

"THE KEY-STONE OF THE ARCH":
COLERIDGE'S METAPHOR OF JOINING
AND SOME OF ITS CONSEQUENCES

By

HILARY ANNE TURNER, M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

October 1991

COLERIDGE'S METAPHOR OF JOINING

This thesis is dedicated to three
by whom it was a privilege
to be taught:

George Grant (1918-1988);

George Whalley (1915-1983);

and George Grinnell, who flourishes.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: "The Key-Stone of the Arch":
Coleridge's Metaphor of Joining
And Some of Its Consequences

AUTHOR: Hilary Anne Turner, B.A. (McMaster University)
M.A. (Queen's University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor R. W. Vince

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 310

ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the implications of Coleridge's claim that in the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte he had discovered the "key-stone of the arch"--a connection, in other words, between materialist and idealist ways of conceiving the world. Since a purely Fichtean philosophy seems to generate an unbridled will set over against a passive world, and to culminate in a technological attitude towards both nature and the products of human activity, the various schools of literary criticism that trace their origins to Coleridge have, to a certain extent, inherited a fascination with will and with technique. But while Coleridge undoubtedly appreciated the philosophic significance of Fichte's conception of a foundational act of self-positing, he diverges from Fichte on the proper uses of the human will. Rather than regarding the world as simply an arena in which the will exerts itself in opposition to nature, Coleridge works his way toward a dialectical philosophy in which human consciousness and nature cooperate and are reconciled. In his understanding of the dialectic as both a formal method and a way of accounting for human history, Coleridge resembles the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel more than has previously been acknowledged.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The members of my supervisory committee have shown an extraordinary patience during the writing of this thesis; all three have also been extremely generous with their time and their considerable scholarly resources. I am deeply grateful to Professors R.W. Vince, D.P. Goellnicht, and G.J. Grinnell for their unfailing assistance and encouragement.

I am grateful as well to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for granting me a Doctoral Fellowship in 1988-89.

But without the support and sympathy of my parents, this thesis could never have been completed. They deserve more thanks than they would ever willingly lay claim to.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
1 Revolution and Reaction	14
2 Mastery	68
3 Technique	116
4 Method	155
5 Dialectic	195
6 Otherness	251
7 Conclusion: Towards a Dialectical Criticism	287
Sources of Chapter Epigraphs	295
Works Cited	297

Introduction

This thesis, primarily an exercise in intellectual history, is written in an uneasy awareness of some relatively recent developments in the literary criticism of the Romantic period. Foremost of these is a contention among critics of Romantic writers that metaphor--the most basic and pervasive of literary tropes--is frequently best understood as a smoke-screen for epistemological uncertainty. A particularly revealing uncertainty is thought to be discernible in the prominence that Romantic writers assign to metaphor, a form of figurative language that seeks to unite disparate concepts and yet, by its very concreteness within poetic discourse (it is more concrete than allegory, for example), that draws attention to their difference from one another. Metaphor, in other words, because it is an unmistakably self-conscious use of language, ironically reveals that the concepts it yokes together can be yoked together only with recourse to language: the reality is entirely otherwise. The presence of metaphor can thus be construed as evidence of a tentativeness, or even an anxiety, on the part of the writer about the adequacy of language to its objects. Poets and thinkers who are confident about the unity of thought and

thing, and about their ability to describe the world in terms that are commensurate with its structure, texture, form, and so on, do not need to resort to such expedients.

This is roughly the position of Paul DeMan, who, in an influential essay on the uses of figurative language among Romantic poets, argued for a radical and poetically functional disjunction between the linguistic image and the natural object it seeks to represent. The characteristic imagery of Romantic poetry, says DeMan, "is grounded in the intrinsic ontological primacy of the natural object. Poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer to the ontological status of the object, and its growth and development are determined by this inclination. We saw that this movement is essentially paradoxical and condemned in advance to failure." Although DeMan admits that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between "expressive or constitutive" and "mimetic or literal" uses of imagery--that is, between imagery that acknowledges its inferior status as mere language, and imagery that does not--the epistemological value of both types is identical: "Critics who speak of a 'happy relationship' between matter and consciousness fail to realize that the very fact that the relationship has to be established within the medium of language indicates that it does not exist in actuality."¹

¹ "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," in Harold Bloom, ed., Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism (New York: Norton, 1970), 70.

Whatever we may think of DeMan's strategy here--or of the absence of any inquiry into the intentions of the authors in question--we have to acknowledge the validity of the deconstructionist insight: language is indeed a way of marking the absence, rather than the presence of the thing it names. When poets describe or name objects in the world, then, they are in fact acknowledging an absence, drawing attention to a failure or an emptiness at the heart of language. It is also hard to shut one's eyes to a tendency among modernist poets, the immediate heirs of Romanticism, to express the impossibility of bridging the gap between word and object. Their recognition of the inability of language to be commensurate with its objects has led, as DeMan puts it, to "a feeling of threatening paralysis"² which, in turn, has necessitated a critical and philosophical fascination with language as an autonomous system with no reference to an external order. The language of modern poetry accordingly ceases to be denotative in anything but the most nominal sense. Modern poetry does not profess to tell us anything about the world; the act of description itself has been given up as futile.

Necessarily, one of the questions that has informed this thesis is the extent to which the insights of deconstruction apply to Coleridge, a poet and thinker who was, in some ways,

² "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," op.cit., 72.

on the cusp of modernism's ontological distress, and yet who professed a distinctly unmodern faith in the capacity of thought and language to be adequate to their objects. At a fundamental level, it seems clear that the deconstructionist conception of language can be applied to him, as indeed it can be applied to any writer who, self-consciously or unconsciously, ingenuously or ironically, makes use of language as a referential system of signs. But while deconstruction can be applied to any writer, there does seem to be something peculiarly tantalizing about the Romantic attitude towards the relationship between language and the outside world. For example, in 1971, M.H. Abrams, certainly no deconstructionist, made the point that the most significant philosophical work of the period, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, is itself a deeply ambivalent work, a work that is only mistakenly read as a "transparent" or sincerely descriptive account of being in the world. Rather, the Phenomenology is a self-reflexive parable; it "stands squarely at the intersection of these diverse but collateral genres, for it is a work which explicitly fuses the modes of the circuitous and self-implicating Bildungsbiographie, of systematic philosophy (Wissenschaft), and of Universalgeschichte." Read intelligently--that is, as literature rather than as philosophy--the Phenomenology reveals itself, as Abrams goes on to say, as "one of the earliest, yet at the same time the most intricate and extreme

of modern involuted works of the imagination. It is a self-contained, self-sustained, and self-implicated puzzle-book, which is enigmatic in the whole and deliberately equivocal in all its parts and passing allusions."³ Given the positive tone of this assertion, it seems safe to conclude that the apparent insistence of Idealist philosophy on a basic congruence between mind and world has been an important factor in encouraging recent critics to examine the use of language characteristic of Romantic poetry and prose. In much the same fashion as the Freudian notion of resistance, the apparent assuredness of Romantic poetry, the very concreteness of its imagery and seeming guilelessness of its diction, have come to suggest a correspondingly intense despair about the stability of the order it seeks to depict. Thus, when Coleridge maintains in the Biographia that he has discovered, in German Idealist philosophy, the "key-stone of the arch"--how, exactly, are we to receive the metaphor?

As Coleridge himself might have observed, unity and discontinuity, certainty and uncertainty, are pairs of polar opposites; each can be identified only by its implicit contrast with the other. Given, too, the hermeneutical caution that acts of interpretation are smooth in approximate proportion to the observer's ability to anticipate their outcome--and to select the data accordingly--it stands to

³ Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), 225, 236.

reason that any text to which this particular question is put can be made to yield evidence of both authorial certainty and uncertainty, or of an oscillation between the two. I am convinced, in other words, that the disposition of the interpreter is frequently a decisive factor in the position one chooses to occupy in debates such as the present one. As an incorrigible traditionalist, I find I have no viable alternative but to throw my lot in with the proponents of a Romanticism relatively unencumbered by fundamental linguistic despair.

There are other reasons for my inclination to stress Coleridge's confidence in the relationship between thoughts and things and to minimize his anxiety and doubt. Some of these will become apparent in the chapters that follow. But it is worth acknowledging at the outset my strong suspicion that Coleridge's intellectual method is one that does not appear to best advantage in the light of efficient or single-minded scholarly techniques. What may look like a temporizing uncertainty on the part of the author is as likely, in Coleridge's case, to be traces left by a thoroughly self-assured, though idiosyncratic, method of inquiry. He himself was well aware of the propensity of more practical intelligences than his own to equate his desultoriness with a lack of resolve:

Southey once said to me: You are nosing
every nettle along the Hedge, while the
Greyhound (meaning himself, I presume) wants

only to get sight of the Hare, and Flash--
 strait as a line! he has it in his mouth!
 --Even so, I replied, might a Cannibal say to
 an Anatomist, whom he had watched dissecting
 a body. But the fact is--I do not care two
 pence for the Hare; but I value most highly
 the excellencies of scent, patience,
 discrimination, free Activity; and find a
 Hare in every Nettle I make myself acquainted
 with.⁴

Coleridge's equanimity on the subject of the mind's ability to grasp its objects might, of course, be construed as a shrewd defensiveness, a robust disclaimer that conceals an actual uncertainty about the efficacy of that process. But it can be attributed with equal justice to a faith that is simply at odds with contemporary scepticism. When thinkers are confident, to change the metaphor a little, they are capable of casting their nets widely--precisely because of their assurance that the relationship among the ill-assorted creatures they have pulled out of the deep is, in the end, explicable.

While a basic conviction of the intelligibility of nature and history can account for the apparent randomness of Coleridge's investigations, the occasionally frustrating digressions of Biographia Literaria, for example, can also be explained by assuming his fundamental certainty about the nature of the project. Stanley Cavell (one of the few recent

⁴ Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from his Published and Unpublished Prose Writings, Revised Edition, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 143.

critics to argue for an essential unity informing the Biographia) is at some pains to expose the lack of sympathy that lies behind objections to the author's circuitous approach to his subject: "No wonder Coleridge remarks, 'Great indeed are the obstacles which an English metaphysician has to encounter.' I take it as to Coleridge's philosophical credit that he finds the initial obstacle, perhaps therefore the greatest, the image of all the rest, to be the finding of a place to begin undigressively. Such is a cost of refusing to identify the vocation to philosophy with the vocation to science, enviable, glamorous, as that may be."⁵

None of this is to suggest, of course, that Coleridge is a transparent, unproblematic, or even entirely truthful writer. He is famous for his dodges; and while it must be agreed that his habits of plagiarising, prevaricating, and postponing mean that his assertions cannot always be taken at face value, the refusal ever to take him at face value seems equally indefensible. It may indeed be more so, since the refusal to believe eliminates the one test by which we might sort out the authentic from the inauthentic. This is the historical context of the utterances themselves--something which I have endeavoured to keep in mind throughout my reading of Coleridge. In many cases, however, the decision

⁵ "Emerson, Coleridge, Kant," in John Rajchman and Cornel West, eds., Post-Analytic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 102.

about how far to trust Coleridge can be made on no other grounds than intuition. An identical problem is faced by Grevel Lindop in his biography of Thomas DeQuincey, another celebrated romancer of his life, his plans, and his motives. Lindop admits that "while the nature of his experience was such that only he could tell us about it, we know that his statements are not always accurate on matters of fact.... Inevitably I shall have believed too much for some readers and too little for others, but I see no solution to the problem."⁶ The same might be said of the present study.

Rather than focussing on Coleridge the critic, the political thinker, or the poet--all areas in which valuable work still remains to be done--I have tried in what follows to isolate and evaluate the main premise of his philosophy. This I take to be the notion of joining itself, a concern or desire that recurs throughout his writings and that appears to have motivated his last, failed attempt at delivering himself of a systematic magnum opus. I have tried to consider the idea of joining both in its immediate intellectual context (that is, the context of German Idealist philosophy), and with respect to its significance for later criticism, including that of the present day. This latter task has proved by far the more taxing, largely because (I sense) the intellectual climate in which I have been trying

⁶ The Opium Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), x.

to come to terms with Coleridge is characterized by a deep scepticism about the very notions that preoccupy him as a thinker. The possibility of a correspondence between language and experience, self and other, art and life, is, as I have suggested, one that is by and large uncongenial to the dominant mode of literary thinking at the present time. That is to say: the intellectual errors least likely to be tolerated by contemporary criticism are errors of naiveté--errors that arise from an unscrutinized trust in the capacity of language to be commensurate with experience of the world. And there is a sense in which Coleridge is vulnerable to an attack on this score. Nevertheless, my contention will be that Coleridge is far from naive, and that he deserves a more considered verdict than the sort E.P. Thompson described in another context as "the enormous condescension of posterity."⁷ Not in spite of, but because of, the apparent uncongeniality of his presuppositions and goals, Coleridge has something important to offer contemporary literary criticism.

I have used the word "joining" in my title rather than the more obvious term "unity" for two reasons. The first is that the more active, dynamic word seems suitable to the intellectual tradition in which Coleridge would have situated himself. This is a tradition which begins in the Pre-

⁷ The Making of the English Working Class (London: Gollancz, 1965), 12.

Socratic emphasis on becoming rather than being⁸, and which appears to reach an impasse in the bifurcation in Western epistemology after Descartes. Coleridge's endeavours to reunite the subject-object dichotomy (for which he held Descartes responsible), and his break with Hartlean associationalism (on the grounds that mind within that framework is merely passive), are further evidence of his conviction that the mind is empowered to unite rather than merely juxtapose the concepts it entertains. Finally, the metaphor of the "key-stone of the arch" with which Coleridge explains his debt to Fichte, suggests that Coleridge's approach to mending the epistemological breach that Kantian philosophy had reopened was entirely active--a keystone, of course, being a locus of stored energy.

My second reason for this choice of words is almost purely rhetorical. Where "unity," one of the favourite terms of the New Criticism, still carries connotations of the static perfection of the "verbal icon" that the technique of close reading tended to promote, the word "joining" is more suggestive of the diachronic--and ultimately dialectical--brand of criticism with which I associate Coleridge. Unity

⁸ Coleridge follows Schleiermacher on Heraclitus to this effect in his Statesman's Manual. See R.J. White, ed., Lay Sermons (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 20 and n. 1. For a consideration of the textual evidence of Heraclitus's rejection of the notion of static unity, see Michael C. Stokes, The One and the Many in Presocratic Philosophy (Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1971), 107-108.

is the result of a process that is presumably complete; it is a known or, at least, a knowable quantity. The consequences of joining, on the other hand, especially in cases where two previously disparate ideas or entities come together in a new relationship, are unforeseeable and potentially interminable.

In a subtle way at least, the consequences of Coleridge's philosophical acts of joining do continue perceptibly to unfold. The immediate problem that seems to have given rise to Coleridge's various formulations of the notion was, as I have intimated, a version of the question upon which all Continental philosophy of the late eighteenth century turned. The transition from the rationalism and empiricism of Descartes and Locke to the "absolute" idealism of Hegel was accomplished by the intensive scrutiny of three or four major thinkers of the question "how can we know?" or, "how is it possible for our minds to grasp the world?" The way in which Coleridge answers the question, both directly and by implication, thus provides a means of locating him within the intellectual history of his day. But more than this, an examination of Coleridge's various attempts to bridge the gap between subject and object, mind and world, illuminates in a specific way a disagreement that is still very much with us. By looking closely at the arguments that persuaded Coleridge of the possibility of a synthesis between subject and object, I hope to comment, at least obliquely, on some matters of contemporary critical importance. Coleridge,

in other words, was well aware of the gap between consciousness and experience, and of the fragmentation of perspectives that must ensue if it could not be overcome. For him, however, that gap did not appear as the shifting, unstable relationship we envisage today: it exhibited, rather, all the earmarks of the age-old tension between faith and knowledge--a problem that presented itself to him as solvable, both intellectually--by means of a dialectic--and pragmatically--by means of a conservative politics.

Chapter One

Revolution and Reaction

History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many-sided, more lively and 'subtle' than the best parties, and the most class conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes imagine.

--V.I. Lenin¹

Nothing disappears in revolution. Revolution is simply the ironic form in which history comments on its own continuity.

--John P. Farrell

It would be difficult to imagine plainer evidence of the upheaval that has recently taken place in critical thinking on the Romantic period than that which would emerge from two works by a single author whose purposes and orientations appear entirely at odds with one another. Such a case is to be found in a comparison of Thomas McFarland's Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (1969) with his Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin (1981). The earlier volume, to which I am indebted in this thesis for its help in locating Coleridge

¹ The sources of all chapter epigraphs are listed together at the end of this thesis.

among his German Idealist contemporaries, is primarily a work of intellectual history. The book's most significant innovation as far as its central subject is concerned is McFarland's diagnosis of Coleridge's method of writing as "composition by mosaic organization,"² a contribution to the longstanding debate about Coleridge's originality that at once challenges the case for premeditated plagiarism so often made against him and, more importantly, lends credence to Coleridge's own vision of himself as the articulator (potential, rather than actual, to be sure) of a philosophic system designed to encompass the whole. McFarland insists that "Coleridge's thought demands for its assessment a recognition...that his intellectual endeavour constitutes an organic unity," although he also acknowledges that in the twentieth century, "we have all forgotten how to think in systematic or organic terms in the sense that those terms had validity for philosophical minds from Descartes to Hegel."³ In his first sustained attempt at putting Coleridge's thought in its historical context, then, McFarland delivers a figure who belonged to an intellectual tradition that prized coherence and completeness above philosophic originality. Given that the assumptions and goals of this tradition have been dramatically revised by more recent thought, we are

² Thomas McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1969), 27.

³ Ibid., xxxii, xxxviii.

presumably competent to assess it only by allowing for the counterweight of intellectual alternatives that have conditioned our own different attitudes.

By 1981, however, McFarland has shifted his ground.

Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, as broad in scope as the earlier book, though more literary than philosophical in its emphasis, identifies incoherence and incompleteness, rather than their opposites, as the distinguishing features of the intellectual climate that prevailed during Coleridge's lifetime. The apparent urgency and longevity of the impulse toward unity--an impulse that is shared by many thinkers and artists of the period--are now seen as evidence "that the situation actually obtaining must be the contrary of unity: that is, one of fragmentation, of things not tied together, not harmonious, not architectonically ordered."⁴ The thesis of the second book thus virtually reverses that of the first; this change in orientation, however, as McFarland explains, is to be understood "not by way of repudiation...but by way of necessary complement. The relation of this volume to the earlier one may be thought of...as the reverse of that coin's obverse; or as the turned identity rendered by an act of mirroring; or...as the white field reciprocally definitive of the silhouette that we ordinarily refer to the form of the

⁴ Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), i.

black outline."⁵

It is unfortunate, however, that in his second foray into the thickets of Romanticism, McFarland should have neglected to examine the assumptions that led him to isolate the concept of fragmentation--in both its literary and philosophic manifestations--as the most characteristic concern of the period. The manoeuvre has been accomplished only by positing fragmentation as a constant in history, as a point of reference that should somehow persist unchanged by adjustments in the perspective of the observer, and that should be expected to carry the same intellectual and emotional overtones in 1978, say, as it did in 1798. McFarland maintains, for example, that "incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin...are at the very center of life," and that "no invocation of a whole can countervail the truth that we live in a world of fragments."⁶ No more justifiable than their opposites, these assertions are suspiciously conducive to reconstituting Romanticism as a more convenient, more familiar, object of study. The implication is that the thinkers of the Romantic period--like their successors Nietzsche, Jaspers, Husserl, Heidegger⁷--were as mindful as we ourselves of the unbridgeable chasm that lies between consciousness and its objects, and as fascinated by it.

⁵ Ibid., xi-xii.

⁶ Ibid., 5, 53, 55.

⁷ See, for example, ibid., 382

For reasons that I will presently explain, the proposition strikes me as very doubtful. As necessary as it may be, from time to time, to correct an unbalanced view of any historical period, more is at issue in McFarland's revision than the restoration of equilibrium in our assessment of Romanticism: the question that emerges from a comparison of his two books on the subject is not merely whether the cup is half full or half empty, but whether in each case the cup under observation is the same cup--or, as a reviewer wryly remarked, whether there remains any cup at all.⁸ Bearing in mind McFarland's earlier observation that the writers of the Romantic period can be described only in a full awareness of the differences between our world-view and theirs, it seems appropriate to recall that one of the popular creeds of twentieth-century philosophy has been that the stance of the observer cannot help but affect the object that is observed.⁹ As David Simpson has remarked, also in

⁸ Review of Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin, The Wordsworth Circle 13 (Spring, 1982), 126.

⁹ It is to Werner Heisenberg that this notion of the indeterminacy of the object under investigation is usually attributed. I am grateful to George Grinnell, however, for pointing out that Heisenberg himself, though well aware of the arguments that are advanced against philosophic realism, was by no means inclined to doubt the ontological status of the scientific object. As he remarks in Physics and Philosophy, "our perceptions are not primarily bundles of colors or sounds; what we perceive is already perceived as something, the accent here being on the word 'thing,' and therefore it is doubtful whether we gain anything by taking the perceptions instead of the things as the ultimate elements of reality." (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 84.

the context of the modern hermeneutic of Romanticism, "we can never be sure of the degree to which we are the generous transcribers of fact, and of how far we remain the architects of personally and socially determined patterns."¹⁰

My second and more substantial reservation about the critical transition of which McFarland's two books are representative springs from specific convictions about the grounds of admissibility where scholarly evidence is concerned. At the heart of the matter, manifestly, is the long debated question of authorial intention.¹¹ While it is

¹⁰ Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1979), 20. In spite of his awareness of this principle, Simpson seems to me guilty of a similar imaginative projection of the twentieth-century fondness for epistemological uncertainty backwards onto the Romantics. He acknowledges, for example, that the "strong closure" of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," by its very strength, "is [a way of] forcing a rift, trying to upset the 'single state' of any reader who might tend to enact a synthesis of the various contraries within the poem as part of the process of reading" (11). A little later in the argument, the same seemingly over-emphatic closure becomes evidence of "a slight faltering of tone as a surreptitious confession of the true nature of the case" (34).

¹¹ For a thorough exploration of this question, beginning with the seminal article by Wimsatt and Beardsley, see David Newton De Molina, ed., On Literary Intention (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976). More recently, Jerome McGann has considered the problem in his Critique of Modern Textual Criticism (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 34-80, passim. Coleridge's remarks on the general subject of intention are interesting as well: "It is a matter of infinite difficulty, but fortunately of comparative indifference, to determine what a man's motive may have been for this or that particular action. Rather seek to learn what his objects in general are. What does he habitually wish, habitually pursue? and thence deduce his impulses which are commonly the true efficient cause of men's conduct; and without which the motive itself would not have become a motive." Literary

plausible, psychologically, that the possibility of cosmic unity that seems to have galvanized Romantic poets and thinkers was seized upon in defiance of reason rather than in philosophical or religious certainty, this interpretation is not so easily substantiated with reference to the actual texts. To take one of a multitude of possible illustrations, when Wordsworth asserts in The Prelude that,

there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society,

the claim cannot automatically be received as a transparent irony. Though the workmanship is called dark and inscrutable, at this juncture in the poem its existence is unequivocally affirmed. There is nothing here to suggest that the intended meaning is precisely the opposite of the overt meaning, that the divergence and not the reconciliation of discordant elements ought to carry the day in the mind of either the speaker or the reader of the poem.

Of course, I do not wish to imply that the interpretation of literary texts should confine itself to their immediate, lexical meaning; I want only to point out that it is obliged to take that meaning into account.¹² A calculated

Remains, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (London, 1836), I, 297.

¹² Cf. the much more categorical pronouncement of Hans-Georg Gadamer: "Everything depends on how something is said. But this does not mean we should reflect on the means of saying it. Quite the contrary, the more convincingly

scepticism about the overt assertions of poets and philosophers, in other words, is at least as otiose as a simple-minded credulousness. Admittedly, such a baldly empirical approach as the one I am proposing runs the risk of overlooking the hermeneutical complexities of the multivalent text. There are clear exceptions to the rule. For example, though neither contains the sort of textual indicators that would negate the literal meaning of their arguments, Swift's Modest Proposal and Defoe's Shortest Way With Dissenters are both identifiably ironic in their intent. Such exceptions do not, however, compel us to abandon the original rule, but merely to design a larger context for it. Thus: while the texts themselves do not explicitly announce their ironic intent, the reader's knowledge of the historical circumstances of their composition and of the writings of Swift and Defoe in general is enough to make the irony apparent. We can safely conclude, then, that judgements and intuitions about authorial intention must rely, in a way that is not always articulated, on the interpreter's understanding

something is said, the more self-evident and natural the uniqueness and singularity of its declaration seems to be, that is, it concentrates the attention of the person being addressed entirely upon what is said and prevents him from moving to a distanced aesthetic differentiation. Over against the real intention, which aims at what is said, reflection upon the means of the declaration is indeed always secondary and in general is excluded where men speak to each other face to face....Understanding does not occur when we try to intercept what someone wants to say to us by claiming we already know it." Philosophical Hermeneutics, ed. and trans., David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 102.

of the original context of the utterance.

It follows that the critical transition under consideration here has been negotiated with the assistance of some new conception of the historical or cultural milieu in which Romantic attitudes towards unity were expressed. That the conception must be new is apparent from the contrast between the historical and philosophical evidence canvassed in McFarland's first book, and the literary evidence assembled in the second. If we may take it as given that the analysis of authorial intention can be predicated only upon some knowledge, however partial, of the historical context in which the intention originates, the irreconcilability of the two books becomes bothersome. Even Romantic irony,¹³ a different thing entirely from the heavily rhetorical irony of the eighteenth century, cannot be identified as such without reference to the social, political, and intellectual conditions in which the text originates. Thus, my chief complaint about the more recent view is that, in the attempt to promote fragmentation as the defining characteristic of the Romantic consciousness, certain relevant historical

¹³ Chapter Four of Kathleen Wheeler's Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) is devoted to an extended definition of this term, and to showing its relevance to studies of Coleridge. See also Peter Conrad, Shandyism: The Character of Romantic Irony (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) and Paul Hamilton's survey of work in the field, "Romantic Irony and English Literary History," The Romantic Heritage: A Collection of Critical Essays (Copenhagen: Publications of the Department of English, University of Copenhagen, 1983), 11-32.

evidence has been put aside or discounted.¹⁴ The overarching purpose of this thesis is to make a plea for its reconsideration.

The objections I have outlined are especially significant where Coleridge is concerned. Though his thought is seldom taken as paradigmatic of Romanticism--perhaps because his works (excepting a handful of poems) had little immediate impact on the dominant taste of the day--his output was nevertheless large, and the authors he had read and the subjects on which he expressed himself, both in conversation and in print, were legion. He is, in the second place, a difficult, enigmatic, and frequently inconsistent writer; his prose generally, as Hazlitt remarked of The Friend, "though it contains some noble passages and fine trains of thought," is characterized by "prolixity and obscurity."¹⁵ Nevertheless, given his eventual reputation as a major poet, his undoubted importance as the conduit through which German

¹⁴ I find myself in agreement here with Paul Hamilton's observation that the limitation of a deconstructive approach to irony is evident in its failure to consider that irony in an historical context: "It wishes to fix literature forever in its sights and deny it that path of escape which literary history always suggests.... Unlike [Marxism, psychoanalysis and feminism] it tries to do this without incorporating a theory of historical explanation, whether in terms of class-struggle, biography, or patriarchy. Among the salutary spin-offs from renewed interest in romantic irony is the recovery of the truth that irony does have its historical moments, and the realization that it is better understood as a consequence of this recognition." "Romantic Irony and English Literary History," op. cit., 14.

¹⁵ The Spirit of the Age, 1825 edition, (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971), 76.

Idealist philosophy first made its way into English letters, and the several directions in which his influence can be traced, there are good grounds for regarding Coleridge as the test by which any account of Romanticism in England proves its comprehensiveness. For all these reasons, at least since the beginning of academic criticism in Britain and North America, Coleridge has been cited in many different contexts, sometimes as an authority or a progenitor, but occasionally also as an ambiguous power which new critical schools have either to assimilate or discredit in their ascent towards orthodoxy.¹⁶ Because of his variety and his complexity, he is arguably the most likely figure among the English Romantics to be reinterpreted according to fluctuations in the academic weather, and his reputation can accordingly be used as an index of change in matters of theory and critical practice.¹⁷

¹⁶ A charming example of this tendency is I.A. Richards's assertion in 1925 that "It is probable that Wordsworth and certain that Coleridge if writing to-day would use quite other terms in place of pleasure for describing poetic values." Principles of Literary Criticism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, n.d.), 97. Richards himself preferred the more neutral and scientific term "emotional experience."

¹⁷ Another contender is Shelley, whose reputation has been considerably revised in recent years. See, for example, Andrew J. Welburn, Power and Self-Consciousness in the Poetry of Shelley (London: Macmillan, 1986), Kelvin Everest, ed., Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983); Ronald Tetreault, The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), and G. Kim Blank, ed., The New Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority (London: Macmillan, 1990).

Certain anomalies are apparent. The tremendous contrast between the view of Coleridge tendered by the American New Critics of the nineteen-forties and fifties, and the picture that has recently been drawn by the advocates of Deconstruction attests to the breadth of the intellectual spectrum in which his reputation can be enlisted. The New Criticism held Coleridge up as an exemplar of its central principle of poetic unity (a unity which almost invariably is shown to survive the ironic or paradoxical tensions discernible in the text); deconstruction, the self-declared opponent of the previous orthodoxy, is coming to regard him as an early apostle of the postmodern values of discontinuity, incompleteness, and willful fragmentation. While there is no obvious reason why opposing critical movements should not claim descent from the same progenitor (after all, both Trotskyites and Stalinists invoke the authority of Marx), there is nevertheless a resounding irony in the congruence of these mutually hostile attempts to appropriate Coleridge as a theoretical ancestor.

By and large, the New Critics and their sympathizers regarded Coleridge as having established the philosophic foundations of the enterprise in which they were engaged. Writing in the mid-nineteen-thirties, John Crowe Ransom, the architect of the collection of interpretive principles and techniques that were shortly to dominate American academic criticism, made an ostensibly Coleridgean declaration of what

he considered the proper aims of the literary critic:

The critic should regard the poem as nothing short of a desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre.... The poet perpetuates in his poem an order of existence which in actual life is constantly crumbling beneath his touch. His poem celebrates the object which is real, individual, and qualitatively infinite.... The critic should find in the poem a total poetic or individual object which tends to be universalized, but is not permitted to suffer this fate. His identification of the poetic object is in terms of the universal or commonplace object to which it tends, and of the tissue, or totality of connotation, which holds it secure.¹⁸

The metaphors that Ransom uses here--the artist's struggle against chaos, his or her conscious preservation of a realm of order (the work of art) against that chaos, and the critic's attempt to see each in terms of the other--suggest that he regards poetry and criticism as analogues of one another. Each is an attempt at making sense of chaotic experience; each is teleological; each is directed ultimately at the production of order. Like the poet, the critic attempts to reconcile the opposing forces of "art" and "life" in a single interpretative act.

Writing in 1953, Ransom's disciple, William K. Wimsatt declares Coleridge "the father of holism in English

¹⁸ "Criticism, Inc.," The World's Body (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 347-8.

criticism,"¹⁹ and finds that as early as 1796 he had discovered precisely the cohesive power of the poetic faculty on which Ransom's notion of literary work was predicated:

[Coleridge] was concerned with the more complex ontological grounds of association (the various levels of sameness, of correspondence, and analogy), where mental activity transcends mere 'associative response'--where it is in fact the unifying activity known both to later eighteenth century associationists and to romantic poets as 'imagination.'²⁰

The Coleridgean text to which both Ransom and Wimsatt are indebted in these formulations is the famous description of the imagination (in Chapter 14 of Biographia Literaria), a power which

reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order...²¹

And it comes as no surprise to find this very passage approvingly reproduced by Cleanth Brooks in The Well-Wrought

¹⁹ The Verbal Icon (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 238.

²⁰ Ibid., 107.

²¹ Biographia Literaria, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 16-17.

Urn,²² a work which, because of its pedagogical usefulness (and the confidence with which it demonstrated the centrality of irony and paradox to the structure of lyric poetry) was to be more widely read than any other statement produced by the New Criticism.

It was his perceived holism, then--his insistence on the interdependence of text and world--that constituted Coleridge's appeal for the New Critics. There can be little doubt, however, that this appeal was proportionate also to his usefulness as a touchstone in the midst of their attempts to define themselves not only intellectually, but politically--in both the broad sense of that word and in the narrower context of the literary academy. The agrarian sympathies and vaguely Christian inclinations of the early spokesmen for the New Criticism are well known;²³ and the extension of these conservative tendencies into the arena of scholarly politics was not slow in coming. As Gerald Graff has observed, the first applications of the New Criticism as "a historical and cultural method" were undertaken in the service of the then burgeoning interest in defining the specifically "American" element in American literature. This application of theory to practice, he goes on to say, "was

²² The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947, 1975), 19.

²³ See, for example, Walter Sutton, Modern American Criticism (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 98-102.

accomplished by reviving the latent cultural dimension of organicist poetics that, for Coleridge and the Southern New Critics had connected the literary with the social organism."²⁴

The New Criticism has been maligned in recent years on the grounds that it was narrowly formalist in its conception of the literary artefact, and disingenuously apolitical in its roster of intellectual ambitions. As with many orthodoxies that have passed into eclipse, the immediate successors of the movement are loath to grant it anything approaching the respectability it once enjoyed. Bruce Franklin's asperity on the subject of the New Critical technique of "close reading" seems only slightly in excess of the norm: "The ostrich sticks its head in the sand and admires the structural relationship among the grains."²⁵ What is often overlooked about the programme designed by the New Critics, however, is the revolutionary determination with which it overturned the esoteric textual strategies that it had inherited in its turn from the British literary academy of the twenties and thirties. Pitting itself against the

²⁴ Professing Literature: An Institutional History (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 216-17.

²⁵ "The Teaching of Literature in the Highest Academies of the Empire," in Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter, eds., The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 122; cited in Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 130.

perceived impressionism of this earlier generation of British academics,²⁶ the New Criticism announced itself as an attempt to establish the autonomy and the methodological sophistication of academic criticism. It did so by redefining the institution of criticism in broad and eclectic terms that were also thought to be reminiscent of Coleridge himself. According to R.P. Blackmur, it was in fact Coleridge who "began the whole business of the special techniques of modern scholarship and criticism of poetry; all the expansions into the psychology of language and imagination."²⁷ The brand of criticism that resulted from the efforts of the New Critics to introduce this exoteric model into the academy is aptly designated by Murry Krieger as "contextualist."²⁸

²⁶ Elizabeth W. Bruss, Beautiful Theories: The Spectacle of Discourse in Contemporary Criticism (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 13.

²⁷ The Lion and the Honeycomb: Essays in Solicitude and Critique (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), 184. Cf. the remark of Allen Tate that "The famous Chapter 14 of Biographia Literaria has been the background of the criticism of poetry for more than a hundred years....This chapter is the most influential statement on poetry ever formulated by an English critic: its insights, when we have them, are ours, and ours too its contradictions." "Literature as Knowledge," Collected Essays (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), 35.

²⁸ For a succinct account of the implications of this term, as well as Krieger's analysis of the indebtedness of the New Critics to Coleridge, see "The Existential Basis of Contextualist Criticism," in Hazard Adams, ed., Critical Theory Since Plato (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), 1224-1231.

The revolution in literary studies brought about by Ransom, Tate, Blackmur, Wimsatt, Brooks, and their adherents was, undeniably, a conservative revolution. The New Criticism regarded itself as preserving a tradition of literary and cultural holism in the face of recent deviations from that tradition. It advanced such typically conservative doctrines as the moral advantages of an organicist rather than mechanistic conception of the work of art, and the desirability of a "unified sensibility" on the part of both poet and critic. (This last turn of phrase, significantly, was coined by T.S. Eliot, who derived it from his teacher F.H. Bradley, who had derived it in turn from the most substantial of apologists for conservatism, G.W.F. Hegel.)²⁹ The New Criticism was conservative, finally, in the suspicion with which it regarded all a priori, schematic attempts to define the nature of poetry,³⁰ or to compromise the unique ontological status of the work of literature by subjecting it to the methods of other disciplines or allowing it to become a mere piece of evidence in non-literary projects of any description.³¹

²⁹ René Wellek, The Attack on Literature and Other Essays (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 93.

³⁰ See, for example, Robert Penn Warren's "Pure and Impure Poetry," in Selected Essays of Robert Penn Warren (New York: Random House, 1958), 32-51.

³¹ Wimsatt and Beardsley make what is probably the most unequivocal case for preserving the "literariness" of literary judgements from all extrinsic considerations in "The

These conservative tendencies notwithstanding, the revolution in institutional criticism brought about by the New Critics was similar in several respects to the contemporary revolution in North American literary studies that, at the present writing, can be said to have established a new hegemony within the academy. Certainly the efforts of deconstructionists to claim Coleridge as one of their own betray a strikingly similar mix of political and intellectual motives. The attempt of Jerome Christensen to appropriate Coleridge in the name of Derridean deconstruction is a case in point. In Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language (1981), Christensen offers, first, a historical justification for the suitability of the Coleridgean banner to the deconstructionist camp that echoes the earlier efforts of Ramsom and Wimsatt. Pointing out that the "contemporary critical scene" has for some time been divided between French and Anglo-American schools of thought, Christensen invokes Coleridge as the source of that division: "one would expect to find the model for the current antagonism there in the seed. And there it is." He locates this "model" in The Friend, where Coleridge engages in some animadversions on France and the French, with whom England was at war at the time when the periodical was being produced. Christensen attributes Coleridge's objections to French politics, philosophy,

Intentional Fallacy," in The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 3-18.

economics, and literature to "a fundamental anxiety about style," an anxiety that Coleridge speciously attaches to the French style, though it properly belongs to an awareness of the "incorrigible impropriety of his own."³² It is worth pointing out that Coleridge is highly unlikely to have been the "seed" of the French strain of criticism that shares the contemporary academic scene: certainly Christensen presents no evidence for this unusual claim.³³ The effect of his genealogy is thus, subtly, to attribute the "antagonism" between the rival branches of contemporary criticism to the Anglo-American strain alone, of which Coleridge has formerly been seen as the initiator.

In spite of the contradiction that the next stage in the argument implies, Coleridge's method of composition is then playfully likened to the very "style" he so heatedly opposed:

Coleridge's collection of essays The Friend could be, mutatis mutandis, successfully republished today as a polemical monograph entitled 'The Dysfunction of Criticism at the Present Time' or, abbreviated, be delivered as a paper on a Modern Language Association panel called 'What Hath Derrida Unwrought.'³⁴

³² Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 22.

³³ It is conceivable that his influence might have reached the French Symbolists through Edgar Allen Poe; but the connection is remote.

³⁴ Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language, 22.

If Coleridge, in his capacity as the originator of the Anglo-American strain in modern criticism, is to be taken as the sower of discord with the contemporary French school, it is illogical to claim that he can simultaneously typify the very tendencies against which the hostility has been directed. Even if he were as impossibly Protean an author as the comparison suggests, even given the "prolixity and obscurity" of The Friend, the remark is a considerable overstatement. Still more importantly, the link that is being forged here between Coleridge's stylistic flourishes and those of the deconstructionists evinces a deliberate disregard for both the intentions of the author and the historical rootedness of discourse itself.

Christensen is an acute observer of the formal properties of Coleridge's prose. "Indeed," he remarks, his "is a book that does not try to understand Coleridge, but attempts to read him. Spare in generalizations, my argument attempts to adhere as much as possible to the text."³⁵ Broadly speaking, Christensen regards the Coleridgean text as self-conscious in the extreme; he accounts for the intricacies of the Biographia, for example, by calling attention to a sort of ghostly auto-commentary within the work itself, a commentary which directs the reader alternately toward and away from its central argument: "The Biographia is a constant falling away from itself that is a

³⁵ Ibid., 29.

reading of itself, falling to know its constitution, falling to know the course of its descent--a narcissism providentially flawed by the apostasis that motivates a theoretically endless tracking."³⁶ Christensen attempts to account for Coleridge's intellectual oscillations by identifying them with the chiasmus, a trope that preponderates in his writings, especially in the Biographia. Yet this apparently formalist diagnosis, this attempt to fix what is ostensibly an intellectual or emotional instability in an explicitly rhetorical framework, conceals within it a whole set of biographical assumptions about the nature of Coleridge's intentions. Christensen's description of the rhetorical figure he is considering thus cannot help but spill over into a discussion of the etiology of textual fragmentation:

In Coleridge the chiasmus is where extremes meet. But that encounter is not, as the author would have it, the methodical envoy of a dialectical empire. Instead the chiasmus figures the promise of dialectic as merely the enabling presupposition of a rhetorical practice; its elegant mechanics render the concord of identity and opposite, proposition and inverse, as a marginal yet indelible sophistication of metaphysical truth.³⁷

³⁶ "Like a Guilty Thing Surpris'd: Deconstruction, Coleridge, and the Apostasy of Criticism," Critical Inquiry 12 (Summer, 1986), 777.

³⁷ Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language, 26-27.

According to Christensen, Coleridge is not advancing an argument of his own in the Biographia. Rather, he is jotting in the margins of other texts; the dialogue he conducts with David Hartley, for example, in Chapters V through VIII of that work "settles nothing; on the contrary, it unsettles the authority of the writer, who, dislodged from his will, must live in a borrowed home."³⁸ In much the same spirit as that in which the august Milton was recuperated by the younger Romantics, Coleridge is here perceived as being of the Associationalists' party (or perhaps even that of the Sophists) without knowing it. Once again, however, an apparently formalist analysis of the method of the Biographia has been erected upon an unacknowledged assumption about the motives, weaknesses, and personal circumstances of the writer. Coleridge's inability to construct a univocal text, in short, is taken as evidence of his wish to avoid responsibility: "Moral action," as Christensen cryptically remarks, "is the risk of moral conviction."³⁹

Brilliant as the strategies are by which Coleridge is revealed as an apostate from the very credo he pretends to uphold, Christensen's argument remains unconvincing. It is unconvincing because, though grounded in a view of Coleridge that is undeniably contextual and implicitly historical, the relevance of context and history to the project at hand is

³⁸ Ibid., 30.

³⁹ Ibid., 95.

repeatedly denied. From the beginning of the book, it is clear that Christensen's personal interest in Coleridge is aesthetic: he acknowledges that "fundamentally...the seductiveness of Derrida's writings reflects the appeal that Coleridge has long had;" yet the bulk of Christensen's implicitly historical assessment of Coleridge is left unsupported--unless we include the idiosyncratic assertion that Coleridge's affinity with Derrida is so close as to make "the issues of priority and dominance merely irrelevant."⁴⁰

The really interesting irony in the conflicting claims of the New Criticism and Deconstruction to the reputation of Coleridge is not so much that each finds opposing qualities in his works to identify with and approve, but that the procedures by which they appropriate those qualities should be so visibly at odds with their implicit positions on the subject of authorial intention. The notion of a. "intentional fallacy" where literary interpretation is concerned has long been considered a central doctrine of the New Criticism.⁴¹ Yet, as I have suggested, the very foundations of that critical practice depend on an unexplored assumption about Coleridge's intentions for literary criticism. The deconstructionists, on the other hand--despite their principled resistance to the very idea of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁴¹ Cf. Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), 15-16.

interpretative heresies--have ostensibly confined themselves to the strictly textual exegesis that the New Critical precept demands. Both groups, it seems to me, are guilty of feigning unconcern about Coleridge's intentions while silently assimilating those intentions to their own designs; and both are guilty to some extent of making convenient exceptions to the general precepts that underlie their discourses.

