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# Coleridge and the ‘More Permanent Revolution’<sup>1</sup>

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You tell me it's the institution  
Well you know  
You better free your mind instead  
(John Lennon, ‘Revolution’, 1968)

JOHN LENNON a Coleridgean? Well, not entirely. But these words resonate with one aspect of the multifarious ‘choral Echo’ (BL II 248) that Seamus Perry has called the ‘Coleridgean tradition’.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I want to suggest that Coleridge was a life-long social revolutionary of a particular sort: a revolutionary of the mind.<sup>3</sup>

In describing Coleridge in this way, I seek to complicate that line of criticism which depicts Coleridge as a ‘conservative’ apostate to his earlier ‘radicalism’.<sup>4</sup> E.P. Thompson provided what probably remains the most damning analysis of Coleridge’s politics, accusing him of a retreat into disenchanted conservatism and apostasy, the puppet of a manipulative pro-ministerial press. Thompson appears to be as much baffled by Coleridge’s behaviour as he is disturbed by it; but Alan Liu sees a more cynical apostasy at work, describing Coleridge’s later public stance of ‘impartiality’ as ‘test-the-water politics’. More recently, Jon Mee has read Coleridge’s transition from Bristol political agitator to sequestered poet as a rejection of unregulated demotic ‘enthusiasm’, and as such, a ‘conservative’ retreat from public ‘activity’. Hazlitt was among the first to articulate such views, considering Coleridge to have ‘at last turned on the pivot of a subtle casuistry to the *unclean side*'; and yet as ever, Hazlitt was astute enough in his interpretation of Coleridge to see that he was a special case, ‘whose discursive reason would not let him trammel himself into a poet-laureate or a stamp-distributor’, and who, unlike Southey and Wordsworth (to whom Hazlitt alluded here), resisted entry into the citadel of reaction, instead ‘pitching his tent upon the barren waste

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is an extended and revised version of a paper delivered at ‘The Romantic Voice’ conference at Warwick University, on 26 April 2007, entitled ‘The Unnamed Vocation: Coleridge and Intellectual Revolution’.

<sup>2</sup> Seamus Perry, ‘Coleridge, the Return to Nature, and the New Anti-Romanticism: An Essay in Polemic.’ *Romanticism On the Net* 4 (November 1996) [03.11.06] <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/antirom.html>.

<sup>3</sup> In making this claim I am conscious of another echo, with M.H.Abrams’s summary of the cultural dynamics of ‘Romanticism’, where ‘faith in an apocalypse by revelation had been replaced by faith in an apocalypse by revolution, and this now gave way to faith in an apocalypse by imagination or cognition’: *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York and London: W.W.Norton & Co, 1971), 334. Abrams provides a disclaimer to his generalisation by acknowledging that it is a ‘drastic simplification’; and while there is some truth in it in relation to Coleridge, my argument is not grounded on this or Abrams’s other well-known contentions, important and interesting as they are.

<sup>4</sup> Such criticism, or variants of it, perpetuates an underlying ‘grand narrative’ of Coleridge’s life and works, now receding, but for a long time ingrained in Romantic studies. Crudely put, this narrative sees the years 1795-1798 as the high-point of his career, either as a political ‘radical’ or a poet, followed by an enervating and reactionary diversion into German metaphysics (causing irreversible damage) 1798-1804, an even less productive period of opium-fuelled wandering and increasing personal derangement 1804-1815, culminating in a torpid apostasy of religious orthodoxy and hesitant Toryism 1815-1834. For a balanced overview of Coleridge’s political peregrinations, see Peter Kitson, ‘Political thinker’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 156-169.

