I

³⁵⁸ Lines 91–94.

AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will.”³⁵⁹

The imagination creates and destroys even as it is the echo of the divine force that creates and destroys:

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.³⁶⁰

Although circling back on itself to imply the never-ending repetition of freedom and captivity, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* contains a strong message of redemption. The Mariner is brought out of the antipodal seas, the realm of death and punishment, after having been posited and “stuck...As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean.”³⁶¹ The Mariner will continue to be captive to his story, and he will experience freedom only in its retelling, but he will remember one small consolation: at least he will not be stuck at sea. By taking captive a listener and retelling his tale, the Mariner can experience again the freedom of his journey.

Although he and his crew attribute the disaster that became their journey to the wanton killing of the Albatross, there is no clear cause of the Mariner’s return. Coleridge draws tight focus around this point by repeatedly raising the question of the ship’s movement away from its encounter with the phantom death ship:

The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!³⁶²

And,

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up blew³⁶³

³⁵⁹ *BL*, Chapter 13.

³⁶⁰ Lines 556–559.

³⁶¹ Lines 117–118.

³⁶² Lines 327–328.

³⁶³ Lines 335–336.

And,

Till noon we quietly sailed on,
 Yet never a breeze did breathe:
 Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
 Moved onward from beneath;³⁶⁴

and perhaps most illustrative of the self-positing activity of self-consciousness,

The Sun, right up above the mast,
 Had fixed her to the ocean:
 But in a minute she 'gan stir,
 With short uneasy motion—
 Backwards and forwards half her length
 With a short uneasy motion.³⁶⁵

More than pointing up the ship's unseen and unfelt motor, Coleridge calls out the question from two unseen voices and indicates that it the movement is the result of an unmerited favor bestowed by the moon:

FIRST VOICE:

But tell me, tell me! speak again,
 Thy soft response renewing—
 What makes that ship drive on so fast?
 What is the ocean doing?

SECOND VOICE:

Still as a slave before his lord,
 The ocean hath no blast;
 His great eye most silently
 Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;
 For she guides him smooth or grim.
 See, brother, see! how graciously
 She looketh down on him.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Lines 373–376.

³⁶⁵ Lines 383–388.

³⁶⁶ Lines 410–421. It is unclear whether the subject of these lines is the Mariner or the sea. If the lines pertain to the Mariner, then he is still as a slave before his lord and looking up to the moon, indicating that the activity of reflection is inward and not measured by natural laws. Moreover, the guidance found in reflection is reliable in good times or bad. If the lines pertain to the sea—the abyss—the slave imagery recalls the captivity of the sea by the power of God and the freedom of chaos that gives birth to life and

Again, perhaps unsatisfied with the answer the second voice gives, the first voice questions:

FIRST VOICE:

But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?

SECOND VOICE

The wind is cut away before,
And closes from behind.³⁶⁷

In retelling the tale, the Mariner recalls the deliverance that brought him swiftly and personally back to his homeland. The wind, which is the spirit, brought him home by inward means invisible to others:

But soon there breathed on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sailed softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.³⁶⁸

out of which creation is spoken, as described by Proverbs 8:29—"When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth"; and Job 38:8–11—"Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

³⁶⁷ Lines 422–425.

³⁶⁸ Lines 452–463.

The Mariner is restored to his homeland by this mysterious and invisible—yet powerful—breeze. The tale is one of redemption amidst captivity, and the Mariner’s experience of freedom is found in its repeated retelling to whomever will hear.

“The Wanderings of Cain” is likewise a story of redemption that engages many of the themes in *Mariner*, although it is concerned with a darker and more directly biblical context of fratricide. Recall the story of Cain and Abel.³⁶⁹ As a child, Cain did not know that his offering would be rejected; he did not know it to be bad. Cain submitted an offering from the fields he tended, and Abel submitted an offering of the fat from the flocks he kept. God looked with favor upon Abel’s offering and judged it good, yet God despised Cain’s offering. No explanation is provided for why God accepted one offering and rejected the other. God—not Cain or Abel—was the judge of the action, and neither Cain nor Abel knew the outcome of the offering prior to acting. To use the language of this dissertation: the subject was indeterminate before committing its individual will to an action.

In the piece, Coleridge portrays Cain being led by his son, Enos, through a forest. The path is wide and easy when it is illuminated by the moon, but it becomes narrow and restrictive when the sun is at its apex.³⁷⁰ Coleridge employs repetition to point up the clarity of moonlight contrasted to that of the sun. The theme of redemption appears early in the “innocent little child” guiding the murderous father through the wilds of this strange land.

Enos guides his father to a place where he meets the Shape resembling Cain’s dead brother. After meeting him and following him across seemingly endless scorching white sands,

³⁶⁹ Genesis 4:1–16.

³⁷⁰ “Their road was through a forest of fir-trees; at its entrance the trees stood at distances from each other, and the path was broad, and the moonlight and the moonlight shadows reposed upon it, and appeared quietly to inhabit that solitude. But soon the path winded and became narrow; the sun at high noon sometimes speckled, but never illumined it, and now it was dark as a cavern.” “Cain,” Canto II, 42.

they somehow end up where they began—a deceptive cycle. In the end, Abel is seen leading Cain (at his request) to meet the God of the Dead: “Who is the God of the dead? where doth he make his dwelling? what sacrifices are acceptable unto him? for I have offered, but have not been received; I have prayed, and have not been heard; and how can I be afflicted more than I already am?”³⁷¹ Having lost the attention of the God of the Living, Cain seeks redemption from his life of burdened wandering from whatever source may offer it.

Both Cain and the Mariner carry the responsibility of their actions, the weight of which is the death of another. Cain carries the death of his brother, which is his responsibility, and the Mariner, as the captain of the ship, carries the death of his 200 crew, who were his responsibility. By choosing to follow these subjects along their quest from disorientation to orientation, from sin to salvation, from guilt-stricken and paralyzing punishment to redemption, Coleridge emphasizes the significance of the subject’s responsibility for its actions. God reprimands Cain and tells him that he is indeed his brother’s keeper: there is no one more responsible for the life of a brother than his own brother, a responsibility echoed and magnified in the relationship of captain to crew.³⁷² Morality and faithfulness cannot be attained in a vacuum. The subject learns of its responsibility to the other in the experience of guilt that follows misguided action. The subject becomes aware of itself as a moral agent in the experience of guilt. The memory of the sin holds each one captive, and the retelling of the tale—recalling the experience of redemption—offers the subject freedom.

How do these literary observations relate to Coleridge’s philosophical theology? Because Coleridge conceives of the subject as simultaneously free and captive, Coleridge believes the

³⁷¹ “Cain,” 46.

³⁷² Gen 4:9–10. Compare to St John’s definition of love: 1 John 3:16: “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren,” and John 15:13: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

subject is constituted in such a way as to require cultivation. Release from this tension is not possible under such a scheme; there is no balm in Gilead that will simply heal the sin-sick soul, no *deus ex machina* that will extract the subject from its circumstances. Instead, under such a construal, redemption becomes an insight that the subject must attempt to sustain.³⁷³ The insight is not, however, the beatific vision of Platonism. Under Coleridge's pen, the insight points to Christian faith. To sustain life under that insight, the subject is to seek consolation in the church and pursue a life lived in accordance with Christian faith. Faithful living, which is defined as allegiance to God as the ground of one's being in all of one's willing, offers the truest and most sound way to navigate the life that is always on the verge of captivity.