The object of this thesis is not, however, to decide between rival claimants to the Coleridgean crown. Indeed, from the angle of a consciously historical criticism, the New Criticism and Deconstruction seem to belong together on the same formalist continuum, albeit at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. Any attempt to mediate between them, especially on the subject of their fidelity to Coleridge's brand of criticism, would have to engage in a prolonged discussion of the intentions of the author. To a certain extent, inevitably, this thesis does concern itself with what Coleridge believed he was doing. But at the same time, as the foregoing comparison will have made clear, the impulse to align either his criticism or his philosophy with a contemporary critical position cannot help but leave one open to an accusation of academic or political appropriation. One of the main objectives of the species of historical criticism I have in mind is to avoid such a charge by attempting to

preserve rather than assimilate the otherness of the thinker in question.

Clearly, too, one must dispense at the outset with the notion of a standard or unmediated view of Coleridge, and acknowledge the ideological cast of any impulse to construe him as a thinker splendidly isolated from all the inferences subsequently drawn from his thought. On the contrary, I am convinced of Coleridge's relevance to the current debate in literary studies. Yet unlike the New Critics, and unlike Christensen, I perceive him not as the progenitor of those who populate the contemporary scene, but as a sort of collateral antecedent--one whose influence, though discernible, has been indirect, and whose most substantial legacies have been diverted away from this branch of the family. Coleridge, that is to say, is situated at or near the beginning of a critical tradition which has yet to exhaust itself; we are still digesting much of the material he himself had adopted from Kant and the German Idealist philosophers. But although we have come into possession of many of the questions that Coleridge considered, we have ignored or considerably modified the answers he was working towards. In order to explain this indirect relationship, it will be necessary (and I think it possible) to step back from the debate I have been discussing and to try to locate both it and Coleridge himself in a much broader intellectual tradition.

All these things being said, the enormous impact of deconstruction upon the study of Romantic writers is impossible to deny. The shift in critical emphasis away from unity and towards discontinuity that we observed in McFarland's two books takes place in precisely this context. And most research in the area in the past ten or twelve years has been predicated on the assumption that romanticism itself betrays a conscious ambivalence or irony in its use of language, especially poetic language.⁴² The task of accounting for this irony, to complicate matters still further, is frequently made self-referential, the assumption again being that to explain romanticism is to explain ourselves. "Reading Coleridge means questioning romanticism," as Christensen rightly remarks; and this questioning is to be understood explicitly as "a romantic project, for the most definite characteristic of romanticism is the obstinate questioning of its own ambiguous status: its lineage, inheritance, privileges, and powers."⁴³ Paul De Man makes the same connection more emphatically: "To interpret romanticism means quite literally to interpret the

⁴² Among the most influential books in recent years are: David Simpson, Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1979); Ann K. Mellor, English Romantic Irony (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980); Tillotama Rajan, Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Paul De Man, The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁴³ Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language, 23.

past as such, our past precisely to the extent that we are beings who want to be defined and...interpreted in relation to a totality of experiences that slip into the past."⁴⁴

The relationship between the self-definitions of the early nineteenth century and those of the late twentieth is a subject that will undoubtedly preoccupy scholars for some time to come. That there is a connection between the two, that academic critics and theorists of the present day are in some sense indebted to the intellectual patterns laid down by Romanticism seems almost self-evident. But it is equally evident that the attempt to demonstrate this supposed affinity requires a full acknowledgement of the differences as well as the similarities between the beginning of the Romantic tradition and its contemporary manifestations--a task that extends well beyond the limitations of the present project. It seems important, nevertheless, to convey in a rudimentary way the contours within which I myself conceive of the problem, and the hesitations I have in accepting a simple equation between the ethos of the Romantic poets and thinkers and the one that prevails in the academy today. The sketch that follows will also indicate in a slightly more detailed way the position I believe Coleridge occupies with regard to contemporary literary criticism.

⁴⁴ The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 50.

* * *

If it is proposed that to describe romanticism is to describe ourselves, it makes sense to consider, as a kind of test case, the central political happening of the period, the event that gives rise to the framework within which the romantics organized their own self-conceptions. The loadstone around which Hazlitt (if he may be taken as a spokesperson for the times) configures the personalities he investigates in The Spirit of the Age is, of course, the French Revolution. The intellectual significance of the Revolution, in Hazlitt's mind, is indicated to some extent by the facility with which he identifies Wordsworth's poetry as being most clearly in tune with the contemporary ethos:

It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His Muse...is a levelling one. It proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard. It relies upon its own resources, and disdains external shew and relief.⁴⁵

The difficulty with which a statement like this can be read today without some faint surge of approval--both of the analogy itself and the literary qualities that are held up for admiration--is perhaps the best indication we have that

⁴⁵ The Spirit of the Age, 1825 edition (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971), 233.

the modern Western intellectual remains on something like the same ideological wavelength as those who initially identified the French Revolution as an enlightened, egalitarian protest against the excesses of a decadent and obsolete political regime. And, though the question has been much debated, the French Revolution is generally thought to be one of the definitive events, not merely of romanticism, but of modernity itself.⁴⁶ Unmistakably, the new methods of identifying the self socially and politically that emerged in the late eighteenth century and that were decisively articulated during the French Revolution are still with us. The notion of the "natural" rights of human beings as opposed to privileges conferred upon them from above or inherited, the contractual rather than hierarchical understanding of the relationship between citizen and government, and the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity are all felt to be at least compatible with--if not foundational to--the modern, Western democratic state.

There are less obvious ways, however, in which the French Revolution can be said to have conditioned the thinking of anyone who has been able to contemplate it as a completed event, whether from the vantage point of a few

⁴⁶ Norman Hampson considers the question of the revolution's importance for modernity in his Social History of the French Revolution (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 249-65. Having examined dissenting views, on a balance of consideration, he finds that "there is no denying the French Revolution its full tragic stature as the profound social convulsion from which modern Europe was born." (265)

years or of two centuries. In a recent article, James A. Leith observes that because of the French Revolution, it has become possible to believe that "there is genuine novelty in human history, institutions, and ideas not completely like anything that has happened before," and, furthermore, that "such distinctive phenomena modify human behaviour."⁴⁷ There are sound reasons for ascribing this fairly commonplace assumption to inferences drawn from the French Revolution. Leith points out that, with the doubtful exception of the "glorious revolution" of 1688, the idea of a populist revolution is unheard of in Europe until the late eighteenth century, the time of the French and American Revolutions; and it is not until the last quarter of the century that the word begins to carry the now familiar connotations of "profound and extensive rupture with the past." It was in fact the French Revolution that firmly established the concept of "a sudden rupture in the flow of time."⁴⁸ Precisely because of the familiarity of this usage, it is reasonable to conclude that revolution has come to appear as a norm, not a exception to the laws of history--an event to be anticipated rather than merely wondered at after the fact. The intellectual consequences of expectations along these lines are striking; and it is arguable, charitably allowing for the brevity of

⁴⁷ James A. Leith, "The Place of the French Revolution in Revolutionary Tradition," Queen's Quarterly 96 (Winter 1989), 859.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 862.

the account I have given above, that the history of literary criticism in the twentieth century has proceeded--with or without the conscious design of its agents--by a series of revolutions.

This aspect of Leith's assessment accords well with George Steiner's well known statement that the French Revolution and its aftermath were responsible for a dramatic reorientation in the popular apprehension of time and history:

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars plunged ordinary men into the stream of history. They laid them open to pressures of experience and feeling which had, in earlier times, been the dangerous prerogatives of princes, statesmen, and professional soldiers. Once the great levies had marched and retreated across Europe, the ancient balance between private and public life had altered. An increasing part of private life now lay open to the claims of history.⁴⁹

To those who experienced or witnessed the French Revolution--and the Romantic writers and thinkers are among such people--this statement would almost certainly appear abstract to the point of absurdity. This is a consideration to which I will return. But although Steiner here glosses over the elation, pain, fear, and disappointment variously attendant upon what E.P. Thompson has called "the actual lived historical

⁴⁹ The Death of Tragedy (New York: Knopf, 1961), 116-117.

experience,"⁵⁰ his point is nevertheless well taken: no matter what the personal vicissitudes--material, intellectual, or emotional--that ensued from the Revolution and its aftermath, private experience itself could not help but be regarded in a new light.⁵¹

Taken together, these two conceptions of the legacy of revolution do appear to constitute a familiar contemporary paradigm, perhaps especially within the academy. The significance of private actions and individual decisions as they pertain to the process of "making history" is nicely conveyed in the current popular slogan of self-awareness, "the personal is the political." The literary-critical counterpart of this insight has been well expressed by Cyrus Hamlin: "all theory is dependent, it seems to me, on historical conditions, and every critical concept emerges from a process of historical development."⁵² Perhaps because

⁵⁰ "Disenchantment or Default: A Lay Sermon," in Conor Cruise O'Brien and William Dean Vanech, eds., Power and Consciousness (London: University of London Press, 1969), 150.

⁵¹ Thompson selects two "spots of time" in the affairs of Wordsworth and Coleridge in which public events intruded upon and merged with private life. The first is the well known visit of John Thelwall, "the most notorious public Jacobin in England" to Nether Stowey in July, 1797. The second, in April of the following year, concerns the series of happenings--the Irish rebellion, the suppression of the left-wing press, the mobilizing of arms against France--that coincided with Wordsworth and Coleridge's sudden decision to go abroad. "The poets, when they went to Germany," Thompson remarks, "were hopping the draft." Ibid., 156-168.

⁵² "The Temporality of Selfhood: Metaphor and Romantic Poetry," New Literary History 6 (1974), 169.

of some such impulse to historicize the present, it has become almost axiomatic in matters of both teaching and scholarship that one is accountable for one's beliefs and attitudes in a political as well as a scholarly context. The emphasis that is laid upon originality in intellectual work and the attention that radical departures from tradition command are further examples of the contemporary deep-seatedness of the revolutionary ethos.

Nevertheless, the conviction that history proceeds by a series of ruptures in which private individuals play an active role does not by any means imply a concomitant sense of the continuity of the past with the present. The reverse seems rather to be the case. The introduction of a new calendar at the commencement of the Republic and the designation of 1789 as the Year One of a new era suggest that the French Revolution had the effect of orienting people toward the future and away from the past. Indeed, the notion of revolution itself seems to incorporate a desire to repudiate the past, to begin afresh with a clean slate. Leith points out that in the case of France in the years immediately after the revolution a kind of ritual purification was undertaken in nearly every sphere of activity:

the scope of change extended far beyond the political system, administration, and church to embrace symbolics, language, and the usages of everyday life. In their zeal to erase the past they sought to get rid of all

coats of arms, insignia, and signs which had denoted special status. In place of the old symbols they aspired to create a new ideological landscape by means of revolutionary monuments and public buildings.⁵³

Once again, to anyone writing and thinking in the literary academy between the end of the nineteen-sixties and the present day, these effects of revolution will sound familiar. Indeed, Barbara Hernstein Smith, in her capacity as outgoing president of the Modern Language Association, has diagnosed the current condition of literary studies in terms that might well have been borrowed from the account cited above:

As I think would be acknowledged all around, various new developments in literary theory and related fields--and, by now, what field is not related?--have produced quite radical disruptions in the discipline... involving, at the least, a thoroughgoing skeptical scrutiny of some of its most fundamental conceptual structures and also its most characteristic practices, objectives, and claims....One consequence of these recent scrutinies and novel accounts...is the radical destabilization of the domain of literary studies as a discipline and the opening of its borders to traffic to and from all directions....It is, I think, entirely possible, that at some time in the future the discipline...will be effectively and undeniably undone.⁵⁴

⁵³ Leith, op. cit., 865.

⁵⁴ "Introduction" to "Presidential Forum: Breaking Up/Out/Down--The Boundaries of Literary Study," Profession 89, ed., Phyllis Franklin (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1989), 2.

If revolution is thus associated with change on a grand scale, and if such change is understood to be the rule and not the exception, then the anxiety about the future of academic criticism that is here expressed can be partly accounted for. Having become, by choice or necessity, an institutional activity, literary criticism now runs the perpetual risk of discovering itself to be too firmly committed to the status quo to sustain its revolutionary ideals; it must therefore engage in a constant self-questioning that is nearly incompatible with the achievement of any appreciable coherence or consistency.

Probably the most clear-cut instance of a categorical rupture with the discourses of established criticism, and a principal source of the latest wave of change within this consciously revolutionary discipline, can be found in the 1966 symposium on structuralism at Johns Hopkins University. The conference was a moment in the annals of North American literary criticism that it is not too fanciful to compare with the summoning of the Estates General. Certainly both events can be taken as points of crisis at which all the ills of the ancien regime burst upon the reigning orthodoxy; and both mark the beginning of the destruction of the order that had previously prevailed. Curiously, the terms in which the purposes of the symposium were originally expressed suggest only a faint awareness of the revolutionary nature of the undertaking. The objective was not to overturn the

discipline, but merely to revitalize it, while at the same time to resist the tendency of all new departures in criticism to harden into orthodoxy:

The danger was clearly that of deforming a method or a 'family of methods' into a doctrine. The purpose of the meetings, rather, was to bring into an active and not uncritical contact leading European proponents of structural studies in a variety of disciplines with a wide spectrum of American scholars. It was hoped that this contact could, in turn, stimulate innovations both in the received scholarship and in the training of scholars.⁵⁵

But matters did not fall out in precisely the way the organizers had foreseen: a wholesale demolition of all previous critical and theoretical structures was imminent. So sweeping were the changes that ensued in the next four years that it was felt necessary to introduce the second edition of the conference proceedings with some abashed reflections on the innocence of those who had believed that change could be curtailed:

Given that the times are not propitious to another symposium which would attempt to circumscribe (nostalgic image!) this new topology, the editors of this symposium have accepted its republication in the hope that its readers may come to see the papers and discussions as a point of departure whence to reenact for themselves on an imaginary stage the necessary confrontation of old

⁵⁵ The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), xv-xvi.

sureties demanded by the exigencies of our present intellectual conjuncture.⁵⁶

Among the Cahiers that have since been presented to the literary establishment are the several branches of feminist criticism, the various species of phenomenological criticism, a revitalized Marxist and psychoanalytic criticism, and deconstruction--not to mention the critique of the literary canon and of the structure of the discipline itself that has emanated from several quarters. It is notable that these new departures in literary thinking are united--if in nothing else--in their willingness to dismantle all earlier critical assumptions; each implies a rejection, or at least a thorough reformation, of the foundations of previous academic criticism. Marxist and feminist criticism, in particular, constitute themselves as revolutionary in the sense that they actively confront and attempt to dispel the old ideologies; but all represent a conscious attempt to redefine literary studies, to break with the habits of the past, to make the academy more populist and egalitarian.

There is a sense, then, in which it is all but inevitable that modern academics in the throes of a revolution of their own should recall the circumstances under which the revolutionary paradigm originated, and should compare their own position to that of the Romantics. Nevertheless, the affinity that we are inclined to perceive

⁵⁶ Ibid., xiii.

between the ideological temper of the Revolutionary years and that of the present day is by no means without its embarrassments. For instance, in the course of these recent developments in literary theory and criticism, the distinction that has necessarily been drawn between the established order and the forces of revolution is clearly reminiscent of the paradigm we have been considering. The French Revolution, in other words, is the source of one very fundamental binary division in modern thought, one that appears as undesirable as it is difficult to avoid. This is the distinction that it insists upon between "liberal" and "conservative," reactionary and radical, droit and gauche.⁵⁷

From the first, not surprisingly, the simplicity of such dichotomies has proved dangerously alluring. Thomas De Quincey, certainly no sympathizer with the aims of the Revolution, found it possible to conduct a lively journalistic career equipped with no more sophisticated a guide to the political scene than the simple, functional antithesis between revolutionaries and conservatives. His biographer, Grevel Lindop, following De Quincey's own account of the derivation of his political attitudes--"which had

⁵⁷ These are among the terms that Leith lists as directly traceable to the discourses of the French Revolution. Op cit., 865-6. See also the series of linguistic polarizations that are attributed to the revolutionary ethos by J.M.E. Blanchard in "The French Revolution: A Political Line or a Language Circle?" Literature and Revolution, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 64-76.

crystallized during the Napoleonic Wars"--explains that they were the product of "two 'great original principles in politics,' namely 'Jacobin and anti-jacobin; principles as old as the human heart.' Accepting this classification as absolute and timeless, [De Quincey] saw every contemporary development as the interplay of these two changeless opposites."⁵⁸ Whether or not we choose to regard De Quincey's thinking on this question as typical of the Romantic ethos, we must recognize that the easy antithesis to which he succumbs is at least a possible outgrowth of the revolutionary paradigm.⁵⁹

This, it seems to me, is a central consideration. Intellectual shortcuts along the lines of De Quincey's

⁵⁸ The Opium Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 285-6.

⁵⁹ Literary history also confirms the polarizing effect that the French Revolution produced on consciousness, and on moral consciousness in particular. The contest between exaggerated representatives of human goodness and evil typical of the melodrama, a form which enjoyed enormous popularity in France between 1800 and 1830, is traceable to the heightened ethical consciousness of the years of Revolution. Peter Brooks, for example, observes that melodrama "comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern. When the revolutionary Saint-Just exclaims, 'Republican government has as its principle virtue; or if not, terror,' he is using the manichaeistic terms of melodrama, arguing its logic of the excluded middle, and imaging a situation--the moment of revolutionary suspension--where the word is called upon to make present and to impose a new society, to legislate the regime of virtue." The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 15

distinction are commonly referred to today as "binary thinking," and are received with some distaste:⁶⁰ within each pair of binary opposites, the automatic privileging of one term over the other is held to be philosophically arbitrary and culturally unsound. Binary thinking is linked in the contemporary critical mind, furthermore, with the social and political imperialism of the European cultural tradition, and has been held responsible for many of its misdemeanors. To a certain extent, of course, the distaste we feel for the pairing of incompatible opposites is the product of hindsight: enough time has surely elapsed to permit a thorough and cautionary case history of the excesses of the French Revolution to accrue. James Wilkinson has emphasized, for instance, that it was precisely a rhetoric of binary oppositions--in contrast to the hierarchical, mytho-historical self-justifications adopted by the ancien regime--that characterized the statements of those who came to power during the revolution:

⁶⁰ Jonathan Culler summarizes the pitfalls of binary thinking: "Given two items one can always find some respect in which they differ and hence place them in a relation of binary opposition.... If one opposes A to B and X to Y, the two cases become similar because each involves the presence and absence of certain features, but this similarity is deceptive in that the features in question may be of very different kinds....[T]he very flexibility and power of binarism depends on the fact that what it organizes are qualitative distinctions, and if those distinctions are irrelevant to the matter in hand, then binary oppositions can be very misleading." Structuralist Poetics (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 15-16.

The world of moral absolutes which inspired revolutionary rhetoric was a binary world of paired opposites: virtue and vice, liberty and oppression, democracy and tyranny, people and privilege. This play of opposites served to simplify choices and thus to mobilize public opinion for the revolution and against its enemies.⁶¹

The question that Wilkinson leaves unanswered, however, is one that seems to me essential to the relationship we are considering: do such polarities inevitably ensue from revolutions? or, are academics on the contemporary scene entitled to liken themselves to the Romantics in every respect but that of their own more sophisticated picture of the aftermath of revolution?

On the one hand, though the tendency of revolutionaries to construct their frames of reference in terms of good and evil, the past and the future, the tyrannical and the oppressed, is a virtual commonplace of twentieth century thought,⁶² there is no reason to assume that such an insight

⁶¹ "After the Revolution in France: the Rhetoric of Revolution," Salmagundi 84 (Fall, 1989), 158.

⁶² And it is so because we have had the experience of at least one other major revolution on which to base our analysis. It was this same tendency to engage in a rhetoric of binary oppositions, as Wilkinson further argues, that brought about the decadence of Soviet socialism: "From within the edifice of language created by the revolutionaries, no single term could be applied to revolution and counter-revolution alike. Thus if the Ancien Regime was by definition tyrannical, the Terror, being revolutionary, was by definition the opposite of tyrannical, therefore liberating. If capitalism benefited the bourgeoisie and oppressed the working class, then socialism must benefit the working class and oppress the bourgeoisie. In practice, of course, the "new regime," in order to rid

required two centuries to come to fruition. Coleridge's remarks on Robespierre in his Essays on his Own Times make it clear that he himself was thoroughly apprised of the dangers of polarized thinking:

If we clearly perceive any one thing to be of vast and infinite importance to ourselves and all mankind, our first feelings impel us to turn with angry contempt from those, who doubt and oppose it. The ardour of undisciplined benevolence seduces us into malignity: and whenever our hearts are warm, and our objects great and excellent, intolerance is the sin that does most easily beset us. But this enthusiasm in Robespierre was blended with gloom, and suspiciousness, and inordinate vanity. His dark imagination was still brooding over supposed plots against freedom--to prevent tyranny he became a tyrant--and having realized the evils which he suspected, a wild and dreadful tyrant.⁶³

Still, on the other hand, if we are not entitled to be complacent on the grounds of our greater experience of political rupture or our longer perspective on the French Revolution, we have, by the same token, no reason to suppose that binary thinking was extinguished when the Terror, the First Republic, or the Napoleonic wars came to an end. To acknowledge an affinity with the immediate heirs of the French Revolution means thus simultaneously to admit our

itself of the old, had to fight the old with its own weapons; the more it resembled the enemy, the better its chance of destroying it." op. cit., 171.

⁶³ Cited in Kathleen Coburn, ed., Inquiring Spirit, revised edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) 277.

susceptibility to the intellectual temptations that the revolution created.⁶⁴

This is not to deny that recent literary theorists have exerted themselves in order to forestall the academic counterpart of the syndrome embodied in Robespierre, Stalin, and the other revolutionaries-turned-tyrant with whom we are familiar. Catherine Belsey, in her widely read account of post-structuralist criticism, goes to some lengths to demonstrate that the recent revolution is different in kind from the paradigm to which it is indebted--is, in fact, in revolt against the revolutionary ethos itself:

There is always a danger that a radical literary criticism will simply create a new canon of acceptable texts, merely reversing old value judgements rather than questioning their fundamental assumptions.... In arguing that the interrogative text enlists the reader in contradiction, while classic realism does its best to efface contradiction, I do not mean to suggest that the interrogative text is therefore 'good' and classic realism is ideological, misleading, and therefore 'bad'. But if we are not simply to subject ourselves (in every sense)

⁶⁴ According to James McAuley, it is more than a susceptibility: "'Liberal intellectuals' present two appearances, both true. They seem to be much given to scepticism and indecisiveness; they have undermined certainty in knowledge, and generated a distrust of the very instrument of knowledge, the intellect; they have relativized all values, denied the rationality of all ends of action; they oppose all conformism, and cling to sovereign individualism. Yet they also appear to be dogmatists, arrogant with esoteric certainties, and full of party spirit for causes whose rightness one cannot question without becoming a traitor to humanity and progress. The Grammar of the Real: Selected Prose, 1959-1974 (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1974), 147.

to ideology, we need a new way of approaching classic realism.⁶⁵

Both the need and the attempt to meet it are genuine. The inescapable conclusion, however, is that any intellectual model with which the late twentieth century can undo or supersede the binarism attendant upon revolution must be acknowledged per se as decisive evidence of our difference from the thinkers of the Romantic period.

For an indication that such an alternative model exists, I refer again to Critical Practice. In her discussion of twentieth-century linguistics, Belsey calls particular attention to Ferdinand de Saussure: "The most revolutionary element in Saussure's position was his insistence that language is not a nomenclature, a way of naming things which already exist, but a system of differences without positive terms."⁶⁶ To conceive of language as a network of differentiations--rather than (as had previously been the case) the record of a process of historical derivation--does indeed provide a new paradigm for thought in general. Given a particular system in which meaning is localized nowhere, but evenly distributed over the whole, it becomes feasible after Saussure, to conceive of system itself synchronically, and from a more scientifically impartial perspective. Since no term within the system of language can legitimately be

⁶⁵ Critical Practice (London: Methuen, 1980), 103.

⁶⁶ Op. cit., 38. Italics added.

subordinated to any other, the Saussurean insight, once applied to the analysis of other cultural and intellectual structures, leads to an understanding of the world that is more conducive to the analysis of binary opposites and less so to the unthinking acceptance of these constructs.

Moreover, as Belsey rightly points out, because the relationship that Saussure posits between symbol and referent is one that is dictated by convention rather than by logic or "nature," only two ideological alternatives are possible with regard to the question of the relative meaningfulness of concepts themselves: "We are compelled to argue either that our own language has got its concepts 'right' in some absolute way, and that all others are to varying degrees out of step, or that concepts are purely differential, and that they are determined not by their positive content but by their relations with other terms of the system."⁶⁷ To choose the first, obviously, is to enshrine precisely the hierarchical pattern that the structuralist method is equipped to expose and render impotent; to choose the second --the only viable alternative--is to enter into a pluralistic universe where all terms are of equal weight and interest. It follows, finally, that language and the other signifying practices to which it gives rise are self-contained; they cannot be explained with reference to an external standard, but only with reference to themselves: "If discourses

⁶⁷ Ibid., 40.

articulate concepts through a system of signs which signify by means of their relationship to each other rather than to entities in the world, and if literature is a signifying practice, all it can express is the order inscribed in particular discourses, not the nature of the world."⁶⁸

Notice, however, that the adjective Belsey uses to describe Saussure's innovation is none other than the term on which this discussion has centred: Saussurean linguistics is "revolutionary". It is revolutionary in the sense that it can reveal revolution itself to be productive of culturally constructed antitheses; it is doubly revolutionary in that it attempts to relegate these antitheses themselves to the past --yet at the same time resists enthroning a new set of cultural dichotomies. It is almost as though--to revert to a more historical perspective on these recent developments in literary theory--it had suddenly become possible, in the twentieth century, to prolong the euphoric moment at which one order collapses, and to stave off, perhaps indefinitely, the moment at which the next begins to harden into an orthodoxy in the image of its predecessor. Post-Saussurean criticism, that is to say, tries to avoid replicating the power structures that made earlier brands of criticism unpalatable, and leaves the objects to which critics have formerly turned their attention in deliberate disarray. Whether or not the fragmentation that is thought to prevail

⁶⁸ Ibid., 46.

in the literary academy today can be sustained, is, I would maintain, a matter of considerable doubt--and the subject of another discussion.

What seems clear, nevertheless, is that the preferences and aims of recent criticism, though perhaps effective against the more violent contests consequent upon revolution, are different indeed from those endorsed by the Romantic thinkers who conceived of the French Revolution as the source of palpable change in human affairs. And this seems to be the case whether we take as our prototype those whose enthusiasm for the ideals of the Revolution remained untarnished, or those who, like Coleridge, found the disintegration of revolutionary ideals into struggle and compromise too distressing to contemplate.

As is well known, Coleridge's politics fit neatly enough into the sort of binary opposition we have been discussing: he was, in 1795, the time of the Bristol lectures, a fervent radical and democrat; in later life, after a period of disillusionment following the Peace of Amiens and the efforts of Pitt to suppress English radicalism, he became one of the country's chief spokespersons for conservatism. Hazlitt considered the transition evidence of Coleridge's apostasy, and the charge has been many times reiterated. But matters are not, of course, so simple. Coleridge's conservatism is not mere nostalgia for the old order; still less is it nostalgia for the idea of order; to interpret his position in

this way is to misconceive the objections conservatism had launched against the French Revolution. As Robert Shuettinger has suggested, even order itself, when conceived in the abstract, is repellent to conservatism generally: "Burke, Coleridge, and Hegel--all intellectual giants--devoted much of their time to exposing the fallacy that a committee of intellectuals could sit down and write a constitution for a given society without reference to the customs, traditions, and habits of that society."⁶⁹ Coleridge's conservatism, that is to say, conceives of society both organically and diachronically: it understands society as arising out of the past, and proceeding towards the future. His political principles are predicated, therefore, on the conception of a totality.

The difference between this way of conceiving the world and the one that holds sway in the academy today is not merely private and emotional--nor is it peculiar to Coleridge. Rather, it is specifically methodological. Coleridge deliberately rejects the convenience of binary oppositions in politics,⁷⁰ as he does in literature,

⁶⁹ Robert Shuettinger, ed., The Conservative Tradition in European Thought (New York: Capricorn Books, 1971), 36.

⁷⁰ His remarks in Biographia Literaria on the tendency of revolutionary liberals to prefer abstractions to historical realities are illustrative: "I have seen gross intolerance shewn in support of toleration; sectarian antipathy most obtrusively displayed in the promotion of an undistinguishing comprehension of sects; and of acts of cruelty (I had almost said) of treachery, committed in furtherance of an object vitally important to the cause of

religion, and philosophy; yet his rejection is motivated by the conviction that such oppositions exist only to be reunited within a larger whole. He is not a structuralist (in any sense of the word that would be intelligible today), but a dialectical thinker. His picture of the world is synchronic to the extent that it acknowledges the existence of a tissue of relationships, but diachronic in that it understands these relationships as perpetually in flux, and perpetually subordinate to a whole that is larger than the sum of the parts. Coleridge esteems the past not merely as it might be abstractly opposed to the future--the former lamentable, the latter utopian--but considers the past and the future together as aspects of a single entity. Society (or literature, or religion, or philosophy) is not, to his mind, a system of differences without positive terms, but a totality which demands an effort on the part of the thinker to join its disparate elements together.

In 1833, to take one of many possible illustrations of this principle, Coleridge inveighs against the "solemn humbug" of "modern political economy" (one suspects he is thinking of Malthus) on the grounds that its calculations have neglected to take the real existence of men and women into account:

You talk about making this article cheaper by

humanity; and all this by men too of naturally kind dispositions and exemplary conduct" (I, 197).

reducing its price in the market from 8d to 6d. But suppose, in so doing, you have rendered your country weaker against a foreign foe; suppose you have demoralized thousands of your fellow-countrymen, and have sown discord between one class of society and another, your article is tolerably dear, I take it, after all.... All is an endless fleeting abstraction; the whole is a reality.⁷¹

These remarks, it seems to me, constitute good grounds for placing Coleridge well outside the contemporary critical ethos. In appealing here to an external standard--the good of the state--that is, by definition, anterior to the supposedly autonomous system of political economy, he is implicitly enlarging the synchronic thinking of his opponents. More significantly, however, in putting forward the idea of "joining" the particulars of economic activity with the universal of the greater economic good, Coleridge is subordinating the binary pairs implicit in the economic system to a totality that stands some chance of arbitrating the conflicts that arise between them.

This brings us back, finally, to the question of "lived history" to which I referred earlier. What is lost in post-Saussurean literary analysis, it seems to me, is precisely the sense of continuity between past and present upon which Coleridge's conservatism depends. The determination with

⁷¹ Specimens of the Table Talk, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (New York: Harper, 1835), II, 68-69. Cited in John Colmer, "Coleridge and Politics," in R.L. Brett, ed., Writers and Their Background: S.T. Coleridge (London: G.Bell and Sons, 1971), 260.

which scholars today historicize their own activity, though undoubtedly an improvement upon the perceived absolutism of previous critical movements, seems still to lack a dimension. That dimension is a sense of the past. There has been a failure, in other words, to locate the revolution in literary theory in its own specific social and historical context.

Not unlike Coleridge and other presumed defectors from the ideals of revolution, academics in the late twentieth century are in some sense the victims of a resounding political disappointment. Many of the most vocal theorists and critics of the present day, like Coleridge, experienced the exhilaration of a short period of popular, liberal protest against the established order. By the end of the 1960s, however, they were compelled to acknowledge the failure of the left to stem the technological and military capitalist tide; they found the still prevailing inequality between citizen and state impossible to deny. That some degree of disillusionment should result is inevitable. What seems to me unique about the present time, however, is the formalism with which all the accoutrements of revolution--the ironies, the oppositions, the fragmentations--are painstakingly analysed and reified in the absence of any sense of revolution as a practical force in human affairs,

past or present.⁷² James Wilkinson concludes the essay from which I have already quoted with precisely this observation:

As little as twenty years ago, the word 'revolution' still possessed an emotional force, an aura of hope and energy that mobilized citizens and sent them out into the streets to do battle against the establishment. One can even imagine what would have been the...celebration [of the bicentennial of the French Revolution] in a France still suffused with the exhilaration and anger of les Evenements of May 1968.... But today the very fact that France can celebrate the fall of the Bastille under the umbrella of government patronage suggests the extent to which the concept of revolution has ceased to be a polarizing force in French political life.⁷³

Particularly within the Western academy, revolution has become an abstraction, rather than a live possibility. This may explain our lack of sympathy--our sense of alienation, in point of fact--with regard to Coleridge and the Romantics generally. Not having had the experience of Hegel who, famously, was putting the finishing touches on his Phenomenology of Spirit as Napoleon marched through Jena,⁷⁴ or that of Coleridge, who came under the suspicion of

⁷² I would make an exception in this blanket condemnation for the various strains of Marxist and neo-Marxist criticism, and for feminist criticism, New Historicism, and Postcolonial theory.

⁷³ James Wilkinson, op. cit., 154.

⁷⁴ See H.S. Harris, Hegel's Development: Night Thoughts (Jena 1801-1806) (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1983), lxvii.

government agents,⁷⁵ modern academics have too easily substituted the rigours of post-structuralist formal analysis for the rigours of historical self-understanding.

The way towards a resolution of this disjunction, it seems to me, is not synchronic, but diachronic. Terry Eagleton, for one, urges the contemporary literary academy to become not less introspective, but more historically so. To his way of thinking, the question that has yet to be addressed--perhaps ironically--is that of the causes of the revolution to which we are the immediate heirs:

The reason why we are still afflicted by the fall-out of the great theoretical explosion which has taken place over the past two decades is that we have still not solved the problem of which this outburst of theory is the symptom. That problem in my view has nothing to do in the first place with literature or literary criticism; it has to do with the role of the 'humanities' in late capitalist societies.⁷⁶

To draw the obvious conclusion, we are guilty of overlooking our own "lived history," and of choosing instead to erect intellectual and methodological barriers not merely between the academy and the political arena, but also between the Romantic past and the post-Romantic present. It is these two binary relationships, as Coleridge would almost certainly insist, that have yet to be dialectically reconciled.

⁷⁵ See E.P. Thompson, op. cit., 160-161.

⁷⁶ The Significance of Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 28.

Chapter Two

Mastery

"The ancient teachers of this science," said he, promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows."

--Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

Given the tendency of much academic criticism to regard Coleridge as the instigator of a now familiar brand of literary formalism, it is easy to lose sight of the complexity and decisiveness of the period in European intellectual history during which his ideas came to fruition. As a thinker, Coleridge exhibits many of the characteristics associated with the origins of modernity: he is deeply implicated in the transition between the confident empiricism of the late eighteenth century and the more searching and

self-conscious attitudes of post-Kantian philosophy. In Technology and Justice (1986), the last book he published, the Canadian thinker George Grant located the origin of our modern Western ideologies in precisely the period during which Coleridge was most active as a thinker. Grant equates modernity with the origin of technology, a term he is content to leave somewhat oblique, but which is characterized by the dramatic coming together of the previously distinct concepts of techne and logos, "making" and knowing." The modern conviction that we can "know" both ourselves and the world (rationally, scientifically, empirically), and, by virtue of this knowing, constitute ourselves as the makers of objects and structures through which to exert our mastery over the world, are the characteristics that make us unique in history. Grant acknowledges that "human beings have from their beginnings developed instruments to help them get things done;" our modern civilization, however, has raised this process to an unprecedented level of efficiency: "[Its] novelty lies in the fact that the activity of inventing instruments reaches new levels of effectiveness because it has been systematically related to our science, and our science has at last discovered the sure path of a methodology which has allowed it progress in objective discovery."¹ In trying to postulate exactly how the dramatic conjunction of

¹ "Thinking About Technology," in Technology and Justice (Toronto: Anansi, 1986), 19.

making and knowing took place, Grant does not quite fall into the trap of insisting that such an event might itself be known "objectively" or "historically". Nevertheless, his meditations on the nature of the event lead him to frame a tentative answer:

[W]as there some originating affirmation made somewhere and sometime when Europeans defined themselves over against the classical civilization they were inheriting? Many scholars have written of the details of the arts and sciences, the struggles and reverences of that originating time; some philosophers have attempted to bring such a self-definition into the light of day. But who has succeeded in laying before us in a convincing unity what it was that gave the Europeans their special destiny, what primal affirmation penetrated their life and thought? Without denial of the unfathomableness of this affirmation, I would be willing to say that Europeans somehow seem to have come to an apprehension of the whole as "will".²

In spite of the difficulties and pitfalls implicit in this sort of historical speculation, Grant has allowed himself to be still more specific about the moment at which a change in thinking caused the modern age to diverge from its classical roots. In an informal symposium recorded in 1978, he spoke as follows:

What seems to me central to the whole modern experiment is the exaltation of freedom and will outside any given structure of justice. The given--what the scientists call data--is chaos; we create within that chaos. One of

² Ibid., 18.

the central moments in the arrival of that view of will occurred when Kant affirmed the autonomy of the will. Freedom had never meant that we made our own laws before that. Of course, the whole matter is confused because the words "freedom" and "will" have come to have so many differing and unclear meanings. When we talk of political freedom, what sane human being could be against that? The word only becomes dangerous when it is tied to will, and it comes to mean man's power to make the world as he wants, outside any received structure of justice.³

The failure completely to clarify the terms of reference here raises a thorny problem. Given that Grant equates the essence of modernity with technology, and given that he identifies Kant's conception of the will with the beginning of modernity, are we to infer that Kant is to be held responsible for the inception of technology in the coming together of making and knowing? To what extent are ideas the cause of material change in the world? One is reminded of Yeats's poem "Fragments":

Locke sank into a swoon;
The Garden died;
God took the spinning-jenny
Out of his side.⁴

Yeats is speaking figuratively. It would be a misunderstanding of the poem to conclude that Locke invented

³ "Conversation: Theology and History," in Larry Schmidt, ed., George Grant in Process (Toronto: Anansi, 1978), 106.

⁴ The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1950), 240.

the spinning-jenny, that he was directly responsible for its existence. Yet it is less easy to dismiss the implication that without Locke the spinning-jenny could not have come into being. To permit a thing to occur, however, is not necessarily to cause it. Is this the spirit in which we are to interpret Grant's apparently equally extravagant claim about Kant and the will and modernity? Though the remark remains unsupported by any evidence, it does not seem historically obtuse to maintain that Kant's assertion about the autonomy of the will permitted the rise of technology, and with it modernity. But is this, in fact, to say anything at all?

The indeterminacy surrounding Grant's allusions to some notion of historical causality may be a legacy from Heidegger, to whom he refers in "Thinking About Technology" as "the thinker who has most deeply pondered our technological destiny."⁵ In his own seminal essay on the subject of technology, Heidegger again and again makes assertions that fly in the face of our ordinary understanding of historical cause and effect. An extreme case is his claim that modern physics, though chronologically prior to the material manifestations of technology, was, nonetheless, itself a technological instrument from its very inception:

[M]athematical physics arose almost two centuries before technology. How, then,

⁵ Technology and Justice, 17.

could it have already been set upon by modern technology and placed in its service? The facts testify to the contrary. Surely technology got underway only when it could be supported by exact physical science. Reckoned chronologically, this is correct. Thought historically, it does not hit upon the truth.⁶

What Heidegger is getting at in this paradoxical statement is the observation that technology is not to be exclusively identified with the productions of technology: "the essence of technology," as he puts it, "is nothing technological."⁷ Technology, rather, is a way of apprehending the world, an instance of the process that Heidegger calls "enframing" (Gestell).⁸ Therefore, it is possible to conceive of the intellectual conditions which were to give rise to technological innovations late in the eighteenth century as having been present (though not, perhaps, in an identical form) and as having determined (to a certain extent) the character of modern physics nearly two centuries earlier. This is not, to be sure, the sort of mental operation conducive to historical writing of the so-called "scientific" school. Heidegger is a metaphysician, not an historian. Yet, when reading him, it is well to bear in mind Emil Fackenheim's remark that "a metaphysical doctrine may well

⁶ The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, ed. and trans., William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 21-22.

⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸ Ibid., 15.

seem unintelligible, and yet in fact be unintelligible only in terms of a metaphysics which is its rival."⁹

Heidegger's conception of causality, and Grant's as well, is acceptable, then, only if we are willing to concede that ideas are indeed capable, in themselves, of initiating changes in the course of history. For this reason, Leo Marx is quite right categorically to distinguish Heidegger's historical method from all the more familiar attempts of recent historians to account for change on the basis of economic, social, or political activities.¹⁰ In the essay to which I have been referring, he remarks that Heidegger "allows the impression that ideas, mentalities...or persistent desires...are the primary agents of change--of history." Marx continues:

Few historians now share that view. They do not, like Heidegger, treat the sequence of mental states as if it constituted a virtually self-contained and, in some sense, primary stratum of history. Although most historical scrupulously avoid the language of causality these days, they habitually account for changes within the realm of motives by reference to exogenous factors. They tend to assume that states of mind or beliefs...can play a significant part in events only if they are adhered to by an influential social group...¹¹

⁹ Metaphysics and Historicity (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1961), 29.

¹⁰ "On Heidegger's Conception of 'Technology' and its Historical Validity," The Massachusetts Review 25 (1984), 643.

¹¹ Ibid., 649-650.

More tellingly for our present purposes, Marx is also correct in likening the Heideggerian vision of history--"a series of interactions between mind and nature"--to the "version of history held by transcendental philosophers."¹² Both Heidegger and Grant, to drive home the conclusion that must by now be obvious, are thoroughgoing idealists in their philosophies of history. A number of unsettling ironies follow from this fact.

Philosophical idealism,¹³ of which there are many varieties, is, broadly, the opposite of materialism. Its fundamental interpretive principle, that is to say, is not the corporeal, spatial or sensuous, but the incorporeal, non-spatial, and suprasensuous: not matter, but mind. Properly speaking, idealism dates from Plato; and since there have been relatively few pure materialists among the major philosophers, it is fair to say that the history of idealism is the history of philosophy. But we are concerned at the moment only with the modern manifestations of the doctrine, and only in a limited way with these. The extreme position of modern idealism--exemplified in Berkeley--holds that external objects possess no objective validity, indeed no existence, apart from the existence they can be said to enjoy

¹² Ibid., 643.

¹³ The two paragraphs that follow draw on the account of idealism given in Margaret Peterson, Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 18-29.

in our minds. The more moderate position, stated most definitively and influentially by Kant (drawing on the work of Leibnitz, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume), is that the external world--the world that one experiences--is a product of the interdependence of mind and matter. Because the synthesis of mind and world takes place in the mind, their relationship is not exactly one of equals: mind is given definite priority over matter, with the result that the existence of an independent physical world cannot help but be problematic. Whether or not external objects really are as they appear to us to be, Kant maintains, is impossible for us to know. We perceive the appearance of a thing, but not the thing in itself. Moreover, without a mind to perceive it, to organize its attributes according to the mental categories of time and space and causality, even the appearance of the thing would vanish.

Kant's idealism, then, is primarily epistemological. It originates, that is to say, in an enquiry about the grounds of our knowledge. But it is easy to see that once these grounds had been located by Kant within the mind itself, there was no theoretical impediment to establishing ontology, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophies of history and religion on the foundation of the new "creative" powers of mind. Both Kant himself and his immediate heirs--Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Schleiermacher--went to work on the broader philosophical implications of his epistemological

revolution. Beginning with Fichte, however, as I shall presently argue, a degree of freedom and power was attributed to the mind that had been explicitly denied by Kant himself. Like many revolutionary ideas, Kant's new conception of mind spawned a series of revisions, extensions, and applications, some of which were much more revolutionary than their original.