without, and having no abiding place nor city of refuge'.<sup>5</sup>

I wish to question the binary opposition of 'radical' and 'conservative', still prevalent in contemporary criticism, and that of (useful) 'action' and (self-indulgent) 'thought' that often accompanies it. Used unreflexively, the terms 'conservative' and 'radical' are prone to mislead, especially when applied to Coleridge's idiosyncratic literary, political and vocational activity. As blanket terms, they obscure what Nicholas Roe has called 'the complexity of the culture of dissent in the mid-1790s',<sup>6</sup> and, I would add, the complexity of social and political dissent at *any* time. Similarly, uncritical acceptance of the distinction between 'thought' and 'action', itself lifted from the culture of political and religious reform in the 1790s,<sup>7</sup> is, insofar as it merely re-enacts such an opposition, of limited value in the interpretation either of Coleridge's work or the cultural dynamic in which he played a part. 'Thought' did not replace 'action' for Coleridge; attention to ideas became the very form of his political action, to which 'retirement' from 'active' life was conducive, but communication remained essential: he endeavoured 'to instruct tho' Absent' by way of the print media (CL I 255). Coleridge's example undermines the distinction between the 'man of action' and the 'mere' thinker. His writing was characteristically self-exploratory, even 'deeply introverted' in Marilyn Butler's ambiguous phrase,<sup>8</sup> but Coleridge retained a sense of public purpose: an eye, in prose, to 'promoting the best interests of mankind' (CL I 371) through an investigation of 'what our faculties are & what they are capable of becoming' (CL I 397), and in poetry to liberate experience from 'the film of familiarity' (BL II 7). In this he continued, attacking those 'who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of humankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*' (CL I 527). This last phrase suggests Coleridge's impatience with the anti-intellectualism of British 'radical' circles of the day, and the narrowing of focus that it entailed.<sup>9</sup>

In Coleridge's defence of speculative thought, however, the intellect alone was never enough: '[t]he searcher after Truth must love and be beloved; for general Benevolence is a necessary motive to constancy of pursuit [...] Let us

<sup>5</sup> E.P.Thompson, 'Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon', and 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Poet and his Editors', in *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (Woodbridge: Merlin Press, 1997), 33-74, 107-55; Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 416; Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 131-72; *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P.Howe, 21 Vols (London and Toronto: J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd, 1930-34), XI, 34, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Roe, 'Coleridge's Watchman Tour', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 21 (NS), Spring 2003, 35-46, 38.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the Unitarian Anna Laetitia Barbauld's exhortation to Coleridge, published in *The Monthly Magazine* 7 (1799, pp. 231-32), to reject 'the maze of metaphysic lore' in favour of 'Active scenes [...] And fair exertion' (ll. 34, 38, 40), reprinted in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn, 26-7. By 1799, however, the horse had bolted

<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 83.

<sup>9</sup> For a shrewd aside on the anti-metaphysical 'Plain Speaker' as a 'radical' type, see Seamus Perry, 'The talker', *The Cambridge Companion* (op. cit.), 103-125, 112-13.

beware of that proud Philosophy, which affects to inculcate Philanthropy while it denounces every home-born feeling, by which it is produced and nurtured' (LPR 46; F I 336).<sup>10</sup> Coleridge's critique of Paine and Rousseau in *The Friend* was based on the view that the life of human beings could not be constituted by the calculations of the intellect alone; humanity has a 'mixed and sensitive Nature', involving 'something besides Reason' (F I 201). It remained a constant of Coleridgean thinking that intelligence was no intelligence unless it was 'rooted and grounded in love' (LS 48), a point he expressed often in later life in his definition of philosophy: 'the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love' (CL IV 922). A valid intellectual revolution involved a *moral* revolution: 'in the moral being lies the source of the intellectual' (F I 115). Just as, for Coleridge, a society is not free without the rule of law to prevent the abuse of power, but tyrannised by such a lack of relational cohesiveness, so the agency of consciousness is not free without 'the law of Conscience or universal *selfless* Reason' (F I 424n): 'Not for myself but for my conscience—i.e. my affections & duties toward others, I should have no Self—for Self is Definition; but all Boundary implies Neighbourhood—& is knowable only by Neighbourhood, or Relations' (CN II 3231).<sup>11</sup> An insufficient sense of 'Neighbourhood, or Relations' brutalises and negates the self, and with it, other selves: this is the nub of the threat Coleridge saw in Napoleonic 'Autotheism' (CN III 3866). If it is to be free, the realm of agency must be one of duty, of consideration for others (and otherness); it must, in short, be a moral realm. Similarly, for Coleridge, insofar as the dominant philosophy of his day (embodied for him by Hume, in particular) appeared to undermine the moral agency of self-consciousness, social damage would result: 'there is a natural affinity between Despotism and modern Philosophy' (EOT II 81).