Cultivation is what happens when the subject sustains its attention and its willing over time. The subject becomes cultivated by keeping its attention on God, and it becomes civilized by keeping its attention on things of the Understanding or the theoretical realm over time. The goal for Coleridge was to introduce the notion of cultivation as a higher and better qualification of life. One could be cultured and civilized, but it was also possible to be civilized and not cultured. Indeed, Coleridge observed Britain on the way to becoming overcivilized and undercultured through its neglect of the higher mode of being.

Left on its own, without proper guidance, the subject will confuse the prompts and stimuli of its sensory and intellectual faculties and pursue life with a confused notion of the good. To be confused about the good is to be confused about what constitutes one's freedom: the confused subject descends into captivity. Inured to its state of captivity, the subject loses its

³⁷³ Near the middle of *Mariner*, towards the end of Part III, Coleridge includes the longest stanza (eight lines) of the poem about the rising of the moon. The other longest stanzas are only six lines, most are four, some are five. The only stanza that is eight lines concerns the moon rising. This occurs immediately after the death ship arrives and it appears that Death and Life-in-Death play dice for the crew, Death winning the crew, and Life-in-Death winning the Mariner. The moon represents the light of reflection and the form of vision it provides.

ability to discern the moral from the mechanical, and life will conform to that of the Ancient Mariner, replete with inversions of the divine animating spirit. Such a subject, according to Coleridge, is in need of cultivation.

Conclusion

Coleridge's religious writings show strong affinity to themes developed in German Idealism, and most notably in the works of Fichte. His work is distinct, however, in that he mobilizes those themes in service to a religious and theological goal, the culmination of which is contained in the 1825 edition of his handbook for spiritual cultivation, *Aids to Reflection*. By attending to the reflective exercises in that volume, Coleridge intends the reader to develop a capacity for rational self-realization that produces a way of seeing that finds faith related to reason. From this point of view, the subject may come to recognize its life as a sustained experience of being simultaneously free and captive. This experience is one Coleridge engaged through poetry.

Moreover, as simultaneously free and captive, freedom may be construed positively. In the following (concluding) chapter, I argue that Coleridge attempted to thread the needle between two articulations of theology as they emerge out of a mind confused by the distinction between Reason and Understanding, and how the notion of freedom that issues from the proper mediation of eternal truths through the Understanding may be conceived as a positive mode of freedom.

Conclusion

To the idea of life victory or strife is necessary; as virtue consists not simply in the absence of vices, but in the overcoming of them. So it is in beauty.
—From *On Poesy or Art*³⁷⁴

Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and that Faith is then but its continuation: even as the Day softens away into the sweet Twilight, and Twilight, hushed and breathless, steals into the Darkness. It is Night, sacred Night! the upraised Eye views only the starry Heaven which manifests itself alone: and the outward Beholding is fixed on the sparks twinkling in the awful depth, though Suns of other Worlds, only to preserve the Soul steady and collected in its pure Act of inward adoration to the great I AM, and to the filial WORD that re-affirmeth it from Eternity to Eternity, whose choral Echo is the universe. THEO MONO DOXA. FINIS.
—From *Biographia Literaria*³⁷⁵

In this dissertation I have advocated for a reading of Coleridge’s late religious prose writing that finds him developing in his readers the capacity to distinguish the difference between freedom as freedom from constraint and authentic freedom as divine disclosure. The capacity to discern authentic freedom emerges from a method of rational self-realization built upon reflective practices in which the content of one’s reflection moves progressively from matters of ordinary prudence to topics of morality, culminating in ruminations on spiritual religion. By reflecting on these topics, thought Coleridge, the reader will not only become acquainted with itself as a thinking subject comprised of various faculties and powers, but will also cultivate within itself a qualification of consciousness that is faith. Coleridge expects to lead his reader to see in a new way, specifically to see that “the perfection of human intelligence is Christian faith.” From this point of view, freedom is the disclosure of the alignment of the individual will with the divine will.

³⁷⁴ *BL*, 262–263.

³⁷⁵ *BL*, 218.

Following Coleridge's preference for "bi-polar"— or dialectical, thinking, I interpret Coleridge's construal of freedom as existing between two extremes manifest in divergent religious experiences in Britain during his time. Specifically, Coleridge's spiritual religion is an attempt to thread the needle between the excesses of speculative (and sometimes mechanico-copular) theology, as in the Modern Calvinist and Socinian movements, and the excesses of spiritual enthusiasm, as in the evangelical and Methodist movements. According to Coleridge, neither pole sufficiently considers the fullness of the human mind; both suffer from a confusion of Reason and Understanding. On the one hand, the Modern Calvinists carry over from natural philosophy into theology a preference for mechanical/causal relations, and interpret the human-divine relationship and the means of grace accordingly. In so doing, they erroneously engage the Understanding as if it were the organ of supersensual apprehension. On the other hand, the several evangelical movements, enlivened by the prospect of divine immediacy, erroneously extend feelings and sensory perceptions into the inscrutable and transcendental realm of Reason, thereby creating a counterfeit of authentic spirituality, replacing revelation with superstition. In a word, and at risk of grossly simplifying a marvelously rich corpus of philosophical theology, Coleridge's entire project on spiritual religion can be read as an attempt to clarify the difference between Reason and Understanding.

This section considers the ways in which Coleridge attempted to clarify precisely this relationship between Reason and Understanding by examining how Coleridge positions the Understanding as a mediating faculty for Reason. By highlighting the role of the Understanding in mediating the supersensual and eternal truths of Reason, Coleridge threads the needle between the two common fallacies of an unbridled Understanding: spiritual enthusiasm, such as that of the millenarian and evangelical movements, and rational orthodoxy, such as that of the Modern

Calvinists or the Socinians. It also considers how the role of imagination, through its fundamental creative activity where “extremes meet,” is essential to Coleridge’s concept of freedom and authentic Christian faith. Finally, Coleridge attempted to represent this arrangement in a series of diagrams I refer to as “the pentads,” the Pentad of Operative Christianity being the most refined. I interpret the pentads as the culmination of his conception of faith, reason, and freedom as they are integrated by the forms and principles he appropriated from Fichte. When interpreted in this way, Coleridge’s pentads represent the perfection of human intelligence and point to the possibility of a spiritual religion beyond *Aids to Reflection*. In the end, I propose that Coleridge’s method of rational self-realization, as a program of spiritual cultivation, may be read as a revision of the Anglican *via media* for the Romantic era.

The Mediation of the Understanding

One way of interpreting Coleridge’s pursuit in *Aids to Reflection* is through its concern with doctrine. Such an interpretation would center on Coleridge’s excurses and notes on Socinianism and Modern Calvinism, concentrated in the *Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B*, and move to an evaluation of the logic and rationality of his treatment of Original Sin and Baptism.³⁷⁶ Coleridge does not make doctrinal arguments. He distinguishes between “Christian faith” and “*the* Christian faith.” That is, Coleridge’s method is directed at attaining a qualification of consciousness that is Christian, although it has little to do with Christian doctrinal orthodoxy. He writes in *Aids to Reflection*, “Christianity is not a theory, or a speculation; but a life. Not a philosophy of life, but a life and a living process.”³⁷⁷ Implicit in his method is a challenge to others who suggest that authentic faith relies upon (or follows from)

³⁷⁶ See Beer, Editor’s Introduction, *AR*.