It is ironic, in the first place, then, that this should be precisely the tradition in which one would have to locate George Grant. To the extent that he evidently believes in the shaping force of the activities of mind upon history--in the notion of a European destiny originating in and evolving from a European concept of self--he is squarely within the modern idealist camp. Most of us in the West are, almost inevitably, the heirs of Kant; even Marxists can trace their lineage back through Hegel to Fichte. As far as Grant is concerned, the irony is merely that his attempt to characterize--or diagnose--modernity, and to explain its preoccupation with technology, cannot help but come from within the philosophical tradition that he has blamed for its least desirable features. Perhaps this is merely another aspect of the paradox inherent in any attempt to criticize technological civilization: as a product of that civilization, one is unavoidably conditioned and even,

perhaps, corrupted to a greater or lesser extent, by its assumptions, material benefits, and habits of mind.¹⁴

The case of Martin Heidegger, on the other hand, is less easy to account for in such fatalistic terms. Even more firmly committed than Grant, one would suspect, to an idealist ontology,¹⁵ and to a version of history that has

¹⁴ Of course this is not to imply that Grant was unaware of the perspective that modernity imposes upon the thinker. His solution to the problem has been, as far as possible, to perceive the assumptions of one era through those of another--through a strategy of indirect comparison. Thus: "as far as philosophy goes it is almost impossible for anybody to apprehend the whole except in terms of modern assumptions. If that is the case, how then can one even get near to apprehending what Plato is asserting? One apprehends it through modern eyes, and what Plato is asserting is thought in terms of quite other assumptions. How does one then ever move out of the circle of our present destiny? Seeing modern assumptions laid before me at their most lucid and profound in Nietzsche and Heidegger has allowed me (indeed only slightly) to be able to partake in the alternative assumptions of Plato. It is by looking at modernity in its greatest power than one is perhaps able even slightly to escape its power." "Conversation: Intellectual Background," in George Grant in Process, 67.

¹⁵ This is a somewhat contentious assertion and would require a lengthy and elaborate discussion. Heidegger is claimed by a number of different philosophical schools. But he himself speaks the language of idealism in, for example, his Introduction to Metaphysics when he explains the "darkening of the world" in the modern era as a "darkening of the spirit": "World is always the world of the spirit. The animal has no world nor any environment....Darkening of the world means emasculation of the spirit, the disintegration, wasting away, repression, and misinterpretation of the spirit." (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), 37. See also the complaint of Herbert Marcuse: "...I soon realized that Heidegger's concreteness was to a great extent phony, a false concreteness, and that in fact his philosophy was just as abstract and removed from reality, even avoiding reality, as the philosophies which at that time had dominated German universities, namely a rather dry brand of neo-Kantianism, neo-Hegelianism, neo-Idealism, but also positivism." "Heidegger's Politics: an Interview," cited in Frank

been said to be almost entirely without a place for material agency,¹⁶ at the same time, Heidegger, at one point in his career, subscribed to a set of ideas that did indeed alter the world in an unmistakable and catastrophic fashion. It is a perpetual embarrassment, perhaps especially to those who admire his writings on technology, that he should have affiliated himself, even briefly and before these works were written, with the most technologically ruthless project in history. For a period of ten months in 1933-34, during his rectorship of Frieberg University, Heidegger acted as a public spokesman for the Nazi Party. His cooperation with the regime has been well documented and is discussed at length by a number of commentators, perhaps most admirably by George Steiner.¹⁷ Thus, although there seems to be no need to reproduce the details of his involvement here, there can be no doubt that it existed. The question I would like to raise, rather, concerns the nature of the relationship between his philosophic idealism and the role which he consented to play in the political realm.

Allan Megill has argued that the two are connected in a fairly immediate fashion. In his judgement, the political

Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 97.

¹⁶ Cf. the remarks of William Barrett in The Illusion of Technique (Garden City: Doubleday, 1979), 256-7.

¹⁷ George Steiner, Heidegger (London: Fontana, 1978), 111-112. See his bibliography for a list of works devoted to the debate on Heidegger's political involvement.

utterances of the Nazi period should be considered as all of a piece with Heidegger's philosophical writings. It would be difficult to counter this claim. But not only are the political statements recognizably the product of the mind that conceived Being and Time; they appear as well to be a kind of practical application of the concerns of that work. Both kinds of analysis, that is to say, are predicated on a recognition of "crisis" in the spheres to which they belong. As Megill remarks,

[Heidegger] continually moves between the abstract realm of thought on the one hand and the immediate social and political condition of Germany on the other. It is entirely fair to say he confuses the two....It is of practical and not merely rhetorical moment that in 1933 Heidegger dealt with philosophical issues of the most profound complexity, and with the immediate political situation of Germany, on the same plane and without even a pause for breath--indeed, using the same words ambiguously to refer to both.¹⁸

In his slightly more searching look at the same problem, George Steiner also remarks on the preoccupation with crisis common to Being and Time and the political speeches. "In both," he writes, "--as in so much of German thought after Nietzsche and Spengler--there is the presumption of...a nearing apocalypse, of so deep a crisis in human affairs that the norms of personal and institutional morality must be,

¹⁸ Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 130.

shall inevitably be, brushed aside."¹⁹ These are replaced, he suggests, in both Heidegger's philosophy and the rhetoric of the Nazis, with a melding of the fate of the individual to the national destiny. And concomitant with this notion of "ethnic vocation" is an emphasis--to be found, again in both Heidegger and National Socialism--on the sheer physicality, the rootedness in the soil, the necessary concreteness of all attempts to realize that destiny.²⁰ Steiner's most telling argument in favour of a direct connection between Heidegger's idealism and his political stance, it seems to me, concerns their common conception of the individual person as in some sense the instrument of large impersonal forces:

There is in Heidegger's supposition, itself at once metaphorical and mesmeric, that it is not man who speaks where language is most fully effective, but 'language itself through man,' an ominous hint of Hitler's brand of inspiration, of the Nazi use of the human voice as a trumpet played upon by immense, numinous agencies beyond the puny will or judgement of rational man. This motif of dehumanization is key. Nazism comes upon Heidegger precisely at that moment in his thinking when the human person is being edged away from the centre of meaning and of being.²¹

¹⁹ Heidegger, 117.

²⁰ Ibid. That an idealist philosopher should stress the physicality of the human condition is not as contradictory as it might appear. How else is spirit to manifest itself except in historical and phenomenal terms?--a point I shall return to in connection with Fichte's political philosophy.

²¹ Ibid., 118.

One hesitates, however, to insist upon a causal link between post-Kantian idealism and the techniques of the Third Reich. One hesitates not because there is too little evidence,²² but because, given the nature of the argument, there seem to be no grounds by which such a link could be disproved. Thus, the circumstantial evidence that is assembled by Frederick Heer in his Intellectual History of Modern Europe, while

²² At least one roughly contemporary writer did not hesitate to admit the causal link between idealist philosophy and violent political upheaval. As Karl Lowith reports, "[a] few years after Hegel's death, Heine, at the conclusion of his Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland (1834), tried to open the eyes of the French to the very concrete revolution which might proceed from the Reformation and German philosophy: 'It seems to me that a methodical nation like us had to begin with the Reformation, could only thereafter engage in philosophy, and only after the perfection of philosophy go on to political revolution. This order I find quite sensible. The heads which philosophy has used for reflection can be cut off later by the revolution for whatever purpose it likes. But philosophy would never have been able to use the heads cut off by revolution if the latter had not preceded it. But do not become anxious, you German republicans; the German revolution will not take place any more pleasantly and gently for having been preceded by the Kantian critique, Fichtian transcendental idealism, or even natural philosophy. Through these theories revolutionary forces have built up which only await the day on which they may break loose, filling the world with horror and awe. Kantians will appear who want nothing to do with mercy even in the phenomenal world; they will plough up without pity the very soil of our European life with sword and axe, in order to eradicate every last root of the past. Armed Fichtians will arise, whose fanaticism of will can be restrained neither through fear nor through self-interest....If the hand of the Kantian strikes swift and sure because his heart is not moved by any traditional reverence; if the Fichtian courageously defies all danger because for him it does not exist in reality; so the natural philosopher will be terrible, for he has allied himself to the primal forces of nature.'" Cited in From Hegel to Nietzsche: the Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought, David E. Green, trans. (London: Constable, 1964), 43-44.

superficially persuasive, seems so simple, so straightforward and incontrovertible, as to make one suspect that the question has been begged. Instead of asking, "what were the sources of the Nazi ideology?" or "what were the effects of German philosophical idealism?", Heer seems unconsciously to have adopted the maxim post hoc ergo propter hoc. Thus, the nineteenth century, which "came to an end amid the rubble of European cities at the end of the Second World War," is said to have begun in the efforts of German thinkers between 1770 and 1830 to design "a new era of salvation, which bore Heaven and Hell in itself."²³ The attempts at secularizing the Christian ideas of reward and salvation--or, what comes to the same thing, at spiritualizing the functions of the state --on the part of Fichte, Herder, Schelling, Novalis, Muller, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Rilke are then shown to culminate in the political thinking of Adolf Hitler:

The bulk of German political historiography of the nineteenth century was nothing but a more or less disguised spiritualist, prophetic vision, the aim of which was to suggest to the 'kingdom' how it should have carried out a better policy and history of salvation. This was Hitler's version of history. It was also the innermost conviction of the poets, writers, and professors within Germany. No wonder they fell over like straw men before the Nazi god.²⁴

²³ The Intellectual History of Modern Europe, Jonathan Steinberg, trans. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 448.

²⁴ Ibid., 454.

The flaw in the argument, of course, is that it fails to establish a necessary connection between the idealist tenor of German thought and the growth of National Socialism. The uniformity of the tradition from Fichte to Rilke is assumed but not proved, as is the inevitability of the process by which, in this line of descent, idea gave rise to idea. As was the case with Yeats's poem about Locke and the spinning-jenny, a sufficient cause has been taken for a necessary cause, and the assertion that is made is not logical but rhetorical.

It would be at least equally unwise, on the other hand, to dismiss such evidence for a direct link as does exist on the supposition that it is merely coincidental. It cannot seriously be argued, for example, that Heidegger was implicated in the Nazi project purely by chance, or that he was so politically innocent as to have misunderstood the nature of its goals. Another familiar extenuation that is often put forward in the defence of intellectuals must also, I think, be rejected. This is the contention that those who occupy themselves primarily with ideas are not to be blamed if their fascination with the symmetry or potency of a given idea causes them temporarily to overlook its consequences in the practical sphere. For surely one of the most basic assumptions of modern thought generally, and of its idealist strain in particular, is that of the fundamental unity of mind and world--and hence of the inseparability of theory and

practice. But perhaps with this observation we at least come closer to a more promising formulation of the question that needs to be asked. What is it about the theoretical or philosophical dimension of modernity, that is to say, that enables it to coexist with such large-scale enactments of the will to power as have taken place in the twentieth century?

* * *

This lengthy and indirect approach to the main subject of this chapter has been necessary as a way of indicating the scope of the questions that are implicit in Fichte's philosophy, and, as we shall see later, in Coleridge's use of Fichte. As the first and most influential extender of the Kantian critical philosophy, Fichte stands near the beginning of the strain of European thought that has been held responsible, rightly or wrongly, for much that is least desirable in modern civilization: the technological conquest of nature, the dehumanization of the individual, Nazism. Since Fichte's philosophy finds its way, through Coleridge, into the mainstream of Anglo-American criticism, we should like very much to know whether any or all of its suspect tendencies have been adopted along with it. In some ways, Fichte's thought provides a more manageable test case than that of Kant for the problem of the relationship between philosophical idealism and a politics of mastery or technology. "Fundamentally," writes William Barrett, "Kant

is a creature of the Enlightenment, with its cool and tidy rationalism, and does not share the explosive passion, the storm and stress of the romantics that were to follow him."²⁵ Fichte, by contrast, is interested above all in the practical consequences of the philosophic system elaborated by Kant: his idealism is ontological rather than epistemological, and he relentlessly pursues its implications into the realms of politics, education, ethics, and aesthetics. It is much easier, then, to ask of Fichte than it is of Kant, first, whether the destructive patterns we have witnessed in more recent times are already implicit in his thought, and second, whether, if they are implicit, they are inevitable as well.

Though he was reluctant to admit it, and perhaps never entirely convinced by those who pointed it out, Fichte's philosophy makes a decisive break with Kant. He began his career, certainly, as a disciple of Kant's. His first publication, the Critique of all Revelation, had been read and approved by Kant in manuscript. When it appeared anonymously in 1792, it was widely mistaken for the fourth critique of the master himself. When Kant publicly denied authorship of the work and ascribed it to Fichte, Fichte became famous, and his intellectual debt to Kant a matter of

²⁵ William Barrett, Death of the Soul (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 102.

public interest.²⁶ His second book, Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre (1794) is, as its title suggests, the foundation of Fichte's philosophical system. So pronounced, however, was the apparent change in his philosophical orientation with this work,²⁷ and so great was the controversy that ensued among readers of Kant, that Fichte, according to George Seidel, "spent much of the rest of his life trying to explain what he did, and did not, mean by the work."²⁸

As Fichte contends with some asperity in the Second Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre (1797)--addressed to "readers who already have a philosophical system," that is, the Kantians--what he meant by it primarily was that it should be seen as a logical inference from Kant's philosophy, and not as an alternative to it:

Now I am very well aware that Kant by no means established a system of the aforementioned kind; for in that case the present author would have saved himself the trouble and chosen some other branch of human knowledge as the scene of his labors....However, I think I also know with equal certainty that Kant envisaged such a system; that everything he actually propounds consists of fragments and consequences of

²⁶ For details of the publication history, see Garrett Green's introduction to Fichte's Attempt at a Critique of all Revelation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 4-5.

²⁷ Ibid., 19-20.

²⁸ Activity and Ground: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1976), 33.

such a system, and that his claims have sense and coherence only on this assumption.²⁹

To those who continue to insist that he has deviated from what Kant intended, Fichte has this to say:

It may appear arrogant and disparaging to others when a solitary person appears and says: Till this moment, among a crowd of worthy scholars who have devoted their time and energies to the exposition of a certain book, there is not one who has understood this book in anything but a completely distorted fashion; they have discovered in it the very opposite system to that which is propounded therein; dogmatism instead of transcendental idealism: I alone, however, understand it aright. Yet in truth this arrogance should only seem to be such; for it is to be hoped that hereafter others, too, will understand the book, and the solitary one no longer remain alone.³⁰

A close examination of the point on which the argument turns, however, suggests that Fichte was both right in fearing the charges of arrogance, and wrong in his notions of Kant's true intentions.

The significant question on which Fichte differs from Kant concerns the independent existence of the noumena or things-in-themselves. Kant had maintained, in the first place, that the constitution of our knowledge of the sensible (or phenomenal) world was wholly dependent upon the activity

²⁹ Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre), ed. and trans, Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1970), 51.

³⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

of the mind. In other words, it is we (and not the objects perceived by us) who create the appearance of form and matter in the world of experience. Thus, in the Critique of Pure Reason he explains that:

What we have meant to say is that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things which we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them as being, nor their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us, and that if the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us.³¹

This is to state unequivocally that the mind creates the world of appearances; and up to this point, Fichte is perfectly in accord with the teachings of Kant. But it is extremely important to note that in the passage just quoted, Kant says nothing whatever about the mind's capacity also to create the reality behind the appearances--a reality which is completely unknown by us and whose existence therefore remains indeterminate. But if the existence of things-in-themselves is indeterminate, it must follow too that we have no right to assert that our capacity to constitute the world of appearances generates reality in its entirety.

³¹ Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Modern Library, 1958), 54.

Kant is indeed reluctant to claim that the mind is creative in the full sense of the word. It would be extremely difficult to account for a priori knowledge, for example, if both phenomena and noumena derived from our own sensibility. There are some statements about experience, that is to say, that we know to be true (for example, that $5+7=12$) without ever needing to see them proved empirically.³² Such "a priori synthetic judgements" are incontrovertible; all our empirical knowledge is dependent on their being true: how, then, can necessity itself be merely the product of subjective mental activity? In another way too, Kant's entire system rests on the tacit assumption of the independent existence of a noumenal realm. It is agreed that the mind itself imposes form on the objects that present themselves to the senses. It is agreed that the categories of space and time--without which objects cannot be perceived--originate in the mind. It follows from these premises that everything that is perceived has already undergone the synthesizing process of the mind. Thus even though we may say that a mental operations creates or constitutes the object, we are forced to recognize that the mental operation is not identical with the object. It would seem then, that the thing-in-itself must have some kind of existence before our minds go to work on it, and must in some sense be the cause of the appearance that our minds produce.

³² Ibid., 52.

When we begin to consider causality, however, as Fichte was among the first to point out, a serious weakness in Kant's thinking becomes apparent. Even when postulated as the cause of our sensations, the noumena, of course, remain unknown to the intellect. They are still to be understood as entirely outside the cognitive concepts or categories which we use in our encounter with the phenomenal world. But to assert that the noumena are the ultimate cause of our understanding and are, at the same time, outside the categories of our understanding, is to involve oneself in a contradiction--for one of these categories is causality itself. Since causality, furthermore, would seem to be the only principle by which the noumena are connected to the phenomenal realm--or, the only basis for our suspecting that they exist at all--it begins to be clear that things-in-themselves cannot be shown to be independent of our minds.³³ Fichte deduces, reasonably enough, that the noumena, like their appearances in the phenomenal world, must therefore be taken as products of our mental operations.³⁴ Perhaps without being wholly aware that he had by this argument removed the linch-pin of the entire system, Fichte begins at this point to make inferences from, and shortly to redesign, the philosophy expounded by Kant.

³³ For a very clear explanation of this crux, see G.N.G. Orsini, Coleridge and German Idealism (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 173-5.

³⁴ Science of Knowledge, 59-60.

Curiously, he takes it for granted that Kant had intended the logical anomaly in his system to constitute proof of the impossibility of an independently existing noumenal realm. How broadly, Fichte asks, does Kant intend the applicability of the categories of the understanding, and particularly causality, to extend? The answer he provides to his own question, though it invokes the authority of Kant, is decidedly un-Kantian:

[The applicability of the categories extends] only over the realm of appearances; and thus only over what is already in us and for us. And how, then, could one arrive at the assumption of a something distinct from the self, as a ground of the empirical content of knowledge? Only, I take it, by an inference from the grounded to the ground; hence, by an application of the concept of causality. That is Kant's own view of the matter...and that reason alone is enough for him to reject the assumption of things existing a themselves outside us.³⁵

The doctrine of the independently existing thing-in-itself, Fichte declares, is a spurious addition to the Kantian system for which his muddled commentators are responsible. "To impute this absurdity to any man still in possession of his senses," he writes, "is, for me, impossible; how could I attribute it to Kant?"³⁶ So sure is Fichte of the correctness of his interpretation that he proceeds to issue a

³⁵ Ibid., 54.

³⁶ Ibid., 58.

kind of challenge to Kant himself. In effect, he will stake his reputation on the point:

So long, therefore, as Kant does not expressly declare in so many words, that he derives sensation from an impression given by the thing-in-itself; or, to employ his own terminology, that sensation is to be explained in philosophy from a transcendental object existing in itself outside us, for so long shall I decline to believe what his expositors tell us of him. If he does issue such a declaration, however, I would sooner regard the Critique of Pure Reason as a product of the most singular accident than as the work of a human head.³⁷

Fichte seems to have tempted fate too far. For a second time, Kant was forced to a public disavowal of the utterances of his former disciple. As Orsini reports, "on August 28, 1799, the old philosopher...published a statement in which he expressly repudiated Fichte's interpretation of his doctrine, and referred the reader who wanted more information straight back to the text of the Critique of Pure Reason, literally interpreted."³⁸

I have dwelt at such length on the essential difference between Kant and Fichte partly because it seems to me that the rupture that occurs here constitutes a major turning point in modern thought. Whether or not Fichte continued to believe that he had merely stated outright what was implicit in Kant, he was certainly aware of the novelty of the course

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Coleridge and German Idealism, 174-5.

he was pursuing. As early as 1795, we find him describing himself as the "first philosopher of freedom." In a draft of a letter of that year, designed to elicit a pension for himself from the government of France, Fichte declared that the essential idea of his philosophy had come to him while he was at work on a defense of the French Revolution. His epistemology, the "first system of freedom," could therefore be likened to a liberation in the political sphere insofar as it frees man from the tyranny of the Kantian thing-in-itself: "Just as France has freed man from external shackles," Fichte insists, "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."³⁹ Indeed, as M.H. Abrams has argued, Fichte's attempt to overthrow the Kantian noumenon must be regarded as fundamental to his system:

To Fichte's view of the mind in its primal act of knowing, any entity or condition which is external to and independent of the mind's own constitution and activity--even Kant's stripped down postulate of an unknowable Ding an sich--is and insupportable limitation which must be eliminated if man is at last to come into his essential freedom.⁴⁰

³⁹ Daniel Breazeale, ed. and trans., Early Philosophical Writings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 385. The same letter is cited in Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), 358.

⁴⁰ Natural Supernaturalism, 368.

George Grant was fundamentally correct in perceiving Kant as the philosopher who made possible an elevation of the will to the status of an autonomous principle. This, indeed, is the penultimate step in the argument of Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.⁴¹ And yet Kant stops short of positing absolute freedom for man. It is clear, in the first place, that as creatures of the phenomenal world, humans are subject to causality and bound by the physical laws of nature. Because they possess reason, it is equally clear, on the other hand, that humans are capable of imaginatively projecting their wills "into another order of things," into a realm where they can conceive of themselves as pure intelligence, independent of sensibility and subjective determinations.⁴² Nevertheless, because Kant continues to maintain that the noumenal sphere is inaccessible, he is forced to conclude that human beings, while noumenally free, remain empirically determined in their actions.⁴³ Kant's conclusion, then, which he describes as "the extreme limit of all moral inquiry" is that man, as he is in himself, is autonomous and free; as an appearance of himself, however--a

⁴¹ Ed. and trans., H.J. Paton (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 108.

⁴² Ibid., 125.

⁴³ Ibid., 126-30.

state to which he is confined as long as he inhabits the phenomenal world--man remains the prisoner of necessity.⁴⁴

Thus it is Fichte, not Kant, who takes the decisive step of declaring the absolute autonomy of the will. It is he who first goes beyond the Kantian "extreme limit" by finding metaphysical grounds for human freedom. The logic by which he derives these grounds from an inconsistency in Kant's conception of the inaccessible thing-in-itself is impeccable. Yet stripped of this central doctrine, the Kantian philosophy begins to lead in a direction that Kant himself would have been unable to countenance.

The actual mechanics by which Fichte establishes the "fundamental principles" of his science of knowledge are themselves an attempt to improve upon Kant. Instead of beginning, as Kant does, with the "facts" of consciousness--that is to say, with an experiencing self which is set against a world of objects--Fichte bases his philosophy upon what seems to him to be logically prior to either of these: the original act of self-consciousness itself.⁴⁵ By this he means "that Act 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."⁴⁶ Though the act itself is, by definition, underivable and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁵ Garrett Green, op. cit.: 21.

⁴⁶ Science of Knowledge, 93.

unprovable, Fichte establishes its existence by resorting to a version of the fundamental principle of non-contradiction,⁴⁷ the proposition that "A equals A", which, because it can be asserted absolutely and unconditionally by the self, entails the assumption of the absolute and unconditional existence of the self that does the asserting.⁴⁸ A=A can thus be translated as "I=I", or as "I am I", or, most decisively, as "I am." The original act of consciousness, then, says Fichte, is the act of self-consciousness: it consists in the Ego's positing of itself.⁴⁹ The second basic principle of his metaphysics, which Fichte will use to establish the existence of the world that is experienced by the Ego, is, like the first, absolute and unconditional. He expresses it as "not-A is not equal to

⁴⁷ Kant makes the principle of non-contradiction "the universal and completely sufficient principle of all analytic knowledge;" he hastens to point out, however, that "beyond the sphere of analytic knowledge it has, as a sufficient criterion of truth, no authority and no field of application." Critique of Pure Reason, 190. Fichte has, once again, transformed a doctrine that is merely formal and logical in Kant into a positive and generative philosophical assertion.

⁴⁸ Science of Knowledge, 94-95.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 98. The formula by which Fichte expresses the original act of consciousness, it is worth noting, is more fundamental in its implications than the Cartesian cogito ergo sum. As Fichte himself points out, "we do not necessarily think when we exist, but we necessarily exist when we think. Thinking is by no means the essence, but merely a specific determination of our existence; and our existence has many other determinations besides this." Ibid., pp. 100-101. Descartes, what is more, arrived at his principle by endeavoring to find something which was impossible for him to doubt. Fichte's act of self-consciousness is, by contrast, utterly free and unconstrained.

A".⁵⁰ It is important to note, as George Seidel remarks, that the second principle is not the same thing as "not-A=not-A," "which would simply be the first fundamental principle rendered negatively, and would not be something derived from it." Rather, what we have is a statement that is asserted by the self in its self-consciousness, namely: the not-self is not the self.⁵¹ In metaphysical terms, this is equivalent to the Ego's positing (or counterpositing) of a non-Ego. It is from this second principle, as Seidel goes on to say, that the virtually untrammelled freedom of Fichte's Ego, as well as the virtually pure idealism of his system as a whole are derived:

What this does, ultimately, is to provide a logic of freedom, or dialectic, in virtue of the (nearly) infinite possibilities. Non-A, or the non-self of the second fundamental principle, can be anything except A, or the self; and even the meaning of what non-A or non-self would be, is determinable only in terms of A or the self. To say that the non-self is not the self is to say that it can be anything but the self, which opens up a vast field of possibilities, not only for the non-self, but...for the self as well.⁵²

Logicians will not fail to notice, however, that when the first and second principles are placed side by side, an apparent contradiction emerges. If both principles are

⁵⁰ Ibid., 102

⁵¹ George Seidel, Activity and Ground: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, 44-45.

⁵² Ibid., 45.

stated absolutely, then both the Ego and the non-Ego are posited unconditionally. If both are unconditioned, both are also infinite--and it is difficult to see how two infinite and mutually excluding entities could exist within the same metaphysical system. It is the purpose of Fichte's third fundamental principle to eliminate this anomaly. By a logical process which I find unconvincing, he argues that the first and second principles are not contradictory, but mutually limiting. This is so, Fichte says, because the very concept of limiting (regardless of whether it is A or not-A that is to be limited) implies the notion of divisibility. Divisibility, in turn, implies the notion of something to divide. "To limit something," Fichte continues, "is to abolish its reality, not wholly, but in part only, by negation."⁵³ The act of limiting that A perpetrates upon not-A thus implies the divisibility, and hence the existence, of not-A. (The same is true if we take it that not-A imposes a limit upon A.) The third basic principle of the system, then, is that the Ego posits the non-Ego as limited by the Ego, and simultaneously posits the Ego as limited by the non-Ego.⁵⁴ In short, having worked through the three principles, we find ourselves--to put it in lay terms--with a self that has first generated a world and then defined itself as finite in opposition or contradistinction to that world.

⁵³ Science of Knowledge, 108.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 122.

The notion of an opposition between self and world is fundamental to Fichte's philosophy in more than a merely logical sense. In a way, it is even implicit in the initial "act" from which his system takes its point of departure. Unlike the more neutral Kantian recognition of a relationship between self and world, Fichte's conception of an Ego that exists in and through its own action already takes for granted the complementary existence of a passive sphere in which or upon which it is to act. And the Ego's overt positing of a non-Ego carries with it more than a slight suggestion that the self creates the world out of itself and for its own benefit. One cannot help but be reminded of the Judeo-Christian account of the creation ex deo--and the concomitant doctrine that the world belongs to God and exists for no other end than His pleasure. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the ontological scene that is laid by Fichte's three fundamental principles prominently features an absolute identification between being and acting. The self, by definition, cannot be passive; and it follows that in Fichte's metaphysics, unlike Kant's, acting is prior to knowing--prior, indeed, to everything.⁵⁵

It needs to be stressed, moreover, that the capacity to act is exclusively the prerogative of the self. In his

⁵⁵ On this point see Tom Rockmore, Fichte, Marx and the German Philosophical Tradition (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 75, and George Seidel, op.cit., 6.

examination of the basic metaphysical relationship between the Fichtian Ego and non-Ego, George Seidel has shown that the lack of any real reciprocity between the two leads to a somewhat convoluted depiction of what actual experience is like. Because it is the self that acts upon the world and not vice versa, even our sensations must be understood as the product of actions on our part. Thus:

Fichte cannot say 'The fly annoys me.' The fly is incapable of annoying me unless I let the fly annoy me. The non-self is active only insofar as it is posited as active through the self in virtue of a non-positing.... Activity can be posited in the fly only by a non-positing of activity in the self.⁵⁶

This unconvincing and entirely anthropocentric formulation of the nature of experience in the world is at least partly motivated, one suspects, by Fichte's eagerness to demonstrate the self's essential freedom from the feeling of necessity that sensation confers upon us. But he can arrive at this freedom, it would seem, only by postulating an ironfisted faculty of control in the self. Not only does the mind impose order upon the world by organizing it according to its own concepts (as in Kant); it also controls the very manner in which it imposes this order. The self has the capacity, according to Fichte, for unconstrained mastery over both itself and the world.

⁵⁶ Activity and Ground, 54.

But the key words in the paragraph above are "freedom from." Though central to his philosophy as a whole, Fichte's concept of freedom is almost entirely negative: freedom is merely the absence of necessity. Thus, as far as the theoretical part of his system is concerned, it is impossible to ask, for example, why should the absolute self posit a world? Surely as well as being free to act, the Ego is free to refrain from action? Yet this question, as Peter Heath and John Lachs have made clear, "simply does not admit of an answer." This is so because to suggest a basis of choice for the absolute self in its original act of creation is to posit a cause that is prior to the first principle of existence--an obvious impossibility:

A reason or ground must always be a consideration that goes beyond what we wish to account for. But there is nothing extraneous to, different from, or 'beyond' the absolute self in its infinity, and in any case, if there were reasons for what it creates, its activity would be determined and not free. The absolute self creates freely and in that sense unaccountably.⁵⁷

Even in Fichte's ethical philosophy, there is no inherent answer to the question "freedom for what?" (Fichte's own formulation is that freedom is the drive toward freedom for the sake of freedom.)⁵⁸ Like the absolute Ego,

⁵⁷ Science of Knowledge, xvii.

⁵⁸ Cited in Activity and Ground, 80. The quotation is from Fichte's Samliche Werke, ed. I.H. Fichte (Berlin, 1845), IV, 189.

the finite Ego is characterized by its freedom and by its capacity for action. Posited against a passive and finite world--the field, as it were, for its activity--the self appears to have ample opportunity for free action, but little or no motivation. But this is to overlook the stress that is apparently built into the principle that the world was originally posited by the self and remains an entity against which the self defines itself. Fichte derives two impulses to action from this relationship: the self is motivated to affirm itself in the world and, conversely, to bring the world into conformity with itself. The mutually limiting character of the opposition between self and world suggests that we exist, in Fichte's account of things, in a state of perpetual becoming. Indeed, as G.N.G. Orsini remarks of the ethical implications of Fichte's system:

A man can never affirm that he is wise or he is good but only that he is becoming wise or good, and that only if he is continually striving towards that goal....The world has not been made once and for all as a solid system of being which we must accept and to which we must conform. It has to be made anew every day, and it is up to man to make it, since it is his world.⁵⁹

Fichte himself makes the point more succinctly: the world, he says, is the material of our duty made sensible.⁶⁰ The world is a sphere of moral struggle which, in the nature of

⁵⁹ Coleridge and German Idealism, 176-7.

⁶⁰ Cited in George Seidel, Activity and Ground, 51.

things, can never quite be won (for that would destroy the equilibrium that exists between Ego and non-Ego), but which can never be given up as long as consciousness exists.

It comes as no surprise that in actual practice the vacuum that is created by Fichte's negative concept of freedom is gradually filled by a multiplicity of duties and drives. One takes it on trust that the ethical precepts of Fichte's later philosophy can all be derived, ultimately, from the original concept of the absolute self.⁶¹ It is no easy task, however, to connect all the ramifications of his ethical works to the system that is laid out in the Wissenschaftslehre. This is because the source of morality is sometimes identified as the ideal self, sometimes as spirit (Geist) or the Absolute (as in Hegel), and sometimes as the divine idea or God.⁶² Indeed, as was anticipated earlier in this chapter, the more overtly political writings equate the ethical principle with the spirit of the German nation, with specific classes of its citizens, and with its ruler. The duties that are enjoined upon humanity, though they can all be classified as forms of self-perfection through conformity with the ideal (whatever guise it may take), are equally various. Without wanting to dwell at length on the details of Fichte's ethical pronouncements, the

⁶¹ Ibid., 65.

⁶² Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation, 23.

tremendous flexibility of his moral philosophy needs to be made clear.

A couple of examples should suffice. In the relatively early work On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy (1794), designed as a kind of popularized version of the Wissenschaftslehre,⁶³ Fichte applies his ethical idealism to the study of aesthetics. While discussing the psychology of the artist in a general way, Fichte raises the question of how it is that "mood" is transmitted through literature. His notion of the way in which communication takes place between author and reader provides a revealing instance of how we can act upon our duty to bring the world into conformity with the self:

As you have observed yourself, there is in all of us the drive to make the people round us as like ourselves as possible, and to duplicate us in them as closely as possible. ... Only the unjust egoist wishes to be the sole representative of his kind, and cannot endure anyone else like him; but the noble person would like everyone else to be like him, and does everything in his power to bring this about. This is how it is with the inspired darling of nature. He would like to see his own beloved image reflected back to him from all other souls.⁶⁴

⁶³ David Simpson, ed. German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 74. "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy" was translated for this anthology by Elizabeth Rubenstein.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 89.

According to Fichte, this narcissism or emotional imperialism is particularly well-developed in artists; since they have the vehicle of language at their disposal as well, their powers are considerable.

[T]he inspired artist expresses the mood of his nature in a flexible physical form, and the motion, action, and continuity of his forms is [sic] the expressions of the inner vibrations of his soul. This motion should arouse in us the same mood that was in him. He lent his soul to dead matter so that it could communicate itself to us. Our spirit is the final goal of his art, and those forms are intermediaries between him and us, as the air is the intermediary between our ear and the string.⁶⁵

Perhaps it is unnecessary to point out that both text and audience are conceived of here as essentially inert. The activity of the artist, a clear analogue for the activity of the self in its relation to the world, is portrayed by Fichte as a form of manipulation or mastery. It is easy to see that if this activity were transferred into a more material sphere we should recognize the attitude behind it as technological.

Nowhere is the tendency that M.H. Abrams has identified as Fichte's Machtpolitik⁶⁶ more disturbingly apparent than in his On the Nature of the Scholar and his Manifestations in the Sphere of Freedom (1805). In these lectures, delivered, to be sure, in a climate of anxiety about French

⁶⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁶ Natural Supernaturalism, 358.

expansionism, Fichte finds an explicitly political use for his notion of conformity between the absolute and the finite self. We are all, he argues, instruments of the divine "idea" or Geist. Education, self-discipline, and a conscious honing of the will may help to elevate us to the positions in the world that we are best suited to fill; ultimately, though, these duties will be performed in vain without the fiat of the divine idea. What is being urged in the lectures is a selfless cooperation with destiny, a cooperation so complete that the mark of its success seems a virtual eradication of the person by the "idea":

The idea is not the ornament of the individual (strictly speaking there is no such thing as individuality in the idea) but seeks to flow forth in the whole human race, to animate it with new life and to mould it after its own image.... Wherever, therefore, it attains such life, it irresistibly strives after this universal efficacy not through the life of the individual but through its own essential nature. It thus drives everyone in whom it has an abode as though he were a passive instrument, even against the will and wish of his sensuous, personal nature.⁶⁷

Although there is a pronounced echo here of the Christian ideal of the negation of the personal will in the acceptance of God's will, Fichte's version of the process seems wholly secular. He is interested in the material consequences of

⁶⁷ David Simpson, ed. and trans., German Aesthetic And Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel, 100. The translation is that of William Smith in The Popular Works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 4th ed. (London: 1889).

renunciation--in the power that is thereby held in reserve for use upon the world.

When Fichte begins to discuss the qualities and functions of the ideal leader, it becomes difficult to understand how he could once have characterized himself as the philosopher of freedom. The ruler is the one in whom the divine idea has most fully manifested itself. His will and God's will are therefore one. He is above the constitution of his age, and the passive materials on which he exerts his power are, in some cases at least, his own subjects. How does the ideal ruler, Fichte asks, "answer to his conscience for determining upon a just war...for the victims who would fall in such a war, and the many evils thereby inflicted upon humanity?" His answer is blunt:

The ruler who sees a divine calling in his occupation stands firm and immovable before all these doubts, overtaken by no unmanly weakness. Is the war just? Then it is the will of God that there should be war, and it is God's will with him that he resolve upon it. Let sacrifices be made as they must; it is again the divine will that chooses them.⁶⁸

The difficulty here, of course, that the renunciation of will cannot be accomplished in Fichte's system without a simultaneous renunciation of responsibility. As much as one may wish that utterances like this one could be dismissed as an aberration, they are so clearly part of a coherent

⁶⁸ Ibid., 105.

sequence within Fichte's thought that it would be misleading to discount them.

* * *

If what we have here is the consequence of that elevation of the will to autonomous status that George Grant deplored in Kant--and it seems so--then we need to explain why it should so strikingly resemble determinism. And a number of other dramatic reversals in Fichte's philosophy need also to be accounted for. His concept of freedom, having been taken to its extreme, now ushers in an inexorable necessity. His notion of the "act," initially assigned a central role in the system, now culminates in a plea for submissiveness. Self-consciousness has been replaced by self-abnegation. Idealism has put itself in the service of the material forces of history. Philosophy has turned into political rhetoric.

Indeed, in Fichte's political writings, we have an uncanny foreshadowing of the pro-Nazi pronouncements of Martin Heidegger. The parallel probably does not need to be stressed. But precisely because it is so clear, the similarity between the two cases renews the urgency of the questions that were posed near the beginning of this chapter. Is a drive toward mastery in the practical sphere--whether directed against nature, as in technology, or against other

human beings, as in tyranny--implicit in philosophical idealism? And, if it is implicit, is it also inescapable? Perhaps by answering these questions with regard to Fichte's philosophy we will also, indirectly, answer them with regard to Heidegger and others who have acted upon the same set of assumptions.

The first possibility that presents itself is that somehow something "went wrong" with Fichte's system--that, in the course of working out its implications, he introduced a false note or took an incorrect logical step. We are justified, I think, in eliminating at once the rather tempting supposition that it is only in its political "application" that the system begins to degenerate. In point of fact, we have dealt with this argument obliquely already in our consideration of the possible political naivete of Heidegger. It is even less convincing with regard to Fichte whose philosophy, we recall, was political in its very inception, arising as it did from his ruminations on the French Revolution. And clearly, it will not do to cite some pardonable misapprehension of the real nature of the French Revolution as the ultimate source of the threat posed by his philosophy. That hypothesis could only be verified in an extensive search through the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau and Paine--and we would be committed to a potentially endless debate about whether ideas cause events or events ideas. It is better to return to our original

premise that philosophy and politics, theory and practice, are inextricably interwoven.

Is there, then, a structural flaw in Fichte's idealism? This question is less easy to settle in a word or two. There seem to me to be two points in the system, however, where Fichte's reasoning is less than compelling. The first concerns the logical soundness of the derivation of his third fundamental principle. I remain unconvinced, that is to say, that the infinite Ego and the infinite non-Ego must necessarily enforce limitations upon one another. And without the mutually limiting character of the Fichtean self and world, the philosophy as a whole would have a different complexion entirely.

This leads directly to the second point I would want to query in the design of Fichte's idealism. Even if we accept the premise that the world begins where the self ends and vice versa, one cannot help but suspect that Fichte has smuggled into their strictly logical opposition some of the antagonistic connotations that the term "opposition" usually carries in non-philosophic discourse. It seems to be understood from the outset, thus, that when the finite self posits a finite world for itself, a sphere for its activities, its subsequent drive for mastery over that world is virtually a matter of course. In his discussion of the Fichtean conception of unity between the self and the not-

self, James Engell has also commented on the presence of a seemingly inevitable "friction" between the two:

This is not only because the Nicht-Ich is a postulate of the Ich but also because everything must be brought back to the understanding and to the reflection of the self if it is to have any effect on practical life. Fichte stresses that the Nicht-Ich is a necessary postulate of the Ich, because the idea of opposition and struggle is necessary to life. Otherwise there would be no creation and no death, only an eternal presence that is divine and boring.⁶⁹

Yet it is neither logically nor psychologically inevitable that the mere recognition of boundaries implies a determination to overcome those boundaries. Nor, to push the metaphor a little further, does one's ownership of a given thing (in the sense in which the self can be said to own the world) necessarily lead to one's desire to use it, master it, conquer it, or impose one's nature upon it. The will, in short, seems to play a vital role in Fichte's system that cannot readily be accounted for by the theoretical foundations of that system. Nevertheless, even if these two objections are justified, we are still unable to state unequivocally that Fichte's idealism need not inevitably result in a drive towards technological or political mastery. This is because, whether or not his deductions are flawless, these two doctrines are made to emerge from the foundations

⁶⁹ The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 227.

of his system. They cannot be said to undermine it. They are not extraneous to it. And without them, of course, it would no longer be his system.

The question can be answered more definitely, it seems to me, from a slightly longer perspective. One of the most striking features of Fichte's philosophy, looked at in its broad outlines, is the degree to which it depends on a concept of power. To a certain extent, Fichte's interest in power is part of his Kantian heritage. That it is the world that conforms to the structure of the mind, and not the other way around, is a principle of enormous potency. The way in which this power is unleashed in Fichte's metaphysics is extremely significant. It is present, to be sure, in the originating act that sets the whole system in motion. But in that absolute "I am," power is merely potential. It is not until that self creates a world, and power finds its proper object, that the philosophical "big bang" can truly be said to occur. Unmistakably, it is a relationship of power that governs all the ensuing encounters between self and world. In Fichte's ethical and political works, it is always some use, transfer, manifestation or preservation of power that is foremost in his mind and that directs his pronouncements. It is inevitable that this should be so, since the underlying and unstated premise of his system--the motive force behind it--is that the mind is empowered to create and control the world. Mind, for Fichte, is simply the power to act. For

this reason the tendency toward mastery that we have observed in his philosophy is inevitable as well. Though I would hesitate to make the same claim for all post-Kantian idealism, I would argue that a drive toward mastery is at least implicit in any philosophy that maintains that mind creates world without simultaneously making some provision for the fact that the world is populated by other people.

This last point can perhaps be made clearer if we examine the same problem from a slightly different angle. A second very prominent feature of Fichte's philosophy as a whole, and one that he acknowledges, is the central role that is assigned to freedom. As we saw earlier, however, Fichte's concept of freedom is a rather empty one. The question "what is freedom for?" cannot be answered within the terms of the system. But, like power, freedom is not a static thing. It is always directed toward something; it always seeks out its own objects. In a certain sense, freedom and power are aspects of one another. Certainly in the world we inhabit--the world of other people--freedom and power are never mere abstractions; they are always in some sense attached--as possessions, desires, or motives--to particular social groups. Indeed, they are the factors which we most commonly use to distinguish one social group from another. The destructive tendencies of Fichte's philosophy arise primarily because a fundamental necessity for action, an almost unlimited reserve of power, and an entirely undirected

freedom are brought together. Unleashed in combination on the world, each one seeks out its objects in a way that is ultimately uncontrollable.

Chapter Three

Technique

What I shall try to do...is to use Coleridge's metaphysical machinery as machinery, disregarding the undeniable fact that Coleridge himself so often took it to be much more. I shall take his constructions, that is, as 'concepts of the understanding' (to use his terminology) and use them, not as doctrines to be accepted, refuted, or corrected (however great the temptations) but as instruments with which to explore the nature of poetry.

--I. A. Richards

The term technique, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining an end. In our technological society, technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity. Its characteristics are new; the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past.

--Jacques Ellul

In the central "philosophical" chapters of Biographia Literaria, Coleridge attempts to expound his "dynamic" or "polar" philosophy for the first time in a published work. The significance of Chapters IX through XIII for nearly all modern Anglo-American criticism is analogous to that of George Grant's notion of a "central moment" of affirmation within European intellectual history: the chapters have

often been taken to represent a point in the history of literary criticism at which two previously distinct forces or ideas are joined together in a new relationship. In the most literal sense, this section of the Biographia is devoted to the idea of joining itself: Coleridge is here endeavouring to bring about the reconciliation of the dualities of mind and nature, and to create out of their conjunction a new and more vital epistemology than any with which English-speaking readers were familiar. He is also attempting to derive the imagination, or "esemplastic power," as the necessary link between the materialist conviction that everything can be explained by the evidence of our senses, and the equally inescapable (though less demonstrable) intuition that a transcendent, unknowable realm exists beyond that of sensory experience.