This was no mere 'conservatism': Coleridge's use of the word 'modern' in this context obscures the fact that his own approach was itself thoroughly modern. His engagement with and respect for intellectual tradition<sup>12</sup> was inextricably bound to his commitment to change, but, in a way that (as he was acutely aware) put him at odds with the dominant social mores of his day: '*for old Faith is often modern Heresy*' (F II 17). Coleridge did not advocate a reversion to a Burkean fantasy of the past,<sup>13</sup> least of all past thinking unmodified by modern insights, but instead invoked the potential latent in the present: the transformative powers of self-consciousness. His affinity lay with

<sup>10</sup> This, of course, a view Coleridge held in 1795 and reiterated verbatim in 1818, is an attack on Godwinian rationalism. See Nicola Trott, 'The Coleridge Circle and the "Answer to Godwin"', *Review of English Studies*, 41 (1990), 212-29.

<sup>11</sup> For a sensitive and thorough exposition of this principle, rightly setting it at the heart of Coleridge's thinking, see Anthony John Harding, *Coleridge and the Idea of Love: Aspects of relationship in Coleridge's thought and writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> Not to be confused with 'custom' for its own sake, which Coleridge viewed with an Enlightenment impatience; poetry, for example, was a way of 'awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom': BL II 7.

<sup>13</sup> For an acute reading of 'Christabel' as a psychological critique of Burkean 'chivalry', enacting 'one of the era's most profound investigations of the social and sexual relations on which the state is based', see Tim Fulford, 'Slavery and superstition in the supernatural poems', in *The Cambridge Companion* (op. cit.), 45-58, 55-58.

philosophical and artistic developments on the continent<sup>14</sup> that, he recognised, represented 'a new & peculiar sort of Thinking and Imagining' (CL III 522), augurs of which he also found in his reading in the European literary, philosophical and religious tradition. For Coleridge, the social and material causes of human suffering ultimately lay in the complex of ideas that enabled them to take place and thrive. A revolution in these ideas then, i.e. in self-consciousness, would be a revolution in the constitution of the human habitat. In this, Coleridge is a precursor to the present-day philosophy known as 'social idealism', as developed by the British jurist Philip Allott.<sup>15</sup> Allott observes: 'A conservative revolutionary is much like a socialist revolutionary. The one wants a new order of things formed from perfecting the best of the old order. The other wants a new order of things formed from the destruction of the worst of the old order'.<sup>16</sup> If Coleridge was closer to the latter in his early years, and closer to the former in his later years, his vocational activity nevertheless remained on this continuum. Coleridge did not, of course, limit himself to explicitly political or social-revolutionary issues. But if, as I am suggesting, his vocational concern was with consciousness, as the means by which human beings articulate reality, that is, render reality intelligible, it is no surprise that language should be at the very centre of that concern, and that Coleridge's most obvious existential commitment should be as a writer.<sup>17</sup> It is in the *poiesis* of communication itself, the attention to and faith in language as an *affective* activity, that distinguishes his revolutionary mode. And in this sense, Coleridge remains, above all else, a poet.

There can be no doubt, of course, that Coleridge's opinions on specific political issues changed markedly in the late 1790s. The most explicit shift occurred in respect of private property: he went from viewing it in 1796 as 'beyond doubt the Origin of all Evil' (CL I 214) and advocating its abolition (LPR 128), to rather disingenuously stating in 1802 that it was always an 'axiom' of his politics that 'property must be the grand basis of the government' (EOT I 372-73).<sup>18</sup> However, this change is the result, rather than the abandonment of, what John Morrow calls Coleridge's 'continuing concern with the maintenance of public and private freedom':<sup>19</sup> whereas he had previously seen private property as a threat to that freedom, he now saw it as a

<sup>14</sup> In 1815 Coleridge said that he believed 'the learned Public of Germany' to be 'a full century before [i.e. ahead of] the Scotch & the English' (CL IV 550).