³⁷⁷ *AR*, 202.

mastery of doctrine. Hedley argues persuasively that the entire thrust of *Aids to Reflection* is geared toward countering the prevailing influences of Socinianism within the Church of England.³⁷⁸ If this were the entire purpose of *Aids to Reflection*, then doctrinal orthodoxy would be the goal of the reflective practices. Then one would expect the reader to move through a series of rational arguments concerning the legitimacy and systematicity of doctrines as they relate historically to the church and its ecclesial authority. Yet as persuasive as Hedley is on the topic of Coleridge's dismissal of Socinian theological tendencies, a brief examination of the form and structure of *Aids to Reflection* shows that it is not a volume concerned with establishing clear lines of doctrinal orthodoxy in the mind of the reader. To be sure, one must understand orthodox doctrine well enough to recognize its counterfeit; Socinianism is heresy only if it is contrasted to orthodoxy. Hedley reads Coleridge as motivated primarily to preserve the believer's capacity to behold the mysteries of the faith—especially the Trinity. Socinianism, with its low Christology and subsequently diminished (or nonexistent) theology of the Trinity, suppresses the place of mystery in the believer's consciousness, or so Coleridge feared. For this and other reasons, argues Hedley, Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* takes up doctrinal matters as its central concern, with the intent that routing improper doctrine will eventually restore meaningful thinking in the congregation. The reasoning goes like this: doctrine is a representation of the church's thinking; therefore, reject inadequate doctrine, repair adequate thinking.

My reading takes a different approach. Although I agree with many of Hedley's conclusions, and I am assisted by his thorough examination of the influence of Coleridge's thinking on nineteenth-century British philosophical theology, I depart from his process in that I do not think that Coleridge (to borrow a metaphor from maneuver warfare) fought surface-to-

³⁷⁸ See Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion*.

surface against doctrines he did not support. For if Coleridge truly believed that the doctrine was the problem that needed to be undone, representing the “surface” or strong point of the counter argument, then I would not expect him to make a doctrinal argument and go “surface-to-surface” to accomplish his goal.³⁷⁹ Coleridge is too adroit a thinker to accept the terms of the counterargument as his own. Nor does that strategy appear in *Aids to Reflection*, nor even in *The Friend*, although that volume comes closer to it. Instead, Coleridge undermines the doctrinal argument by cultivating in the reader a mode of thinking that leaves the doctrine unsupportable from the newly attained and cultivated point of view. Once the reader learns to think “connectedly,” the argument for doctrinal orthodoxy dissolves as inconsequential to a proper experience of faith.

The genius of Coleridge’s method and his contribution to British philosophical theology was not merely that he shifted the “central doctrine of Christianity” to the “Incarnation instead of the Atonement,” as William Inge has suggested.³⁸⁰ Moreover, Hedley argues sufficiently that Coleridge’s fusion of German Idealism with Cambridge Platonism shaped the tone of British philosophical theology for a century by cementing two principles: “‘the world is an evolving sacrament of the spirit,’ and ‘freedom means dying to live.’”³⁸¹ Instead, I argue through my reading of *Aids to Reflection* and late religious writing that Coleridge achieved his lasting influence on British philosophical theology by reforming the ways in which theological thinking,

³⁷⁹ Maneuver warfare, the warfighting doctrine of the United States Marine Corps, published as *Warfighting* (Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, or MCDP 1), defines war as a clash of wills. It then teaches that the most efficient and effective way to win is to maneuver around the strongpoint of the adversary’s will, like a wrestler seeking to destabilize his opponent. The maneuver warfare strategy seeks to exploit “gaps” in the adversary’s fortifications. Maneuver warfare is distinct from other forms of warfare, such as attrition warfare, that seek to break the opponent’s will through overwhelming violence or mass destruction, oftentimes seeking to destroy the adversary’s strength through stronger means. Attrition warfare would be considered a “surface-to-surface” strategy.

³⁸⁰ William Inge, *Protestantism* (London: Benn, 1930), 109–110, cited in Hedley, 288.

³⁸¹ Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion*, 288.

as cultivated through reflection, issues in moderating expressions of faith and religious practice. By integrating Fichtean principles of idealism into a series of reflective exercises, Coleridge transforms the reader's mind in such a way that it emerges from those readings to see Hedley's two principles as perhaps "always already" undergirding reality. This new way of seeing results in what historians may view as a shift in the central doctrines of Anglicanism, but the shift was not the consequence of arguments of doctrinal rationality.

Recall the illustration of the iron miner from *The Friend*.³⁸² The story illuminates something of Coleridge's thoughts about the indeterminate quality of the subject prior to its willing, and the peculiar condition of being simultaneously free and captive. In other words, the subject is determined by its choices: it moves towards the will of God and the moment of freedom that is disclosed therein, or it moves in another direction and continues in captivity. One may interpret from Coleridge's scheme that the subject, in its primal condition, is neither inherently good nor inherently evil, although it can become either through its choices. As I argued, education plays a pivotal role in the formation of the subject's ability to discern the quality of its choices one way or another. *Aids to Reflection* is one means by which education can assist the reader to discern the divine will and the mode of freedom that is disclosed in it. In the previous chapter, I interpreted *Mariner* as suggesting that the subject will always maintain awareness of being simultaneously free and captive, suggesting that Coleridge maintained a deep skepticism towards the human will and its ability to achieve or sustain freedom, which is a quality of divine self-disclosure. As such, freedom, in Coleridge's construal, is a grace that cannot be grasped or sustained by the efforts of the individual human will alone. Instead, freedom meets the subject in its proper willing, and captivity creeps behind it, but "faith is the

³⁸² See the opening pages to Chapter 4, above.

substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”³⁸³ The goal of *Aids to Reflection* is not freedom, per se, but faith, which is a quality of consciousness that can discern authentic freedom, which is a commitment to an ideal, from inauthentic freedom, which is release from constraint, i.e., the choice of a will independent of sensuous determination. The structure and preliminary conditions of *Aids to Reflection* support my interpretation of the status of the individual as indeterminate prior to its falling into captivity, which is also the precondition of redemption and the point of departure for the reader who turns to the volume in the hopes of finding there a method of spiritual cultivation.

Coleridge did not intend to challenge the prevailing winds of Socinianism or other doctrinal heresies (as one might regard them) through arguments made in the terms of doctrinal rationality. He wanted to reframe the argument altogether, and to do this by instructing young readers (especially those desiring to teach or become clergy) to think in a new way, to think “connectedly”, and to know that thinking in this way is proper, whole, and signals the “perfection of human intelligence,” which is also “Christian faith.”