At a metaphorical level as well, the philosophical chapters endeavour to reconcile two previously antipathetic strains in Coleridge's own intellectual development: that is to say, the mechanistic philosophy of David Hartley and the associationalists is here brought into contact with the subjective idealism of Berkeley.¹ As is well known, the bridge between these two diametrically opposed philosophical positions--virtual materialism on the one hand, subjective

¹ The two strains are explicitly contrasted in the last paragraph of Chapter VIII. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, eds. Biographia Literaria (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, 137.

idealism on the other--is constructed out of materials appropriated from Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, whom Coleridge had been reading in sequence, beginning in 1801.

Just as Grant's hypothetical moment of European self-definition generates a powerful new understanding of the relationship between humankind and nature--an attitude that, in his account, leads directly to the drive towards mastery over nature that we sometimes call technology--so the intellectual and literary consequences of Coleridge's act of joining are powerful, far-reaching, and at least partly technical. There has been much disagreement about the degree to which Coleridge was aware of or intended to stress a connection between the theoretical explorations of Volume One of the Biographia and the practical criticism he engages in in Volume Two.² While there are some grounds for believing that, in Coleridge's own mind, the theory was propaedeutic to

² Among those who deny any connection between the two volumes of the Biographia are J.A. Appleyard, "Coleridge and Criticism: I. Critical Theory," in R.L. Brett, ed., Writers and Their Background: S.T. Coleridge (London: J. Bell and Sons, 1971), 135; Norman Fruman, Coleridge: the Damaged Archangel (New York: George Braziller, 1972), 179-180; J. Shawcross, Introduction, Biographia Literaria (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), lxxv-lxxvi. On the other side of the debate are J.R. de J. Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Yale University Press, 1969) 63; George Whalley, "The Integrity of Biographia Literaria," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association 6 (1953), 87-101; Catherine Miles Wallace, The Design of Biographia Literaria (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983); and Kathleen Wheeler, Sources, Processes, and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

the criticism of Wordsworth's poems and the discussion of poetic diction that it precedes, I would like for the moment to leave his intentions in this matter an open question. The fact is, of course, that connections between the theory and the interpretive practice have subsequently been made foundational to textual analysis. The applications that have been found for Coleridge's "speculative apparatus," as I.A. Richards termed the metaphysical inquiries of the Biographia,³ are plentiful--particularly so within academic criticism in English, as we observed in the first chapter of this thesis.

Richards himself furnishes an early and ostentatious example of the deliberate translation of Coleridge's philosophical arguments into a repertoire of strategies for the interpretation of literature. In his influential book, Coleridge on Imagination (1935), Richards describes himself as "a Materialist trying to interpret...the utterances of an extreme Idealist,"⁴ and, in spite of this rather drastic difference in orientation, exhibits no obvious qualms about sifting the central chapters of the Biographia for ideas that will be "useful" in assembling a set of techniques for criticism. It is important to point out that Richards is often considered a major influence on the American New

³ Coleridge on Imagination (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 2.

⁴ Ibid., 19.

Critics, whose felt indebtedness to Coleridge we have already discussed. Richards's influence, however, is not always explained in terms that are recognizable as Coleridgean. According to Terry Eagleton's irreverent account, for instance, "Richards sought...to lend [criticism] a firm basis in the principles of a hard-nosed 'scientific' philosophy.... The literary text, for American New Criticism as for I.A. Richards, was therefore grasped in what might be called 'functionalist' terms."⁵ In addition to the statement that introduces this chapter, then, some further observation of Richards's treatment of Coleridge will be necessary to discover the way in which the "dynamic philosophy" has been made to yield such an apparently utilitarian attitude towards the text.

At an important juncture in Chapter XII of the Biographia, just before the introduction of the terms "subjective" and "objective" (terms that are to prove crucial to the discussion), Coleridge attempts to show that philosophy, unlike mathematics, can be directed or verified by nothing external to the self: it must be deductive rather than inductive, analytic rather than synthetic; it must indeed originate in the self. The short passage in which he states this premise propels him, as its last sentence

⁵ Literary Theory: An Introduction (London: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 45-47.

indicates, directly into his elaborate derivation of the imagination from the interpenetration of subject and object:

The postulate of philosophy and at the same time the test of philosophic capacity, is no other than the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF ... And this at once practically and speculatively. For as philosophy is neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of BEING altogether, its primary ground can be neither merely speculative nor merely practical, but both in one. All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject.⁶

Richards is aware that the passage is essential to the deductions that it introduces: "The rest of [Coleridge's] philosophy," he remarks, "is a verbal machine for exhibiting what the exercise of this postulate or this act of contemplation yielded." Accordingly, Richards makes the idea central to his own thesis, recognizing at the same time that while "we must study it as a machine," we must also admit that "in the nature of the case it must be a very inefficient machine--useful only in so far as it helps us to go through the same realizing intuitions." This characteristic aside on the inefficiency of Coleridge's philosophic apparatus is enough to convey that, for Richards, the "realizing intuitions" are the heart of the matter; and he stresses at once that these intuitions are themselves entirely unconstrained. Richards arrives at this conclusion by

⁶ Biographia Literaria, I, 252.

silently passing over the initial description of the impulse toward self-knowledge as "heaven-descended." On the contrary, Richards insists that "Coleridge deliberately makes this postulate seem arbitrary. It is an act of the will, a direction of the inner sense, a mode of action, or of being, at the same time that it is a mode of knowing."⁷ By ignoring the modifier, however, Richards has eliminated one essential feature of the postulate itself. As Coleridge implies later in the Biographia, self-knowledge is no mere device by which the limitations of selfhood may be pragmatically overcome. Rather, it is a state of contemplation in which one's limitations are in fact recognized as being integral to the self: "Know thyself: and so shalt thou know God, as far as is permitted to a creature, and in God all things..."⁸ In spite of this significant amplification, the initial postulate of the Coleridgean "dynamic philosophy" is understood by Richards as a philosophical instrument, an enabling device, a "machine" whose power is limited only by the will of the one who wields it.

There is, to my mind, a striking resemblance between the operation that Richards is here performing on the philosophy of Coleridge and the Fichtean revision of Kant that we considered in the previous chapter. Indeed, Richards's interpretation of Coleridge and Fichte's interpretation of

⁷ Coleridge on Imagination, 47.

⁸ Biographia Literaria, II, 240.

Kant seem almost uncannily similar, not only as far as motivation is concerned, but also in terms of their methods and consequences. Like Fichte, Richards emphasizes that the origin of all activity is found in an initial act of self-recognition. But just as Fichte had regarded the unknowable thing-in-itself as a kind of clumsy furbelow upon the Kantian system, Richards finds the Coleridgean notion of the divine origin of the impulse toward self-knowledge quite irrelevant to potential applications of that knowledge in the practical sphere. Like Fichte, in other words, he eliminates an apparently superfluous structural constraint in the philosophy he is adapting. Richards is interested--again like Fichte--in the will, in freedom (which he understands in the loose Fichtean fashion as the absence of restrictions), and above all, in the exercise of technique. He is at pains in the later part of Coleridge on Imagination to demonstrate the potency of his application of Coleridge's philosophy to the analysis of literary texts, referring to his own version of that philosophy as a "charter of technological liberty."⁹ (One recalls Fichte's designation of his system as "the first philosophy of freedom.") Finally, Richards's theoretical claims, like the exertions of Fichte before him, culminate in a thinly-veiled celebration of the idea of mastery itself: "With Coleridge, he declares, "we step across the threshold of a general theoretical study of language capable of opening

⁹ Coleridge on Imagination, 86.

to us new powers over our minds comparable to those which systematic physical inquiries are giving us over our environment."¹⁰

The extent to which Richards's words were prophetic for subsequent criticism in English is a matter that might be debated at length. My own experience has been that, within the admittedly restricted sphere of academic criticism in English before 1965, his influence has been pronounced.¹¹ Certainly the analogy that Richards sets up between the world and the text--both construed as objects to be mastered by a neutral and independent observer--is one that will strike students of North American literary criticism as familiar. To cite one instance, in his aptly titled work of metacriticism, The World's Body, John Crowe Ransom effectively ruled out of court the notion that a reciprocal relationship between reader and text had anything to do with the business of criticism: "declarations of the effect of the art-work upon the critic or reader" were found distinctly unpalatable. According to Ransom, "the first law to be

¹⁰ Ibid., 232.

¹¹ Margaret Peterson has argued that "descending from Richards, the school of New Criticism has flourished...by adopting the theory of the Coleridgean imagination as a working hypothesis, uncontaminated by metaphysical problems and transcendental subterfuges. It has done so by appropriating the sceptical heritage of its own intellectual tradition, by using a skeptical 'critique' to justify, as Richards does, the dismissal of its philosophic sources, of the very assumptions which have proliferated its critical dogmas." Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition, 33.

prescribed to criticism...is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object rather than its effects upon the subject."¹²

No less a commonplace of the discipline has been Richards's concomitant desire that literary scholarship should seek its model in the physical sciences. In his magisterial and highly influential Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye made a similar plea:

It occurs to me that literary criticism is now in such a state of naive induction as we find in a primitive science.... I suggest that it is time for criticism to leap to a new ground from which it can discover what the organizing or containing forms of its conceptual frameworks are. Criticism seems to be badly in need of a coordinating principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole.¹³

The "new ground" of which Frye was speaking was, by definition, external to the sealed universe of textuality he devoted his career to describing. In order to practise an intellectually respectable form of analysis, critics were enjoined to adopt a scientific stance towards their data: to do otherwise was to indulge in mere "value judgements

¹² "Criticism, Inc." The World's Body (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 342.

¹³ Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 15-16.

informed by taste."¹⁴ Thus, as Frank Lentricchia observes, "Frye offers a view in which a gigantic palace of art contains all life within.... The subject-object problem has been solved in favor of the poets with a vengeance that few outside the mythopoeic tradition would seriously entertain."¹⁵ But as extreme a case as this one may be, the implicit separation in Frye's account between the reader and the text--the subject and the object of critical activity--is in fact fundamental to the several brands of formalist criticism that have been practised in the North American academy.

The reification of the literary text that appears to follow from Richards is reminiscent, then, of the new way in which the external world had been philosophically conceived in the light of Fichte's revisions to Kant. Given the similarities I have sketched out between Fichte and Richards, one is not surprised to find that an equally drastic adjustment results from the latter's interpretation of Coleridge. As we have seen, Fichte's philosophy appears to lend itself to an unconstrained drive toward mastery--not only over physical nature, but also within the human spheres of morals and politics. In a parallel fashion, Richards's reading of Coleridge, with its stress on the will and on

¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵ Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 23.

technique, issues a licence for literary interpretation that brings it closer than I find comfortable to the technological world-view that is weighed and found wanting by George Grant.

These intuitions notwithstanding, the problem to be solved in this chapter is the extent to which Coleridge himself can be held responsible for the technical applications that have been found for his "act of joining". This is a more complex undertaking than it initially appears. It is not difficult to demonstrate that Richards has read Coleridge through a filter of his own designing, nor, indeed, that he has wrenched certain of Coleridge's utterances from their context: he admits as much at every turn. But this does not begin to answer the question. Much less straightforward is the related task of showing that Coleridge himself succeeded in curtailing the "rage for order" implicit in the philosophy of Fichte--for Fichte, of course, is one of his principal sources in the philosophical chapters.

It is an odd situation because, in a sense, questions about the validity of Richards's interpretation of Coleridge and about Coleridge's interpretation of Fichte merge and become one. A credible hypothesis might be that in spite of Coleridge's nominal efforts to contain it, the spirit of Fichte permeates and controls the relevant sections of the Biographia. Then, in spite of his nominal misreading of Coleridge, it falls to I.A. Richards, a century later, to extract from the text precisely the technical, utilitarian

implications that Coleridge had tried, but failed, to suppress. As plausible as this hypothesis might seem, however, I intend in what follows to argue that precisely the reverse is the case.

* * *

Coleridge's scattered remarks on Fichte are more than a little equivocal. Even a cursory reading of the central chapters of the Biographia shows that he is of two minds concerning Fichte's contribution to philosophy. Coleridge's first reference to Fichte, halfway through Chapter IX, is occasioned by a discussion of Kant's unwillingness to accept "the honours of martyrdom" by declaring himself in favour of the pantheistic construction put on his writings by "his commentators."¹⁶ The exchange that Coleridge is recalling is surely the one that we have already cited: Kant's reply to Fichte of 28 August 1799.¹⁷ Coleridge's interpretation of this apparent rebuke, however, is that by refusing to explain himself and by merely directing his disciple back to the text of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant was tacitly endorsing Fichte's surmise about the inessential character of the thing-in-itself. Furthermore, as he has made clear already, whether or not the Fichtean revisions to his system had had

¹⁶ Biographia Literaria, I, 157.

¹⁷ See p. 83, above.

Kant's entire approval, Coleridge finds himself as unwilling as Fichte himself to regard the noumena as, by definition, beyond the realm of intellectual experience:

In spite therefore of his own declarations, I could never believe, that it was possible for [Kant] to have meant no more by his Noumenon, or THING IN ITSELF, than what his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole plastic power to the forms of the intellect, leaving for the external cause, for the materiale of our sensations, a matter without form, which is doubtless inconceivable.¹⁸

Coleridge, in other words, rejects the Kantian philosophy at the same point and for the same reasons as did Fichte. The inference for readers of the Biographia is that by virtue of his elimination of the unknowable, but regulative, thing-in-itself, Fichte has surpassed Kant in Coleridge's estimation.

The sentence by which Fichte is introduced in his own right confirms this impression:

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; and supplied the idea of a system truly metaphysical, and of a metaphysique truly systematic: (i.e., having its spring and principle within itself.)¹⁹

¹⁸ Biographia Literaria, I, 155.

¹⁹ Ibid., I, 157-8.

In light of the demonstration to which all of his remarks on the German Idealist philosophers are prefatory, it is impossible not to see in Coleridge's depiction of Fichte's work as "the key-stone of the arch" a metaphor for the central act of joining subject and object that will be foundational to his own philosophy. We are justified in taking the phrase as an indication that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, Fichte will prove indispensable to Coleridge's explication of the essential unity of mind and nature.

Fichte is praised, in the second place, for having grounded philosophy on an act rather than on a substance or thing. He thus provides a way of transcending the materialist assumptions that had troubled Coleridge in the associationalist philosophy; and he postulates, at the same time, a new realm in which the link between subject and object might be made. We can gauge how significant a step this must have appeared to Coleridge by glancing at the nature of his objection to the mechanistic world-view. In a letter to Poole of 23 March 1802, he complained that

Newton was a mere materialist. Mind, in his system, is always passive,--a lazy looker-on in an external world. If the mind be not passive, if indeed it be made in God's image, and that too in the sublime sense, the Image of the Creator, there is ground for suspicion

that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as a system.²⁰

Not only, then, does Fichte provide for the existence of creative mind, but, in the third place, his system has the advantage of being self-grounded, "having its spring and principle within itself." This may be taken as strong evidence for Coleridge's approval of the foundation of Fichte's philosophy--his derivation, that is, of both mind and nature from the self-conscious universal Ego.

Whether Coleridge fully understood the consequences of Fichte's emendations to Kant has been so far unclear. Yet in the two sentences that follow these praises, and in the verse parody that he includes in a footnote, Coleridge seems to go out of his way to denigrate the applications that Fichte found for his revisions to the Kantian philosophy:

But this fundamental idea he overbuilt with a heavy mass of mere notions and psychological acts of arbitrary reflection. Thus his theory degenerated into a crude egoism, a boastful and hyperstoic hostility to NATURE, as lifeless, godless, and altogether unholy: while his religion consisted in the assumption of a mere ORDO ORDINANS, which we were permitted exoterice to call GOD; and his ethics in an ascetic, and almost monkish mortification of the natural passions and desires.²¹

²⁰ Collected Letters. Ed., Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1956-71), II, 709.

²¹ Biographia Literaria, I, 158-160.

The burden of the criticism here is that the elaboration of Fichte's philosophy from its original postulate is neither rigorous nor inevitable: its superstructure, so to speak, is too easily detachable from its logical base. Significantly, while Richards was enthusiastic about the apparent arbitrariness of precisely this derivation of the powers of mind from an initial act of self-recognition, Coleridge registers displeasure. Presumably, however, he is not above retaining Fichte's fundamental insight while dropping, or attempting to drop from the system all those areas in which the philosophy appears to have run amok. Indeed, Coleridge's mocking dismissal of three major applications of Fichte's initial postulates--his attitude to nature, his religion, and his ethics--strongly suggest that he regards the manoeuvre accomplished by Fichte as a purely formal revision to the Kantian system, and, like Richards after him, intends to find uses of his own for the initial, foundational act of the Fichtean philosophy.

Still, Coleridge's criticisms of Fichte rest on unsupported assertions rather than proof. He does not pause to explain where Fichte went wrong in working out the implications of his system, nor does he in fact offer anything to put in the place of Fichte's erroneous ideas about nature, religion, and ethics. Rather, he proceeds to speak at greater length, and more generously, of his debt to

Schelling. Fichte's initial, enabling postulate is thus allowed to stand.

We may canvas Coleridge's remarks on Fichte in other sources without coming much closer to an explicit critique. In his Headnote to the marginalia on Fichte, George Whalley quotes from two letters, both of which testify to Coleridge's ambivalence on the subject of Fichte--without, however, directly suggesting its cause. In the earlier letter, we find Coleridge declaring that

Fichte in his moral system is but a caricature of Kant: or rather he is a Zeno with the Cowl, Rope and Sackcloth of a Carthusian Monk. His metaphysics have gone by; but he has the merit of having prepared the ground for, and laid the first stone of the Dynamic Philosophy by the substitution of Act for Thing.²²

A year later, Coleridge delivers himself of a similar mixture of praise and blame: "Fichte was far nearer the truth than Schelling--he had hold of the Horns of the Altar, but with nerve-palsied hand--and blind."²³ But when we bear in mind that the "Dynamic Philosophy" (for which Coleridge here gives Fichte the credit) was also the name he gave to his own, and, furthermore, that in the Biographia he was explicitly to bestow the titles of "most successful improver" of that system and author of its "most important victories" upon

²² Marginalia, II, 595. Collected Letters, IV, 792.

²³ Marginalia, II, 595. Collected Letters, IV, 874-5.

Schelling instead, the remarks on Fichte begin to suggest something more substantial than mere uncertainty about the relative merits of his various German sources. Coleridge seems to be consistent in acknowledging his indebtedness to Fichte for a fundamental insight, while at the same time implying that he himself was to make more appropriate use of it than did his predecessor.

The most recent editors of Biographia Literaria find in Coleridge's equivocations on the subject of Fichte some indication of a personal desire to minimize the extent of his debt. Engell and Bate point out that "crucial ideas," indeed, "much of the intellectual content" of the chapters we are considering might just as easily have been borrowed from Fichte as from Schelling.²⁴ Coleridge must surely have had some motivation for giving credit, when he does give credit, to the later rather than the earlier philosopher. Moreover, the seemingly unnecessary harshness of Coleridge's asides on Fichte may itself suggest a grievance that is more personal than philosophical:

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

²⁴ Biographia Literaria, cxxvi.

anxieties, moral conscience, and sense
of religious piety.²⁵

The remark is psychologically acute, explaining as it does not only Coleridge's approval of Fichte's solution to the bifurcation of mind and nature that had been so troublesome in Kant, but also his animosity towards the perpetrator of this solution. The approval is genuine--for Coleridge has indeed seen the implications of the Fichtean insight; the animosity, though no less genuine, is the result of repressing his uneasy awareness that these implications, though philosophically desirable, belong, morally, to a realm where angels fear to tread.

The marginalia themselves, though less circumspect than the public utterances, cannot be said to provide a clear indication of the strength of Coleridge's loyalty to Fichte.

²⁵ Ibid., cxxvii. Cf. Daniel Stempel, "Revelation on Mount Snowdon: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Fichtean Imagination" Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 29 (1971), 371-84, who offers another, equally personal reason for what he construes as Coleridge's obfuscation of his debt to Fichte: "Whenever Coleridge could bring himself to the point of praising Kant and Fichte, it was for their logic and not for their metaphysics or ethics that his praise was reserved. That, in his opinion was their original contribution; the rest he had found in earlier sources or worked out for himself. But there is a pervasive undercurrent of disappointment (almost, one might say, of ressentiment) in Coleridge's comments on the Germans from whom he borrowed so liberally; even his most enthusiastic passages are qualified by a reluctance to abandon what he considered to be his own unique and original scheme of thought. Perhaps it all dates back to that summer day in 1801, when, after his first period of study of German philosophy, he wrote, "Into a discoverer have I sunk from an inventor." (384)

From them we can ascertain the intensity with which Coleridge studied Fichte, and establish the duration of his interest: he read at least eight works, according to Whalley, "repeatedly over a period of at least twenty years."²⁶ But while the notes consist, for the most part, in objections to matters of detail too minute to be really helpful, several do offer at least a clue to the grounds of his reservations. A significant example is Coleridge's comment on Fichte's concept of freedom. In The Vocation of Man (1800), Fichte had written:

I stand under the inexorable power of strict necessity; if this power destined me to be a foolish and vicious person, I would no doubt become a foolish and vicious person; if it destined me to be a wise and good person, I would no doubt become a wise and good person.

Coleridge's reaction, written in 1815 or later, is as follows:

In no other sense than that it is not an act of my own that I am born a Man and not a Wolf or Sheep. As God, I would be above that wavering Choice, which we know learn our freedom from; as a beast below it. But *Wilkühr ist nicht der Wille*; and the highest object of the latter is to soar above the former--to leave it behind. Else, every

²⁶ Marginalia, II, 524. For detailed accounts of Coleridge's progress through the works of Fichte, see Daniel Stempel, op. cit., 374-8 and G.N.G. Orsini, Coleridge and German Idealism (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 177-191.

perfect Habit of Virtue would be a loss of Freedom.²⁷

In making this distinction between choice (Wilkuhr) and the will, Coleridge puts his finger on a crucial oversight in the Fichtean philosophy. By associating the will with the merely pragmatic (and merely human) realm of choice--always a matter of deciding between two or more specific alternatives--Fichte reveals that the purpose and direction of his system are, in the last analysis, utilitarian. By conceiving the will in such narrow terms, Fichte cuts himself off--as Coleridge observes--from any consideration of the will that wills an end to its own preoccupation with choice. Here, and in one or two of the other marginalia, Coleridge indicates fairly clearly that it is Fichte's consuming interest in the uses of the will within the practical sphere that most disturbs him.

More decisively, Coleridge locates the "Achilles heel" of Fichte's system in the apparent arbitrariness of the universal Ego's act of self-limitation--the act by which it creates for itself both an identity and a potential for activity within the field of the not-self.²⁸ This, we recall, was the critical step by which Fichte achieved the untrammelled freedom of the Ego within the world; it is tantamount to a declaration of the supremacy of the will over

²⁷ Marginalia, II, 603.

²⁸ Marginalia, II, 633. See above, pp. 97-98.

all external obstructions. Coleridge's objection appears to underline the contradiction between Fichte's insistence on the logical necessity of the Ego's self-limiting act and his simultaneous emphasis of its absolute freedom.

Nevertheless, although we do find Coleridge groping his way towards a setting right of Fichte's less acceptable practical pronouncements, there is nothing amongst the marginal comments on Fichte that resembles a systematic refutation of his conceptions of freedom and the will. It would seem, then, that the test of Coleridge's commitment to the practical consequences of Fichte's philosophy is only to be found by looking at the argument in the context of its actual use in Chapters XII and XIII of the Biographia. Only by venturing a little further into what Murray Krieger has rightly called "the unforgiveably German involutions which Coleridge borrowed to work the union of subject and object"²⁹ can we be sure of the degree to which he in fact cooperates in the machinations of Fichte's "crude egoismus."

"All knowledge," then, to return to the beginning of Coleridge's principal argument, "rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject." The statement is itself an affirmation of the experience of the "inner sense," and is not verifiable with reference to things outside the self.

²⁹ "The Existential Basis of Contextualist Criticism." Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts 8 (1966). Rptd. in Hazard Adams, ed., Critical Theory Since Plato (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), 1224.

Coleridge here makes an appeal, in other words, to the private but--in his account--universal apprehension that "during the act of knowledge itself, the objective and the subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs."³⁰ The premise leads him, logically, to a "hypothetical" dissolution of the "intimate coalition" of subject and object that is, in actual experience, indissoluble. He will suppose that object and subject, each in turn, constitutes the primary ground of knowledge.

The first possibility--that "the objective is taken as the first"--is identified as a form of "natural philosophy," the goal of which (as in Newtonian physics) is to explain the material world by discovering its laws, by showing its orderliness, by revealing the operation of intelligence within it. We recall Coleridge's disparagement of Newton. The disadvantage of this initial postulate, presumably, is that it would reduce mind to a lazy observer of external activity. Mind would have to be regarded as the passive recipient of impressions, and in no sense constitutive of the world it inhabits.

The second possibility--that "the subjective is taken as the first"--calls for an explanation of "how there supervenes to it a coincident objective." Coleridge characterizes this position as a form of transcendental philosophy. It is

³⁰ Biographia, I, 255.

idealist in character, and its direction is toward the systematic elimination of our natural conviction that there exist objects independently of our perceptions. Since by its very nature this assumption can command no proof either way, it can easily be identified (given the exercise of a deliberate scepticism) as a mere prejudice, and silently disqualified as a philosophic premise. For this reason, "the philosopher therefore compels himself to treat this faith as nothing more than a prejudice, innate indeed and connatural, but still a prejudice."

We find ourselves, then, at a crossroads where the objective or "natural" philosophers are busily engineering the disappearance of creative intelligence--and accounting for knowledge as the mere effect of external nature upon a receptive intellect. At the same time, in opposition to the efforts of their materialist colleagues, the transcendental philosophers are arranging for the disappearance of matter--and contriving to explain knowledge as the product of active intelligence operating upon inert nature.

But there remains a way of tipping the balance between these alternatives, says Coleridge, in the recognition of a prejudice which neither school can explain away. This is the existence of the self. The conviction that one's self exists prior to all acts of knowledge may well be without foundation; "but then in the very idea it precludes all ground, and separated from the immediate consciousness loses

its whole sense and import." Without a self to think itself, that is to say, the very proposition that a self exists becomes meaningless. Given a self to think itself, on the other hand, the proposition becomes inevitable. The conviction that a self exists, thus, "is groundless; but only because it is itself the ground of all other certainty." It follows that it must, by its very nature, underpin both the materialist and the transcendental philosophies. Could it not, by the same token, Coleridge wonders, constitute a bridge between the two, and a way of reconciling their opposition? Indeed, some such surmise presents itself as the only means by which the two contradictory tendencies in epistemology can be brought into alignment:

Now the apparent contradiction, that the former position, namely, the existence of things without us, which from its nature cannot be immediately certain should be received as blindly and as independently of all grounds as the existence of our own being, the transcendental philosopher can solve only by the supposition, that the former is unconsciously involved in the latter; that it is not only coherent but identical, and one and the same thing with our own immediate self-consciousness.³¹

The metaphysical somersault for which Coleridge has been both admired³² and ridiculed takes place precisely here. He

³¹ Biographia, I, 260.

³² See, for example, J.A. Appleyard: "Coleridge's paradox is fascinating. He solves with apparent ease the central problem of several centuries of philosophy. Can his words be intelligibly interpreted, or is there here only more

was not, of course, the first to perform the feat: the paragraph in which the statement above occurs has been "freely mixed, condensed, and conflated" from two paragraphs in Schelling's System of Transcendental Idealism³³; and Schelling, as we have seen, is relying upon Fichte before him for the crucial leap between self and world. What needs to be stressed, however, is that the "truest and most binding realism" which Coleridge (and Schelling, whom he continues to paraphrase) extracts from the equation is entirely dependent on an act of faith. That our twin convictions (that a self exists, and that an independent world also exists) should be regarded as one conviction--though not prohibited by logic--is far from logically necessary. We will recall that in the Wissenschaftslehre, by contrast, Fichte had argued (somewhat unconvincingly) that the mutually limiting character of self and world that ensued from the original act of self-positing had been necessary indeed.³⁴ Nevertheless, in Coleridge, the vital operation of joining self and world under the auspices of an initial positing of the self is demonstrably conducted through faith and faith alone.

This is not to suggest that Coleridge, at this stage in the argument, has effected a departure from Fichte. On the

³³ Biographia, I, 259, n. 1.

³⁴ See above, p. 103.

contrary, we scarcely need to proceed as far as his eventual deduction of the imagination from this initial act of self-positing to be convinced that Fichte's initial premise has been indispensable to the Biographia. In a sense, of course, this observation goes without saying: having been identified as "the ground of all other certainty," self-recognition is foundational, in Coleridge's account, to philosophic activity in general. Nevertheless, as Daniel Stempel has argued, it is not by mere chance that Coleridge defines the primary imagination as the "prime Agent of all human Perception," and associates it with the creative act of self-positing "in the infinite I AM." As well acquainted with Fichte's terminology as he was with the central argument of transcendental philosophy, Coleridge makes a direct connection between the enabling act of self-recognition in Fichte, and the faculty by which both thinkers insist mind and world are united. His description of the imagination thus "cannot be dismissed or ignored as a vague allusion to the third chapter of Exodus or as piety perverted by transcendentalism. Coleridge had read Fichte; he was fully aware of the central significance of the 'I am' in Fichte's system."³⁵

Stempel is correct to the extent that Coleridge is indebted to Fichte for the derivation of the imagination from

³⁵ "Revelation on Mount Snowdon: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Fichtean Imagination," 378.

the twin principles of self and not-self. Indeed, his conception of the imagination as a unifying power, a link between mind and nature, has specific antecedents in both Fichte and Schelling.³⁶ What Coleridge has notably avoided, however, is any suggestion that the initial opposition of self and world is a sustainable, or in any sense an observable condition. Rather, as Chapter XIII proceeds to its anticlimax in the temporizing "letter from a friend," he declares his conviction that a "tertium aliquid" must emerge from the "two assumed forces" to bring about their "interpenetration;" this conception, he says, is "necessary."³⁷ In spite, therefore, of his description of the secondary imagination as "vital," in contrast to the objects upon which it operates (which are, in themselves, "essentially fixed and dead"), Coleridge implies that the sole function of imaginative activity is to reconcile mind with world--"to idealize and to unify," as he somewhat obscurely puts it. The original, mutually defining character of the self and the not-self that in Fichte's philosophy had made possible the drive towards mastery is thus understood by Coleridge as an original state of unity which the imagination perpetually replicates in individual experience.

Nor does Coleridge, in spite of appearances to the contrary, equate this unifying faculty with the will. Unlike

³⁶ See Biographia, I, 299, n. 1.

³⁷ Biographia, I, 300.

Fichte, who attempted a proof, Coleridge has made a "supposition" that convictions about the existence of external nature and about the existence of mind must be "unconsciously involved" with one another; nor has he attempted to show that mind, operating independently of all constraints, posits a world for itself to inhabit. Coleridge's description of the secondary imagination as "coexisting with the conscious will" suggests, rather, that the imagination is distinct from the will: it is a power, as he confirms in Chapter XIV, "first put in action by the will and understanding," and one which "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities."³⁸

This is not to obscure the fact that Coleridge is a thoroughgoing voluntarist where knowledge is concerned.³⁹ As an ethical thinker, as well, he is bound to regard the will as the site of all meaningful interaction between the human and the divine. "I became convinced," he remarks in Chapter X, "that religion, both as the corner-stone and the key-stone of morality, must have a moral origin; so far at least, that the evidence of its doctrines could not, like the truths of abstract science, be wholly independent of the will."⁴⁰ And,

³⁸ Biographia, II, 16.

³⁹ Cf. J. H. Muirhead, Coleridge as Philosopher (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930), 98-9.

⁴⁰ Biographia, I, 202-3.

as he goes on to say, it is precisely the absence of any compulsion operating upon the believer that imbues his or her conviction of God's existence with its probative force. Hence, it is the voluntary character of one's belief, and not its logical seamlessness, that Coleridge regards as morally estimable:

It could not be intellectually more evident without becoming morally less effective; without counteracting its own end by sacrificing the life of faith to the cold mechanism of a worthless because compulsory assent.⁴¹

But the use of the will, in this case and in the case of the imagination, is to provide the impetus towards overcoming barriers that resist intellectual analysis. On the connection between faith and the philosophic imagination--the two are presented as virtual synonyms--Coleridge is equally emphatic about the philosophic significance of willingly suspending one's rational apprehension of the external order:

They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination...who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucre for antennae yet to come.⁴²

⁴¹ Biographia, I, 203.

⁴² Biographia, I, 242.

In a curious way, then, Coleridge's provides a more extensive sphere for the operations of the will than Fichte had conceived. Yet as well as being metaphysically more ample, the uses of the faculty are constrained, in Coleridge's account, by the derivation of the will itself from God. In this instance, at least, Coleridge has taken the insight of the transcendent philosophy to a higher level, and has resisted the attractions of unlimited power over nature that had so preoccupied Fichte. The will, according to Coleridge, is not ultimately practical; and while its uses in the world of experience will undoubtedly present themselves, the essential application of the faculty consists in a recognition of its "heaven-descended" character. The final purpose of the will, in short, is to submerge itself in the divine will--to unwill itself.

Fichte, as we observed earlier, has a great deal to say about the individual's duty to interpret and cooperate in manifestations of divine will.⁴³ What he appears to have in mind, however, are pragmatic choices within the realm of moral experience. Fichte's is a cooperation with the divine will that does not cease to revolve among the practical choices presented by nature. As we have seen, Coleridge, by contrast, makes a clear distinction between "choice" and the will; he consistently maintains that the proper use of the

⁴³ See above, pp. 106-109.

latter is the renunciation of the former. He is quite unambiguous, furthermore, in his assertions that the human and divine versions of the will are not merely analogous: they are not, as in Fichte, two distinct and mutually limiting aspects of one all-encompassing will. On the contrary, their relation to one another, as Coleridge acutely observes in a marginalium, does not resemble that between the current of a river and the river itself.⁴⁴ Instead, in Coleridge's philosophy, the individual will is given an ontological status and a provenance that complement rather than jeopardize its participation in the divine will.⁴⁵ The river and its current, though distinguishable by an act of the understanding, are in actual experience one and the same.

Coleridge's refinement to Fichte's account of the will is neither more nor less than a version of the observation with which his excursion into these transcendental deductions began--that the ground of philosophy can be neither merely speculative nor merely practical, but is always both in one. Thus, as the argument nears its conclusion, Coleridge returns to the notion of the polarity, rather than the opposition, that obtains between the self and the not-self:

If a man be asked how he knows that he is? he can only answer, sum quia sum. But if...he be again asked, how he, the individual

⁴⁴ Marginalia, II, 640.

⁴⁵ Cf. Coleridge's marginal comment on Fichte's Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung (1793). Marginalia, II, 640.

person, came to be, then in relation to the ground of his existence, not to the ground of his knowledge of that existence, he might reply, *sum quia deus est*, or still more philosophically, *sum quia in deo sum*.⁴⁶

In a similar vein, at the end of Thesis IX, Coleridge insists that "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."⁴⁷

By these subtle but telling alterations to the arguments he is reproducing, Coleridge effectively reverses the direction of the will as it is described by Fichte. He regards the individuality of humans as the property that enables them to align their wills with the divine will. The separate identity of nature is not therefore a barrier to be overcome by striving, nor is it an occasion for exerting mastery (as God does not exert mastery over humans, but permits them to submit their wills to his); rather, it is a rift that can be willed to come together again. This species of willing--the will to eliminate the need for will itself--is, according to Coleridge, the highest and most characteristic use of that faculty. By attending to the very fine distinction that results from this reorientation of

⁴⁶ Biographia, I, 274. "In this paragraph," as the editors point out, Coleridge "intentionally affirms and expands a position that Schelling fully explains but sets aside as 'untenable in theoretical philosophy'" (274, n. 2).

⁴⁷ Biographia, I 283. Again, the sentence represents a departure from Schelling's original. See Ibid., n. 2.

the Fichtean system--a distinction between imposing oneself on nature and infusing oneself into it--we can interpret Coleridge as entertaining a conception of the relation between will and nature that is diametrically opposed to Fichte's.

While there is no denying that the argument from Fichte is indispensable to the derivation of the imagination that Coleridge undertakes in Biographia Literaria, the argument itself in no sense prescribes a purpose for the will. The complete absence of moral constraints upon the will in fact constitutes both the strength and the weakness of the Fichtean philosophy. While the sheer arbitrariness of Fichte's derivation of the finite self permits Coleridge, in turn, to derive the imagination from the opposition of self to world, it also constitutes a blank cheque that is issued to the self in its mastery over the world. It is a feature of the system, in other words, that permits the self too great a freedom in the practical sphere. Metaphysically, on the other hand, the operations of the Fichtean self are too limited: the willed separation of the self from God, or its willful independence from nature, eliminate what is, to Coleridge's way of thinking, the single most important use of human freedom.

Perhaps the difference between the two thinkers can best be accounted for by recalling that Fichte's method, in the Wissenschaftslehre in particular, had been entirely a priori.

In his three initial postulates, Fichte relies strictly upon logic; and his demonstration of the necessity for a division between ego and non-ego, though not logically illegitimate, is unsupported by anything in experience. One feels intuitively that his argumentation is strained and false. Coleridge, by contrast, is entirely synthetic in his approach to the relationship between self and world. He begins with an example in mind of a concrete unity between intelligence and nature--with a conviction, indeed, that such things must be philosophically explicable--and finds in Fichte and Schelling a theory that confirms his intuitions. In spite of his indebtedness, then, Coleridge cannot finally be understood as embracing the practical implications of Fichte's philosophy.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Coleridge never directly dissociates himself from the Fichtean insight. The apparent equivocation may well have occurred because Fichte's initial postulate of the self's positing of itself, though it forms the sine qua non of Coleridge's transcendental excursions, has given him more than he bargained for. It gives him the imagination--the "tertium aliquid" of whose existence he had been convinced. It provides a morally desirable connection between the acts of the imagination--vital acts of joining self and world--and those of the will. It suggests a satisfying analogy between the human and the divine creative powers. But while it explains what needed

to be explained, Fichte's insight provides no integral way of curtailing the power that it brings into existence. It is easy to see what has happened. As J. A. Appleyard has summarized the sequence of events:

when he was engaged in writing the Biographia, Coleridge conceived the answer to his metaphysical problem to lie in a choice between the extremes of associationalism and Schellingian idealism. He rejected the first, of course, and for very sound reasons; but then he discovered that in the second he had more than he wanted, not only a faculty to explain the affective and noetic unity of the work of art in itself and in relation to the world of experience, but also a faculty which was the source and guarantee of universal and absolute truth. Coleridge could not really give that importance to the imagination, and finding no medium between the two views, he ended in confusion.⁴⁸

There is thus a sense in which Coleridge finds himself making use of a powerful philosophic argument whose ultimate consequences he will wish to repudiate--or at least to pass over in silence.

* * *

Of course, it is precisely because of Coleridge's idealist stance that I.A. Richards is drawn to his philosophy and finds it useful. Richards finds the arguments canvassed in the central chapters of the Biographia particularly

⁴⁸ Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature, 188.

compelling because, if the self (or the imagination) can be shown to be constitutive of the world and all the sensations we feel, then both poetry and criticism will fall neatly into alignment with science. The poet and the critic, like the scientist, will acquire powerful tools with which to manipulate both the world and the text. Richards cannot be faulted for having perceived that idealist philosophy promotes an unconstrained freedom for the intellect; he is equally correct in his surmise that a science of the text, were such a thing to be invented, would lead to textual mastery. Nevertheless, his attribution of any such programme to Coleridge himself runs counter to the spirit--if not the letter as well--of Biographia Literaria.

Coleridge's idealism was acquired in part from Fichte. It was Fichte, at least, who provided him with "the key-stone of the arch." Unlike Fichte, however, Coleridge tries to make his version of the initiating act of self-consciousness quite distinct from its consequences in the moral and political spheres. He recoils, as we have seen, from Fichte's moral and political exhortations--and from their underlying assumption that it is possible for humans to design the world according only to the dictates of their wills. Coleridge's reasons for steering clear of pure Fichtean idealism--the "crude egoismus," the hostility to nature, the formalistic conception of God--are the very reasons why he cannot be held responsible for the scientific

attitude toward the text that gets its start in I.A. Richards.

The essential difference between the two is evident: Richards conceives of the poetic process as being directed toward the creation of something permanent, new, and unconstrained. For Coleridge, the act of poetic creation is an "echo" in the finite mind, an action that is derivative or imitative of divine creation. The operation that Richards performs upon Coleridge is isomorphic with the one that Fichte performed upon Kant: by dispensing with an external constraint upon the system, he transforms something that was (in its original conception) dependent upon a noumenal realm into an autonomous will to power.

It is equally evident that the concept of technique, whether in science or literary criticism, arises out of the separation of subject and object. Without this separation, the action or control that the one exerts upon the other would be unthinkable. Coleridge's ambition in the Biographia, however, was to insist upon the prior and enduring unity of these polarities, and to describe the imagination as the force that perpetually joined them.

Chapter Four

Method

It is not lawful to enquire from whence it sprang, as if it were a thing subject to place and motion, for it neither approached hither, nor again departs from hence to some other place; but it either appears to us or does not appear. So that we ought not to pursue it with a view of detecting its secret source, but to watch in quiet till it suddenly shines upon us; preparing ourselves for the blessed spectacle as the eye waits patiently for the rising sun.

--Plotinus

Ever since 1927 when John Livingstone Lowes published The Road to Xanadu, the habits or methods by which Coleridge operated as a thinker have received a great deal of scholarly attention. Lowes's influential account of the genesis of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan" was not so much a deliberate investigation of Coleridge's intellectual practices, as it was a reconstruction of the convoluted process by which certain arcane images and motifs from Coleridge's reading made their way into his own literary productions. Yet in spite of his focus on the tangible results of this process, Lowes's rather breathless admiration in the face of Coleridge's depth and range of knowledge, and the apparent casualness with which he acquired

it and set it down, is understandable in light of what these things reveal about the workings of Coleridge's mind generally. Describing the "Gutch Memorandum Book" (Notebook I in the Collected Works),¹ the record, such as it is, of Coleridge's preoccupations between 1795 and 1800, Lowes waxes eloquent on its lack of any discernible principle of organization:

It is singularly like a collection of the flashing, fleeting, random, and disjointed thoughts and fancies, which dart, with the happy inconsequence of aquatic insects, across the surface of the stream of consciousness--all jotted down impartially by an interested, and sometimes amazed, Recording Angel. A shower of meteors is not more erratic, and you cannot impose upon a shower of meteors the luminous sequence of the wheeling constellations without its forthwith ceasing to be the thing it is.²

What is surprising is not that such an apparently random miscellany should contain the seeds of poetry, nor that (as Lowes notes) a recipe for Irish stew should rub shoulders with an extract from Erasmus Darwin,³ but that Coleridge should have been so apparently unaware of the use to which he would eventually put his observations and discoveries. "The

¹ The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. Kathleen Coburn. 3 vols. to date (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957-).

² John Livingstone Lowes, The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), 6.

³ Ibid., 18, 25.

Gutch Book," according to Kathleen Coburn, "was used with a wild extravagance that scandalized Coleridge later, a mercurial carelessness that makes it very difficult, at times impossible, to date some entries in it."⁴ The disorder of the record suggests that he was oblivious, in the period of time the notebook covers, to any discoverable principle of selection, and completely innocent of any specific plan for his materials. He read books and observed the world indiscriminately and without any motive but sheer interest to guide him.

Coleridge was not, of course, an academic. Dorothy Emmet has registered the simple but often overlooked fact that neither was he in any sense a professional philosopher.⁵ Still, it is difficult to explain how Coleridge could so entirely disregard the cardinal rule of intellectual work--that "to read" is properly a transitive verb, and reading itself a purposive activity--and still manage to produce lectures, essays, and books, which, although they are not famous for their organization, are nevertheless largely coherent. Two hypotheses are possible. The first is that Coleridge tried, but failed dismally, to acquire the intellectual discipline necessary to original and rigorous thought; his unsystematic way of collecting information was

⁴ The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I, xxviii.

⁵ "Coleridge and Philosophy," in R.L. Brett, ed., Writers and their Background: S.T. Coleridge (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971), 196.

thus symptomatic of an intellectual handicap that allowed him to realize only a fraction of his real creative potential. A great deal of evidence might be brought in support of this hypothesis, but rather than enumerate the many occasions on which Coleridge promised works that were never delivered or deferred essential explanations to works that were never written or allowed himself or others to think that mere sketches and plans constituted works that were all but complete, let me merely refer to the notebook in question, which contains a list of eleven items entitled "My Works", only one of which--"Poems"--can be said to correspond to a document published by Coleridge.⁶ It is certainly arguable that the remaining ten might also have been executed had Coleridge only observed some discipline in his reading and note-taking. On the other hand, for reasons that will become clear, it seems to me more probable that what appears to be a flouting of the conventions of productive literary activity is actually evidence of some method or intention that recent scholarship fails to recognize as legitimate.

No one has been more sceptical about the supposedly unpremeditated chaos of Coleridge's note-taking than Norman Fruman. Indeed, the Gutch notebook figures prominently in the monolithic case he puts together for the forethought and practised skills that made Coleridge's career as a plagiarist possible, and it strikes him as odd "that Lowes seems not to

⁶ Notebooks, I, 161.

have seriously considered the possibility that Coleridge was consciously on the hunt for images, lines, and ideas which could be used in his poetry..."⁷ With this likelihood in mind, Fruman examines the thirteen items in entry 259, and attaches great importance to the fact that, though it lacks a heading and names no source, the list has been shown to consist of words and phrases taken in roughly sequential order from the books of the Bible and Apocrypha--Psalms through Ecclesiasticus. Fruman is impatient with theories that point to "preternatural flashings of genius" as the explanation for Coleridge's ability to draw upon a reservoir of words and ideas: "Much more reasonable is the supposition that in the cold light of common day Coleridge had his Bible and Apocrypha open before him and...was flipping pages back and forth between them...picking up phrases which might prove useful." The case for conscious method seems watertight when Fruman skips ahead to entry 272, another list of short excerpts--twenty-four, this time--which the Notes trace to their source in Jeremy Taylor's Sermons. Taken both together, the two lists contain a number of words and phrases (five by my count, four of which come from the Bible) that reappear--as Fruman meticulously demonstrates--slightly altered, though without acknowledgment, in "Ode to the Departing Year" which Coleridge was writing around this time.

⁷ Norman Fruman, Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel (New York: George Braziller, 1971), 236.

The question is not, at the moment, whether premeditated plagiarism has been proved--nor whether one could realistically be said to have plagiarized the Bible. What is at issue is only the presence or absence in Coleridge's mind of a definite purpose for his research. The problem with Fruman's approach, in this instance and elsewhere in his book, is that the abundance of material he is compelled to sift through is wildly out of proportion to the number of relevant cases he is able to produce.⁸ If the Gutch notebook is indeed evidence of Coleridge's habit of storing up potentially "useful" bits and pieces from other writers, expressions that he consciously intended to fit patchwork-stylve into his own works, one can only conclude that he was lamentably inefficient. For every "literary" nugget, there are half a dozen entries that are obviously unsuitable for incorporation into projected works. And surely a hardened plagiarist would be more systematic than to jumble the

⁸ Cf. John Beer's remark on the reception of The Damaged Archangel: "Those who did not know Coleridge well found it a devastating attack and some newspaper reviewers took the line that his intellectual reputation had been destroyed once and for all.... To those who have considered these questions at greater length and more dispassionately, on the other hand, it is clear that while Coleridge does not emerge from such an examination unscathed, a consistent or overwhelming case against him is equally hard to prove. If one examines the evidence and takes it back to its context, one may discover that an important element has been disregarded or that events will bear a more charitable interpretation. "How Far Can We Trust Coleridge?" The Wordsworth Circle 20 (Spring, 1989), 79.

materials of his trade in with laundry lists and observations on the behaviour of his children.

The purpose that Fruman suggests is too narrow to account for more than a handful of the notebook entries. Yet the direct connection that he shows between Coleridge's reading and his writing--far more direct than anything Lowes had intimated--is extremely suggestive. If we look at the evidence from the opposite point of view, setting the preponderance of entries that did not find their way into the published work against the handful that did, it is at least as plausible to argue that the contents of the notebook somehow determined what Coleridge was to write, as it is to insist with Fruman that the requirements of the writing determined what was to be recorded in the notebook. One hesitates between the unlikely conclusion that Coleridge consciously controlled the material he had collected, and the rather illogical impression that his material controlled him.⁹

⁹ In her attempt to demonstrate the unity of Biographia Literaria, Kathleen Wheeler cites a number of passages from the Notebooks (the earliest from 1801) which later turn up, often greatly modified, in the finished work. She regards the many parallels between the unpublished and the published writings as suggesting "that the composition, in distinction from the actual writing down of the [Biographia], was underway for many years.... They illustrate the 'prevailing intellectual point of view' of the author which Friedrich Schlegel insisted was the only genuine way of unifying and organizing a work of art." Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 26. Although it seems clear from Wheeler's investigations that Coleridge was indeed in the habit of "mining" his notebooks for material that

On the one hand, as Thomas McFarland maintains, the fragmentary and unfinished quality of much of Coleridge's work may itself be taken as an indication of the comprehensiveness of his vision. The argument is not as eccentric as it might sound. Only the thinker who is completely at ease in a knowledge of the whole can afford the luxuries of allusiveness and compression. This is the reason why the most intellectually demanding form of literary composition, as well as the most satisfying to read, is the aphorism: it points beyond its own small scope to a whole galaxy of related ideas. It declares itself a part of a larger system. The same can be said of the marginal note--a form in which Coleridge was at his most fluent--and of the cryptic, condensed notebook entries that we have been considering. McFarland's point is that Coleridge's facility with the fragment indicates a broad command of knowledge rather than the reverse:

[A] true master of the fragment, far from thinking in a fragmentary and eclectic way, would in fact have to be more than usually clear in his own mind as to the total implications of the point under consideration. The marginal note in its most finished form would, therefore, seem to indicate not a fragmentary and erratic power of insight, but exactly the opposite, an organic, coherent, and fully worked-out

might prove useful in current projects, it is equally clear that a certain consistency of purpose governed his selections. The process was not, in other words, as fugitive and random as Fruman would have us believe.

viewpoint that could be quickly focused on a given topic because all larger problems of structure had already been solved.¹⁰

The principle, furthermore, "has its primary validity with respect to the kind of involuntary fragmentation typical of Coleridge". Presumably this is so because the habits of mind that prevail involuntarily--in private memoranda not intended for publication, or in published works that, like the Biographia, are written in haste and lamented at leisure--cannot help but reflect the innate intellectual disposition of the thinker.

By the same token, Coleridge's characteristic dependence upon the words of other writers, and his frequent unacknowledged borrowings, are seen by McFarland as further evidence of his deliberate, methodical accumulation of minute particles of the whole that existed already in his mind. The process is described as "composition by mosaic organization rather than by painting on an empty canvas."¹¹ In order to assemble a mosaic, one must first have an idea of

¹⁰ Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p.xxvi. Coleridge would undoubtedly have concurred in this assessment of his powers. According to the 1818 Friend, the mark of the "well-educated" man 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." The Friend, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), I, 449.

¹¹ Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition, 27.

the figure as a whole: one must understand the relationship between the parts, and know intuitively which belong in the structure and which do not. Coleridge, in other words, was like many philosophers in that he directed his efforts primarily towards the "reticulation" of a system: though the individual parts of that system may be found scattered through the works of previous thinkers, the design of the whole is characteristically his.¹²

McFarland's exoneration of Coleridge from the charges of randomness, carelessness, and a wilfull intent to mislead his readers depends, of course, upon our willingness to grant--or our ability to perceive--that the edifice of his thought is ultimately coherent and systematic. Though he makes a far more substantial case than can possibly be detailed here, the stumbling block to the success of his argument is obvious. The difference between pastiche and mosaic can be apparent only to a trained observer, and, more crucially, to one who can command a prospect of the whole.¹³ Polymaths of the

¹² Ibid., xxxix-xl.

¹³ Kathleen Wheeler has raised another objection to McFarland's thesis: "'mosaic' is an instance of mere juxtaposition, in contrast to transformation and true interpenetration of parts to form a whole. It is an adoption of the syncretic over the synthetic, and is diametrically opposed to the central Coleridgean conception of the vital relation of part to whole, a relation which is the basis of the connection between organicism and the philosophy of essential dualism..." Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, 43. Her objection, however, is tantamount to a denial that a mosaic can exhibit unity. But the nature of the form, to my mind, is precisely that unity is achieved through the juxtaposition of the

stature of Coleridge, as McFarland admits, are exceedingly rare. And yet, although one might spend a lifetime acquiring the knowledge necessary for judging the consistency and comprehensiveness of Coleridge's thinking, there is an alternative. My assumption in this chapter, at any rate, is that the study of his method itself will reveal a great deal both about the way Coleridge defined himself as a thinker and about the nature of his intellectual project.

The second possibility--that the shape of Coleridge's mind and the character of his thought were dictated by his reading, that glimmerings of a systematic philosophy emerged only over the course of years--is suggested by some of the evidence of J.R. de J. Jackson, who draws attention to Coleridge's unwillingness much later in his career to lecture upon subjects for which fresh preparations were required; he quotes a letter of 1819 in which Coleridge frankly confesses his reluctance to engage in new research:

I would not lecture on any subject for which I had to acquire the main knowledge, even though a month's or three month's previous time were allowed me; on no subject that had not employed my thoughts for a large portion of my life since earliest manhood, free from all outward and particular purpose... [my emphasis]¹⁴

individual parts--a feature that is not apparent until the object is regarded from a distance.

¹⁴ J.R. de J. Jackson, Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 9. For the letter cited, see Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols.

The inference must be, first, that Coleridge retained and relied upon his earlier and apparently undirected reading to an extent that, he now feels, entitles him to make this stipulation; second, that the randomness that characterized the early reading is the factor that now determines his estimation of its relative value; and finally, though this is speculative, that freedom from "outward and particular purpose" gave rise in the last analysis, to an intellectual purpose of some other description. Jackson's own conclusion is that, unlike his more productive contemporaries, "the problem which Coleridge set himself was the study of the nature of the universe, and he spent his life trying to learn something about it."¹⁵ Since this is a project for which no bit of information could be considered irrelevant, the impression one is left with is that Coleridge began by reading indiscriminately, and only later devised the "system" that gave shape to his erudition.

For various reasons, this sort of speculation about Coleridge's general cast of mind has traditionally been the

(Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1956-71), IV, 923.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10. Cf. J.A. Appleyard, who writes: "Unity is of course the motive and hoped-for result of dialectical procedure. Coleridge's single aim in his speculations was the integration of insights and observations into a total philosophical outlook." Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), 11.

point of departure for scholarly works on both his poetry and his prose; as is often the case with other more uniform thinkers, it is almost never regarded as an optional exercise that might best be reserved for a concluding chapter. With the possible exception of Shakespeare, one suspects that more theories have been advanced about the methods, intentions and intellectual character of Coleridge than any other figure in English literature. Unlike Shakespeare, however, Coleridge left behind an abundance of material for speculation. Unfortunately, it points in many different directions. As even Norman Fruman seems ruefully to admit, "Evidence abounds for almost any view one wishes to take of him. The mercurial Coleridge, the protean fashioner of moral and intellectual self-images, was simply not to be fixed in the pouncing grasp of his detractors."¹⁶ To further complicate an already complex situation, the way we interpret Coleridge's intentions will condition the way we respond to his actual writings to an extent that is seldom the case with other thinkers of his scope. Most importantly, it is relevant to the place that we assign him in the intellectual history of his time. The plagiarisms, of course, make a confident assessment of his significance even harder to come by: if, as has often been stated, there is little of importance in Coleridge's literary thought that is not also to be found in

¹⁶ Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel, 420

his German contemporaries,¹⁷ the purpose toward which he meant to put the borrowed material assumes a central role in our estimation of his importance as a thinker. In this connection, there is a world of difference between pastiche and mosaic.

Although the extent to which Coleridge was successful in assembling a philosophic system has long been a contentious question,¹⁸ there can be little doubt that it was his lifelong intention to do so. References to an "Opus Maximum," or "Logosophia" appear in his letters as early as

¹⁷ See, for example, René Wellek's summary of Coleridge's indebtedness to Kant, Schelling, A.W. Schlegel, Maas, and others and his remarks on the effect that the discovery of this indebtedness has necessarily had on his reputation. A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), IV, 151-158.

¹⁸ Owen Barfield maintains that "it is apparent from... the Aids to Reflection, the Friend, the Philosophical Lectures, and the Theory of Life, and it has been becoming more and more apparent during the last few decades from MSS, letters, marginalia, notebook entries, etc., that the substance of his projected Magnum Opus was fully available to Coleridge's mind before he died, in the shape of a coherent and closely knit psychology, philosophy, and cosmology." What Coleridge Thought (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 28. More recently, Kathleen Coburn has argued that "Coleridge's thought was not really fragmentary. It was organic, not a mechanical construction. That is part of the difficulty, his and ours. Perhaps his best influence lay in trying to persuade us that knowledge must be grasped with a comprehensive awareness of the interrelatedness of what he called the 'multeity' of external and internal elements.... Coleridge too was looking for a philosophy of man. His difficulty was that he could leave nothing out of his inquiries." Experience into Thought: Perspectives in the Coleridge Notebooks (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 69-70. See also Dorothy Emmet, "Coleridge and Philosophy," op.cit., 196-7.

1803,¹⁹ and persist with increasing urgency until the end of his life.²⁰ Often the projected work is mentioned anxiously in connection with the pressure of other demands on his time and the uncertain state of his finances. Given the scope and arrangement of the project, which grew progressively broader and more complex, it is hardly surprising that Coleridge got no further than a sort of prolegomena or set of synopses to the work.²¹ Writing to Daniel Stuart on 7 October 1815, he describes the project as one "on which [he] would wish to ground [his] reputation with Posterity," and outlines the contents of six separate treatises:

¹⁹ In a letter to William Godwin of 4 June 1803, Coleridge declares himself "now...ready to go to the Press, with a work which I consider as introductory to a System, tho' to the public it will appear a Thing by itself." The work in its entirety was to be titled "Organum vere Organum, or an Instrument of practical Reasoning in the business of real Life", and would encompass a history of philosophy in eleven chapters, followed by Coleridge's own philosophic system, "which consists of a Systema of all possible modes of true, probable, & false reasoning, arranged philosophically, i.e. on a strict analysis of those operations & passions of the mind, in which they originate, & by which they act, with one or more striking instances annexed to each from authors of high estimation--and to each instance of false reasoning, the manner in which the Sophistry is to be detected, & the words, in which it may be exposed." "The whole will conclude," Coleridge goes on to say, "with considerations of the value of the work, & its practical utility--in scientific Investigations...and the analysis of of all the acts & passions of the mind which may be employed to the discovery of Truth." Collected Letters, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), II, 503-504.

²⁰ See the 85 entries in the index to volumes IV and VI of the Collected Letters under Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, "Special Topics--'Magnum Opus'" and "Opus Maximum".

²¹ See Alice D. Snyder, Coleridge on Logic and Learning (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929) for a survey of the contents of existing manuscripts.

The first, a philosophic Compendium of the History of Philosophy from Pythagoras to the present Day, with miscellaneous Investigations on Toleration, & the obstacles to just reasoning....The second--the science of connected reasoning (with the History of Logic from Aristotle to Condillac) freed from sophistication and pedantry, and applied to the purposes of real Life...The third, the Science of Premises, or transcendental Philosophy...The fourth, a detailed Commentary on the Gospel of St. John:--to which the former is introductory. The object of both is to prove, that Christianity is true Philosophy, & of course that all true Philosophy is Christianity.--The fifth, on the Mystics & Pantheists, with the Lives of Giordano Bruno, Jacob Behmen, George Fox, and Benedict Spinoza, with an analysis of their systems &c.--The sixth, on the causes & consequences of Unitarianism.--It will comprise two large Octavo Volumes, 600 pages each.²²

The point, of course, is that although the "Opus Maximum" never existed in anything like a completed form,²³ the conception of it did exist; and though perhaps incapable of the physical execution of a complete and comprehensive philosophic system, Coleridge was manifestly able to envisage such a thing, and to insist upon the connectedness of various branches of thought. Unrealistic as they were, these intentions were serious. Biographia Literaria, which Coleridge had just completed at the time this letter was written, contains six references to the forthcoming oeuvre, several of which are notorious for the deftness with which

²² Collected Letters, IV, 976-77.

²³ The fragments are currently being edited by Thomas McFarland.

the author glosses over difficult explanations and announces their inclusion in a publication specifically designed for the promulgation of a comprehensive philosophy.²⁴ The practice is undeniably annoying; yet the arguments in favour of overlooking Coleridge's habit of promising far more than he could deliver begin to look less like special pleading when we bear in mind that, taken all together, the works that did see publication represent more of an advance towards an all-encompassing system than Coleridge himself could recognize. Basil Willey, for example, has argued "that all his books are fragments not yet built into the total structure."²⁵ And certainly the ability even to imagine that total structure, and to point out the places where the connections within it are not quite firm, suggests an understanding of method and a facility for logical arrangement that speak for themselves.

Before turning to Coleridge's published remarks on the subject of method, it will be useful to consider in a more explicit way the nature of the relationship between scholarly practices and the intellectual "systems" that they generate. A brief case history of the work habits of one of Coleridge's very near contemporaries may shed some light on the question.

²⁴ See especially I, 136, 263, 271, and 304 in the Engell and Bate edition.

²⁵ "Coleridge and Religion," in R.L. Brett, ed., Writers and their Background: S.T. Coleridge (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971), 242.

Of course, a more methodical scholar than G.W.F. Hegel--and a less likely candidate for comparison with Coleridge's apparently random acquisition of material--can hardly be imagined. At the age of fourteen, while he was still a pupil at the Stuttgart Gymnasium, Hegel appears to have embarked on a programme of systematic research, and rapidly to have perfected the method of note-taking and indexing that was to serve him throughout his career. According to his most recent biographer, H.S. Harris, the collection of Hegel's earliest scholarly efforts is remarkable for the foresight it demonstrates about the mechanics of serious research:

He made his records by carefully excerpting from the books that he read, or studied, the passages that seemed important for his purposes. Almost from the beginning he seems to have recognized that these purposes might vary, or rather...that the execution of his purpose would be facilitated if he made his record in the most flexible way. So he copied the passages that interested him on to separate sheets of paper with index headings to show as clearly as possible the subject-matter or point of the extract.²⁶

It is clear from the compendium put together by Hegel's contemporary, Rosenkranz,²⁷ that the early notebooks encompassed a vast range of reading--including authors that

²⁶ H.S. Harris, Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770-1810 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 5.

²⁷ Harris provides a useful digest of the material collected by Rosenkranz in ibid., 47-56.

Hegel had encountered both through the academic curriculum and through independent work. Owing partly to the incompleteness of the record, however, and the fact that it was not compiled by Hegel himself but by one of his successors, the central purpose of the research is difficult to identify. Harris concludes that "Hegel consciously wished from an early age, certainly before he was fifteen, to become a good and useful scholar." To the implicit question, "what makes a scholar good and useful?" the research itself gradually provided an answer--which is to say that it began to crystallize around the formation of a "general theory of human nature, and particularly...the formative influences of culture and education upon it."²⁸ The collection is methodical, then, in the sense that its organization is intelligible; but the principle underlying that organization is extremely broad, and the individual excerpts have nothing to link them except the interest they held for Hegel. When we attempt to characterize this interest, we run up against the very problem one encounters in trying to account for Coleridge's range of vision: we are thrown back, in other words, upon the initial problem of describing the thinker's mind. Harris identifies the central premise of Hegel's thinking at a slightly later stage in his life as a conviction that "truth is the whole"; what is evident in the early notebooks is an antecedent belief in "the essential

²⁸ Op. cit., p. 45.

unity and integrity of human nature in all its manifestations, a conviction that from every particular case or event, if we can only understand it rightly, we can discover the whole truth about man, his nature, and his destiny."²⁹ Thus, though one was haphazard in his work habits and the other decidedly regular, Coleridge and Hegel have this much in common at least: both fling their nets in a wide arc, and both, instead of looking for any particular bit of information,³⁰ are intent upon discovering a pattern that will explain the whole.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 29.

³⁰ Coleridge himself remarked that "doubtless it would visit the Realm of Literature with a plusquam polar Ink-frost, if a man were bound to write on nothing till he understood everything! Nevertheless, so far I hold it a possible and expedient approximation that, no other person having done it for me, I strive to begin at the Beginning. But independent of the probable unsatisfactory nature of the results, I am yearly more and more sensible of the difficulty of writing on detached Subjects (Philosophical subjects, I mean, whether physio- theo- or anthro-po-logical) and whenever from whatever motive I make the attempt, the importance of this, that, and yet another Principle or Position, which I proceeded to the Subject as part of the System...is sure to return and harrass me with its solicitings...." Cited in Kathleen Coburn, ed. Inquiring Spirit (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 200.

³¹ A thinker to whom both Hegel and Coleridge were indebted characterized his own method of philosophic inquiry as an outright rejection of such random and directionless attention. In his second Preface to the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant insists that "accidental observations, made in obedience to no previously thought-out plan, can never be made to yield a necessary law, which alone reason is concerned to discover....[Reason] must not...[approach nature] in the character of a pupil who listens to everything that the teacher chooses to say, but of an appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer questions which he has himself formulated." Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. (New York:

About Hegel's capacity for articulating such a pattern there can be no doubt. What is less obvious, perhaps, is that for him philosophy was synonymous with the discovery of system. There is nothing, that is to say, that is not germane to the philosophical enterprise, including its own operations. As he maintains in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, unlike the other sciences,

[p]hilosophy is essentially encyclopedic, that is, encompassing or encircling. In distinguishing as well as connecting its own self-distinctions, the whole is both the necessity of its parts as well as its own freedom. The Truth can only exist as such a totality systematically developed; only the whole is the truth.³²

To know the whole, then, is to know the truth. But implicit in a knowledge of the whole is a knowledge of the parts--not merely as formal entities within that whole, but as constitutive of the grand design in their own right. Thus, the process of knowing, as is indicated by a difficult utterance in Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, is by no means a simple acquisition of information to be fitted into a schema. Rather, it entails a mental effort that is itself necessarily circular:

[E]verything turns on grasping and expressing the true, not only as Substance, but equally

Martin's Press, 1965), 20.

³² Trans. Gustav Emil Mueller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), #7, 72.

as Subject....Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself--not an original or immediate unity as such--is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual.³³

This same recognition of the perpetually self-reflecting character of thought is present in Coleridge's descriptions of the principle underlying his philosophy.

It is somewhat surprising that in 1831, some twenty-four years after the publication of the Phenomenology and fourteen years after the first edition of the Encyclopedia, Coleridge can characterize his system as "the only attempt I know, ever made to reduce all knowledges into harmony." Still harder to regard as mere coincidence is the fact that he should use the concepts of reflection and circularity as a way of explaining the relationship among the kinds of knowledge encompassed by his system:

I have endeavoured to unite the insulated fragments of truth, and therewith to frame a perfect mirror. I show to each system that I fully understand and rightfully appreciate what that system means; but then I lift up that system to a higher point of view, from which I enable it to see its former position, where it was, indeed, but under another light and with different relations; so that the

³³ Phenomenology of Spirit. Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 10.

fragment of truth is not only acknowledged but explained.³⁴

In the absence of any evidence that Coleridge had more than a nodding acquaintance with Hegel's works,³⁵ we must accept that he had arrived independently at a similar understanding of what is meant by "system" and an almost identical conception of the relation between specific particles and the pattern at large.

In view of the similarity of their early attitudes towards learning, however, the congruence of their mature views is perhaps not so startling. It is precisely the cast of mind that can refrain from looking for specific information--or, that is disposed to contextualize rather than interrogate the individual datum--that is most open to the possibility of detecting the design of the whole. Certainly, it is a basic hermeneutical principle that intellectual expectations are often self-confirming, that they determine and colour not only the things we see but the ways in which we see them. Any set of expectations has the effect of selecting the data that will fulfill those

³⁴ Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. H.N. Coleridge. (New York: Harper, 1835), II, 3. Cited in Thomas McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition., 49.

³⁵ According to the evidence assembled by George Whalley, he had read the Logic, probably by 1818, but the marginal notes in the copy he used suggest "a cursory and unsympathetic reading," as do the handful of notebook entries that mention or allude to Hegel's works. Marginalia, II, 988.

expectations. Yet what is unusual about both Hegel and Coleridge is that they were not selective; at the beginning of their careers, most notably, both took a catholic position on the things that it is good to know, and, although their interests became more focussed and directed as time went on, neither one renounced the conviction that all things are ultimately related. This is a conviction that must, by its very nature, antedate the process of reading and taking notes. If it had not, the early notebooks of both thinkers would betray some principle of selection that is simply not to be found. An organizing principle, of course, is present in the later work of both Coleridge and Hegel--indeed, the idea of system itself is at the heart of both their philosophies--yet the evidence indicates that this principle emerged from the data and was not imposed from without.³⁶

There is an obvious contradiction in the argument here, another version of the apparent paradox one encounters in trying to decide whether Coleridge's reading determined the

³⁶ See, for example the contention of Peter C. Hodgson that Hegel's "evident willingness to incorporate new data and experiment with new schemas suggests that for him speculative philosophy as a whole involved a kind of 'conceptual play' with the deep structure in order to arrive at new insights, to grasp connections, differences, types, trends, directions, to understand more fully the inexhaustible wealth of what presents itself. He certainly was not offering empirical descriptions but rather imaginative constructions intended to evoke disclosures of the 'truth' of the world in which human beings dwell." Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, One-volume edition, trans., R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson, J.M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 14.

shape of his "system" or whether some conception of system determined what he was to read. It is a paradox that will have to be allowed briefly to stand. It is true that both Coleridge and Hegel begin with an a priori conviction of the interrelatedness of all things. To the extent that they were able, with different measures of success, to enunciate the nature of the whole, and to put the system into language, it could be argued that both were the prisoners of a self-fulfilling prophesy. On the other hand, one has only to spend a few hours reading at random in the early works of either thinker to see that each new branch of knowledge they engage with is not forcibly incorporated into the system, but is allowed to expand and modify the conception of what that system is. The distinction that needs to be made is that between the fabrication and the mere articulation of a system. Hannah Arendt once made the point that "the chief fallacy is to believe that Truth is a result which comes at the end of a thought-process. Truth, on the contrary, is always the beginning of thought; thinking is always result-less....Thinking starts after an experience of truth has struck home, so to speak."³⁷ Neither Hegel nor Coleridge, in other words, can be found guilty of the belief that their researches could create the systems they were eventually to propound. Rather, the act of accumulating information is

³⁷ Hannah Arendt to Mary McCarthy, 20 August 1954. Cited in Carol Gelderman, Mary McCarthy, A Life (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 319.

understood by both as a necessary preliminary to the act of revealing a system that is already in existence.

The epistemological crux I have just described--how it is possible that mental activity can reliably correspond to the structure of the world--is given extensive treatment in Coleridge's "Essays on the Principles of Method", first published in a form he found acceptable in the 1818 edition of The Friend. Unlike the rather forced and heavily Schellingian account of a related problem given in the Biographia, this series of essays is devoted to an extended definition and justification of method as it pertains to intellectual inquiry generally. Coleridge took trouble with the essays, and valued the finished product "more than all his other prose writings."³⁸ Originally the work had been commissioned as an introduction to the projected Encyclopaedia Metropolitana. According to Coleridge, the publishers of this volume, in printing the piece, first garbled the text so badly that he felt compelled to repudiate it; second, when the enterprise had collapsed, only reluctantly and after a long dispute, returned him the manuscript, by this time "cut up into snips so as to make it almost useless."³⁹ Given these circumstances, the restoration and republication of the essays in the 1818 Friend give us some idea of how pleased

³⁸ Collected Letters, IV, 823.

³⁹ Collected Letters, IV, 860.

Coleridge must have been with what he had written⁴⁰. The essays are suitable for our present purposes as well because, although the influence of the German idealist philosophers who had been so substantially present in the central chapters of the Biographia is evident, that influence is offset by an equal debt to both Plato and Bacon, and, to the best of my knowledge, the series has never been thought to contain any evidence of plagiarism.⁴¹ Thus, many of the special difficulties that arise in the attempt to analyse Coleridge's intellectual method--or even to describe it--need not be contended with here.

Coleridge begins by defining method as a kind of meta-science; it is the study, not of things for their own sake, but of the relations of things: "To enumerate and analyze

⁴⁰ For the details of the muddled publication history of these essays, see Alice D. Snyder, Coleridge on Logic and Learning (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 33-40 and Barbara Rooke, ed., The Friend (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), lxxxii-lxxxv.

⁴¹ But see J.R. de J. Jackson's account of Coleridge's request to borrow Crabb Robinson's copy of Schelling's Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums (1803) in November of 1813: "Schelling's lectures have much in common with Coleridge's essays on Method. If we may assume that Crabb Robinson complied with Coleridge's request--and there is no reason for supposing that he did not--we may suppose that Coleridge absorbed Schelling's approach to the problem of philosophic method about two years before he embarked on Biographia Literaria, and that his acquaintance with it precedes all but his earliest critical lectures." Furthermore, though the essays on Method do not consist of "simply a translation of Schelling," it is Schelling who "deserves credit for most of the original thought." Method and Imagination in Coleridge's Criticism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 17 and 36.

these relations, with the conditions under which alone they are discoverable, is to teach the science of Method."⁴² Where there is only an arbitrary or sequential arrangement of individual items--as in the order of the alphabet, for example⁴³--there is no method; method consists, rather, in the "progressive transition" from one entity or stage to the next. What this suggests is that, in order for a line of inquiry to be called methodical, some hierarchical scheme must obtain: individual data cannot simply be laid out collectively on a footing of equivalence; they must be both related to one another and related to the whole of which they form a part. Built into the idea of method, then, is that of the mind's oscillation⁴⁴ between the parts and the whole, the

⁴² The Friend, I, 451.

⁴³ Interestingly, the Encyclopedia Metropolitana was not to be arranged alphabetically, but according to general subject and approach. Walter Jackson Bate surmises that "Coleridge may have been the principal architect of this new conception of approach and method." Coleridge (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 173. See also Alice D. Snyder, op. cit., 38-39 for an account of Coleridge's contributions to the plan of the Encyclopedia.

⁴⁴ In a more general context, J.A. Appleyard has drawn attention to one of Coleridge's "fanciful etymologies"--his association of the word "mind" with the German "mahen," to reap. The resemblance suggested to him "the vibratory yet progressive motion of the scythe" as an analogue for mental activity. As Appleyard goes on to argue, "Coleridge's mind seems to have worked, in his youth, by dividing subjects into opposing parts and rejecting the unsatisfactory half. Later he came to see that the opposition was one of polar tendencies within a complex whole and he espoused a theory of 'reconciliation of opposites.' This evolved, as his thought progressed, into the more sophisticated 'trichotomous' logic in order to express the integrative aspect of dialectical synthesis. It was no accident that Coleridge had such a

particular and the universal. Coleridge's exploration of this back and forth motion--a principle we now refer to as the hermeneutical circle--is unlike many more recent treatments of the problem in that it is metaphysical rather than phenomenological. He does not linger over the question of whether the parts are constitutive of the whole, nor does he dwell on the problem of how we can recognize them as parts without previously positing a whole.⁴⁵ It is simply understood that a whole has been posited, and the important question for Coleridge is not how the process works or how it can be used, but whether or not that positing can be grounded in something external to the immediate relationship. He does, however, provide some illuminating examples of "progressive transition" in operation. The excellence of Shakespeare's plays, for instance, may be defined "as consisting in that just proportion, that union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science." The elements of Euclidean geometry and the argument of Plato's Meno are likewise praised for the continuity of the transitions they exhibit between parts and

brilliant reputation as a conversationalist...for the progressive clarification of back-and-forth discussion was the natural process of his mind." Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), 10.

⁴⁵ Cf. David Simpson, Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1979), 175-6.

whole.⁴⁶ But instead of exploring the ramifications of these internal relationships, Coleridge rapidly passes on to the larger, foundational question of how and why method as he has defined it can be considered a reliable avenue to truth.⁴⁷

It is worth pausing at this stage in the argument to point out that, far from evading the question that has been implicit throughout this chapter, Coleridge has merely raised it to a higher level. It is the whole and not the parts, the system and not its components that must come first. He swiftly dispenses with the notion that it is possible for strict empiricism, the mind's habit of generalizing from objects of sense, to discover the unifying principle that is the prerequisite of method:

[S]uch a principle, it has been proved, can never in the science of experiment or in those of observation be adequately supplied by a theory built on generalization. For what shall determine the mind to abstract and generalize one common point rather than another? and within what limits, from what number of individual objects, shall the generalization be made? The theory must

⁴⁶ The Friend, I, 457.

⁴⁷ He had, of course, considered this aspect of the question elsewhere. See, for example, the famous distinction between mechanical and organic form in the lecture "Shakespeare's Judgement Equal to his Genius," where it is apparent that the kind of organization most to be valued is that which arises from within the artifact, so that "the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form." Hazard Adams, ed., Critical Theory Since Plato (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), p. 462.

still require a prior theory for its own legitimate construction.⁴⁸

The goal, then, is to discover the origin of that prior theory, or, what comes to the same thing, to ground the operations of the mind itself in some absolute certainty.⁴⁹

Coleridge's first approach to this herculean task consists of a demonstration which combines elements of the Platonic and the Kantian positions on the accessibility to the intellect of the noumenal realm. We must begin, he says, by postulating the existence of Method in the ideal--a step which is identical with believing in God as the architect and first cause of all visible order. Positing the principle of divine order as perfect, causal, and creative is the necessary condition for all insight into order as it is manifested in the world: "Alienated from this (intuition shall we call it? or stedfast faith?) ingenious men may produce schemes, conducive to the peculiar purposes of

⁴⁸ The Friend, I, 476.

⁴⁹ The necessity of turning to the mind itself as the source of all method is made a little clearer in the first version of the treatise. Coleridge had originally asserted that "if we would discover a universal Method, by which every step in our progress through the whole circle of Art and Science should be directed, it is absolutely necessary that we should seek it in the very interior and central essence of the Human intellect." (Cited in J.R. De J. Jackson, op.cit., 41.) It seems likely that the point was glossed over in the revised version of the essay because it appears to call for an immediate investigation of the "central essence" of the mind--a line of inquiry that Coleridge later found extraneous to his argument.

particular sciences, but no scientific system."⁵⁰ Thus the active ingredient of this faith, so to speak, is the notion of causality, without which it would be impossible to conceive of any orderly arrangement of things. Given causality, however, the mind is permitted the exercise of reason in its dealings with the objects of nature. And this, in turn, permits us to reconceive the mind's activity within the world as a kind of informed quest for evidence of order, or, what comes to the same thing, for a justification of its initial hypothesis. Equipped with reason, in other words, we now know precisely what to look for in our encounter with phenomenal objects: "For the relation common to all being known, the appropriate orbit of each becomes discoverable, together with its peculiar relations to its concentrics in the common sphere of subordination."⁵¹ And not surprisingly, in view of the circularity of the procedure here, reason, acting upon the phenomenal world, is seen to confirm the expectations we have been entertaining:

And now the remarkable fact forces itself on our attention, viz. that the material world is found to obey the same laws as had been deduced independently from the reason: and that the masses act by a force, which cannot be conceived to result from the component parts, known or imaginable.⁵²

⁵⁰ The Friend, I, 460.

⁵¹ The Friend, I, 461.

⁵² Ibid., I, 462.

Before accusing Coleridge of simplemindedly setting out to prove what he had already assumed, we should examine the conclusions he draws from the argument so far. He fully admits that the grounding of reason upon faith means that we are left without an explanation for the "coincidence between reason and experience."⁵³ We are entitled to say that reason and experience coincide, but we are unable to ground this observation upon reason. And since we are only aware of their coincidence through a faculty that is superior to reason--the divine order being inaccessible to rational inquiry--the result of this stage of the argument is merely to subordinate philosophy to religion:

The only answer which Plato deemed the question capable of receiving, compels the reason to pass out of itself and seek the ground of this agreement in a supersensual essence, which being at once the ideal of the reason and the cause of the material world, is the pre-establisher of the harmony in and between both. Religion therefore is the ultimate aim of philosophy...⁵⁴

The result of this long disquisition, however, is not quite to return the reader to the starting point. The argument does not culminate in a dead end. Rather, an ideal has been posited which, though unattainable, still provides a ground for comparison with objects in the phenomenal world.

⁵³ Ibid., I, 463.

⁵⁴ Ibid., I, 463. For a discussion of the scepticism about the potential for human knowledge implicit in this view, see J.R. de J. Jackson, op. cit., 46.

So long as we are aware of the gap between the ideal and the actual, and make an attempt to narrow it, method is allowed to go forward; it requires no further justification. Coleridge bolsters the point by again referring to the works of Plato, which, when they are regarded as attempts to arrive at truth, appear "tortuous and labyrinthine...and unsatisfactory in their ostensible results." But once we have understood that Plato's purpose in writing was "not so much to establish any particular truth, as to remove the obstacles, the continuance of which is preclusive of all truth," his method "assumes a different aspect, and justifies itself in all its dimensions."⁵⁵ Having adopted an appropriate humility, then, and conscious of its innate tendency toward method, the intellect becomes free to pursue its investigations of the objects of nature. Notice that the possibility of approaching truth through intellectual activity has not been ruled out. And indeed, the second stage of Coleridge's attempt at guaranteeing the validity of mental operations consists of a series of examples, some scientific, some cultural, of the mind's progress towards certainty. The history of theories of electricity, for example, was retarded for many years by the absence of a general principle capable of accounting for all the data. Once the discovery had been made, however, that a single law could explain the phenomena--or, that the

⁵⁵ The Friend, I, 472.

phenomena could be subsumed into a unified system--effects that had at first appeared contradictory became easily explicable. The demonstrable superiority of the new understanding of electricity over the old hypotheses suggests that it is possible for the intellect to progress toward complete knowledge:

For abstract from all these suppositions ...that which is common to and involved in them all; and we shall have neither notional fluid or fluids, nor chemical compounds, nor elementary matter,--but the idea of two--opposite--forces, tending to rest by equilibrium. These give the law, and in it the method, both of arranging the phenomena and of substantiating appearances.⁵⁶

A similar case is built around the evidence that the Christian religion subsumes under a new system significant features of the Hebrew, Greek, and Roman cultures. According to Coleridge, the Hebraic conception of God was wholly spiritual; the prohibition the Hebrews observed against representing the deity in physical images was conducive to a religion that stressed intellectual virtues and attitudes toward the world. "Thus were the very first lessons in the Divine School assigned to the cultivation of the reason and of the will: or rather of both as united in Faith."⁵⁷ The Greeks, who represent "the youth and approaching manhood of the human intellect," combined the spirituality of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., I, 478.

⁵⁷ Ibid., I, 501.

Hebrews with their own predilection for making beautiful objects, and carried the arts to "an almost ideal perfection" while discounting almost entirely the investigation of the laws of the physical world.⁵⁸ Roman civilization, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the mastery of precisely that which the Greeks had neglected: the Romans were instinctively practical, legalistic, and materialistic. The point of the sketch (which I have greatly abbreviated here) is that in Christianity the chief characteristics of each of its precursors were recombined--or synthesized, as Coleridge puts it--under a new law and at a higher level:

Thus the Hebrews may be regarded as the fixed mid point of the living line, toward which the Greeks as the ideal pole and the Romans as the material were ever approximating; the coincidence and final synthesis took place in Christianity, of which the Bible is the law and Christendom the phaenomenon.⁵⁹

As far as Coleridge is concerned, it goes without saying that the principles of Christianity (perhaps because he finds in them a purified reduplication of all the cultural intuitions that had gone before) represent a closer approximation to the true than the precepts of any other religion.

Coleridge's parenthetical remarks towards the end of the "Essay on Method" make it clear that he regards the operations of the mind as being firmly grounded. In the last

⁵⁸ Ibid., I, 503-505.

⁵⁹ Ibid., I, 505-506.

analysis, however, it is impossible to overlook the fact that the sine qua non of the entire demonstration, and of the idea of method itself, has been faith: the capacity of the intellect to apprehend the world, and ultimately to articulate its perceptions about the world, rests on nothing more secure than that. It is difficult to know how to interpret this admission--whether to acknowledge it as a shameful weakness that invalidates the argument, or to affirm it as the bedrock on which systems can confidently be founded.

About Coleridge's position there cannot be much doubt: his own faith is powerful enough to traverse the epistemological gap between the divine and the natural orders. "And what is Faith?" Coleridge asks himself in a notebook entry of 1811. In part, he regards it as a phenomenon of the same order as any other unsought for bit of evidence of the rationality of the universe--explicable, that is to say, only in terms of an already posited cosmic order. Faith, therefore, "is to the Spirit of Man the same Instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to build its involucre as long again as itself to make room for the Antennae, which are to come, tho' they never yet have been...." The formulation comes easily to Coleridge, one senses, because he is convinced by the argument from design. It strikes him as self-evident that the physical world, created by a rational spirit, operates according to rational

principles, which are in turn discoverable by the human intellect. But his conviction lies deeper than this familiar formula would indicate. More to the point is the intuitive equation he makes between nature and spirit, each participating somehow in the other, and the human mind participating in both. The very fact that the external world operates according to observable laws implies that nature is intelligent; that the intellect is capable of discovering these laws further implies that the laws by which it operates are one and the same with those it discovers. Our assurance for this equivalence rests on the proposition that "things utterly heterogeneous can have no inter-communion."⁶⁰ "In short," as the notebook entry continues, "all the organs of Sense are framed for a corresponding World of Sense: and we have it. All the organs of Spirit are framed for a correspondent World of Spirit: & we cannot but believe in it."⁶¹

It is in his recognition of this need for a confirmation of the promptings of faith in actual experience that Coleridge thoroughly redeems himself as a thinker. The task that is enjoined as a result of his attempt to establish the coincidence of mind and world--to recapitulate the conclusions of the treatise on method--is that the mind must

⁶⁰ The Friend, I, 511.

⁶¹ Collected Notebooks III, 4088. The passage is reproduced with a few alterations in Biographia Literaria, I, 242.

exert itself to recognize both the laws of nature in itself and the laws of intellect in nature:

Then only can [man] reduce Phaenomena to Principles--then only will he have achieved the METHOD, the self-unravelling clue, which alone can securely guide him to the conquest of the former--when he has discovered in the basis of their union the necessity of their differences; in the principle of their continuance the solution of their changes. 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.⁶²

Certain phrases in this passage suggest that Coleridge is fully aware of the responsibility for seeking confirmation of one's intuitions that ensues from espousing a method grounded on faith. And taken together with the examples he has given of method in practical operation, the statement further suggests his awareness that the realization or implementation of method as he understands it takes place in an historical context and can be verified only there. It cannot escape our attention, what is more, that the tendency of method, with its characteristic motion of "progressive transition," is always towards unification--either of disparate phenomena or of opposing tendencies. Method is successful, and is at its most reliable, when it manages to subsume under one law or

⁶² Ibid., I, 511.

system ideas that seemed previously unrelated. As in the telling example of the synthesis of ancient cultures embodied in Christianity, the evidence that method is an avenue towards truth is that it elevates as well as preserves the entities under its sway. The guarantee of method, then, is that it can be seen to manifest itself in a fully historical dialectic. And from what we have seen so far, it seems safe to say that for Coleridge method and dialectic are one and the same.