The twin theological pitfalls Coleridge wanted to challenge are typified in both Modern Calvinism, with its mechanical and lifeless construal of human freedom as predestined, and in spiritual enthusiasm, with its fanciful flights of emotion and claims to divine immediacy. If the former erred in being overly rational, the latter erred in being irrational. Coleridge aimed to restore a notion of spiritual religion that would honor the reason, the human intellect, and the patterns of rationality valued by the educated and enlightened citizenry, while also avoiding the pitfalls and parodies of the evangelicals, millenarian movements, and other spiritual fanatics. He accomplished this by drawing a distinction between the Reason as the organ of supersensual

³⁸³ Hebrews 11:1 (KJV); cf. “On St Paul’s Definition of Faith,” *Shorter Works and Fragments*, vol. II, 845.

apprehension and the Understanding as the faculty of sensible perception, and then teaching his readers to live in a way that honors the distinction and cultivates the strengths of each as a whole mind. This manner of living is faith. As the divine discloses itself to the Reason, Reason illuminates the Understanding with the divine's eternal principles, allowing the subject to discern and differentiate between eternal truths and mere principles assembled by its maxims.³⁸⁴

From Coleridge's view, neither the rationalist nor the irrationalist system can stand because both overlook the incomprehensible quality of eternal truth. As eternal and spiritual, the principles of Reason can only be indirectly represented as objects of the understanding. That is, Reason requires content of the Understanding for its transcendental principles to be thinkable, but the objects of the Understanding alone do not constitute the principles. Recalling the Kantian distinction between Reason and Understanding, under Coleridge's pen, without Understanding, Reason is devoid of content. The question arises, how does one represent the ideas of Reason to oneself apart from the conditions of possible experience? What can Reason say apart from the content of Understanding to provide it with finite form?

Although Reason is the grounds of self-consciousness and gives rise to morality through the edicts of conscience, it is insufficient on its own to effectively persuade, lead, or guide the subject on its way. Reason requires mediation: "proof is wanting that...the power of man can be definitely regulated by Reason unaided by the positive and conventional laws in the formation of which the Understanding must be our guide."³⁸⁵ Specifically, Reason requires the mediation of the Understanding for its guidance to be cognizable and persuasive. Left to the realm of Reason and spirit alone, the individual subject cannot discern Reason's commands nor can consensus be

³⁸⁴ Cf. p. 160 above; Table Talk, 24 August 1831: "the essential difference between the reason and the understanding—between a principle and a maxim—an eternal truth and a mere conclusion generalized from a great number of facts."

³⁸⁵ *The Friend*, 199.

achieved. The guidance of Reason must be mediated by the Understanding: “reason never acts by itself, but must clothe itself in the substance of individual Understanding and specific Inclination, in order to become a reality and an object of consciousness and experience.”³⁸⁶

When applied to the realm of religion, Coleridge’s position on the ineffectiveness of pure Reason alone to guide human behavior carries interesting implications for the interpretation of divine mediation. Within Coleridge’s lexicon, Reason may be read as Spirit, the Word of God, or the divine grounds within the human being.³⁸⁷ Reading in this way reveals the insufficiency of Spirit alone to impart sound guidance for faithful living. Coleridge proceeds in line with the Germans, whose distaste for the excessive enthusiasm of *Schwärmerei* points up the insufficiency of the spirit alone to form a just and enlightened community. For as much as Coleridge wants to restore the place and status of spirit in the British consciousness, and in spite of the admiration he holds for the Methodist movement, he leaves his advocacy short of a full theology of spirit fearing that it may bend in the direction of ungovernable enthusiasm.

³⁸⁶ *The Friend*, 201. Elsewhere Coleridge describes the relationship between Reason and Understanding as mutually illuminating: “But Reason cannot exist without Understanding; nor does it or can it manifest itself but in and through the *discourse*, or the discursive faculty...and an understanding enlightened by reason Shakespeare gives as the contra-distinguishing character of man...In short, the human understanding possesses two distinct organs, the outward sense, and the “mind’s eye” which is reason,” *The Friend*, 156ff.

³⁸⁷ In ascribing to Reason the capacity to grasp the supersensual, Coleridge further distinguishes it from the Understanding, which is the faculty of the sensible realm: “I should have no objection to define Reason with Jacobi, and with his friend Hemsterhuis, as an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the Universal, the Eternal, and the Necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent phaenomena. But then it must be added, that 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*. We name God the Supreme Reason; and Milton says, “Whence the Soul *Reason* receives, and Reason is her Being.” Whatever is conscious *Self*-knowledge is Reason; and in this sense it may be safely defined the organ of the Super-sensuous; even as the Understanding wherever it does not possess or use the Reason, as another and inward eye, may be defined the conception of the Sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phaenomena of perception: that faculty, the functions of which contain the rules and constitute the possibility of outward Experience,” *The Friend*, 156. And, “to make the reason spread light over our feelings, to make our feelings, with their vital warmth, actualize our reason,” *The Friend*, 108.

Coleridge's willingness to read the Word of God in the place of Reason bears fruit. His interest in the Trinity and his larger efforts towards a complete *Logosophia* proceed from this insight. For my purposes, I am interested in how the need for mediation influences Coleridge's construal of freedom within his project of rational self-realization and spiritual growth. Specifically, freedom cannot be merely the direction of attention away from instinct, as Kant proposes. Freedom, as an idea of Reason, needs to be clearly distinguished from something discernible to the Understanding alone, yet it requires mediation to be understood and to curtail the destructive excesses of a purely spiritual religion, or of the dry and lifeless solemnity of a religion comprised solely of theoretical dogmatism.³⁸⁸

In his inaugural lecture to the faculty of the University of Oxford, Isaiah Berlin distinguished between two concepts of liberty. At the risk of simplifying what has become a rich academic conversation concerning the status of liberty in liberal governments worldwide, I find the language of positive and negative freedom helpful for my argument.³⁸⁹ According to Berlin's thesis, whereas the negative mode of liberty issues as a *freedom from*, the positive mode of liberty issues as a *freedom to*.³⁹⁰ That is, negative liberty proceeds from Hobbes' emphasis on freedom from external coercion or restraint. This construal leaves the subject with the widest latitude to make independent or autonomous choices. Positive liberty, on the other hand, suggests

³⁸⁸ Coleridge believed that all heresies of the Christian church could be traced to a confusion of Reason and Understanding. He remarked that the distinction is "more than once expressed, and every where supposed, in the writings of St Paul," and more forcefully, "I have no hesitation in undertaking to prove, that every Heresy which has disquieted the Christian Church, from Tritheism to Socinianism, has originated in and supported itself by, arguments rendered plausible only by the confusion of these faculties, and thus demanding for the objects of one, a sort of evidence appropriated to those of another faculty," *The Friend*, 177.

³⁸⁹ For a concise survey of the legacy of Berlin's essay and its influences in twentieth-century political theory, see Horatio Spector, "Four Conceptions of Freedom," *Political Theory* 38, No. 6 (Dec 2010): 780–808. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25749186>.

³⁹⁰ Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 1958.

that freedom is to be found in a certain mode of rationality, thought, or way of being that proceeds from disciplined self-mastery. The positive construal of liberty assumes that the subject who is disciplined and self-controlled according to certain social arrangements is truly free and most capable of making decisions that advance freedom for society generally. Berlin warns that although both modes of freedom can be hijacked in service to authoritarian regimes, and that savvy rhetoricians have attempted (wrongfully) to portray their commitment to a positive construal of freedom as negative, negative conceptions of liberty provide the widest possible arrangement for a just and liberal society.³⁹¹ Positive modes of liberty retain a place within this political theory only in so far as they are found to be in service to individual autonomy and not to an ethical obligation to think in a certain way.

Reading Coleridge's religious writing through Berlin helps to clarify how Coleridge's concept of freedom functions. His is essentially a positive construal of freedom.³⁹² Freedom emerges as a mode of being (and thinking) after a lengthy practice of self-realization. The subject achieves a qualification of consciousness called "faith" after he performs the reflective practices that cultivate his spirit. Faith is freedom, and both are the achievements of a method of self-

³⁹¹ "Pluralism, with the measure of 'negative' liberty that it entails, seems to me a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of 'positive' self-mastery by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind. It is truer, because it does, at least, recognize the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another." See Berlin, *Proper Study of Mankind*, 241.