Chapter Five

Dialectic

There are therefore essentially but three kinds of philosophers and more are not possible: the one is those who give the whole to the subject and make the object a mere result involved in it; secondly those who give the whole to the object and make the subject, that is the reflecting and contemplating, feeling part, the mere result of that; and last those who, in very different ways, have attempted to reconcile these two opposites and bring them into one.

--Coleridge

With a charge of meaning that has been accumulating since the beginning of discursive philosophy, dialectic is a term that is notoriously difficult to use with precision. Originally, the word was a virtual synonym for dialogue: in the ancient world, the dialectic was the art of reasoned discussion and debate. The dialogues of Plato amplified the meaning of the term to include the exchange that takes place between the skilled questioner and his respondent as they attempt to define ideas and work towards more certain knowledge--a process which is usually effected through the meticulous reconciliation of an initial proposition with its stated or implicit opposite. In its basic philosophical sense, then, dialectic is dialogue that is directed toward a specific purpose. Hence Plato's image of the philosopher or

dialectician as midwife, one who assists in the labour of bringing forth truth.

On first consideration, it appears that the equation Coleridge makes in his "Essays on Method" between method and dialectic--and the very broad sense in which both terms are used there--can be fully accounted for with reference to the Platonic dialectic. Like Coleridge after him, Plato assigns dialectic an architectonic function among the other arts: arguably the most significant outcome of the discussion on education in Book VII of the Republic is to set dialectic "above all other studies to be as it were the coping stone."¹ But as well as being the art of ordering all the other arts, the means to a "comprehensive survey of their affinities with one another," dialectic is defined as the art that makes clear their connection "with the nature of things." "He who can view things in their connection is a dialectician," says Socrates, and "he who cannot, is not."² The statement foreshadows Coleridge's insistence on the distinction between method proper and mere empirical observation.

As an exchange between two speakers that leads toward truth, not only does dialectic imply a certain duality; the Platonic sense of the word contains as well the notion of "progressive transition" that is reiterated by Coleridge.

¹ Republic, VII, 534e. The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 766.

² Ibid., 537c, 769.

The words of Socrates and those of his interlocutor, if they are the right words in the right relationship, give rise to something of a different order than mere words. Dialectic is thus described as the progression of thought from a lower to a higher order:

when anyone by dialectic attempts through discourse of reason and apart from all perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence of each thing and does not desist till he apprehends by thought itself the nature of the good in itself, he arrives at the limit of the intelligible.... [a]nd the release from bonds...and the conversion from the shadows to the images that cast them and to the light and the ascent from the subterranean cavern to the world above...³

Dialectic, then, is further distinguished from other kinds of thinking in that it is concerned with essences rather than appearances.⁴ It holds out a promise to philosophers that by this means they may transcend the realm of opinion and conjecture and approach that of the Ideas. Thus even the original philosophic application of the term suggests the possibility of movement or transition from mere appearance to enduring reality, a sense which is also present in Coleridge's understanding of the word.

Nevertheless, there is a dimension to the Coleridgean dialectic which seems not to be prefigured in the writings of Plato. This is his notion of the mysterious bond that exists

³ Ibid., 532b, 764.

⁴ See ibid., 534b, 766.

between the mind of the thinker and the external world, and that constitutes for him the inevitable starting point or foundation of all attempts at method. "In a self-conscious and thence reflecting being," says Coleridge, "no instinct can exist, without engendering the belief of an object corresponding to it...much less the instinct, in which humanity itself is grounded: that by which, in every act of conscious perception, we at once identify our being with that of the world without us, and yet place ourselves in contradiction to that world."⁵ Whereas for Plato, the truth to which the philosopher aspires transcends the world of sensory appearance, Coleridge conceives of dialectic as in some sense a unification of the realms of reason and sensation. In order to account for this difference in orientation, we will have to look more closely at some of the additional shades of meaning the term had acquired before Coleridge began to make use of it.

* * *

The more familiar modern sense in which the word dialectic is used, derived from German Idealist philosophy, is both narrower and more subject to minute variations in usage than its classical antecedent. By and large, from Kant onward, dialectic refers to an intellectual process by which opposites on either side of what is now perceived to be a

⁵ The Friend, I, 498.

strictly epistemological barrier are reconciled. Raymond Williams has shown that this second, more specialized meaning of the word is in some sense an extension of the first: it applies "the notion of contradiction in the course of discussion or dispute to a notion of contradictions in reality."⁶ Yet although a formal opposition between mind and world--a contradiction to be reconciled--is found throughout the writings of German Idealist philosophers, this opposition is not in itself proof of the existence of a dialectic in the more specialized sense of the term.⁷ Nor, as Sidney Hook points out, is the tridadic pattern we associate with the Hegelian culmination of Idealism a guarantee of genuine dialectic: "It is not so much the number of phases a situation has which makes it dialectical but a specific relation of opposition between those phases which generates a succession of other phases." Hook's rather abstract description of the conditions that must be satisfied before a mode of thinking can be called dialectical is one that will prove useful in trying to locate the Coleridgean dialectic among the German thinkers who shared his general approach:

The necessary condition...of a dialectical

⁶ Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976), 92.

⁷ Schelling, for example, never developed a dialectic, though the concept seems to have interested him. See F.W.J. Schelling, Bruno, or On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things, ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 82.

situation is at least two phases, distinct but not separate. The sufficient condition of a dialectic situation is given when those two phases present a relation of opposition and interaction such that the result (1) exhibits something qualitatively new, (2) preserves some of the structural elements of the interacting phases, and (3) eliminates others.⁸

More specifically, dialectic arises out of the provision that is made in a given philosophy for a logical process by which the mind is enabled to overcome its apparent separation from the external world--a mechanism, in short, by which subject and object are potentially unified. Thus, the initial test for the existence of a dialectic would seem to be the answer that is given to the question of how our knowledge of the objective world is possible.

Kant's answer to this question, as we saw earlier, is that our minds can grasp the world, or rather, the world as it appears to us, because the categories of the understanding have already formed or organized the raw material perceived by our senses.⁹ This claim, of course, is tantamount to a denial that there exists any separation between mind and

⁸ Sidney Hook, From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971), 61.

⁹ I am indebted in the summary that follows to two general histories of philosophy: that of Frederick Copleston, S.J. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1985), VI, 211-307, and that of Wilhelm Windelband, trans. [1901] James H. Tufts (New York: Harper, 1958), 537-559; the section is also informed by a reading of G.N.G. Orsini, Coleridge and German Idealism (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 57-97.

world: indeed, Kant would argue, all perception, including the mind's recognition of itself, is inevitably mediated by a consciousness of objects external to the self--a doctrine which suggests, of course, that self-consciousness and consciousness of external objects are inextricably interwoven. The conjunction of mind and world is thus seen to be involuntary and inescapable; more to the point, perhaps, this conjunction is logically prior to consciousness itself. Kant maintains at the same time, however, that there exists an impassable gulf between the perceiving mind and the things-in-themselves; since we lack any justification for moving beyond mediated experience, we have no reason to believe that our minds can provide a complete picture of the universe as it really is in itself. Thus, as far as certain knowledge is concerned, we are confined to the sphere of sensible appearances.

The inference should not be, however, that Kant is a straightforward empiricist. Indeed, his empiricist leanings can be explained by the fact that he posits a cohesive bond between mind and nature, a bond so indissoluble that the mind must be seen as continually and involuntarily performing an act of synthesis. The mind, in other words, is far from passive; it does not merely assemble the data it receives through the senses, but actively organizes sensation

according to a priori concepts.¹⁰ These concepts are not to be understood, as some previous philosophers had asserted, as innate ideas: they simply provide the necessary conditions for experience itself, and have no meaning or application outside of experience. With no sensory information to complete them, they are mere empty forms or categories.

On the other hand, with a stroke that brings him surprisingly close to the Idealist camp, Kant establishes the universal and necessary validity of this basic act of synthesis by showing that space and time are the forms without which we cannot think at all: they constitute the necessary condition for perception itself. Knowledge, to be sure, is always a mixture of the a priori and the a posteriori, a synthesis between concepts arising naturally and spontaneously in the mind and the "manifold" perceived by our senses. At the same time, however, this discovery can tell us nothing whatever about phenomena: it is the forms of space and time that "give the law" to nature, and not nature

¹⁰ He says, for example, "if we eliminate from our experiences everything which belongs to the senses, there still remain certain original concepts and certain judgments derived from them, which must have arisen completely a priori, independently of experience, inasmuch as they enable us to say, or at least lead us to believe that we can say, in regard to the objects which appear to the sense, more than mere experience would teach--giving to assertions true universality and strict necessity, such as mere empirical knowledge cannot supply." Critique of Pure Reason, 42.

itself that imposes these forms upon thought.¹¹

Thus, if we follow the twists and turns of Kant's initial epistemological argument at all closely, we find ourselves puzzled in the end as to what is actually being synthesized. Speaking rather loosely, there seems to be nothing here but mind--or, at least, the activity of mind is all we can be sure of. This reading of Kant's general position is confirmed when we examine the role that synthesis plays in his epistemological system at large. The fundamental act of synthesis, the initial transformation of sensation into perception, is eventually proposed as the basis for two higher acts of synthesis performed by the mind. As the product of the mind's initial organization of sensory data, perceptions are in turn synthesized by the understanding; the outcome of this new synthesis is called

¹¹ Wilhelm Windelband has glossed this rather difficult point as follows: "If...Nature, as object of our knowledge, were a real connected system of things, independent of the functions of our reason, we could know of it only through experience and never a priori; a universal and necessary knowledge of Nature is possible only if our conceptional Forms of synthesis determine Nature itself. If Nature prescribed laws to our understanding, we should have only an empirical, inadequate knowledge; an a priori knowledge of Nature is therefore possible only if the case be reversed and our understanding prescribes laws to Nature. But our understanding cannot determine Nature in so far as it exists as a thing-in-itself, or as a system of things-in-themselves, but only in so far as it appears in our thought. A priori knowledge of Nature is therefore possible only if the connection which we think between perceptions is also nothing but our mode of ideation; the conceptional relations also, in which Nature is an object of our knowledge, must be only 'phenomenon.'" A History of Philosophy, 2 vol. Trans., James H. Tufts (New York: Harper, 1958), 542.

experience. In yet a third intellectual operation, judgements of experience are recombined to form the basis for metaphysical knowledge; this final act of synthesis is brought about by means of general principles which Kant calls Ideas.¹²

At first glance, we may be inclined to think that because the structure Kant postulates is hierarchical, it must therefore be dialectical as well. Certainly, each act of synthesis does seem to give rise to the next in order of ascent, and the product of each synthesis does appear to furnish the basis for the next level of intellection. When we ask ourselves, however, where the real foundation of each of these stages is to be found, we must admit that all three owe their origins to the basic conditions of perception examined above. And this initial act of synthesis we have already discovered to be nothing more than the mind's imposition of its own forms upon nature.

The formal and rather sterile nature of Kant's system of syntheses is most apparent at the level where experience is brought into contact with the Ideas. It is interesting that it is only here, at the uppermost limit of synthetic activity, that Kant himself makes use of the word dialectic. At the boundary between the phenomenal and noumenal realms, the act of synthesis is most notably lacking in any product;

¹² This hierarchy is succinctly described in Wilhelm Windelband, *ibid.*, 538-9.

its function is to prevent misapprehension rather than to arrive at truth; and its relevance is confined to only a single branch of intellection. Indeed, as he makes clear in Book Two of The Critique of Pure Reason, in a section entitled "The Transcendental Dialectic," the possibility of a cognitive bridge between the phenomenal and noumenal spheres is itself a source of "illusion" brought about by the misapplication of the categories of the understanding--or, as he puts it, by their "employment extending beyond the limits of experience."¹³ Kant allows, nevertheless, that the impulse toward transcendent rational inquiry is useful to the extent that it defines the boundary between objective knowledge and unprovable metaphysical speculation. Given that transcendent ideas arise in us through the use of reason, we can employ reason in turn to demonstrate the inadequacy of these ideas as knowledge. The use of reason in order to limit reason, here as elsewhere in the system, is in fact the essence of Kant's dialectic.

It is evident that reason must be limited, Kant points out, because reason, in certain situations, is productive of antinomies. When an a priori judgement that claims universal validity is made, and when this judgement entails an illegitimate extension of the categories of the understanding beyond the phenomenal realm, then the reason embroils itself in contradictions from which there is no

¹³ Critique of Pure Reason, 299.

logical escape. Kant's point is not, however, that the result of these excursions will be error and illusion; antinomies, rather, because they consist of two equally provable but contradictory assertions, simply demonstrate the incapacity of reason to operate outside the bounds of experience:

If in employing the principles of understanding we do not merely apply our reason to objects of experience, but venture to extend these principles beyond the limits of experience, there arise pseudo-rational doctrines which can neither hope for confirmation in experience nor fear refutation by it. Each of them is not only in itself free from contradiction, but finds conditions of its necessity in the very nature of reason --only that, unfortunately, the assertion of the opposite has, on its side, grounds that are just as valid and necessary.¹⁴

The opposition that exists between two such logically necessary assertions represents the only real focus of the very circumscribed Kantian dialectic.

True antinomies, though they cannot be resolved, can be dialectically "rendered harmless" by a process that is more akin to a dismantling of the rational structure that gave rise to them than to the reconciliation of opposites within it.¹⁵ Kant proceeds to explore four sets of propositions,¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 394.

¹⁵ Strictly speaking, this statement does not apply to Kant's "Dialectic of the Aesthetical Judgement" outlined in the Critique of Judgement. Judgements of taste themselves, because they are neither rational nor a priori--nor capable of

each divided into a "thesis" and an "antithesis", and each susceptible of logical, but mutually contradictory proofs. It is logically demonstrable, for example, that "the world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space." But the contrary assertion--that "the world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both time and space"--is equally admissible in logical terms.¹⁷ Without going into the proofs themselves, which, though intricate, are irrefutable, let us turn briefly to the conclusion that Kant arrives at in the four instances he discusses.

In a word, we are faced with a kind of indeterminacy.

commanding universal assent for themselves--are not productive of antinomies, and hence require no dialectic. Judgements about the principles of taste, however, produce apparent antinomies, and are susceptible of a dialectical critique. Nevertheless, as Kant demonstrates, the contradictions that occur in such cases result not from a logical opposition, but from the use of the same term or concept in different senses in the thesis and in the antithesis. The solution of the antinomy here depends upon "the possibility of showing that two apparently contradictory propositions do not contradict each other in fact, but that they may be consistent, although the explanation of the possibility of their concept may transcend our cognitive faculties." Since this indeed turns out to be the case among judgements about the principles of taste, the problem is of a different order from that explored in the first Critique, and not very illuminating for our purposes here. See the Critique of Judgement, ed. and trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 182-186.

¹⁶ That there are four instances is not arbitrary: "There are just so many, neither more nor fewer, owing to the fact that there are just four series of synthetic presuppositions which impose a priori limitations on the empirical synthesis." Critique of Pure Reason, 422.

¹⁷ Ibid., 396.

Kant states it as a general principle that in the case of rational activity generally, the very ability to pose a question would seem to imply a facility for discovering an answer: "there are sciences, the very nature of which requires that every question arising within their domain should be completely answerable in terms of what is known, inasmuch as the answer must issue from the same sources from which the question proceeds.... That very concept which puts us in a position to ask the question must also qualify us to answer it, since...the object is not to be met with outside the concept."¹⁸ But the mention here of the word "object" reveals that the case in point must be an exception to this general rule. Within transcendent philosophy there are possible questions whose formulation rests upon an Idea alone, an Idea which lacks a knowable corresponding object. These are what Kant refers to as "cosmological" questions, and their peculiarity is that, when analysed, they show themselves to be questions not about objects at all, but about the ideas that permit the formulation of the questions in the first place.¹⁹ The answer to transcendent cosmological questions, therefore, "cannot lie anywhere except in the idea.... We have here a case where the common saying holds, that no answer is in itself an answer. A question as to the constitution of that something which

¹⁸ Ibid., 431.

¹⁹ Ibid., 432.

cannot be thought through any determinate predicate--inasmuch as it is completely outside the sphere of those objects which can be given to us--is entirely null and void."²⁰

Given the very restricted usefulness of the process we have been considering here, as well as its formalist character, it is difficult to know whether Kant's "transcendental dialectic" can properly be called a dialectic at all. What makes the appropriateness of the term most doubtful is that the method itself rules out the possibility of a final act of synthesis. The confrontation between thesis and antithesis generates no new term; instead, the mind is compelled to revert to the premises that first made an opposition possible, and to call those premises into question. The fact is that in the critical philosophy, as Kant himself intimates, a productive or progressive dialectic is almost entirely superfluous.²¹ In all situations except

²⁰ Ibid., 432.

²¹ "[I]t is only for transcendental philosophy that this sceptical method is essential. Though in all other fields of enquiry it can, perhaps, be dispensed with, it is not so in this field. In mathematics its employment would, indeed, be absurd; for in mathematics no false assertions can be concealed and rendered invisible, inasmuch as the proof must always proceed under the guidance of pure intuition and by means of a synthesis that is always evident. In experimental philosophy the delay caused by doubt may indeed be useful; no misunderstanding is, however, possible which cannot easily be removed; and the final means of deciding the dispute, whether found early or late, must in the end be supplied by experience. Moral philosophy can also present its principles, together with their practical consequences, one and all in concreto, in what are at least possible experiences; and the misunderstanding due to abstraction is thereby avoided." Ibid., 396.

that of noumenal speculation, the validity of reason, intuition, and sensory experience can be confirmed in practice; it is only when we attempt to apply reason to transcendent ideas that a dialectical test is called for.²² But since the principal discovery of Kantian epistemology is, arguably, that knowledge of the noumenal sphere is beyond the scope of reason--that such apparent knowledge cannot go by the name of "science"--it becomes clear that the function of the Kantian dialectic, even in its one necessary application, is entirely negative.²³

If we want, nevertheless, to invoke a literal definition and insist that Kant's epistemology is dialectical in its very structure, we must be prepared to admit that the process culminates in nothing more than the discovery of the limitations of human knowledge. Nothing "new" is generated by Kant's interlocking series of synthetic transformations.

²² In Kantian philosophy, as Dorothy Emmet has succinctly put it, "without the materials of experience to work upon, order and interpret [the] a priori functions of the mind are purely formal, producing possible ways of thinking, but not knowledge. "Coleridge and Philosophy," in R.L. Brett, ed. Writers and their Background: S.T. Coleridge (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971), 201.

²³ In his preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant himself makes the perfectly apt observation, however, that "[t]o deny that the service which the Critique renders is positive in character, would...be like saying that the police are of no positive benefit, inasmuch as their main business is merely to prevent the violence of which citizens stand in mutual fear, in order that each may pursue his vocation in peace and security." op. cit., 27. The positive benefit of the Critique is that it clears the way for the proper application of reason beyond the limits of sensibility--which is, of course, the moral application.

For this reason, the hierarchy on which the acts of synthesis are arranged, far from being "given" or determined by the nature of the process, can be recognized as a mere descriptive model of the process by which we acquire knowledge. This is, of course, precisely what Kant intended to produce. Why, then, does his epistemology remain so unsatisfying?

What one longs to do with the Kantian syntheses is to pull them apart and inspect their components in order to understand how the process works. But this would be to misunderstand Kant's insight. The point is precisely that the synthesis cannot be dismantled: perception (for example) simply is the synthesis of sensation and a priori forms of thought. Neither side of the equation can be conceived of independently; the two halves cannot be fitted together in any other way. Coleridge, albeit in a slightly different context, makes the point rather well: "Water is neither Oxygen nor Hydrogen, nor yet is it a commixture of both; but the Synthesis or Indifference of the two: and as long as the copula endures, by which it becomes Water, or rather which alone is Water, it is not less a simple Body than either of the imaginary Elements, improperly called its Ingredients or Components."²⁴ But as irresistible as the principle may be from a strictly logical point of view, we somehow balk at

²⁴ The Friend, ed. Barbara Rooke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), I, 94.

applying it to the notion of consciousness. The act of perception, one senses, is aggregate rather than simple: by rights one ought to be able to disassemble it, to stand outside of it, to watch its wheels and cogs as they engage. This same sense of impotence extends to the entirety of Kant's tightly woven dialectic. There is something enervating, to say the least, about a journey whose only result is to demonstrate the security and practical inescapability of one's point of departure.

To a certain extent, then, one sympathizes with Fichte's attempt to rid philosophy of the limitations that Kant had imposed upon it. As we saw in an earlier chapter, his revisions to the Kantian system began with the elimination of the regulative, but unknowable, thing-in-itself. In Fichte's epistemology there is to be nothing external to the self, nothing that restricts or controls the perceiving mind. Fichte answers the question "how is knowledge possible?" by making self-consciousness coinstantaneous with and constitutive of the world, a logical manoeuvre that is based upon the observation that "an object exists only for a subject; and the common ground of both is the reason, the I which perceives itself and its action."²⁵ We are in a position, consequently, to perceive things as they truly are; no longer imprisoned in the sphere of sensory experience, we can rely upon our intellectual affinity with the rational

²⁵ Wilhelm Windleband, op.cit., 581.

principle of nature in order to engage with the objective world.

What needs to be noticed here, especially since it indicates the direction of post-Kantian idealism generally, is that Fichte's revisions to the system of his predecessor are ontological rather than strictly epistemological in character. The self, we will recall, is defined by its initial act of positing a sphere of experience for itself; becoming, or acting, is the essence of the Fichtean ego. Fichte's world picture differs most markedly from Kant's in that it entails a practical interdependency between subject and object, a virtual reciprocity between mind and world that is potentially productive and generative instead of merely formal. As the system is worked out, however, Fichte's dialectic seems to remain potential rather than actual. The relationship he posits between mind and world is undeniably dialectical in the sense that mind creates world and thus can grasp it, know it, assimilate it. Because world is the product of mind, at a certain level, the two are one substance. But the three-step process by which Fichte derives the existence of mind and world--or self and not-self--although it allows for the interaction of the two entities, does not explain how they might be reconciled, or how their union might generate a higher level of being.

In a practical sense, as I argued in Chapter Two, a resolute opposition between world and mind seems inescapable

in the Fichtean scheme. The mind alone is active; the world is merely acted upon. But, like counterweights, the two exist in a state of unresolvable tension, the mind perpetually exerting itself against the world, yet never quite overcoming it. As Fichte describes this relation in The Vocation of Man:

I stand in the center of two entirely opposite worlds: a visible world, in which action is the only moving power; and an invisible and absolutely incomprehensible world, in which will is the ruling principle. I am one of the primitive forces of both these worlds. My will embraces both.²⁶

The self, however, cannot participate in both realms simultaneously. Though it is empowered, as the Kantian consciousness was not, to stand outside itself, to regard itself as object as well as subject, there exists no point of equilibrium at which the perceiving mind can rest assured in its unity with nature. This absence of the very possibility of objective certainty about the phenomenal realm is the real weakness in Fichte's system. As a result of its initial derivation from the self, nature--or the not-self--remains fundamentally inexplicable in objective or rational terms. In Fichte's system, that is to say, the self, as pure subjectivity, is forced to contain or encompass objectivity: the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity can

²⁶ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, The Vocation of Man. Trans. Roderick M. Chisholm. (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 118.

therefore be located only within the self. Thus, as Stanley Rosen has put it, "the 'outer' has objective meaning only within my subjectivity, yet it cannot be genuinely explained or assimilated by the 'inner' or subjective dimension."²⁷

The finite self, under Fichte, then, is condemned to oscillate between two poles, confined in terms of its actions to the world of sense impressions, all the while setting its sights on an inaccessible rational sphere. Fichte's description of the conditions of moral activity makes the practical opposition of the two orders quite plain:

I will as I ought, and the new deed follows. It may happen that the consequences of this new action, in the world of sense, may appear to me not more beneficial than those of the first; but with respect to the other world I retain the same calm assurance as beforeAnd thus should it still appear that, during my whole earthly life, I have not advanced the good cause a single hair's breadth in this world, yet I dare not cease my efforts: after every unsuccessful attempt I must still believe that the next will be successful. But in the spiritual world no step is ever lost....Thus do I live and labor, even here, in my most essential nature and in my nearest purposes, only for the other world; and my activity for it is the only thing of which I am completely certain.²⁸

Mind and world thus appear to exclude one another, even in the act of synthesis that binds them together. The

²⁷ G.W.F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 54.

²⁸ The Vocation of Man, 120-121.

possibility of their reconciliation draws the mind forward, but this potential--like a carrot held constantly just out of reach by its invisible attachment to the mind's own motive force--is, in the last analysis, unattainable. In Fichte's philosophy, then, we find a more developed, but still incomplete dialectic. The system is characterized, in the apt phrase of Martin Jay, by "yearning and frustration,"²⁹ a mood that is only to be dispelled by Hegel's radical reformulation of the Idealist project.

Before venturing into this new territory, it is worth pausing to consider in a slightly less abstract fashion just what the presence or absence of a dialectic indicates about a philosophy generally. What happens when we cease to think dialectically? How exactly can we distinguish between an "incomplete" and a complete dialectic? What is gained or lost, in terms of dialectic, by the shift that takes place from an epistemological to an ontological foundation for philosophy?

It is clear, in the first place, that the original sense of dialectic as a species of dialogue has been considerably modified--though not entirely lost--by the contributions of the German philosophical tradition. In place of the easily grasped dichotomy between an ascending mind and a transcendent realm of Forms that we found in Plato, we seem

²⁹ Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 56.

compelled to accept, under Kant and Fichte, an endless game of tag between an ever expanding consciousness and an ever receding reality. Yet each of the three models we have glanced at, we are led to believe, is in some sense dialectical. These different versions of what is ostensibly one process can be brought into closer alignment, however, when we bear in mind that the central question one can ask about any philosophy is: where does it locate being?³⁰ Being, for Plato, is manifestly exterior to the self: the thinking mind is thus in dialogue with--or moves dialectically toward--something supersensible, something quite independent of consciousness. With Kant and Fichte, by contrast, being is located within the mind--and in this connection it makes no difference whether that mind is conceived of as finite or absolute. Dialectic, therefore, in these systems of thought, must be a process that is interior to consciousness. The mind, of course, can engage in dialogue with its own functions and products, and can constitute itself as separate from them. Some separation is necessary, we recall, if dialectic is to be possible at all. But the fact remains that a process similar to that described by Plato has now been circumscribed by an invisible intellectual boundary beyond which it is impossible to pass.

Once we have accepted the implications of this

³⁰ I am indebted to my friend the late Bruce Lidsten for this formulation.

interiority, two possibilities present themselves. The mind can direct itself, in the first place, toward the objects that "common sense" recognizes as independent of consciousness (though reason suggests otherwise). This first option, Kant is correct to say, is scientific; he is right also in calling it non-dialectical. The second alternative consists entirely of the mind's conscious reflection upon itself. But although the activities of the self-consciously reflecting mind are inevitably dialectical in nature, they result, as we have seen, in either a sort of indeterminacy from which one must retreat (as in Kant), or in a perpetual and fruitless oscillation between two realms of consciousness (as in Fichte). I will return to the apparent dilemma that these alternatives suggest.

A second and perhaps more significant shift in emphasis discernible in the post-Kantian version of dialectic consists of an apparent obliviousness to the linguistic medium from which the process originally took shape. The notion of a productive "exchange" of words that is so central to the dialogues of Plato seems transformed by Kant and Fichte into a sort of hard, involuntary--and silent--encounter between mind and world. Although both thinkers maintain in their different ways that the two entities can be synthesized--indeed are, in some sense, already unified--one suspects that their coming together is envisaged as a conquest rather than a true amalgamation. Mind has been empowered to overcome or

assimilate world; mind acts, and world is merely acted upon; mind, in the last analysis, is a kind of metaphorical envelope that delineates the boundaries of what is knowable and encloses that ground within itself. After Kant, in short, the dialectic ceases to be discursive; having been stripped of its association with dialogue, it becomes a sort of tool or instrument for the conquest of nature.

The imagery that one feels compelled to resort to in describing this new departure in dialectic may itself be indicative of a reformulation of the nature and purpose of the process. It is difficult, for some reason, to think the Kantian or Fichtean versions of the dialectic without summoning up a visual analogy, without picturing a clash of mighty forms. The Platonic dialogue, by contrast, seems actually to resist comparisons drawn from the sense of sight. That this observation is not merely fanciful on my part is indirectly confirmed by the argument of a recent book by Jacques Ellul. Ellul describes two disparate modes of consciousness, one of which takes place in language, the other in images. These are not to be understood as mere variations on a fundamental process called thinking, but as mutually antagonistic opposites: "Experience tends to show that a person who thinks by images becomes less and less capable of thinking by reasoning, and vice versa. The intellectual process based on images is contrary to the intellectual process of reasoning that is related to the

word."³¹ Ellul's subsequent defence of the latter and deep scepticism about the former can be partly accounted for by his anxiety about the effects of modern mass communication, which threatens, he says, to mystify its recipients and render them emotionally and politically manipulable. But in spite of the apparent anachronism that results from placing this specifically modern concern side by side with the discoveries of late eighteenth-century philosophy, Ellul's remarks on the broader consequences of non-dialectical thinking and the extremes to which it tends have an important application to the subject at hand.

At first glance, the dichotomy he establishes between the two kinds of thought strikes one as simplistic. Dialectic is described as the locus of all human interaction; visual thinking, by contrast, is said to annihilate the very possibility of interpersonal activity:

Images leave everyone in an icy silence that can only be transcended by total, intuitive communication. No interchange is involved. The word, however, is the means of human relationship and dialogue, which is the dialectical exercise of experience. The word requires reasoning and the use of analysis and synthesis, even when these are involuntary. Language is this way because of its very structure.³²

But when we examine the philosophical reasons for Ellul's

³¹ The Humiliation of the Word. Trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 214.

³² Ibid., 215-216.

celebration of language at the expense of images, we find that the case is less straightforward than it at first appears. Words are to be preferred to images not because they are more sensitive or reliable, not because they approach truth more closely--but because language is, by definition, uncertain, incomplete, and inadequate. Even though two speakers may use the same linguistic code, the connotations of each signifier within that code will never be wholly shared; words can never be identical with the things or concepts they represent; and the correspondence between word and thought is always only approximate. This self-evident gap between language and meaning leads, inevitably, to further dialogue: "Speech fills the infinite gap that separates us. But the difference is never removed. Discourse begins again and again because the distance between us remains....The word is resumed and repeated because it is never fully explicit or an exact translation of what I have to say. It is never precisely received, never precisely understood."³³ When images are the means of address, on the other hand, the effect is a kind of sterile--and deceptive--confidence: "We are sure of our information. This certainty is direct and does not move gradually from unknown to uncertain and then from uncertain to known." Visual knowledge arrives all at once in a "package" that makes

³³ Ibid., 17.

further inquiry unnecessary.³⁴ Though they prove in the long run to be illusory, the attractions of visual thinking are not easily brushed aside. The crudest of these is the sensation of control that visual thinking provides. Because the evidence of our eyes is so difficult to doubt, we are inclined to believe that knowledge arrived at through visual data is somehow "objective" or "scientific"; it can be quantified, defined, and organized in ways that knowledge in the medium of language cannot.³⁵ The visual observer feels unconstrained by the utterances of previous thinkers: the immediacy of sight makes any sense of obligation to a community or an intellectual tradition easy to overlook. Closely related to the illusion of control, then, is a sense of freedom and autonomy.

One can conclude that if language is, as it appears to be, a reflection not only of history and culture, but also of reason itself, the attempt to escape from language--and with it, the expectations and codes of the past--is nothing less than a radical redefinition of what it is to be human. Because language carries with it this burden of human self-definition, it has certainly at times been seen as imposing an intolerable set of restrictions on thinkers, and perhaps more especially, on literary artists. As both the repository of all previous patterns of thought and as an intellectual

³⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

³⁵ Ibid., 219.

matrix in its own right, language automatically prescribes and limits the range of thought available to the mind. Thus any attempt at self-definition on the part of individuals or cultures must begin in a rupture with language. Yet because of the further connection between language and the foundations of perception itself--Kant's categories of the understanding--the attempt to step beyond language can be, as the title of Hugo Ball's memoir of the Dadaist project suggests, at bottom a rejection of the very conditions of thought. In Die Flucht aus der Zeit (1927), Ball gives an account of his own experiment in creating a poetry without words:

In this kind of 'sound-poetry' (Klanggedichtung) one relinquishes--lock, stock, and barrel--the language which journalism has polluted and made impossible. You withdraw into the inmost alchemy of the word. Then let the word be sacrificed as well, so as to preserve for poetry its last and holiest domain. Give up the creation of poetry at second-hand: namely the adoption of words (to say nothing of sentences) which are not immaculately new and invented for your own use.³⁶

The result of Ball's experiment, and of others like it undertaken by the Symbolists, Futurists, and Surrealists, is

³⁶ Cited in George Steiner, After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 194.

an intentionally static, non-dialectical form of art.³⁷ Its product, sometimes known as "concrete" poetry, is language devoid of rational sense, a poetry "produced solely for the reading eye."³⁸ Whatever may be said to take place in the encounter between readers and the texts of this genre is emphatically not rational: rather, the experience deliberately frustrates the intelligence, and causes the mind to retreat into pure sensation. Thus, in a curious way, the terminal point of the Modernist experiment in art very much resembles the point at which Kant began his investigations: the extreme limit of language, in both frames of reference, would appear to be sensory perception, or the apprehension of the world as object. Bearing in mind, however, the supremacy that Kant assigns to reason over perception (all the while recognizing that, in the Kantian scheme of things, the authority of reason is itself curtailed), the question that

³⁷ Roland Barthes remarks that the "classical" use of language "postulates the possibility of dialogue...establishes a universe in which men are not alone, where words never have the terrible weight of things, where speech is always a meeting with others." Modern poetry, by contrast, "destroy[s] relationships in language and reduce[s] discourse to words as static things.... In it, Nature becomes a fragmented space, made of objects solitary and terrible, because the links between them are only potential....These unrelated objects--words adorned with all the violence of their irruption, the vibration of which, though wholly mechanical, strangely affects the next word, only to die out immediately--these poetic words exclude men: there is no humanism of modern poetry." Writing Degree Zero, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 49-50.

³⁸ Steiner, op. cit., 195. A quotation from Ball's Elefantenkarawane is provided on the same page.

needs to be asked is how such experiences of "purified" sensuous forms can possibly lead to freedom. The refusal to think dialectically, in other words, topples the tyranny of reason only by the desperate expedient of placing some form of mechanistic psychology in its place; it leads to precisely that way of characterizing the mind's activity that Coleridge, speaking of David Hartley's physiological theory of association, referred to as the "despotism of the eye."³⁹ Nevertheless, for reasons which I shall try to make clear, there cannot be much doubt that the Modernist project represents at one and the same time a natural outgrowth of the Kantian philosophy and a rebellion against it.

The dilemma that is posed by Kant's epistemology, as I suggested earlier, consists of an apparently forced choice between "scientific" enquiry (that is, enquiry into phenomena existing independently of the self), and reflection upon the mind's own autonomous activity. The difficulty with the

³⁹ Biographia Literaria, I, 107. Coleridge returns to the negative connotations of purely visual thinking in his Logic: "To emancipate the mind from the despotism of the eye is the first step towards its emancipation from the influences and intrusions of the senses, sensations, and passions generally. Thus most effectually is the power of abstraction to be called forth, strengthened and familiarized, and it is this power of abstraction that chiefly distinguishes the human understanding from that of the higher animals--and in the different degrees in which this power is developed, the superiority of man over man mainly consists. Hence we are to account for the preference which the divine Plato gives to expressions taken from the objects of the ear, as terms of Music and Harmony, and in part at least for the numerical symbols in which Pythagoras clothed his philosophy." Alice D. Snyder, Coleridge on Logic and Learning (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 126-7.

first of these options is that, if we accept the central premise of the Kantian view of knowledge, we must admit that phenomenal objects, insofar as we are able to study them, are themselves already constituted by the mind's own imposition of the categories of understanding. The attempt to reach, let alone to grasp, the phenomenal world as it really is in itself is therefore thwarted from the beginning. The difficulty with the second option, as we have seen, is that it leads inexorably towards a recognition of the mind's own limitations: dialectical process, undertaken with regard to mental operations, serves only to remind us once more of reason's inability to apprehend the things-in-themselves; it thus returns us to the starting point of the investigation. One way of characterizing this dilemma would be to say that, regardless of where the enquiry begins, we find ourselves eventually imprisoned within the mind itself. A second, and perhaps more illuminating way would be to say that the two options are identical in their apprehension of an impassable gulf between mind and world. That is to say: when we begin with scientific enquiry, we end up with mind constructing its own objects; when we begin with the way in which mind constructs its objects, we end up denying or having to doubt the reality of anything outside the mind. The effect of Kant's epistemology is actually to posit a new and seemingly

irreconcilable dualism:⁴⁰ the mind is convinced, by the evidence of its own processes, of a genuine synthesis between subject and object--and yet unable, on all counts, to affirm the reality of this synthesis or to move beyond it.⁴¹

The Modernist experiment in form, as I have argued, is just such an attempt to "move beyond" the paradox that is built into the Kantian version of cognitive activity. As accurate as its analysis of this paradox may be, however, the Modernist movement is hampered by the fact that its goals are themselves a legacy from Kantian philosophy. And these goals, --the individual freedom and intellectual autonomy that Kant's epistemology seems to promise--are in turn contingent upon precisely the intellectual restrictions that Modernism attempts to overthrow. The difficulty, in other

⁴⁰ I am indebted here to the argument of Stanley Rosen in his G.F.W. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom, xiv-xvii.

⁴¹ Herbert Marcuse has made a similar point: "The senses are not merely passive, receptive; they have their own 'syntheses' to which they subject the primary data of experience. And these syntheses are not only the pure 'forms of intuition' (space and time) which Kant recognized as an inexorable a priori ordering of sense data. There are perhaps also other syntheses, far more concrete, far more 'material,' which may constitute an empirical (i.e., historical) a priori of experience. Our world emerges not only in the pure forms of time and space, but also, and simultaneously, as a totality of sensuous qualities--object not only of the eye (sopsis) but of all human senses (hearing, smelling, touching, tasting). It is this qualitative, elementary, unconscious, or rather preconscious, constitution of the world of experience, it is this primary experience itself which must change radically if social change is to be radical, qualitative change." Counterrevolution and Revolt (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 63.

words, is that Kant's assertion of the autonomy of intellect in its constituting of the world is, by definition, only a limited autonomy. The mind is subject always to the conditions under which its ability to constitute the objects of perception is possible in the first place. Mind cannot escape mind. And the conditions that underlie the transformation of perceptions into understanding--the categories of space and time--render the quest for unmediated perception a contradiction in terms.

The attack that is directed against language owes its peculiar vitality to the fact that the structure of language, more than any other medium, reveals the Kantian separation of subject and object (that same inadequacy of concept to thing that Ellul remarks upon), with a clarity that invites subversion. Language reveals the barrier that separates the two; but it is not itself the barrier. The true barrier, as we have seen, is the mind itself. Yet because the proponents of Modernism do indeed accept the conditions imposed by Kant--and they accept them because even a limited autonomy is better than none--their attempt to create "pure" linguistic form, and to present it to the mind for the mind's unmediated apprehension, is doomed to failure.⁴² Or, what comes to the

⁴² The Structuralist understanding of language as an autonomous system of signs quite independent of "real" objects is confounded by the same difficulty. "From the point of view of epistemological theory," writes Fredric Jameson, expanding on a remark in Ricoeur's Conflict of Interpretations, "it is rather to the dilemmas of Kantian critical philosophy that, consciously or unconsciously, Structuralism remains a

same thing, having once accepted the Kantian frame of reference, the opponents of dialectic find themselves with no cognitive ground whatever upon which to base an alternative.

The attempt to escape dialectic, taken to its furthest extreme, culminates in a wholesale intellectual abdication. Signs of the tendency are unmistakable in even the earliest adaptations of the Kantian system. Fichte's reformulation of the dialectical process on ontological rather than epistemological grounds, though it points toward a resolution of the Kantian dilemma, results, ironically, in a still greater disjunction between subject and object, knower and known. The effect is traceable, of course, to Fichte's claim that mind or ego is not merely formally constitutive of external reality, but actually the creator of the world as we know it. But the intellectual cul-de-sac implicit in such a view is apparent as soon as Fichte begins to sketch out the new relationship between the mind and its products:

It is the I which first brings order into dead, formless matter. Regularity comes from man alone, surrounding him and extending as far as he can see, and as he expands the sphere of his observations, order and harmony are further extended as well. His observation assigns to each of the infinitely many and different things its proper place, so that none may displace any other. Human observation holds together the planets, which, thanks to it, constitute just one

prisoner." The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 214.

organized body. Thanks to it, the suns move in their allotted paths.⁴³

It is clear that without the controlling influence of the "I" of observation--and the pun is intentional--the universe would be both chaotic (that is, "formless") and dead. Given the influence of the observer, however, the object itself is transmogrified into a mere appearance or by-product of an all-encompassing self-consciousness; we seem to have no choice but to account for all phenomena solely as extensions of ourselves. Knowledge of the world thus depends, to a degree that is ultimately self-defeating, upon the mind's internal workings. To study nature--as Pope might have said --is to study them.

The impact of this strain of subjectivism on subsequent conceptions of the self is obvious, as are its implications for dialectic and for language. The Fichtean formulation leads--directly or indirectly--to a seemingly inevitable despair about the relationship between reality and language

⁴³ "Concerning Human Dignity," in Daniel Breazeale, ed. and trans., Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 83. My justification for citing this early and highly rhetorical lecture is, as Breazeale has pointed out, that it encapsulates the central problem of Fichte's philosophy: "the initial remarks about the constitutive role of the I and the concluding assertion about spiritual unity serve to indicate what would soon become--and remain--the central problem for any interpretation of the Wissenschaftslehre, and indeed one of the central problems of the history of German idealism generally, namely, what is the relation between the finite, individual conscious subject and the one, absolute I?" (81-82).

(insofar as language can be equated with consciousness) that is quintessentially modern. Hence the observation of George Steiner that "there is an inescapable ontological autism, a proceeding inside a circle of mirrors, in any conscious reflection on (reflection of) language." Hence too his verdict that the only alternative to this consciousness mediated by self-consciousness is "a total leap out of language, which is death."⁴⁴ Speaking in broader and still more arresting terms, Stanley Rosen also seems justified in maintaining that the philosophic systems of Kant and his immediate followers contain the seeds of their own destruction and, when pursued to a logical conclusion, precipitate the destruction of system itself: "The unintelligibility of the first principle of the culminating (pre-Hegelian) system of modern philosophy leads to the unintelligibility or negation of the system as a whole. The entire course of Western thought, in its religious as well as its philosophical forms, terminates in nihilism."⁴⁵

* * *

The groundwork has now been laid for an examination of Hegel's solution to the contradictions of Kantian and post-

⁴⁴ After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation, 110 and 111.

⁴⁵ G.W.F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom, 60.

Kantian dialectic. In a certain restricted sense, the solution he proposes seems anticlimactic--a merely logical adjustment undertaken to correct a merely formal paradox. In a broader sense, of course, Hegel's contribution to German idealist philosophy is radically innovative. Even Marx, despite his serious and far-reaching objections to the Hegelian system, acknowledges that Hegel perceived and reinstated into philosophy a truth that his idealist predecessors had overlooked. Hegel recognized, according to Marx, that the abstractions in which the Kantian philosophy becomes ensnared--its sterile inquiry into the mind's own processes, and the separation it enforces between the mind and the phenomenal world--must be understood not as abstractions, but as real phenomena; these must in turn be explained by any philosophy worthy of the name. Hegel, in other words, takes the self-consciousness of Kant and Fichte in the material rather than the ideal sense. Notwithstanding his subsequent offenses against the materialist world view, for this initial act of intellectual atonement he has Marx's unqualified approval:

Thus, that which above all constitutes the essence of philosophy, the alienation of man knowing himself, or alienated science thinking itself, Hegel grasps as its essence.... What other philosophers did, that is, to conceive separate elements of nature and of human life as phases of self-consciousness and indeed of abstract self-consciousness, Hegel knows by doing

philosophy; therefore, his science is absolute.⁴⁶

Volumes--entire libraries, perhaps--have been written on Hegel's dialectic. In the interests of compression, the emphasis here will have to be on the strictly formal changes he makes to the dialectics of his immediate precursors, on the logical apparatus itself, rather than the consequences of the Hegelian system for philosophy and history. This is not to suggest that the importance of Hegel, even within the context of this chapter, can be conveyed in a description of his logic alone; but, since the intention is eventually to return to Coleridge and his conception of dialectic, I want to postpone discussion of the wider implications of Hegel's thinking until an explicit comparison between the two can be made.