³⁹² Coleridge is not the only post-Kantian to move away from the negative construal of liberty implied in Kant's practical philosophy. In his fragmentary essay "On the Law of Freedom," Friedrich Hölderlin observed the law of freedom emerge from the context of natural desires as punishment: "The first time that the law of freedom discloses itself to us, it appears as punishing. The origin of all our virtue occurs in evil;" Thomas Pfau, trans., ed., *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 34. Although the voice of conscience issues in the moment of one's willing as a correction to instinct, it does not provide more guidance as to what constitutes respect from the moral law, leaving the subject reprimanded for its natural desires. Naturally inclined to captivity, the subject may become confused by the prospect of desiring freedom. Such a construal of freedom is unsatisfying for Hölderlin.

development comprised of introspective and reflective readings. In Coleridge's words, the "Christian Faith is the Perfection of Human Intelligence."

One may ask: How does the subject represent freedom to himself in such a way as to comprehend it as a guide for life and morality? Reason requires mediation. The imagination is the power and means of representation. The imagination is required to represent something to the self in such a way that it can become distinct and comprehensible. To do this, as the "esemplastic power," the imagination makes a new thing by unifying two or more things. To read the imagination as the power whereby a new thing is created from two divergent sources is to understand Coleridge's proverb, "extremes meet," in a new way. Without content provided by the Understanding, the representation of Reason to itself would be empty: "In the same manner the moral laws of the intellectual world, as far as they are deducible from pure Intellect, are never perfectly applicable to our mixed and sensitive nature, because Man is something besides his Reason; because his Reason never acts by itself, but must clothe itself in the substance of individual Understanding and specific Inclination, in order to become a reality and an object of consciousness and experience."³⁹³ The imagination requires content to build a representation of a transcendental idea. It grasps the spiritual and the material to create a new thing.

Coleridge attempts to develop in his reader the habit of mind that perceives the difference between free will (interpreted as the freedom to choose) and authentic freedom (which becomes revealed through the qualification of consciousness of faith as obedience to God's will). Coleridge tries to move the reader to this insight by distinguishing the various faculties and powers of subjectivity—the Reason, Understanding, Imagination and fancy, Will and conscience—and illustrating how each is a distinct component with a peculiar contribution, but

³⁹³ *The Friend*, 201.

also a part of a whole, a distinction yet not a difference. To prefer Understanding over Reason in religion would lead to a dry, speculative, and impractical faith; to prefer Reason over Understanding would lead to fanaticism and superstition. Coleridge is always in search of the coincidence of opposites, the unity of heart and head: “There is one heart for the whole mighty mass of Humanity, and every pulse in each particular vessel strives to beat in concert with it.”³⁹⁴ His method of rational self-realization leads to faith that is the product of heart, head, and will grounded and guided by the “indwelling WORD” that “law of conscience.”³⁹⁵

Coleridge’s statement that the individual cannot be directed by Reason alone (without the mediation of the Understanding and its sensible content) serves as helpful evidence for the positive construal of freedom inherent to his religious program. The subject who aspires to freedom in faith *requires* content—sensible, cognizable content—to mediate the super-sensual guidance of reason. The subject must be able to represent the ideas of reason to itself in such a way as to mobilize allegiance. The Understanding provides content that is derivative from “past experience and immediate observation” and “comparisons of expediency.”³⁹⁶ Left to their own devices, individuals acting purely from Reason tend to “barbarism” and “grinding oppression.”³⁹⁷ They tend that way because the people are deceived into believing that Reason can provide motives for action apart from the content of Understanding and the sensible faculties. In other words, a spiritual religion that appeals to motivations whose authenticity cannot be verified between subjects (it is not intersubjectively verifiable) is dangerous. Coleridge points to the violence of the French Revolution for evidence of how a population will behave when entrusted to their Reason to guide their judgment: “with a wretched *parrottry* they wrote

³⁹⁴ *The Friend*, 97.

³⁹⁵ *The Friend*, 112.

³⁹⁶ *The Friend*, 196.

³⁹⁷ *The Friend*, 199.

and harangued without ceasing of the *Volante generale*: the inalienable sovereignty of the people: and by these high-sounding phrases led on the vain, ignorant, and intoxicated populace to wild excesses and wilder expectations.”³⁹⁸ Entrusting the masses to their conscience and Reason for the success of a government or social order results only in military rule and horror: it “cleared the way for military despotism, for the satanic Government of Horror under the Jacobins, and the Terror under the Corsican.”³⁹⁹ Coleridge is emphatic that the Reason alone is insufficient for morality. Morality and justice—“austere unrelenting Justice, is every where held up as the one needful thing”—requires the Understanding to mediate the purity of Reason into actionable living. Such mediation implies a positive construal of freedom, and a hedge against a purely spiritual religion.

In the case of Coleridge’s spiritual religion, he wanted to maintain continuity with doctrine, but he did not want to become rigidly doctrinaire. Additionally, he wanted to maintain continuity with spirit, but he did not want to become enthusiastically carried away by its excesses. The way he hoped to achieve this balance was by ascribing to the Understanding a mediating role for the eternal and spiritual truths of the Reason. As the imagination created a new middle way between extremes, and the subject learned to live into the life of faith that is Christianity (as distinct from a definition of Christianity that relies entirely upon doctrine), Coleridge attempted to represent the relations of the all in a diagrammatic array. In the next section, I interpret his attempts to do so in the various “pentads” scattered through several of his late prose works.

³⁹⁸ *The Friend*, 194.

³⁹⁹ *The Friend*, 194.

The Pentads

After becoming cultivated by the reflective practices collected in *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge's reader will have obtained a habit of mind that can discern the difference between free will and authentic freedom. Whereas the freedom of the will is qualified in terms of choice, or freedom from external determination, authentic freedom is qualified as the alignment of the free will with the divine will. This also indicates a measure of grace implicit to Coleridge's method that is not often appreciated by the critics. In the formation of subjectivity and in the subject's striving, freedom is disclosed in the subject's attempt to grasp the supersensual divine. In turn, it finds itself grasped by the divine. Freedom comes to the subject as a grace from whence it cannot say, but it comes to the subject in the midst of its striving. Authentic freedom is God's self-disclosure revealed in the subject's striving for God.

Coleridge attempted to represent the revelation of God diagrammatically through a series of sketches and footnotes in *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection*, and *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*. I refer to these sketches collectively as the pentads. The pentads rely upon the language of *thesis* to relate opposites and suggest activity as it relates to being. By integrating this language into his philosophical psychology and philosophical theology, Coleridge elaborates on ideas present in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* while also making a case for how it is possible to see the relation of the divine to the world in a new, more "cultivated" way.

To become cultivated to faith in the way of *Aids to Reflection* and to attain this quality of freedom requires a balance of mind gained by the careful participation of the mind's faculties, each according to its purpose and measure. Imbalance resulting from overreliance on any single faculty tips the subject into confusion. A sparse and diminished life meets the subject who relies too much on the Understanding without the illumination of Reason, and frustration meets the

subject who strives for God with an overly speculative conception of Reason unaided by imagination and creativity. Through reflection, Coleridge seeks to balance the mind and assist the reader out of self-confusion.

By drawing distinctions between the functions of mind and ascribing to them roles, Coleridge seeks to clarify the ways in which a subject may become confused. Confusion of this sort is a hindrance most of all to the subject's attempts to grasp the divine. Coleridge is Augustinian on this matter. It is not hard to hear themes of Augustine's *Confessions* behind Coleridge's conviction of a subject gone astray from itself, of a disordered mind in need of divine reintegration.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, Coleridge directs his efforts at assisting his reader to have the mind untangled in faith and the discovery of freedom that shows forth through it. By his stewardship, the reader of *Aids to Reflection* will come to know the freedom gained in faith as the alignment of the individual will with the divine will. By Coleridge's instruction, the reader will also come to know that this alignment of wills is possible because of how other of the reader's faculties participate in perceiving the right qualities of the relation between self and world.

Coleridge's attention to the mind's various faculties does not, however, indicate a commitment to a so-called "faculty-psychology," where the detached functions of any single faculty is regarded as a physiological or psychological fact.⁴⁰¹ Moreover, although it is possible for a subject to attain a partial view of a truth by relying too much on the impressions provided through a single faculty, such a view is always the product of a subject's self-confusion, and the

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Augustine's *Confessions*: "You raise us upright. You are not scattered but reassemble us," I.ii. (3); "You gathered me together from the state of disintegration in which I had been fruitlessly divided. I turned from unity in you to be lost in multiplicity," II.i. (1); "I travelled much farther away from you into more and more sterile things productive of unhappiness, proud in my self-pity, incapable of rest in my exhaustion. If only someone could have imposed restraint on my disorder," II.ii. (2-3).

⁴⁰¹ Table Talk, 29 July 1830: "You know, that every intellectual act, however you may distinguish it by name in respect of the originating faculties, is truly the act of the entire man; the notion of distinct material organs, therefore, in the brain itself, is plainly absurd." Cf. Shawcross, "Introduction," lxxxvi.

partial view of truth obtained by it should always be regarded as partial and incomplete.

Highlighting the roles and functions of a mind's faculties enables readers of Coleridge to speak about the mind's perceptions in terms of limitation. It is possible to say of Coleridge's method, where perhaps others cannot because they lack the means to say, that an overly theoretical philosophical system is *limited* in its capacity to grasp spiritual truths because it regards truth through a faculty of mind that is limited in its reach. Such a dependence, although capable of perceiving truth, is not capable of perceiving the whole truth, and assertions by the authors of systems over-reliant on a single faculty and claiming the whole mantle of truth are pretentious and bloviating, according to Coleridge.

In 1831, Coleridge attributed this confusion to the inability of the English public to “comprehend the essential difference between the reason and the understanding—between a principle and a maxim—an eternal truth and a mere conclusion generalized from a great number of facts.”⁴⁰² The English public was unable to discern the difference between principles and maxims because they were not yet “ripe to comprehend” the difference: its thinking was immature, incomplete, resulting in bitter fruit.⁴⁰³ The source of the confusion is a small and simple one, easily overlooked by one less attuned than Coleridge to the nuance of language, although magnified by its duration and conclusions: “It used to be said that four and five *make*

⁴⁰² Table Talk, 24 August 1831, *The Major Works*, 597.

⁴⁰³ Coleridge also thought the English public was too adversely influenced by Locke's common sense philosophy. Hedley interprets *AR* as Coleridge's attempt to rout doctrinal fallacies from the Church of England. He locates the thrust of Coleridge's protest against the creeping influence of Socinianism as it emerges from Lockean anti-metaphysical preferences as diminishing the Church's long-standing Neoplatonic tendencies, and more importantly, its Trinitarian commitment: “Coleridge was convinced that the shift in English thought from the Christian Platonic view of the idea as a divine power to the Lockean view of an idea as a mental image meant that the traditional riches of Christian philosophical speculation about the nature of spirit and concept of God became increasingly unintelligible, and were duly replaced by the rational supernaturalistic apologetics on the common-sense anti-metaphysical Lockean model of miracles and evidences of Christianity,” Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion*, 47.

nine. Locke says, four and five *are* nine. Now I say, that four and five *are not* nine, but that they will *make* nine. When I see four objects which will form a square, and five which will form a pentagon, I see that they are two different things; when combined, they will form a third different figure which we call nine. When separate they *are not* it, but will *make* it.”⁴⁰⁴ The mistake is simple, created by confusion between *being* and *making* in common parlance. But for Coleridge the distance between being and doing (especially a creative mode of doing) is profound, and its clarification and correction requires the clarity of sustained attention imbibed by reflection.

To perceive eternal truths, the subject must overcome its habitual reliance on partial perceptions given through individual faculties, and the subject must find unity of self and mind signifying maturity, wholeness, and freedom. In Coleridge’s words, the partial views of truth will be drowned by the “life-ebullient stream” of the spirit when the spirit is known to be the “ground of all comprehension”:

As every faculty, with every the minutest organ of our nature, owes its whole reality and comprehensibility to an existence incomprehensible and groundless, because the ground of all comprehension: not without the union of all that is essential in all the functions of our spirit, not without an emotion tranquil from its very intensity, shall we worthily contemplate in the magnitude and integrity of the world that life-ebullient stream which breaks through every momentary embankment, again, indeed, and evermore to embank itself, but within no banks to stagnate or be imprisoned.⁴⁰⁵

The distinctions of any single faculty—the Reason from the Understanding, the Imagination from the fancy—are not distinctions of “perfect instruments of knowledge existing in mysterious detachment from one another,” as Professor Shawcross observed, “but of a more or less complete activity of the self by which these faculties are informed.”⁴⁰⁶ The function of a single faculty is discovered from the operation of the whole; nine is *made* from four and five.

⁴⁰⁴ Table Talk, 24 August 1831, *The Major Works*, 597.

⁴⁰⁵ “Essays on the Principles of Method,” *The Friend*, 519.

⁴⁰⁶ Shawcross, “Introduction,” lxxxvi.

The move to see the whole from given parts is not altogether obvious to the mind confused by itself and unpracticed in reflection. The view of the whole is not obvious to the mind insufficiently “ripe to comprehend” the difference between eternal principles and maxims. To attain such vision requires self-knowledge and the ability to perceive the relation of parts to whole that comes through reflection. I have argued that Fichte’s theory of subjectivity and philosophical psychology provided Coleridge with a means to talk about the formation of the subject through the mind’s reflective activity in the imagination, and that these insights enabled Coleridge to fashion a pedagogical method to build up a mind desiring to enlarge itself and grow mature in spiritual religion, or to use Coleridge’s terms, to become “cultivated.” Once cultivated, the subject may discern the ways in which each particular faculty contributes to the point of view achieved wherefrom principles are distinguished from maxims, and eternal truths revealed as “life-ebullient streams.” The cultivated subject is capable of receiving God’s self-disclosure in freedom.