The logical starting point of Hegel's dialectic, then, is the notion of opposition between consciousness and world--or subject and object--that follows from Kantian epistemology. In Fichte, this opposition had become a matter of mutual definition: the limit of the other is the beginning of self, and vice versa. But definition is also negation: in Kantian terms, as we have seen, to think the object is to encompass it within the realm of thought, and thus to annihilate it as an independent entity. Self-

⁴⁶ "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy," in T.B. Bottomore, ed. and trans., Karl Marx: Early Writings (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 203.

consciousness pure and simple, as we have also seen, has the similar effect of cancelling out consciousness of the objective world. As I understand it, Hegel's first point about this state of affairs is that these activities produce identical results: both entail the assertion of self (or spirit) against or within an objective realm. His second point is that the act of assertion, once it is regarded as an objective phenomenon in its own right, is not an annihilation but a transformation or recreation of the object, through the medium of subjectivity, into a new and more fully actualized entity. This basic Hegelian inversion is explained succinctly by Stanley Rosen: "The negation of the object is thus its preservation as a mode of my consciousness; in one sense or another, it is part of my satisfaction. One could therefore say that the negation of the object gives significance to it and to the subject, which has been satisfied in this objective way."⁴⁷

Hegel's own phrase for this new departure in dialectical thinking is "the negation of the negation"; the same idea is expressed in his early formulaic description of "life" as "the union of union and non-union."⁴⁸ It will readily be seen that the coming together of such logical oppositions

⁴⁷ G.F.W. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom, 156.

⁴⁸ "Fragment of a System" (1800) in T.M. Knox, trans. and Richard Kroner, ed., Early Theological Writings (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 312.

puts dialectic itself upon an entirely new footing; the union of opposing terms does not result in their mutual cancellation or indifference, as had been the case with Kant and Fichte, but in the reincorporation of negativity itself into a larger, more comprehensive whole.⁴⁹ The Hegelian system thus incorporates, elevates, and conjoins all the elements that had previously been held together only by the uncertain theoretical glue of Kantian epistemology; it transforms a merely theoretical synthesis into one that is active and actual. On the one hand, as Hegel puts it in his Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

All other sciences are concerned with the knowledge of finite things; they are finite kinds of knowledge. Reason (Vernunft) is their principle; it is the correlation of finite subjects and given objects. [But] reason functions without self-knowledge. Even when objects, such as laws, duties, and values exist in consciousness for reason, they are still particular objects over against the consciousness which is aware of them.⁵⁰

His own dialectic, on the other hand, does not ignore or attempt to extenuate the gap that these modes of thought had

⁴⁹ The verb Hegel habitually uses to express the effect of interpenetration without mutual cancellation is "aufheben" --to annul, to preserve, to sublimate; M.H. Abrams has called the term "the most consequential pun since Christ said, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my church.'" Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), 230.

⁵⁰ Trans. Gustav Emil Mueller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), #5, 70.

created between subject and object. Rather, it makes use of--and is fuelled by--the very idea of their separation: the notion of an active union in a special sense requires an opposition which is to be overcome. Thus:

The dialectical movement, in contrast to reason, cancels such one-sided determinations. Dialectically they are related to that which they are not. It is this negative relation which defines them. They themselves require their opposites, and are determined by them.⁵¹

Still, it is difficult to make clear the precise nature of the change that has occurred here. Hegel himself admits that the step he has taken, when understood as a mere form of words, appears to invite the charge of obscurantism: "Historically, dialectic is considered a sophistic trick which arbitrarily and deliberately produces confusion in conception."⁵² But it is not in fact to words or concepts alone that Hegel refers when he speaks of negating the negation. Had his contribution to dialectic been merely logical, merely a tinkering at arm's length with the terms of the Kantian system, we could hardly avoid supposing that the upshot would be the cancellation of system itself, a kind of "abstract void" or "abyss," as Hegel says, "into which everything is thrown." The error that is responsible for misconceptions along these lines is none other than an

⁵¹ Ibid., #15, 81.

⁵² Ibid., 82.

imprisonment within the finite, inflexible set of oppositions dictated by the Kantian bifurcation of mind and world. "The Absolute," in other words, "appears as 'nothing' to those finite positions which want to cling to their pseudo-absolute claims."⁵³ A just appreciation of what Hegel has done requires, instead, a stepping back from the machinery that he is realigning--and an attendant willingness to connect rather than merely juxtapose mental activity with activity in the world. The action requires considerable daring, yet, as Hegel declares elsewhere, to refuse it is a form of intellectual sterility: "It is the cowardice of abstract thought to shun sensuous presence in monkish fashion."⁵⁴ Only when we have readmitted the world in its actuality to our logical inferences about the world does it become possible to see that mind or spirit can indeed encompass the objects it contemplates without annihilating their existence. This act of encompassing, furthermore, leads to a form of inter-penetration between mind and world that the Kantian system was unable to envisage. "The identity of speculative comprehension is the concrete unity of all essential opposites in the world itself."⁵⁵ The negation of the

⁵³ Ibid., #16, 83.

⁵⁴ Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, trans. E.B. Speirs and J.B. Sanderson (London: Kegan Paul, 1895), 101.

⁵⁵ Encyclopedia of Philosophy, #16, 84.

Kantian negation, that is to say, constitutes an ontological as well as a logical leap forward.⁵⁶

But if, in reconstituting the dialectic upon new logical grounds, Hegel is also making a claim about the world, we are justified in asking explicitly: what claim is he making? There are several ways of approaching this question. For the moment, I would like to come at it indirectly--that is, by stressing the major points of difference between his dialectic and those of Kant and Fichte. Although it proceeds logically out of the systems of his predecessors--and, in a certain sense, simply makes explicit an identification between the internal and external activities of consciousness that was already implicit there--Hegel's dialectic seems to me to be different in three distinct respects.

⁵⁶ Emil L. Fackenheim's gloss on the apparently paradoxical notion of the negation of the negation is worth quoting at this point: "The enigma concerning Spirit appears because Hegel asserts...that Spirit has the power of what he calls overreaching. Spirit, first, tolerates the other-than-spirit beside itself. Secondly, it can and does overcome this side-by-sideness, by absorbing the other-than-Spirit. Thirdly--this must not be overlooked--it reconstitutes the other in its otherness even while absorbing it. If in absorbing the other Spirit simply destroyed its otherness--if the 'union' which is the 'result' did not preserve the 'process' throughout which there is 'nonunion'--the philosophy affirming the result would be a one-sided monism opposed by an equally one-sided pluralism. If it failed to absorb the other-than-Spirit there would be no Spirit but at best only spirits, side-by-side, and immersed in, what is not Spirit. The upshot is that only if Spirit has overreaching power can there be an all-comprehensive, yet radically open system, rather than either a one-sided system opposed by other one-sided systems, or else so radical an openness to the world as to dissipate all philosophy into it." The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 20.

It is, in the first place, fundamentally and formally reciprocal in a way that the dialectics of Kant and Fichte (and even the system of Schelling) could not be. The reciprocity of Hegel's dialectic consists in its recognition of the interdependency of subject and object, a relationship that becomes unmistakable once we have seen the implications of the activity of the self in an objective or historical light. In asserting itself within nature, spirit not only assimilates nature to itself, but also imbues nature with itself: the exertions of spirit, in other words, have external as well as internal consequences. In the early fragment "Love," the nature of this mutual definition of self and other is described:

In fact, nothing is unconditioned; nothing carries the root of its own being in itself. [Subject and object, man and matter,] each is only relatively necessary; the one exists only for the other, and hence exists in and for itself; the one shares in the other only through that power's favour and grace. Nowhere is any independent existence to be found except in an alien Being; it is this Being which man has to thank for himself and for immortality, blessings for which he begs with fear and trembling.⁵⁷

Admittedly, the example is complex. But that the "other" should be, in this case, the ultimate Other--God, or Spirit itself--serves only to underline the central point that both

⁵⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, Early Theological Writings, trans., T.M. Knox; ed., Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 304.

participants in the exchange are endowed with selfhood and will; neither one, as would have been the case in the Kantian model, is an inert substance passively available to the incursions of the other. Nor, as in Fichte, do we have here a case of self-definition by mere negation: Hegel is saying a good deal more than that the I is everything that is not the not-I, and vice versa. On the contrary, his notion of reciprocity is far more active, far more voluntary than that. The preservation of the identities of both self and other is vital to the ontological status of each: the recognition of one in the other is a self-recognition as much as it is a recognition of the otherness of the other. "Each sees the other doing the same thing it is doing. Each does itself what it demands of the other. And for that reason it does what it does only insofar as the other does the same. One-sided action would serve no purpose." ⁵⁸ Or, as Donald Forbes has expressed the same point, "Spirit finds itself in its other, and is a perpetually re-enacted process of seeking and finding itself in its other which cannot mean abolishing the otherness of the other: the other must remain other for Spirit to be at all."⁵⁹ Thus it is that, in an immediate and

⁵⁸ Phenomenology of Spirit, trans., A.V. Miller; ed., J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 242. Cited in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hegel's Dialectic, trans., Christopher P. Smith (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 64.

⁵⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), x.

concrete way, subject and object must be reconceived as aspects of one another, and their encounter regarded as an exchange very much along the lines of the verbal exchanges of the Platonic dialectic.

In the second place, as is well known, Hegel's dialectic is historical. This is to say that it applies the notion of the progressive interpenetration of subject and object to the actual character of existence, or, more precisely, that it explains the world as the enactment of dialectic. "World-conceptions," as he says in the Encyclopedia, "unfold themselves in self-consciousness or in the form of self....These world-contents make it impossible for a logic of philosophy to be merely formal; if we wish still to employ the word matter, the genuine matter of philosophy is at the same time formal self-differentiations of the Absolute." The objective sphere, in other words, is to be understood as a process, and one which includes and consists of, rather than merely permits, the incursions of the thinking subject. World history thus becomes a totality which lives in and through its particular manifestations.

That history should, consequently, be understood as the sphere of conflict between opposing forces--and that the tendency of conflict should be always toward reunification: this is the insight that makes Hegel's version of dialectical movement so dramatically different from Kant's. What needs to be stressed as well is that reunification is brought about

not through the conquest or nullification of one force by the other, but by their assimilation at a higher level of existence or understanding. "To Hegel," as Martin Jay has put it,

the apparent dualisms naturalized by Kant were merely way-stations on the journey toward self-recognition and reconciliation that was the progress of Absolute Spirit through time. Contradiction, fragmentation, estrangement, alienation were real and necessary aspects of that progress.... When the journey was completed, the contradictions

and dualisms that had manifested themselves along the way would be reconciled, but the type of reconciliation achieved would also include their preservation.⁶⁰

But abstract explanations, by themselves, are vague and uninformative. In order to make the modus operandi of Hegel's dialectic less nebulous, I would like to consider an instance of its unfolding--an instance that is not drawn from history itself, but from literary history, the eventual destination of this present investigation. Hegel's "Lectures on Aesthetics" are not remembered as the pinnacle of his philosophical system; indeed, as Rene Wellek observes, his literary theory, perhaps because it is here expressed in a form that the lecturer himself did not revise for publication, "appears in part as a relapse into older rationalistic attitudes and concepts." But Wellek finds

⁶⁰ Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 55

something original and valuable in the historical concreteness of Hegel's interpretation of artistic activity: "It is made completely historical, identified with historical process itself. Art theory and art history are thus implicated with each other..."⁶¹ For this reason, in spite of the slightly mechanical quality of Hegel's analysis, the example that follows will serve our purposes well enough.

The distinction Hegel makes between classical and romantic art in Section III of the Aesthetics is informed by his understanding of art in general as the embodiment, in sensuous form, of Spirit itself. He thus distinguishes these two modes of artistic endeavour with reference to their degree of success--or their relative adequacy to objective Spirit. Classical art, on the one hand, is identified as having achieved exemplary beauty; it represents a completely satisfying objectification of spirit. By its very objectivity, or spiritual autonomy, however, classical art announces its difference from spirit; inevitably, it points beyond itself, and towards that which it so perfectly hypostatizes. As a result of this implicit opposition, "the simple solid totality of the Ideal is dissolved and it falls apart into the double totality of (a) subjective being in itself and (b) the external appearance, in order to enable

⁶¹ A History of Modern Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), II, 320.

the spirit to reach through this cleavage a deeper reconciliation in its own element of inwardness."

Romantic art, by contrast, is already attuned to the inwardness of spirit: "at the stage of romantic art the spirit knows that its truth does not consist in its immersion in corporeality; on the contrary, it only becomes sure of its truth by withdrawing from the external into its own intimacy with itself and positing external reality as an existence inadequate to itself."⁶² What Hegel means by the interiority of spirit, in this context, turns out to be the self-consciousness of the individual subject as it constitutes itself objectively in history. Whereas classical art concerns itself with the divine rather than the human, with the already-completed as opposed to the indeterminate, the content of romantic art is precisely the indecisiveness of lived history. The subject in romantic art, then, is torn between its two conflicting aspects: the self as it appears to itself, and the self as it exists as an object for others. Romantic art therefore becomes the sphere of "struggle," "battle," "grief," "death," "the mournful sense of nullity [and] the torment of spirit and body."⁶³ Thus, with this formulation of the text as a locus of conflict--as a replication of the endeavours of spirit to know itself in

⁶² G.W.F. Hegel, Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, trans., T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 518.

⁶³ Ibid., 522.

history--we have a useful illustration of the way Hegel's dialectic operates in the microcosm and in the macrocosm simultaneously.

Hegel's discussion of the actual embodiment of conflict in the romantic work of art is still more illuminating in this regard. Within the second "phase" of romantic art (characterized as the phase of "Chivalry"), two feelings or drives are particularly relevant.⁶⁴ The first of these is "honour," a concept which Hegel defines as "the personality as such and in its idea of itself, the value of which the individual ascribes to himself on his own account."⁶⁵ Thus understood, honour is potentially infinite in scope: just as there can be no arbitrary limit imposed on internal self-awareness, in a similar fashion, the individual's choice of the precept or principle with which she will represent herself to herself is unrestricted. The point about honour, then, is that although it appears objective--almost, indeed, as the psychological equivalent of Eliot's "objective correlative"--it is, on the contrary, the subjective ethical mechanism of self-definition. "Therefore," as Hegel puts it, "in every case the man of honour always thinks first of himself; and the question is not whether something is absolutely right...but whether it suits him, whether it

⁶⁴ Hegel in fact lists three terms, but the third, "fidelity," appears not to contribute anything essential to the dialectic he is describing.

⁶⁵ Aesthetics, 558.

befits his honour to concern himself with it or to stay aloof from it."⁶⁶

The antithesis of "honour," not surprisingly, is "love." Under the sway of this principle, the impulse is to dismiss the problem of self-valuation, to submerge the self entirely in the other, to relinquish absolutely all of one's claims to independent self-awareness. One feels compelled, in Hegel's words, "to have one's knowledge of oneself solely in the consciousness of the other."⁶⁷ "In this respect," he continues--and the observation that follows must constitute one of the very few occasions on which Hegel permits himself to state the obvious--"love and honour are opposed to one another."⁶⁸

Kant would have left it at that; indeed, in the Critique of Judgement his treatment of two vaguely similar oppositions, the "beautiful" and the "sublime," is devoid of any suggestion that the two might coalesce or jointly produce a third term. The hallmark of Hegel's dialectical process, however, is the reconciliation of opposing tendencies. And, by extension, the hallmark of the romantic consciousness (in Hegel's account, at any rate), is the discovery or creation of a common ground or meeting place where its conflicting impulses can be synthesized. The opposition between love and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 559.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 562.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

honour in the romantic work of art can thus sometimes be transformed into a higher unity. That is to say: as well as embodying the conscious rejection of internal self-actualization, and the decision to orient the self towards the other, love can at the same time entail a full recognition of the "infinity of the self" that is asserted under its natural opposite, the impulse of honour. The point about the potential synthesis of these two impulses, however, is that it must take both the subjective and objective dimensions into account; it is only by being comprehensive that the act of "overreaching" can preserve each of the opposites in their integrity. Thus,

this recognition is only genuine and total when my personality is not respected by others merely in abstracto or in a concrete, separate, and therefore restricted instance, but when with my whole subjective personality --with all that it is and contains--I penetrate the consciousness of another as this individual, as I was, am, and will be, and constitute the other's real willing and knowing, striving and possessing. In that event this other lives only in me, just as I am present to myself only in her; in this accomplished unity both are self-aware for the first time and they place their whole soul and world in this identity.⁶⁹

The place at which this reconciliation takes place, though Hegel does not say so explicitly, can be found nowhere but within the sphere of history--or within the romantic text itself as a material reflection of the process of history's

⁶⁹ Ibid.

unfolding. Hegel's clear preference for the romantic mode of consciousness is owing to his conviction that it, unlike the classical mode, is inherently dialectical, and therefore a more informative record of the historical self-actualization of spirit. The dichotomy he establishes between the static perfection of the classical art form, and the conflict and drive towards reconciliation he sees as typical of the romantic text exemplify, as lucidly as anything can, his conception of history not only as materiality informed by intellect--since this, by itself, would be only to reproduce the Kantian dichotomy--but as the productive interpenetration of each by the other.

The third and perhaps the most important distinguishing feature of Hegel's dialectic is its claim to encompass rather than overturn the systems of previous philosophers. Within the history of German idealist philosophy, the claim is unusual, if not unique. As Emil Fackenheim has remarked,

Hegel radicalizes tendencies manifest in his predecessors. These exalt one standpoint of life at the expense of others, and the philosophy bound up with the exalted standpoint is in simple opposition to all other philosophies. In the case of Hegel, the 'life' in question is all of life, not one of its standpoints onesidedly exalted; and the philosophy he puts forward does not so much oppose other philosophies but encompass and transfigure them.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Emil L. Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 22.

We might say, then, that in a curious way Hegel's extension of the Kantian dialectic exactly confirms his new understanding of history. While the structural opposition of mind and nature characteristic of that model has been preserved, the notion of opposition has itself been opposed by the addition of a new term from outside the model; the product of this second opposition is a dialectical system that incorporates the original, yet elevates it to a higher level of significance.

From our present point of view, however, Hegel's claim to comprehensiveness is significant primarily because it suggests the potential scope of dialectical understanding. In the previous chapter, where the conceptual problems inherent in this all-encompassing notion of intellectual activity were discussed, I cited the phrase of H.S. Harris, "truth is the whole," as an accurate maxim for Hegel's undertaking. To this I would now like to join the paradoxical observation that, in spite of its potential for comprehensiveness, the dialectical enterprise is quintessentially open-ended. Something of this lack of constraint can be heard in Hegel's acknowledgement of the experimental or experiential dimension of philosophical work:

The object and method of philosophy are not known beforehand; the deployment is philosophy itself. This is the perplexity of its form: On the one hand, philosophy must immediately begin with itself; on the other

hand, it is a mediation of all things. This necessary unity of immediacy and mediation is the Concept of philosophy.⁷¹

And yet, to begin with oneself while history proceeds is to commence a game of cat and mouse that will end only when history itself comes to a close. For history, as long as it continues to unfold, will relentlessly inform self-definition with new perspectives--which must then be dialectically "mediated" according to the original vision. This is not to suggest that the project of philosophy, of self-knowledge, or of any kind of knowledge, is futile; but the point needs to be made that history is not yet over and that, as long as it continues, we remain within it.⁷²

⁷¹ "Preliminary Note," Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

⁷² As Hegel puts it in the Philosophy of Right, "what experience and history teach us is this, that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted according to rules that might have derived from it. Every period has such peculiar circumstances, is in such an individual state, that decisions will have to be made, and decisions can only be made, in it and out of it." Cited in Paul Feyerabend, Against Method (London: Verso, 1978), 17.

Chapter Six

Otherness

Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.

--M.M. Bakhtin

Coleridge would probably have taken comfort from Bakhtin's assertion. As a dialectician, he was hampered to an unfortunate extent by an awareness of the unwieldiness of nature--including human history--and by his consciousness of the delicacy of thought incumbent upon its interpreter. He was convinced, nevertheless, of the existence of a basic affinity between the processes of mind and those of external nature. And, as we saw in the previous chapter, his dialectic differs from that of Plato and resembles those of his German near-contemporaries in that it envisages the possibility of attaining to truth by relying upon this affinity. The direction of his thinking, in short, was always towards solidifying the bond--which suggests his further conviction that one can come to know oneself through nature, and know nature through one's self-knowledge. As he insists in Chapter 12 of the Biographia (and at least

implies on many other occasions), the two tasks must be performed simultaneously:

The postulate of philosophy and at the same time the test of philosophic capacity, is no other than the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF! ... And this at once practically and speculatively. For as philosophy is neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of BEING altogether, its primary ground can be neither merely speculative nor merely practical, but both in one.¹

But although the dictum occurs in the midst of an enthusiastic assessment of Kant's and Fichte's contributions to philosophy, it must be pointed out that Coleridge approaches the problem of "how we can know" somewhat differently than they. He is, in the first place, intent on a palpable rather than merely epistemological synthesis between mind and world.² And, unlike Kant in particular,

¹ Biographia Literaria, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, 252. The last sentence of the passage, as the editors point out, bears a strong resemblance to a statement in Schelling's Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus; and, indeed, the four paragraphs that follow this utterance are quoted almost verbatim from his System des transscendentalen Idealismus.

² It is interesting to note, with J.A. Appleyard, that "[a]bout December 1803 the notebooks are filled with lengthy extracts from Kant, several of which bear upon the nature of the will and its influence upon the moral life. A brooding dissatisfaction with Kant's analyses, however, is apparent in most of the entries." Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), 101. One of these entries (also cited in Appleyard) seems to have some bearing on the epistemological question at hand: "In all inevitable truths, e.g. that the two sides of a [triangle] are greater than the third, I feel my will active: I seem to will the Truth, as well as to perceive it. Think

Coleridge seems to resist the idea that this synthesis is guaranteed--or even already "given"--by the imposition of the mind's categories of organization upon the world. For Coleridge, then, observing and interpreting nature are not acts of interrogation, nor a passive receptiveness to sensation, but a sort of dialogue between the object and the self, conducted on terms of equality. More subtly still, as the following Notebook entry suggests, the role that is played by the self in its exchange with the world includes the task of classifying and interpreting its own responses to the utterances of nature, even as they are forthcoming. The process is completely reciprocal:

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phaenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature/It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is Logos, the Creator! <and the Evolver!>³

This bit of seeming introspection, it is worth emphasizing,

of this!" Notebooks, I, 1717. (Also significant in this connection is entry 1758 which insists upon the necessity of testing a philosophic system by an act of "Self-introition.")

³ Collected Notebooks, II, 2546. Cited in George Whalley, "On Reading Coleridge," R.L. Brett, ed. Writers and their Background: S.T. Coleridge (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971), p. 3; and in J.A. Appleyard, op. cit., p. 118.

can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, it is the self that does the "seeking" or "asking," a state of affairs which suggests that internal conceptions are somehow prior to external phenomena. On the other hand, since apparently "new" phenomena can produce the sense of a "dim Awakening" of forgotten inner truths, the impulse that initiates the synthesis can equally well be said to come from outside.

Coleridge's mention of "symbolical language," "Word," and "Logos" as the objects of desire, indicates that his dialectic anticipates an actual locus for the conjunction of the material and the intellectual orders. This meeting ground emerges in many formulations as the symbol or Logos.⁴ It is fair to say, consequently, that the unity of mind and nature, though their affinity may be felt or suspected, is not simply automatic. Rather, their synthesis seems to take place in a sphere to which neither wholly belongs, but in which both participate. This unification is conducted

⁴ Coleridge's letter to William Godwin of September 1800 gives some indication of the process by which he had arrived at this formulation: "I wish you to write a book on the power of words, and the processes by which human feelings form affinities with them....and to solve the great Questions--whether there be reason to hold, that an action bearing all the semblance of pre-designing Consciousness may yet be simply organic, & whether a series of such actions are possible--and close on the heels of this question would follow the old 'Is Logic the Essence of Thinking?' in other words--Is thinking impossible without arbitrary signs? &--how far is the word 'arbitrary' a misnomer? Are not words & parts & germinations of the Plant? And what is the Law of their Growth?--In something of this order I would endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words & Things, elevating, as it were, words into Things, & living Things too." Collected Letters, I, 625-6.

through the production of a third term, a "tertium aliquid" as Coleridge was frequently to call the result of the dialectical process.⁵ And, in his most contained and coherent utterance on the subject of the symbol, Coleridge makes it clear that its reconciliation of the two terms occurs in such a way that neither is cancelled by or swallowed up in the other. A symbol, that is to say, "always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative."⁶ What we find in this principle, in short, is Coleridge's version of the negation of the negation. The "space" that is created by the symbol, a kind of "interface,"⁷ located between the two original entities, is at once the amalgam and the product of their two identities.

⁵ Notably in Biographia Literaria, where the term refers to the imagination.

⁶ The Statesman's Manual in Lay Sermons, ed. R.J. White (London and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 30.

⁷ I am borrowing the term from George Whalley. See his Poetic Process (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953; rptd. Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 27-32. "Let us imagine that man and nature (or 'subject' and 'object') meet and embrace each other at an interface, the interface being a pliable and permeable membrane extending infinitely both upwards and on either hand. This membrane is to be regarded as a medium joining, not separating, subject and object; as I conceive it the interface has depth, some spatial characteristics--one can 'move about in' the interface. In actual life, subject and object interpenetrate each other, but since for purposeful action we must pretend that subject and object can be separated, the interface also represents this assumed separation" (27-28).

It is clear that the theory of the text or poem to which this conviction gives rise bears a striking resemblance to the Hegelian conception of the "romantic" work of art as the site of conflict and reconciliation.⁸ Certainly Coleridge's most familiar pronouncement⁹ on the balance or reconciliation of opposites that comprises the aesthetic experience suggests a notion of dialectical "overreaching" along distinctly Hegelian lines. Not only is the poet, "described in ideal perfection," equated with the soul in a state of perfect organization, "with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity;" but the poem, which issues from the poet's "synthetic and magical power" of imagination, is also understood as greater than, and in a sense as overtaking, the sum of its parts. Thus, while each of the series of pairs of "discordant qualities" that Coleridge has listed is held in balance in the poem, the reader is also, perhaps simultaneously, conscious of the subordination of a second (and higher) order

⁸ But the idea of the poem as a locus of reconciliation is not, of course, peculiar to Hegel. In his heavily Schellingian essay "On Poesy or Art," Coleridge describes art as "the mediatress between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation." "To make the external internal, and the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature,--this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts." The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed., Henry Nelson Coleridge (London, 1836), I, 216-230. Cited in M.H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism, 269).

⁹ In Biographia Literaria, II, 16-17.

of antitheses one to another: "art to nature," "manner to matter," and "admiration" of the poet to "sympathy" with the poem. The key note of the discussion, it needs to be emphasized, is the subordination of one set of faculties to a higher, more intelligible unity.

The three sentences into which Coleridge packs all this activity are, one is forced to admit, a syntactical jungle. But the point he is striving to make emerges plainly enough in the extract he then quotes from Sir John Davies's Nosce Teipsum: Of The Soule of Man and the Immortalitie Thereof (1599). The application of the lines, he makes it clear, is to the "poetic imagination." Since this coda to the famous definitions has received very little critical attention, it seems worthwhile examining it in the light of the interpretation I am proposing.¹⁰ Like the soul, then, the imagination

...turns
 Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange,
 As fire converts to fire the things it burns,
 As we our food into our nature change.

The transformation or sublimation that is taking place in each of these three instances, as in alchemy, raises a baser substance to a higher or purer state. The substance is not

¹⁰ An important exception is Kathleen Wheeler, Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 114-115. James Engell also mentions the passage in The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 351.

destroyed: we do not destroy food by eating it, but turn it into energy; fire can be said not to consume, but to convert the objects it touches. Thus, (although there is no reliable information on the subject of corporeality in the afterlife) each of the examples suggests the preservation or use of the lower form in the higher. This preservation of the initial form, what is more, is confirmed through the universalization of each particular substance in its next incarnation. From "gross matter," imagination abstracts the "form" or "quintessence"; these she assimilates to "her proper nature." Then, in a subtle way, the implicit purpose of this imaginative synthesis--spiritual edification--is shown to replicate the progression from corporeal to spiritual in miniature:

Thus does she, when from individual states
 She doth abstract the universal kinds;
 Which then re clothed in divers names and fates
 Steal access through our senses to our minds.

Indeed, it would be difficult to conceive of a more illuminating description of dialectical overreaching than the series of examples we are provided in Coleridge's illustration.¹¹

What is less than clear, however, is whether Coleridge

¹¹ Wheeler regards the poem, in a similar way, as an analogy of the reader's experience of reading the Biographia itself: "Here we have an exact description of subject changing object back into its own nature, and of the synthetic process by which nature is transformed into mind, as a text must be taken up inot the mind of the reader to be assimilated into his experience." (114)

is at all confident or consistent in his uses of this feature of the dialectic. The matter is complicated by the vastness of the number of fragments and references that appear throughout his letters, notebooks, and published works, like fugitives from a philosophical system that is in progress, but never quite completed.¹² The system is described by various epithets: the polar logic, the dynamic philosophy, the constructive philosophy, the doctrine of opposites and contraries; Coleridge's habitual shorthand for these philosophic (and sometimes scientific) concerns makes it difficult to tell whether they are one or many--or whether, in combination, they are homogeneous enough to support the hypothesis that I am entertaining. Of course there is no shortage of critical commentary on Coleridge's use of the dialectic, but very little that explores the specific, characteristically Hegelian feature that concerns us here.¹³

There cannot be much doubt that at times the concept of the reconciliation of opposites gave him a good deal of difficulty by itself. In one significant (though fairly

¹² A good example is Notebook entry 1725 which lists, under the heading "EXTREMES MEET" a series of eleven instances of opposites in nature and human society which tend towards reconciliation. E.g., "Sameness in a Waterfall, in the foam Islands of a fiercely boiling pool at the bottom of the Waterfall, from infinite Change." Whether or not the propensity to collect items of this sort (out of which Coleridge says he might "have made a Volume") suggests a thoroughly developed dialectic is a unanswerable question. Collected Notebooks, I.

¹³ Footnote to be inserted on what little there is: Abrams, McFarland, Barfield, etc.

early) instance, Coleridge admitted--perhaps somewhat rhetorically--to finding it difficult to say "whether this theory contradicts the Reason or the Senses most: for it is alike inconceivable and unimaginable." The remark comes at the end of a lengthy footnote to a discussion of the distinction between "opposites" and "contraries" in Essay XIII of the Friend. Speaking of the apparent congruence of the spheres of law and religion, he finds himself arguing that, in such a case, there is a distinction between the two which must at all costs be preserved.¹⁴ This is so in spite of the fact that "[t]here is, strictly speaking, NO PROPER OPPOSITION BUT BETWEEN THE TWO POLAR FORCES OF ONE AND THE SAME POWER." Since they are opposites, but not contraries, law and religion would, one would think, properly enjoy a balanced or dialectical relationship in which neither one can engulf or extinguish the other. And, true to form, Coleridge does account for the nature of this relationship by reverting to a familiar metaphysical principle: "EVERY POWER IN NATURE AND IN SPIRIT must evolve an opposite, as the sole means and

¹⁴ Coleridge, of course, insisted upon the difference between division and distinction. M.H. Abrams points out that "Coleridge's basic opposition is between a sterile juxtaposition of divided, and therefore dead and inert, elements...and a living process in which true polarities ...depart from one another, but only in order to remarry and so to generate a new entity in which both components survive, but on a higher level of organization." Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971), 267-8. Nevertheless, the example of law and religion does not appear to allow for the possibility of reconciliation in anything like the terms we would expect.

condition of its manifestation: AND ALL OPPOSITION IS A TENDENCY TO REUNION."¹⁵

He is forced to acknowledge, however, that it is only too possible to collapse duality into singleness, to obliterate the distinction between the polarities and perceive only their similarity. The consequences of such thinking can be dire: "We have all of us learnt from History, that there was a long and dark period, during which the Powers of and Aims of the Law were usurped in the name of Religion by the Clergy and the Courts Spiritual: and we all know the result. Law and religion thus interpenetrating neutralized each other; and the baleful product or tertium Aliquid, of this union, retarded the civilization of Europe for centuries."¹⁶ The conceptual difficulties in which he has entangled himself by this admission are obvious: if opposition implies a tendency to reunion, how is it that reunion itself--in the case of law and religion, at least--should be so deplorable? How is it that their dialectical product, a "tertium aliquid" of lineage similar to that of the imagination, should at this point be described as "baleful"?

The solution to the conundrum lies in the notion of overreaching, in negating the negation that has been produced, by encompassing the conflict and raising it to a

¹⁵ The Friend, I, 94.

¹⁶ Ibid., I, 95.

higher level. Yet Coleridge, though he comes very close, is not in this instance quite able to articulate the principle. Law and religion overlap, he states, insofar as both recognize cases where a mechanism for the redress of wrongs done to oneself is provided, and yet neither one compels the subject to make use of the mechanism. Law is merely neutral in such situations: it neither enjoins retributive justice, nor condemns it. Religion, on the other hand, "commands" the believer to "forego" the action; it is, therefore, the higher power of the two, and comprehends the lesser within itself. "Nay, so well was this understood by our Grandfathers," Coleridge remarks in passing, "that a man who squares his conscience by the Law was a common paraphrase or synonyme of a wretch without any conscience at all."¹⁷ But the example is not quite pointed enough to offset the confusion that hangs over the argument: though the concept of overreaching is dimly discernible, just below the surface, it does not emerge in plain words.

A comparable indeterminacy prevails in chapters 12 and 13 of the Biographia where Coleridge, albeit with the unacknowledged help of Fichte and Schelling, launches a concerted attack on the problem. His preparation of the ground for a final assault in Chapter 13, though all but his initial postulate is directly traceable to one or the other

¹⁷ Ibid., I, 95.

of these philosophers,¹⁸ is a perfectly straightforward demonstration of the logical necessity for the negation of the negation. The second of the two relevant paragraphs gives a clear enough indication of the direction the argument must take:

The counteraction then of the two assumed forces does not depend on their meeting from opposite directions; the power which acts in them is indestructible; it is therefore inexhaustibly re-ebullient; and as something must be the result of these two forces, both alike infinite and both alike indestructible; and as rest or neutralization cannot be this result; no other conception is possible, but that the product must be a tertium aliquid, or finite generation. Consequently this conception is necessary. Now this tertium aliquid can be no other than an interpenetration of the counteracting powers, partaking of both.¹⁹

But in all likelihood because his sources themselves lack the solution to the problem, Coleridge again leaves his readers baffled as to the meaning of the "interpenetration" he is describing. That the forces conjoin is clear; that they do not "neutralize" one another is unequivocally maintained; that there is a product, an issue, a "tertium aliquid...partaking of both" is unmistakable. All the component terms of the negation of the negation are present--and yet, the sum is not worked out. Instead, the analysis

¹⁸ See Engell and Bate, ed., Biographia Literaria, I, 299, n. 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., I, 300.

simply breaks off, interrupted, unconvincingly, by the fraudulent letter from "a friend," itself an eloquent admission that Coleridge could not complete the demonstration. Nevertheless, the letter itself contains an image that is curiously apposite to the problem at hand. In the words of his imaginary correspondent, "you have done too much, and yet not enough. You have been obliged to omit so many links, from the necessity of compression, that what remains, looks...like the fragments of the winding steps of an old ruined tower."²⁰

The significance of the allusion to a spiral staircase will perhaps not be instantly apparent. Coleridge's preoccupation with circles and spirals throughout his life has often been discussed, notably by John Beer²¹ and, in greater detail, by H.J. Jackson.²² These geometrical figures appear in a variety of guises and applications throughout his writings, and are often adduced as evidence of cosmic design or integrity, as well as the homogeneity of natural and intellectual processes. As Jackson has argued, the "ascending spiral," a favourite image in Coleridge's later works, "represents a great advance over earlier formulations":

²⁰ Ibid., I, 302-3.

²¹ Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence (London: Macmillan, 1977), 214-18 and passim.

²² "'Turning and Turning': Coleridge on our Knowledge of the External World," PMLA 101 (1986), 848-56.

Like the traditional chain or ladder, it was capable of representing gradations within the essential unity and continuity of nature; but it improved on them in other ways. It was dynamic, not static: stemming from God's original creative act, all the phenomena of nature from the simplest to the most complex could be seen to evolve as the unstable products of a perpetual process of reconciliation of opposites.²³

As an image of progression with ascent, the vertical spiral is no less applicable to the process of acquiring and organizing knowledge; Coleridge made sophisticated use of it, as Jackson observes, in both the 1818 revision of the Friend and his Aids to Reflection (1825), as an analogue for the mind's habit of surveying the material it attempts to encompass, by executing higher and higher circles around it. Perhaps his most striking use of the figure occurs in the former of these two works, where it serves both as a metaphor for the learning process and as an explanation of the alternation of abstruse argument with more reflective writing (or "landing-places") in the arrangement of the work itself:

Among my earliest impressions I still distinctly remember that of my first entrance into the mansion of a neighbouring Baronet, awfully known to me by the name of THE GREAT HOUSE... Beyond all other objects, I was most struck with the magnificent stair-case, relieved at well proportioned intervals by spacious landing-places, this one adorned with grand or shewy plants, the next looking out on an extensive prospect through the stately window...while from the last and

²³ Ibid., 850.

highest the eye commanded the whole spiral ascent with the marbled pavement of the great hall from which it appeared to spring up as if it merely used the ground on which it rested. My readers will find no difficulty in translating these forms of the outward sense into their intellectual analogies...²⁴

The didactic strategy that is depicted here cannot quite be classified as a negation of the negation. Coleridge has presented his readers with no direct contradictions to be reconciled in the course of their reading; nevertheless, the purpose of the "landing-places" is to provide an interval of intellectual leisure preparatory to the next stage in the ascent, as well as a new vantage point from which to assimilate what has gone before. It would not, I think,²⁵ be incorrect to describe the methodical progression of the Friend as belonging to a system that reflects upon and encompasses itself as one of its own terms.

As we have seen, it is this ability to survey the ground one has covered from a higher, more commanding position that is so conspicuously absent from the abortive proof of the "dynamic philosophy" offered in the Biographia. Though the image of the spiral staircase makes an early appearance at the end of Chapter 13, it seems clear that by the time the work went to press in 1815, Coleridge had not yet conceived

²⁴ The Friend, I, 148-9. Cited in Jackson, op.cit., 853.

²⁵ Jackson disagrees that there is anything notably Hegelian about Coleridge's use of the spiral, "although Coleridge and Hegel certainly had sources in common." op.cit., 853.

of the notion of "overreaching" as applicable to systems of thought themselves. By 1818, however, as the more developed structural analogy of the ascending spiral suggests, he was working his way towards a more satisfactory understanding of the way in which intellectual opposites can be reconciled through their preservation at a higher level of existence.

One final example from the 1818 Friend will suffice to show the extent to which Coleridge eventually managed to integrate the notion of reciprocity between mind and world with the characteristically Hegelian idea of overreaching. In the "Treatise on Method", which we examined in a previous chapter, Coleridge has occasion to turn to what Martin Heidegger has called "the fundamental question of metaphysics"--that is to say, to the question of "Why are there essents, why is there anything at all, rather than nothing?"²⁶ Having observed that the possibility that "There is nothing! or, There was a time when there was nothing!" is logically self-contradictory, Coleridge, in customary fashion, identifies a pair of opposites to be dialectically reconciled: "Not TO BE, then, is impossible: TO BE, incomprehensible."²⁷ What is interesting about the analysis that follows this antithesis is that it succeeds in raising the method that Coleridge had previously used only in

²⁶ An Introduction to Metaphysics, trans., Ralph Manheim (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 1.

²⁷ The Friend, I, 514.

epistemological inquiries to the level of a fully ontological dialectic. The historical consciousness of the logical opposition between being and non-being that Coleridge has set down is thus made the foundation for an equally historical reconciliation of the two. It was this apparent paradox of being and nothingness,²⁸ he says, that "in earlier ages seized the nobler minds, the elect among men, with a sort of sacred horror. This it was which first caused them to feel within themselves a something ineffably greater than their own individual nature. It was this which, raising them aloft, and projecting them to an ideal distance from themselves, prepared them to become the lights and awakening voices of other men, the founders of law and religion, the educators and foster-gods of mankind."²⁹ The negation that

²⁸ See Herbert Read's remark on this passage that, "writing before Kierkegaard was born, Coleridge had already formulated the terms of an existentialist philosophy--the Angst or sacred horror of nothingness, the Abyss or 'chasm, which the moral being only..can fill up,' the life in the idea which 'may be awakened, but cannot be given,' the divine impulse 'that the godlike alone can awaken.'" Coleridge as Critic (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), 30.

²⁹ The Friend, I, 514. Jerome McGann has commented on Coleridge's propensity for regarding the agency of historical development as intitutional (embodied, as here, in law and religion) rather than individual: "First, Coleridge never ceased to believe that ideas shaped historical events--that thought always preceded and determined action rather than the other way round. Second, even as Coleridge (like Hegel) saw real human history flow unselfconsciously out of the precedent Idea, he lost his conviction that this pattern could be surely grasped, even unselfconsciously, in the single inspired individual. The macrocosm was firmly fixed in the realm of transcendent Ideas, and its historical continuance could be counted on through the institutional forms. The more fundamental idea, however, of the

obtains between being and non-being is, by being raised to consciousness and acted upon, itself negated. Moreover, this negation of the negation is explicitly identified with the notion of Absolute Spirit, at once historical and supersensible:

The power, which evolved this idea of BEING, BEING in its essence, BEING limitless, comprehending its own limits in its dilatation, and condensing itself into its own apparent mounds--how shall we name it? The idea itself, which like a mighty billow at once overwhelms and bears aloft--what is it? Whence did it come? In vain would we derive it from the organs of sense: for these supply only surfaces, undulations, phantoms! In vain from the instruments of sensation: for these furnish only the chaos, the shapeless elements of sense! And least of all may we hope to find its origin, or sufficient cause, in the moulds and mechanisms of the UNDERSTANDING, the whole purport and functions of which consists in individualization, in outlines and differencings by quantity, quality, and relation. It were wiser to seek substance in shadow, than absolute fulness in mere negation.³⁰

Coleridge manages here, at last, to articulate what the interpenetration of self and other actually signifies in dialectical terms--the goal he had been struggling to reach in the Biographia. If Being, that is to say, is not created or constituted by the self, if it does not originate with the world, if "to no class of phenomena or particulars can it be referred," then it can be located only in the conjunction of

determining primacy of the creative person, collapsed under the pressures which Coleridge's own mental pursuits placed upon it." The Romantic Ideology (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 105.