Coleridge attempted to portray the relation of the parts to the whole in the formation of subjectivity in relation to the divine in a series of sketches I refer to collectively as the “pentads.” Although fragmentary and often mentioned merely as notes to other points he was trying to make, the pentads draw together much of Coleridge’s thinking and symbolize the relation of part to whole, individual I am to eternal I AM, person to God. It is the diagrammatic attempt to portray the relation of parts as they comprise a whole through which God’s self-disclosure (revelation) may proceed. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge introduces the relations that appear later in the pentadic formulation, suggesting the development of his thinking on the topic of the many representations of the All in one. There Coleridge introduces the several relations of subject and God in thinking and being through a series of theses leading to the interrupted

deduction of the imagination. Coleridge begins the relations with the identity principle, “SUM or I AM,” moves to self-consciousness, “sum quia sum,” and ends in self-knowledge as knowledge of oneself abiding in God, or “sum quia Deus est, or still more philosophically, sum quia in Deo sum.”⁴⁰⁷ He proposes that the relations, in the “highest principle of knowing, as at once the source and accompanying form in all particular acts of intellect and perception,” can be found “only in the act and evolution of self-consciousness.”⁴⁰⁸ In moving from the identity principle, *sum*, to the relation of self-knowledge from the dialectically related points of view of thinking and being, *sum quia sum*, one finds the entire relation resting on the grounds of the whole, *sum quia Deo sum*: “We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD.”⁴⁰⁹

Coleridge attempted to represent, symbolize, or diagram the relation of subject and God in various ways several times in his prose writings.⁴¹⁰ Although fragmentary and missing the explanatory notes that typically accompany Coleridge’s thoughts on the matter, the Pentad of Operative Christianity represents his most refined attempt at representing the divine-human relationship through divine disclosure. I interpret this version of the pentad as the culmination of his conception of faith, reason, and freedom as they are integrated by the forms and principles he appropriated from Fichte. When interpreted in this way, Coleridge’s pentads represent the perfection of human intelligence as it regards divine disclosure in Christian faith. Moreover, the

⁴⁰⁷ *BL*, 183.

⁴⁰⁸ *BL*, 186.

⁴⁰⁹ *BL*, 186.

⁴¹⁰ For instance, this attempt took the shape of an isosceles triangle with names assigned to each point: “H= the Apex of Humanity or Faith as the Sum and Consummation of Will & Intelligence, the Practical and the Speculative;” at the bottom left of the triangle: “ π = Practical;” the bottom right of the triangle: “ \emptyset Theoretical”; middle point of the hypotenuse: “P=Personal, or Indifference of π and \emptyset ,” “Faith, Will, and Intelligence,” *Shorter Works and Fragments II*, 1104.

Pentad of Operative Christianity points to the possibility of a spiritual religion beyond *Aids to Reflection*.⁴¹¹

Coleridge introduces the concept of the pentad most fully as a note to Aphorism II in Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B. There he attempts to define what he means when he conceives of God as an “existing and self-subsisting reality, a real and personal Being—even the *Person*, the I AM, who sent Moses to his Forefathers in Egypt.”⁴¹² The note spans five printed pages and contains Coleridge’s most exhaustive interpretation of the pentad. I use this note to interpret The Pentad of Operative Christianity, published as a preface by Henry Nelson Coleridge to the 1840 edition of *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*.

Elsewhere, in Letter VII of *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, Coleridge summarized his convictions regarding the disclosure of freedom in faith.⁴¹³ The Pentad of Operative Christianity is the diagrammatic expression of this conviction. Coleridge uses the language of *thesis*: beginning with the *Prothesis*, expanding to *Thesis*, *Mesothesis*, and *Antithesis*, and concluding in *Synthesis*.⁴¹⁴ The language of *thesis* is familiar to the student of the *Wissenschaftslehre* where

⁴¹¹ Coleridge’s works on this topic are collected in the volume *Opus Maximum*.

⁴¹² AR, 178–183.

⁴¹³ “I comprise and conclude the sum of my conviction in this one sentence. Revealed Religion (and I know of no religion not revealed) is in its highest contemplation the unity, that is, the identity of co-inherence, of Subjective and Objective. It is in itself and irrelatively, at once inward Life and Truth, and outward Fact and Luminary. But as all Power manifests itself in the harmony of correspondent Opposites, each supposing and supporting the other, —so has Religion its objective, or historic and ecclesiastical pole, and it subjective, or spiritual and individual pole. In the miracles, and miraculous parts of religion—both in the first communication of divine truths, and in the promulgation of the truths thus communicated—we have the union of the two, that is, the subjective and supernatural displayed objectively—outwardly and phenomenally—as subjective and supernatural.” *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, 98. To summarize his convictions, Coleridge engages the language of polarity, long one of his favorite modes of relating seemingly opposite matters. In this case, he reads religion through the polar relation of subjective and objective manifestations. Moreover, he identifies the middle position where the opposites correspond as the place of power in harmony.

⁴¹⁴ “For the purposes of the universal *Noetic*, in which we require Terms of most comprehension and least specific import, might not the Noetic Pentad be, —

- | | | |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| | 1. Prothesis | |
| 2. Thesis | 4. Mesothesis | 3. Antithesis |

Fichte builds his philosophical psychology on the concepts of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. Relating opposites in this way provided rich soil for Romantic imaginations on the European continent as well as in Britain.

Coleridge engages the language of thesis to depict “God’s Hand in the World” through the Pentad of Operative Christianity:

THE PENTAD OF OPERATIVE CHRISTIANITY

Prothesis

Christ, the Word.

Thesis

The Scriptures.

Mesothesis, or the
Indifference,

The Holy Spirit

Antithesis

The Church.

Synthesis

The Preacher

The Scriptures, the Spirit, and the Church, are co-ordinate; the indispensable conditions and the working causes of the perpetuity, and continued renaissance and spiritual life of Christ still militant. The Eternal Word, Christ from everlasting, is the *Prothesis*, or identity;— the Scriptures and the Church are two poles, or *Thesis* and *Antithesis*; and the Preacher in direct line under the Spirit, but likewise the point of junction of the Written Word and the Church, is the *Synthesis*. This is God’s Hand in the World.⁴¹⁵

As God’s hand in the world, Coleridge means to depict how the Divine influences activity and manifests in historical accidents in the world. It is the depiction of divine-human relatedness

5. Synthesis”

The Noetic pentad is the conceptual structure without content. Coleridge expands the concept to apply to the parts of speech: “1. Verb Substantive = Prothesis, as expressing the *identity* or co-inherence of Act and Being. 2. Substantive = Thesis, expressing Being. 3. Verb = Antithesis, expressing Act. 4. Infinitive = Mesothesis, as being either Substantive or Verb, or both at once, only in different relations...5. Participle = Synthesis.” The mesothesis also conforms with the Middle Voice—the place between active and passive voice that was still operative, although it is essentially lost. Coleridge depicts this as another pentad referencing Latin parts of speech:

Thesis, *Res*.

Prothesis, *Sum*.
Mesothesis, *Agere*.
Synthesis, *Agens*.

Antithesis, *Ago*, *Pator*.

AR, 180.

⁴¹⁵ *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, xlvi.

manifest through the church. As the synthesis of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the Church, the Preacher is in line with Christ the prothesis and the Holy Spirit the mesothesis. From this coordinated position, the Preacher's creativity in proclaiming the Word draws together (or is drawn together by) the historical and physical manifestations of the faith, or what may be deemed the "objective" pole of the faith, in the Scriptures and the Church, with the eternal and spiritual manifestations of the faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Preacher is aligned with the spiritual divine, the Word as Scripture, and the historical accidents of the faith, the manifestation of the believers in community and institution.