³⁰ Ibid., I, 514-515.

self and world, in subject and object simultaneously: "he for whom it manifests itself in its adequate idea, dare as little arrogate it to himself as his own, can as little appropriate it either totally or by partition, as he can claim ownership in the breathing air, or make an enclosure in the cope of heaven. He bears witness of it to his own mind, even as he describes life and light: and, with the silence of light, it describes itself and dwells in us only as far as we dwell in it."³¹

Coleridge is clearly working his way toward an explicitly Christian formulation of God as Absolute Spirit. His reference to the Christian Incarnation ("man in his idea, and as subsumed in the divine humanity, in whom alone God loved the world")³² is philosophically justified in terms that Hegel himself might have used. In the unique moment of the Incarnation, we find precisely the antiphonal relationship between mind and nature that characterizes the Hegelian dialectic. And this relationship issues in the revealed truth of Christianity, a "tertium aliquid" which both comprehends and overreaches the terms it unites. Trans-subjectivity, or consciousness of the universal law, that is to say, is shown to be both historically concrete in and of itself, and constitutive of spirit manifesting itself in the particulars of nature. The universal and the particular, in

³¹ Ibid., I, 515.

³² Ibid., I, 516.

Coleridge's reckoning, are thus thoroughly involved one with the other; and the only thing necessary for the completion of the system is a recognition, on the part of the individual, of precisely this interdependency:

If then in all inferior things...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 of every species, becomes a system in and for itself, a world of its own--if we behold this economy everywhere in the irrational creation, 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 designed to move progressively towards that divine idea which we have learned to contemplate as the final cause of all creation, and the centre in which all its lines converge?³³

A case can certainly be made that the Incarnation, as well as being the final cause of Coleridge's "dynamic philosophy," is the centre at which all the lines of his thought in general converge. The notes that he later appended to this passage in his copy of the 1818 Friend (and to which Henry Nelson Coleridge assigned the date 1829) make the significance he attached to the central Christian moment more explicit--and more explicitly Hegelian. I quote his

³³ Ibid., I, 517.

rather lengthy commentary in full in order to demonstrate Coleridge's ultimately secure grasp of the way in which pairs of oppositions give rise to or are overreached by higher unities:

To affirm that Reason is--is the same as to affirm that Reason is Being; or that the true Being is Reason....Hence, the Reason or Law of a thing constitutes its abstract Being, the ground of its Reality.

And yet this same IS, is the essential predicate of the correspondent Object of this Power. What must we infer--Even this--<that the object and subject are one--> that the Reason is Being, the Supreme Reason, the Supreme Being--and that the antithesis of Truth and Being is but the result of the polarizing property of all finite mind, for which Unity is manifested only by corresponding opposites. --Here do we stop? Woe to us, if we do! Better that we had never begun. A deeper yet must be sought for. Even the Absolute Will, the GOOD, the superessential source of BEING; and in the eternal Act of Self-affirmation, the I AM, The Father--who with the only-begotten Logos (WORD, IDEA, Supreme Mind, Pleroma, the Word containing every word that proceedeth from the mouth of the Most Highest) and with the Spirit proceeding, is the One only God from everlasting to everlasting.³⁴

Thus, as well as being an instance--the crucial instance--of the polar logic in operation, the Incarnation is at the same time, and most importantly, its ultimate explanation and justification. It is the point at which self and world, being and knowing, identity and difference all unite. It represents the decisive overcoming of all previous--and now

³⁴ Ibid., n. 2 and 3

merely apparent--negations; it is the paradigmatic act of aufheben, the one that, by both precept and example, makes all other instances of overreaching humanly and philosophically conceivable.

As the terminal point of Coleridge's metaphysical and aesthetic theories, the doctrine of the Incarnation also provides us with a focus around which to organize a summary of the similarities between his dialectic and Hegel's. In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (1827), Hegel represents the historical appearance of absolute idea in human form as, in one important respect, entirely independent of the speculative philosophy with which it coincides and which it appears to confirm. The Incarnation, that is to say, is exceptional insofar as it is certain; it does not admit of doubt. Its certainty is derived, in other words, not from a philosophical, but an historical foundation:

The necessity [that the divine unity shall appear] is not first apprehended by means of thinking; rather it is a certainty for humanity. In other words, this content--the unity of divine and human nature--achieves certainty, obtaining the form of immediate sensible intuition and external existence for humankind, so that it appears as something that has been seen in the world, something that has been experienced.³⁵

It is equally important, Hegel goes on to say, that the event

³⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. One volume edition, The Lectures of 1827. Ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans., R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson, J.M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 454.

be understood as historically unique. Since, in the larger sense, "[t]he substantial unity [of God and humanity] is what humanity implicitly is," it is vital that the specifically Christian manifestation of Spirit be distinguished by its unification of God and humanity in the person of "just one human being," one who "is not present in the others, but only in one from whom all the others are excluded."³⁶ These two premises then lead Hegel into a consideration of the historical Jesus; and, as he intimates, it is precisely when dwelling upon this historicity that one can perceive the redemptive or reconciling properties of the Incarnation:

The relationship [of believers] to a mere human being is changed into a relationship that is completely altered and transfigured by the Spirit, so that the nature of God discloses itself therein, and so that this truth obtains immediate certainty in its manner of appearance.... On the one hand, the death of Christ is still the death of a human being, a friend, who has been killed by violent means; but when it is comprehended spiritually, this very death becomes the means of salvation, the focal point of reconciliation.³⁷

Like Hegel, Coleridge was well aware of the significance of the historicity of the Incarnation within any metaphysical account of its function as a synthesis of spirit and matter. Given Coleridge's early affiliation with the

³⁶ Ibid., 455.

³⁷ Ibid., 467.

doctrines of Unitarianism,³⁸ we might expect him in fact to stress the human attributes of Christ at the expense of the divine, but this, it is generally agreed, was never the case.³⁹ If anything, the reverse is true: as Kathleen Coburn observed in her annotations to the Malta notebooks of 1805, "Coleridge's return to orthodox Christianity is through the Logos, not the Gospels, a metaphysical rather than a historical approach." Indeed, as he appears to recognize in a notebook entry of February 1805, the stumbling block to his acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity seems actually to have been the place of the historical Jesus in this mysterious unity:

No Christ, No God! This I now feel with all
its needful evidence, of the Understanding:
would to God, that my spirit were made [to]
conform thereto--that No Trinity, no God....
O that this Conviction may work upon me and
in me and that my mind may be made up as to
the character of Jesus, and of historical
Christianity as clearly as it is of the Logos

³⁸ See Basil Willey, "Coleridge and Religion," in R.L. Brett, ed., Writers and Their Backgrounds: S.T. Coleridge (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971), 224-7, and Thomas McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 174-9. Coleridge describes himself at this period in his life as "one of those who believe our Lord to have been the real son of Joseph, and who lay the main stress on the resurrection rather than on the crucifixion." Biographia Literaria, I, 180.

³⁹ See, for example, J. Robert Barth, S.J., Coleridge and Christian Doctrine (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), 130; David Jasper, Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker: Inspiration and Revelation (London: Macmillan, 1985), 142-3; and Basil Willey, op. cit., 242.

and intellectual or spiritual Christianity.⁴⁰

That this particular prayer was answered is evident in many of Coleridge's subsequent writings on the figure of Christ, which display a full recognition of the interdependency of the divine and human aspects of the Incarnation. Of many possible examples, I select one that seems especially vehement in its defence of the historical foundations of Christianity. In his marginalia to Johann Gottfried Herder's Von der Auferstehung (1794), probably composed in 1816 or later, Coleridge takes exception to the implication that the probability of life after death is intellectually discoverable with or without the support of Christianity, the historical evidence of which depends upon faith, not reason:

A strange inconsistency does this appear to me. We are to found our trust in a future state on a History: and yet according to Herder a History so disguised in Symbols, allusions, and short and long Allegories, that of the two main Facts, which give their value to all the others, Herder believes in the literal sense neither the one nor the other and does not even supply a Hint, what we are to believe, i.e., historically, instead of it. --If we are to understand any thing, Christ neither really died <on the Cross,> nor really ascended to Heaven. What then became of Him? --If it be replied, we neither <know> nor care biographically, then

⁴⁰ Collected Notebooks, II, 2448. Quoted, with the annotation, in Basil Willey, op. cit., 239. For Coleridge's later account of these early doubts and their cause, see Biographia Literaria, I, 204-5.

how can your Faith be founded on a
History--⁴¹

Like Hegel, Coleridge would insist that the ineluctable fact about the central Christian doctrine is that it really took place. Like Hegel, he perceives it not merely as a symbol or a proof of philosophical soundness, but as a material, historical event.

According to Hegel and Coleridge both, however, the spiritual efficacy of the Incarnation--as well as its metaphysical significance--depends not merely upon a conceptual understanding of its simultaneously transcendent and historical character, but also upon the receptiveness of the individual believer to its redemptive nature. Moreover, both thinkers maintain that this receptiveness manifests itself in a spiritual dialectic between self and other, soul and God, which is, as we have come to expect, fully reciprocal. As Hegel puts it, in order to benefit spiritually from the Incarnation, the individual must venture beyond a passive appreciation of the empirical significance of God's intervention in history, and constitute his or her understanding of it as itself the product of the reconciliation it has accomplished. The human subject, that is to say, "to the extent that it is related to this truth, arrives precisely at this conscious unity, deems itself

⁴¹ Marginalia, ed. George Whalley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, 1079.

worthy of this known unity, brings this unity forth within itself, and is fulfilled by the divine Spirit." Up until this point, an opposition has prevailed between the self and the ultimate otherness of Incarnate Spirit, a "difficulty" which "consists in the fact that the subject is different from absolute spirit." But with the acknowledgement of one's indebtedness to the reconciliation of God and human history for one's comprehension of that same event, "this difference is removed, and its removal happens because God looks into the human heart, he regards the substantial will, the innermost all-encompassing subjectivity of the human being, one's inner, true, and earnest willing."⁴²

Coleridge's observations on the human contribution to the spiritual reconciliation that takes place by virtue of the Incarnation, though not as conceptually intricate as Hegel's, are remarkably similar in substance, particularly in the emphasis that is given to the human will. In his Aids to Reflection, as David Jasper has noted, he insists upon the necessity for divine revelation to be authenticated, given voluntary assent, in the soul of the recipient: "Make a man feel the want of it; rouse him, if you can, to the self-knowledge of his need of it."⁴³ As in Hegel, the consciousness of one's willingness to be saved, and one's

⁴² Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, 473-4.

⁴³ Cited in Jasper, Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker, 116. Track down the original.

active participation in the process, have the effect of obliterating the ontological barrier between the self and the divine other.⁴⁴ Thus, later in the same work, Coleridge maintains that "there is that union between [the redeemed] and their Redeemer, that they shall rise by the communication and virtue of his rising: not simply by his power...but they by his life as their life."⁴⁵ And an even more telling instance of the importance that Coleridge assigned to reciprocity between the divine and the human in the act of redemption can be found in his highly confessional letter to J.H. Green of 25 May 1820:

[W]hatever is less than God, may act on, but cannot act in, the Will of another--Christ must become Man--but he cannot become us, except as far as we become him--& this we cannot do but by assimilation: and assimilation is a vital real act, not a notional or merely intellective one.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ David Simpson has found an interesting application of the voluntarism implicit in this model. See his discussion of the relationship that exists between writer and reader in Coleridge's prose: "The effort is not wholly on the part of the reader, by any means. The writer must work hard to introduce that disguised guiding hand which will be able to suggest the desired meaning without setting the reader's will in opposition. Coleridge was well aware of the dialectics of communication, and the need to insinuate, rather than announce, the meaning he might wish to pass on." Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1979), 26.

⁴⁵ Quoted in J. Robert Barth, op.cit., 144.

⁴⁶ Collected Letters, 1235. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), V, 48. Quoted in J. Robert Barth, op.cit., 144.

The necessity of mutual recognition, of historicity, and of the negation of contradictions through overreaching, though these ideas crystallized for Coleridge rather late in his career, seem undeniably present in his mature metaphysical reflections. They seem also, as more than one analyst of his late theological writings has remarked, thoroughly consistent with the earlier, less explicit accounts of imaginative and literary activity.⁴⁷

References to Hegel in critical assessments of Coleridge's thought, nevertheless, are few and far between.⁴⁸ This absence can in part be accounted for by Coleridge's obvious indebtedness to Schelling, and to his notoriously frequent plagiarisms from that source. When the origin of Coleridge's idealist tendencies is so apparent and so easily documented, there seems no need to look further afield. But Coleridge, as we have seen, is not wholly in agreement with

⁴⁷ See, for example, David Jasper, Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker, 122, 143; Basil Willey, "Coleridge and Religion," 222; James S. Cutsinger, "Inside Without Outside: Coleridge, the Form of the One, and God," in David Jasper, ed., The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism (London: Macmillan, 1985), 66.

⁴⁸ Kathleen Wheeler's Sources, Processes, and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria contains some hints of his affinity with Hegel (see pp. 107 and 196), as does Owen Barfield's What Coleridge Thought (see especially pp. 31, 137, 259, and 261). But it is an indication of the extent to which the connection between the two has been overlooked that J.H. Muirhead can acknowledge that "Coleridge had already fought his way by his principle of trichotomy beyond the limitations of Kantian logic" without so much as mentioning Hegel. Coleridge as Philosopher (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930), 105.

Schelling on many important matters, nor is he a true follower of Fichte. His objections to the former can be summarized in the loaded term "pantheism;" his scepticism about the latter, though more complex in motivation, boils down to a healthy distaste for the ubiquitousness of the Ego in the Fichtean scheme of things. And, to put fundamental things last, Coleridge is continually anxious to avert the bifurcation of reality that seems to result from the Kantian epistemology--a flaw in the master system that neither Fichte nor Schelling ever completely corrected.

The seemingly obvious inference--that Coleridge, both in his habitual cast of mind and in his particular philosophical goals, resembles Hegel far more than than he resembles any of Hegel's predecessors--has, one hastens to add, been recently entertained by Thomas McFarland. But, having acknowledged the "close similarity" to Hegel's characteristic style of many of Coleridge's unpublished examples of the principle of polarity (for example, those collected under the heading "Extremes Meet" in the 1803 Notebook), McFarland cautions against the too hasty assumption of "a generalized congruence" in their "mental styles."⁴⁹ Not only did Hegel differ from Coleridge in "the dynamic or progressive emphasis of his logic,"⁵⁰ but also in the marked contrast between his

⁴⁹ Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 294.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 295.

meticulous argumentation and the "characteristic hiddenness of the latter's process of thought."⁵¹ McFarland clinches his argument by pointing to the many preoccupations, opinions, and interests that Hegel had in common with Schelling and Schelling's disciple, Oken. When so many philosophic tropes or illustrations are shared by so many, and when prior claims are so difficult to sort out, McFarland continues, there seems no particular reason to draw a parallel between Coleridge and Hegel. Indeed,

[f]ar more important than chronological awareness is the realization that the various enunciations of such doctrines in this period...constitute a kind of cultural flood, one in which divisions into before or after have little relevance, and where creeks and branches of individual discovery or originality...all flow inevitably to a common mingling in the larger current of the age.⁵²

But what is made to follow from this easily (and exhaustively)⁵³ substantiated claim is a kind of reductio ad absurdum of the long debated question of Coleridge's allegiances. "[N]either Coleridge nor any other philosopher can be said 'on his own terms' to have thought anything at all. Not only the philosophical language he uses but the formulations of the very problems he confronts are given him by his intellectual culture. If there were no culture, there

⁵¹ Ibid., 296.

⁵² Ibid., 301.

⁵³ Ibid., 302-307, 308-337, passim.

would be no thought."⁵⁴ Thus, if Coleridge did not learn a particular doctrine from Schelling, he learned it from Schiller or Goethe or Hegel--or, he acquired it as a result of his experiences as one swimmer among many in the "cultural flood." And, to put it plainly, there appears to be little to be gained by pursuing the question.⁵⁵

McFarland is building, at least in part, on the work of M.H. Abrams who, in 1971, argued that the dialectical theme that appears to permeate the writings of romantic poets and philosophers, the "striking parallels" we can discover "in authorial stance and persona, subject matter, ideas, values, imagery, forms of thought and imagination, and design of plot or structure," were part of a generalized secularization of biblical theology that took place after Kant.⁵⁶ Abrams's method is typological and literary rather than philosophical; it comes as no particular surprise, then, that the figure of the "circuitous journey" which "ends in the discovery that the goal of the search was its point of departure" should occupy the attention of many of the poets and thinkers of the age, Coleridge and Hegel among them.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁵⁵ Laurence S. Lockridge has remarked in passing on the scholarly inadequacy of a reference to Weltanschauung "as a methodological justification." The Ethics of Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 81.

⁵⁶ Natural Supernaturalism, 11-12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 227, 269.

My strategy in this chapter has been the reverse of both Abrams's and McFarland's. Rather than concentrating upon similarities among the German idealist philosophers--which, one readily agrees, are so many and so intertwined as to make categorical claims almost impossible--I have tried to concentrate upon a single, and readily identifiable, intellectual strategy--that of the historically integrated dialectic. My feeling is that, as a dialectician, Hegel is appreciably different from Kant and from Fichte--and that Coleridge is different from Kant and Fichte in a similar way and for similar reasons. My reluctance to accept Abrams's main contention thus arises out of a distinction that cannot be made within his strictly metaphorical understanding of the dialectical process--a distinction, that is to say, between the Kantian and the Hegelian traditions in dialectic along the lines of the old nominalist-realist controversy.

Kant and Fichte, to my mind, represent a dry, abstract, and imperfectly psychological account of human being-in-the-world. Neither one seems to recognize the weight of existence, the actuality of one's encounter with nature. Hegel's insistence on the historicity of dialectic--not merely its epistemological validity, but its ability to account for existence itself--is an instance of his difference from them. Similarly with Coleridge: his complaints against Fichte (and also against Kant) spring from a very similar awareness of the actuality of history, and,

within historical experience, of the congruity between the personal and the philosophical. For Coleridge, as, I suspect, for Hegel, the two dimensions had palpably to confirm one another in any credible philosophical account of being. Both Coleridge and Hegel are rebelling, in other words, against a philosophical tradition that takes no account of the authentic human need for a confirmation of one's private convictions in the world of human experience.

There is no room in the systems of either Kant or Fichte for the actuality of the Other; but otherness was at the heart of Hegel's dialectic (for without reciprocity between self and other there could be no productive exchange, and no means by which the contradictions generated by their encounter could be overcome). The notion was important to Coleridge in a more personal, though no less significant respect: it seems impossible for example to read the notebook entries addressed to Sara Hutchinson,⁵⁸ to notice the cross-fertilization between nature and imagination in "Dejection, An Ode," or observe the intensity of the similar use, in the late notebooks, of Christ as an ultimate Alterity⁵⁹ without being aware that this alternate self

⁵⁸ See the evidence assembled by George Whalley, Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson and the Asra Poems (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1955), 88-89.

⁵⁹ Cf. Jean Hagstrum's observation that "Coleridge, a believing man, gave a religious dimension to love. How could he have escaped doing so? If love is like poetry in its uniting of contraries, both become logically related to incarnational Christianity. Thus the point of invoking

against which he could define himself was no mere metaphor. "My nature requires another Nature for its support," he writes in 1803, "and reposes only in another from the necessary Indigence of its being."⁶⁰

Hegel and Coleridge, unlike their immediate predecessors, are moderns. Both refuse to be content with a merely formalistic answer to questions about the relationship between self and world: both insist on speaking what appears to be unspeakable. Both endeavour to be organic and systematic simultaneously; and both are convinced that the organic is the systematic, and that system (to be worthy of the name) must be organic.

Christianity was never to divorce love from life but to give it sanction in human life--in marriage, friendship, the family and art....The important thing to see here is that Coleridgean religion idealizes love not by separating body and soul but uniting them integrally with great respect for each element in the union." The Romantic Body: Love and Sexuality in Keats, Wordsworth, and Blake (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 35.

⁶⁰ Collected Notebooks, I, 1679.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Towards a Dialectical Criticism

Scholarship has, of course, always been a technique--a means through which men could come into the presence of the most serious questions. But when the thought that there are such questions has become dim in the positivist night, then scholarship becomes a technique serving no purpose beyond itself, and supposedly justifying its own existence.

--George Grant

O gentle critic! be advised. Do not trust too much to your professional dexterity in the use of the scalping knife, and tomahawk. Weapons of diviner mould are wielded by your adversary: and you are meeting him here on his own peculiar ground, the ground of Idea, of Thought, and of Inspiration.

--Coleridge

The possibility of a direct connection between Coleridge's philosophical description of the act of joining mind and nature, on the one hand, and his practical criticism on the other, was raised and then postponed in Chapter Three of this thesis. The reason for the postponement was, in large measure, that so many specific uses have already been found for Coleridge's philosophical utterances that his own grasp of their relevance to the practice of criticism has come to seem rather beside the point. But, in the second

place, within a truly dialectical conception of the relationship between consciousness and nature such as I have attributed to Coleridge, the notion of a one-sided application of theory to practice is scarcely a viable one. This is true in part because the philosophical position he espouses refuses to assign a priority either to mind or to nature; it therefore offers no independent position from which it is possible to interrogate the artifact. Thus, were literary critics and theorists actually to accept Coleridge's "act of joining" as efficacious, the result would be to undo rather than shore up the kind of criticism which relies upon the separation instead of the union of object and subject--the kind of criticism, in other words, with which the North American academy has become familiar.

As we have seen, the very reverse has tended to be the case. The majority of twentieth-century criticism that acknowledges a debt to Coleridge has accentuated his Kantian tendencies at the expense of the more nearly Hegelian, dialectical thinking that, in the last analysis, supersedes and softens his critical formalism. In this general agreement to hypostatize the shape of Coleridge's literary thinking, I detect no appreciable difference between the "uses" that the New Criticism found for Coleridge and those that more recent literary theorists are now discovering. Most seem to turn to Coleridge, when they turn to him, for a critical technique. In the case of Richards and the New

Critics, the technique is essentially scientific; in the case of deconstructionist criticism, to paraphrase Jerome Christensen, it is a marginal technique, an immethodical technique, but a technique nevertheless. The extensive mining of Coleridge's works for the remnants of Kant and Fichte that they contain may well be symptomatic of a widespread tendency among recent critics to attribute to Romantic writers habits of mind and of literary style that more properly belong to the eighteenth century. Kant and Fichte, of course, are far more heavily invested in the Enlightenment glorification of human rationality--as well as its quest for the freedom of the will--than they are affiliated with the Hegelian world-view that Coleridge himself endorses. As Marshall Brown has argued, even deconstruction has its roots in the eighteenth century rather than the nineteenth.¹

None of this should be surprising. The pursuit of technique, a legacy (as I have tried to show) of the Fichtean

¹ To quote only part of his evidence: "Derrida made his reputation with a book on Rousseau. Deleuze began with books on Kant, Hume, and Spinoza. Foucault's thesis was on Kant, Serres's on Leibnitz. Barthes's renown dates from his book on Racine--a neoclassicist, marginally an Enlightenment figure, certainly no Romantic. One could go back, to Levi-Strauss's debt to Rousseau, to Bachelard's beginnings as a critic of eighteenth-century science. And one could extend the list: Kant is seminal for Lacan and Lyotard, Casanova for Roustang. Kant and Rousseau straddle the eras, but hardly the centuries; the impulse for all these thinkers comes from Enlightenment and eighteenth-century authors." "Deconstruction and Enlightenment," The Eighteenth Century: Thought and Interpretation 28 (1987), 259-260.

revisions to Kant's philosophy, is one of the most salient features of modern Anglo-American criticism. According to Mark Schorer, "when we speak of technique...we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it."² As I have argued in this thesis, however (and as Schorer seems tacitly to admit), technique does not exist in a vacuum; by its very nature, technique lends itself to the scrutiny analysis, and potentially the mastery of the object to which it is applied. One of the results of this engrossment with technique, in any case, has been to create Coleridge the Formalist--a figure who has attracted more complaints of inconsistency, contradiction, and technical imprecision than the record of his writings seems to call for.

I do not mean to suggest that Coleridge's philosophical investigations were productive of no practical or technical insights whatsoever--nor, indeed, that philosophers such as he ought not to soil their hands in the messy business of textual criticism. He thought otherwise himself, as his mention of "the application of these principles to purposes

² "Technique as Discovery," The World We Imagine: Selected Essays (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1968), 123.

of practical criticism"³ in volume two of the Biographia makes clear. Coleridge's critical approach, however, is not at all what it has frequently been made out to be. Without wanting, at this stage, to venture into the large corpus of his practical criticism, I would nevertheless like briefly to defend him against the familiar charge that there exists an unbridgeable gap between his philosophical and his critical pronouncements.⁴

The point at which the two come together is surely in Coleridge's insistence that the work of art is a mediator or link between nature and human consciousness. On the one hand, the work of art is the product of mimesis; it replicates, or reduplicates, the process by which nature brings forms of being into existence. On the other hand, it is also a formal structure which invites evaluation in terms

³ Biographia Literaria, ed., James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 19. Italics added.

⁴ The most dogmatic of Coleridge's critics on this point must be Norman Fruman: "If there is any bridge between a philosophical standpoint like [his] and practical criticism, it was not found by Coleridge. Neither in the Wordsworth chapters, nor in his 'Philosophic definitions of a Poem and Poetry with scholia'... does Coleridge even so much as glance back at the massive if skeletal foundations he had so laboriously patched together. Contemporary literary criticism is distinguished especially by its minute attention to particular texts, to concrete detail, to specific verbal relations within particular poems--procedures wholly foreign to Schelling's aesthetics. As a foundation for the practical discipline that is modern literary criticism, the formal philosophy of the first volume of the Biographia is therefore not only irrelevant because it is fragmentary, it is conceptually irrelevant." Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel (New York: George Brazillier, 1972), 180.

of the relationship between its parts and the whole that governs them. Ideally, the formal properties of the work will exhibit "multeity in unity,"⁵ the quality by which Coleridge distinguishes the beautiful from the merely pleasing. As he explains the double nature of art in a lecture of 1818 (sometimes known by the title "On Poesy or Art"):

As soon as the human mind is intelligibly addressed by any outward medium, exclusive of articulate Speech, so soon does Art commence. But please to observe, that I have layed stress on the words, human mind--excluding thereby all results common to Man and all sentient creatures--and consequently, confining it to the effect produced by the congruity of the animal impressions with the reflective Powers of the mind--so that not the Thing presented, but that which is re-presented, by the Thing, is the source of the Pleasure. --In this sense Nature is to a religious Observer the Art of God--and for the same cause Art itself might be defined, as of a middle nature between a Thought and a Thing, or, as before, the union and reconciliation of that which is Nature with that which is exclusively human.⁶

The conception of art as the interpenetration of mind and nature (a conception that is by no means unique to

⁵ Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature, ed. R.A. Foakes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), II, 220.

⁶ Ibid., II, 218. The lecture was first published, as Foakes points out, "with omissions, additions, and rewriting," in The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 4 vols. Ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (London, 1836), I, 216-37.

Coleridge)⁷ allows the formal criteria by which art had traditionally been judged to be reconciled with a theory of poetic mimesis. Given that the apparent disjunction between the two dimensions of the work of art had been, in several guises, the problem upon which English Neoclassical criticism had foundered,⁸ Coleridge's formulation of the link between the two can be read as inaugurating a new way of thinking about literature.

Coleridge thus enables literary critics to discuss such artistic properties as symmetry, method, construction, and poetic justice without implying that identical qualities are to be observed always and everywhere in nature itself. The work of art is an imitation, but not a direct copy of the world we inhabit. Like nature, the finished product of human activity will exhibit evidence of intellectual design; like natural objects, too, works of art are examples of organized form.

This last set of observations, admittedly, comprises one of the commonplaces of literary theory. What is less than commonplace, however, is the full realization of a balance between the two aspects of literary inquiry within critical

⁷ James Engell discusses the use of the concept by Tetens, Herder, Coleridge, and Schelling in The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 303-307.

⁸ See John D. Boyd, The Function of Mimesis and Its Decline (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), 17-18.

practice. To emphasize the formal or "exclusively human" aspects of the work of art at the expense of its affinity with natural forms is to become preoccupied with technique; to stress its metaphysical qualities above all else (an error that most twentieth-century criticism in English has, for obvious reasons, avoided) is to venture into a kind of literary mysticism that ends by subsuming the text itself in a vast cosmic night in which all cows are black. The project of criticism in general, in my view, ought to be the dialectical reconciliation of these two extremes.

The question of what a dialectical or "dialogic" criticism would look like has recently been addressed by Tzvetan Todorov. Notable in his description of the endeavour is an egalitarian desire to return literature to the realm of ordinary interaction with other human beings:

Dialogic criticism speaks not about literary works but to them, or rather with them; it refuses to eliminate either of the two voices involved. The text under study is not an object that must be taken in hand by a 'metalanguage,' but rather a discourse that is met by the critic's own; the author is a 'thou' and not a 'he,' an interlocutor with whom one discusses human values.⁹

One of the insights of feminism in recent decades has been the social and political importance of a refusal to eliminate the otherness of the other. The same stance is desirable in

⁹ Literature and its Theorists: A Personal View of Twentieth-Century Criticism, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 162.

matters of literary interpretation. As Todorov goes on to say, the process is, or can be, "somewhat comparable to personal relationships: the illusion of fusion is sweet, but it is an illusion and it comes to a bitter end. The recognition of the other as other makes a better love possible."¹⁰

To the best of my knowledge, Coleridge is the first English speaking critic to insist upon the otherness of the other. As I have argued, however, he himself is other, and is visibly out of step with recent Western academic criticism on many cardinal issues; my evidence is the pervasive tendency of various critical schools to attempt to assimilate him to their own positions. The next step in coming to terms with Coleridge ought thus to be a recognition of his differences from ourselves, and a willingness to enter into dialogue on precisely the points where he seems most alien. As he himself expresses the implicit principle of reconciliation through dialogue, "the Artist may take his point where he likes--provided that the effect desired is produced--namely, that there should be a Likeness in Difference & a union of the two."¹¹ The same can surely be said to apply to critics, and to critics of criticism.

¹⁰ Literature and its Theorists, 163-164.

¹¹ Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature, II, 220.

SOURCES OF CHAPTER EPIGRAPHS

Chapter One

V.I. Lenin. Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder. Revised Translation. (New York: International Publishers, 1934), 75. Cited in Paul Feyerabend, Against Method. (London: Verso, 1975), 1.

John P. Farrell. Revolution as Tragedy: The Dilemma of the Moderate from Scott to Arnold (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 38.

Chapter Two

Mary Shelley, Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus. Ed. James Kinsley and M.K. Joseph. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 47-48.

Chapter Three

I.A. Richards. Coleridge on Imagination (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1935), 21.

Jacques Ellul. The Technological Society. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), xxv.

Chapter Four

Plotinus, Ennead 5.5.8. Plotinus. 7 vols. Trans., A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), V, 179. Cited in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed., James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, 241.

Chapter Five

Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. Kathleen Coburn. London: the Pilot Press, 1949. Lecture III, 116.

Chapter Six

M.M. Bakhtin. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Trans., Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 126.

Chapter Seven

George Grant. Technology and Empire (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), 125.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge. On Method, in Kathleen Coburn, ed. Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from his Published and Unpublished Prose Writings. Revised Edition. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 145.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H. Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature. New York: Norton, 1971.
- Adams, Hazard, ed. Critical Theory Since Plato. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971.
- Appleyard, J.A. "Coleridge and Criticism: I. Critical Theory." Writers and Their Background: S.T. Coleridge. Ed. R.L. Brett. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971. 123-146.
- , Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Barfield, Owen. What Coleridge Thought. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971.
- Barrett, William. Death of the Soul. New York: Doubleday, 1986.
- , The Illusion of Technique. Garden City: Doubleday, 1979.
- Barth, J. Robert, S.J. Coleridge and Christian Doctrine. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Barthes, Roland. Writing Degree Zero. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.
- Bate, W. Jackson. Coleridge. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Beer, John. Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence. London: Macmillan, 1977.

- Beer, John, ed. Coleridge's Variety. London: Macmillan, 1974.
- Belsey, Catherine. Critical Practice. London: Methuen, 1980.
- Blackmur, R.P. The Lion and the Honeycomb: Essays in Solicitude and Critique. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1955.
- Blanchard, J. M. E. "The French Revolution: A Political Line or a Language Circle?" Literature and Revolution. Ed. Jacques Ehrmann. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967. 64-76.
- Brooks, Cleanth. The Well Wrought Urn. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1975.
- Brooks, Peter. The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.
- Brown, Marshall. "Deconstruction and Enlightenment." The Eighteenth Century: Thought and Interpretation. 28 (1987), 259-263.
- Bruss, Elizabeth. Beautiful Theories: The Spectacle of Discourse in Contemporary Criticism. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- Cavell, Stanley. "Emerson, Coleridge, Kant." Post-Analytic Philosophy. Ed., John Rajchman and Cornel West. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. 84-107.
- Christensen, Jerome. Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- , "'Like a Guilty Thing Surprised': Deconstruction, Coleridge, and the Apostasy of Criticism." Critical Inquiry 12 (1986), 769-787.

Coburn, Kathleen. Experience into Thought: Perspectives in the Coleridge Notebooks. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Coburn, Kathleen, ed. Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from his Published and Unpublished Prose Writings. Revised edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Aids to Reflection. 1840. Ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge. Port Washington, New York and London: Kennikat Press, 1971.

----- . Biographia Literaria. Ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

----- . Collected Letters. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1956-1971.

----- . Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit. 1853. Ed. H. StJ. Hart. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1956.

----- . The Friend. Ed. Barbara Rooke. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

----- . Lay Sermons. Ed. R.J. White. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

----- . Literary Remains. Ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge. 4 vols. London, 1839.

----- . Marginalia. Ed. George Whalley. 2 vols. to date. Princeton: Princeton University Press, -1984.

----- . The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Ed. Kathleen Coburn. 3 double vols. New York: Bollingen Foundation and Pantheon Books, 1957-73.

- . Philosophical Lectures. Ed. Kathleen Coburn.
London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949.
- . Specimens of the Table Talk. Ed. Henry Nelson
Coleridge. 2 vols. New York, 1835.
- Cooke, Michael G. The Romantic Will. New Haven and London:
Yale University Press, 1976.
- Copleston, Frederick. A History of Philosophy. 9 vols.
Garden City: Doubleday, 1985.
- Culler, Jonathan. Structuralist Poetics. London: Routledge
and Kegan Paul, 1975.
- DeMan, Paul. "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image."
Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism.
Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Norton, 1970.
- . The Rhetoric of Romanticism. New York: Columbia
University Press, 1984.
- De Molina, David Newton, ed. On Literary Intention.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976.
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. London:
Basil Blackwell, 1983.
- . The Significance of Theory. London: Basil
Blackwell, 1990.
- Ellul, Jacques. The Humiliation of the Word. Trans. Joyce
Main Hanks. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans,
1985.
- . The Technological Society. Trans. John Wilkinson.
New York: Random House, 1967.
- Emmet, Dorothy. "Coleridge and Philosophy." Writers and Their

Background: S.T. Coleridge. Ed. R.L. Brett. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971. 195-220

Engell, James. The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Fackenheim, Emil L. Metaphysics and Historicity. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1961.

----- . The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Farrell, John P. Revolution as Tragedy: The Dilemma of the Moderate from Scott to Arnold. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Feyerabend, Paul. Against Method. London: Verso, 1975.

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation. Ed. and trans. Garrett Green. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

----- . Early Philosophical Writings. Ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988.

----- . "On the Nature of the Scholar and his Manifestations in the Sphere of Freedom." Trans. William Smith. German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel. Ed. David Simpson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 96-113.

----- . "On the Spirit and the Letter in Philosophy." Trans. Elizabeth Rubenstein. German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel. Ed. David Simpson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 74-93.

----- . Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre). Ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs. New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1970.

- . The Vocation of Man. Trans. Roderick M. Chisholm.
New York: Macmillan, 1985.
- Flay, Joseph C. Hegel's Quest for Certainty. Albany: State
University of New York Press, 1984.
- Fogle, R.H. "Coleridge and Criticism. II. Critical Practice."
Writers and Their Background: S.T. Coleridge. Ed. R.L.
Brett. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971. 167-194.
- Fruman, Norman. Coleridge: the Damaged Archangel. New York:
George Brazillier, 1972.
- Frye, Northrop. The Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1957.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. Hegel's Dialectic. Trans. Christopher P.
Smith. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.
- . Philosophical Hermeneutics. Ed. and trans., David
E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press,
1976.
- Gelderman, Carol. Mary McCarthy: A Life. New York: St.
Martin's Press, 1988.
- Graff, Gerald. Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in
Modern Society. Chicago and London: University of Chicago
Press, 1979.
- . Professing Literature: An Institutional History.
Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Grant, George. Technology and Justice. Toronto: Anansi, 1986.
- Hagstrum, Jean H. The Romantic Body: Love and Sexuality in
Keats, Wordsworth and Blake. Knoxville: University of
Tennessee Press, 1985.

Hamilton, Edith and Huntington Cairns, eds. The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Hamilton, Paul. "Romantic Irony and English Literary History." The Romantic Heritage. Ed., Karsten Engelberg. Copenhagen: Publications of the Department of English, University of Copenhagen, 1983. 11-32.

Hamlin, Cyrus. "The Temporality of Selfhood: Metaphor and Romantic Poetry." New Literary History 6 (1974): 169-193.

Hampson, Norman. A Social History of the French Revolution. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.

Harris, H.S. Hegel's Development: Night Thoughts (Jena 1801-1806). Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1983.

----- . Hegel's Development: Towards the Sunlight, 1770-1801
Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1972.

Hazlitt, William. The Spirit of the Age. 1825. Menston, Yorkshire: the Scolar Press, 1971.

Heer, Frederick. The Intellectual History of Modern Europe. Trans. Jonathan Steinberg. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.

Hegel, G.W.F. Aesthetics. Trans. T.M. Knox. 2 vols. Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1975.

----- . Early Theological Writings. Trans. T.M. Knox and Richard Kroner. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

----- . Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Trans. Gustav Emil Mueller. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.

----- . Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. One-volume abridged edition. Ed. Peter C. Hodgson. Trans. R.F. Brown

et al. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

----- . Lectures on the Philosophy of World History.
Introduction: Reason in History. Trans. H.B. Nisbet.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

----- . Phenomenology of Spirit. Ed. and trans. A.V.
Miller and J.N. Findlay. Oxford: the Clarendon Press,
1977.

----- . Philosophy of Right. Trans. T.M. Knox. London:
Oxford University Press, 1967.

Heidegger, Martin. An Introduction to Metaphysics. Trans. Ralph
Manheim. Garden City: Doubleday, 1961.

----- . The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays.
Ed. and trans., William Lovitt. New York: Harper and
Row, 1977.

Heisenberg, Werner. Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in
Modern Science. New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

Hernstein-Smith, Barbara. "Presidential Forum: Breaking
Up/Out/Down--The Boundaries of Literary Study." Profession
89. Ed., Phyllis Franklin. New York: Modern Language
Association of America, 1989: 2-3.

Hook, Sidney. From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual
Development of Karl Marx. Ann Arbor: University of
Michigan Press, 1971.

Jackson, H.J. "'Turning and Turning': Coleridge on our
Knowledge of the External World." PMLA 101 (1986): 848-858.

Jackson, J.R. de J. Method and Imagination in Coleridge's
Criticism. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

Jameson, Fredric. The Prison-House of Language: A Critical
Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism. Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1972.

- Jasper, David. Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker: Inspiration and Revelation. London: Macmillan, 1985.
- Jay, Martin. Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Judgement. Trans. J.H. Bernard. New York: Hafner Press, 1951.
- . Critique of Pure Reason. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: Modern Library, 1958.
- . Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Ed. and trans. H.J. Paton. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964.
- Krieger, Murray. "The Existential Basis of Contextualist Criticism." Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts 8 (1966). Rptd. in Critical Theory Since Plato. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971. 1224-31.
- Leith, James A. "The Place of the French Revolution in the Revolutionary Tradition." Queen's Quarterly 96 (1989): 859-880.
- Lentricchia, Frank. After the New Criticism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Lindop, Grevel. The Opium Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Lockridge, Laurence S. The Ethics of Romanticism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Lowes, John Livingstone. The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927.

- Lowith, Karl. From Hegel to Nietzsche: the Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought. Trans. David E. Green. London: Constable, 1964.
- Macksey, Richard and Eugene Donato, eds. The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970. Rptd., 1972.
- Marcuse, Herbert. Counterrevolution and Revolt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.
- Marks, Emerson R. Coleridge on the Language of Verse. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Marx, Karl. "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy." Karl Marx: Early Writings. Ed., T.B. Bottomore. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963. 195-219.
- Marx, Leo. "On Heidegger's Conception of 'Technology' and its Historical Validity." The Massachusetts Review 25 (1984): 638-652.
- McAuley, James. The Grammar of the Real: Selected Prose, 1959-1974. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- McFarland, Thomas. Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition. Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1969.
- . Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Modalities of Fragmentation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- McGann, Jerome, J. A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- . The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

- Megill, Allan. Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.
- Mileur, Jean-Pierre. Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Muirhead, J.H. Coleridge as Philosopher. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930.
- Orsini, G.N.G. Coleridge and German Idealism. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969.
- Peterson, Margaret. Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983.
- Read, Herbert. Coleridge as Critic. London: Faber and Faber, 1949.
- Richards, I.A. Coleridge on Imagination. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935.
- . Principles of Literary Criticism. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, [1925].
- Rockmore, Tom. Fichte, Marx, and the German Philosophical Tradition. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980.
- Rosen, Stanley. G.W.F. Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974.
- Schelling, F.W.J. Bruno: or, On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things. Ed. and trans. Michael G. Vater. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984.
- Schmidt, Larry, ed. George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations. Toronto: Anansi, 1978.

- Schorer, Mark. "Technique as Discovery." The World We Imagine: Selected Essays. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1968. 123-136.
- Schuettinger, Robert, ed. The Conservative Tradition in European Thought. New York: Capricorn Books, 1971.
- Seidel, George. Activity and Ground: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1976.
- Shawcross, J., ed. Biographia Literaria. By Samuel Taylor Coleridge. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907.
- Simpson, David. Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry. London: Macmillan, 1979.
- Snyder, Alice D. Coleridge on Logic and Learning. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929.
- Steiner, George. After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation. London: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- . The Death of Tragedy. New York: Knopf, 1961.
- . Heidegger. London: Fontana, 1978.
- . Real Presences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Stempel, Daniel. "Revelation on Mount Snowden: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Fichtean Imagination." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 29 (1971): 371-84.
- Stokes, Michael C. One and Many in Presocratic Thought. Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1971.
- Sutton, Walter. Modern American Criticism. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

- Tate, Allen. Collected Essays. Denver: Allan Swallow, 1959.
- Thompson, E.P. "Disenchantment or Default: A Lay Sermon." Power and Consciousness. Ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien and William Dean Vanech. London: University of London Press, 1969. 149-181.
- . The Making of the English Working Class. London: Gollancz, 1965.
- Wallace, Catherine Miles. The Design of Biographia Literaria. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983.
- Weiss, Frederick G., ed. Hegel: The Essential Writings. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
- Wellek, René. The Attack on Literature and Other Essays. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- . A History of Modern Criticism, 175-1950. 4 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955.
- Wellek, René and Austin Warren. Theory of Literature. Revised edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1970.
- Whalley, George. Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson and the Asra Poems. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955.
- . Poetic Process. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953. Rptd., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973.
- . "On Reading Coleridge." Writers and their Background: S.T. Coleridge. Ed. R.L. Brett. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971. 1-44.
- . "The Integrity of the Biographia Literaria." Essays and Studies 6 (1952): 87-101.

Wheeler, Kathleen. "Coleridge's Theory of Imagination: A Hegelian Solution to Kant?" The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism. Ed. David Jasper. London: Macmillan, 1986. 16-40.

----- . The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry. London: Heinemann, 1981.

----- . Sources, Processes and Methods in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Wilkinson, James. "After the Revolution in France: the Rhetoric of Revolution." Salmagundi 84 (1989): 155-176.

Willey, Basil. "Coleridge and Religion." Writers and Their Background: S.T. Coleridge. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971. 221-243.

Williams, Raymond. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. Glasgow: Fontana, 1976.

----- . The Long Revolution. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965.

Wimsatt, W.K. The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967.

Windelband, Wilhelm. A History of Philosophy. 2 vol. Trans. James H. Tufts. New York: Harper, 1958.