From the point of view of the cultivated faithful, a position attained through the reflective practices collected in *Aids to Reflection*, the Pentad of Operative Christianity is the diagrammatic representation of opposites in balanced relationship with one another. Coleridge's notes in the Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion B suggest that the Pentad of Operative Christianity is one such representation, if not the final and most refined version extant in his published writings. The notes suggest that Coleridge worked from a conceptual version (the "Noetic" pentad) to a linguistic arrangement in which it is possible to see the relation of activity and being, which is also a fuller representation of the implied relations in Fichte's Fact/Act. That is, within the contours of being exists the activity of positing and having been posited, the wavering or hovering that occurs in between as the infinitive "to act", and the ordinary activities of life.

As Coleridge appropriated elements of Fichte's philosophical psychology and philosophical theology into his method of spiritual cultivation, at various times he attempted to depict the relation between the human subject and the divine diagrammatically in pentads. Although subject to a wide range of interpretations, I understand these pentads as drawing together Coleridge's theory of subjectivity with his philosophical theology. In other words, they

are his attempt to convey the means whereby divine self-disclosure in revelation intersects with the material world through the individual activity of the will. By playing into the middle position of extremes, the place where Imagination draws material for its creative activity, Coleridge's spiritual religion may be interpreted as a Romantic revision of the Anglican *via media*.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Modern Religion of Conscience

I began this dissertation arguing that Coleridge's religious writings may be interpreted profitably as a modern variant of the religion of conscience. When read against the backdrop of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, especially with regard to his theory of subjectivity, Coleridge's principle prose works of 1817—1825 reveal qualities of coherence otherwise obscured by other aspects of his writing (excessive "borrowing", digressive excursions, fanciful flights of spirit). That coherence takes shape as a version of the modern religion of conscience in which the subject (in this case the reader of *Aids to Reflection*), cultivates the habit of mind that is capable of discerning the difference between free will and authentic freedom. I mean this in two ways:

First, the modern religion of conscience is an intellectual movement that has significant continuity with stoic and Augustinian currents, and that emerges out of the writings of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant, for example. It consists in some measure of the attempt to grasp the divine through ordinary means of consciousness. The modern variant of this religion of conscience seeks legitimation of religion (by various means and in accordance with various interpretations of religion, depending on the writer) through a robust construal of conscience. Serving as the voice of the Divine (again, variously ascribed according to its author), or imparting fundamental wisdom otherwise not perceptible through natural means, the subject relies upon its conscience

to guide the subject into freedom, to create harmonious relationships, and to provide the possibility for a peaceable and civil society.

Second, the modern religion of conscience is also an historiographical thesis articulated by David Pacini. In Pacini's telling, the modern religion of conscience emerged as a way to navigate the challenges posed by the modern problem constellation that manifested most powerfully in the subject's experience of disorientation. Reading through Kant's observation of the modern condition as having rendered the subject "neither suspended from heaven nor anchored to earth," Pacini follows the intellectual trajectory of the European mind through its various phases of doubt and despair in the nineteenth century to its ultimate manifestation of decay in the early twentieth century.

To various degrees, Coleridge leans upon insights gained from Fichte to marshal his own sort of theory of subjectivity. Essential within that theory is a deep concern for the taxonomy and architectonics of the mind and the limits—and possibilities—of the perceptive capacity of each. His use of the language of mind (i.e. Reason, Understanding, imagination and fancy, conscience, will), and the central place that each element of mind holds within his catechetical system, is reminiscent of the works of his German contemporaries. Coleridge relies in no small measure on certain Fichtean principles of subjectivity. Those principal themes are three: the mind is an activity; the self is self-positing; the imagination performs essential functions.

Despite the similarities between these two theories of subjectivity, Coleridge's pseudo-idealist method maintains important differences. Notable among those differences, Coleridge places his speculative or idealist-inspired ruminations in direct service to a program of spiritual cultivation. That is, although he engages the taxonomy and architectonics of mind, at times with fastidious attention, he does so not only for the sake of morality and ethics, the practical goals to

which other of his German counterparts aspired, but also (and principally) for the sake of developing his reader's spiritual sensibilities. It is for a spiritual purpose that Coleridge engaged the life of the mind. By investigating the anatomy of the mind on the way to a theory of subjectivity, Coleridge desired to move his reader in the direction of what he calls a "cultivated" spirit wherein a new sort of vision is possible. The attainment of faith—which he defines as a qualification of consciousness that emerges when the components of mind function as a whole according to the design of each—is the goal Coleridge sets for his reader.

To receive the qualification of consciousness that is faith, the reader must undergo a progressive series of reflective reading exercises, beginning with common sense prudence, moving up through morality and ethics, and ultimately into the realm of spiritual religion. The movement from common sense through morality to spiritual religion suggests a movement from the least to the greatest expression of freedom. Where prudence simply asks for the subject to consider the benefits of rivaling options from a point of view of utility or pleasure (as problem-avoidance), and morality seeks to guide the subject to selfless consideration of personal gain, the place of spiritual religion acknowledges that true freedom has more to do with the complete reliance of the subject upon the Divine than it does the cost-benefit analysis of any given choice. From the point of view yielded by the qualification of consciousness that is faith, Coleridge argues, the reader will see the resolution of the discord and conflict that emerges from a mind estranged from itself and its creator brought about by the forces of modernity that emphasize freedom as choice. By attaining the insight that sees the Christian faith as "the perfection of Human Intelligence," the reader will have overcome disorientation and captivity to achieve right orientation and freedom, which is also right relationship to self and God.

But the freedom that Coleridge assists his reader in attaining is peculiar. It is peculiar because it emerges out of a commitment to the mind's ability to grasp the super-sensual. Deeply committed to the reality of unseen powers or spirits, Coleridge engaged the language and literature of German idealism to find ways to relate the mind and the realm of subjective interiority to the divine and super-sensual powers. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, with its theory of subjectivity that unfolds from the mind's basic Fact/Act, provided Coleridge with a compelling means to speak of inward experiences of longing and relating, the seemingly tidal ebb and flow of personal relationships that move from order to disorder and back again, and the subjective awareness of a deep rootedness in a power that creates and gives life, and in so doing, inspires new modes of individual and collective relation. From this point of view, from which the subject comes to see that it is wholly grasped by the divine, freedom means something more than merely choice. *Freedom is the discovery of one's reliance upon the unseen power that creates, and the alignment of individual will with the divine will that shows forth in that consciousness.*

By intending to shape the minds of young readers entering the clerisy, Coleridge hoped to dissolve doctrinal challenges posed by the prevailing tides of Socinianism he saw within the Anglican Church. In addition, by clarifying the distinction between Reason and Understanding, Coleridge hoped to remove the tendency to enthusiasm from his version of a spiritual religion. Doing so required a creative move of the imagination, in which the supersensual and eternal truths of Reason are mediated by the sensory and discursive faculty of the Understanding. Because Coleridge meant for all of his work to point to a reconsideration of what is meant by "Christian faith," a subject's capacity to mediate the divine will in its own individual will is a skill that must be cultivated and practiced in ordinary life. Coleridge's reform is not one concerned primarily with doctrine, although his concern for doctrinal orthodoxy bears some

consideration. Rather, his reform concerned a construal of faith and freedom that demonstrates and proves itself in practice. To the one who asks for evidence of this depiction of Christian faith, Coleridge replies, “TRY IT.”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁶ *AR*, 202.

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