<sup>15</sup> Allott's work has become a key reference-point for various like-minded international jurists. Social idealism invokes 'the capacity of the human mind to transcend itself in thought, to take power over the human future': Philip Allott, *The Health of Nations: Society and Law beyond the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), x. See also Philip Allott, *Eunomia: New Order for a New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990/2001).

<sup>16</sup> Philip Allott, *Invisible Power: A Philosophical Adventure Story* (Xlibris, 2005), 48.

<sup>17</sup> For an important, historically-grounded critique of new historicist readings of Coleridge, which puts the case for Coleridge as a revolutionizer of the act and consequences of reading and writing, see Tim Fulford, 'Apocalyptic and Reactionary? Coleridge as Hermeneutist', *The Modern Language Review*, 87:1, (Jan. 1992), 18-31.

<sup>18</sup> One can almost hear a sophistry at work in Coleridge's mind here: that property as an *issue* had always been the 'grand basis' of government with him – even if in his previous thinking that basis was one of *communal*, rather than *private* ownership.

<sup>19</sup> John Morrow, 'Introduction', *Coleridge's Writings Vol.1: On Politics and Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 8.

bulwark against tyranny. As so often the case with Coleridge, the change can be traced to a sensitivity to language: Coleridge understood the word ‘property’ to derive from ‘propriety’ (BL I 83\*), and this connected the concept of property with a respect for *person*, the basis of Coleridgean morality. In the face of industrial and political processes that threatened to reduce human beings to economic or strategic data, Coleridge defended ‘the sacred Principle [...] which is the *ground-work* of all Law and Justice, that a Person can never become a Thing, nor be treated as such without wrong’, that is, be treated ‘as a *Means*’ rather than ‘included in the *End*’ (F II 125). Coleridge came to see property as the social and legal expression of the inviolable moral agency of the person: ‘Liberty, i.e. Free-Will, and Property (i.e. the right and power of exercising it within a given sphere) are like Lungs & Air’ (SWF II 1354).<sup>20</sup>

A second obvious change in Coleridge’s approach to politics occurred with his loss of enthusiasm for institutional reform. In an article for the *Morning Post* in 1802 (‘Once a Jacobin, Always a Jacobin’), he distinguished himself from the ‘Jacobin, in *our* sense of the term’, who believed ‘that all, or the greater part of, the happiness or misery, virtue or vice, of mankind, depends on forms of government’, and that ‘no legislature can be rightful or good, which did not proceed from universal suffrage’ (EOT I 368-69). While he remained anti-ministerial (avowedly of no ‘Party’: CL IV 889), and remained convinced that government action was vital to the welfare of society, he grew doubtful of the value that would be gained by cosmetic changes to the constitution, suspecting that without a much more fundamental change in the individual and society, one form of ignorance and incompetence would merely be replaced by another. This ostensible change of opinion, however, derived above all from his lack of faith in the capacity of instrumental reason *alone* to solve social ills;<sup>21</sup> a view, as I have shown, he had held since the height of his ‘radicalism’ in the mid-1790s. Although it was 1803 before he came to define his true calling as ‘Investigations relative to the *omne scibile* of human Nature’ (CL II 949), the ‘state of the agent’ (CL III 216) had always held priority in his ideas of reform. As early as 1794, he saw the preparation and cultivation of the mind as a political act in itself, and in true Dissenting manner, he invoked Jesus as his exemplar:

I have been asked what is the best conceivable mode of meliorating Society—My Answer has been uniformly this—‘Slavery is an Abomination to every feeling of the Head and the Heart—Did Jesus teach the *Abolition* of it? No! He taught those principles, of which the necessary *effect* was—to abolish all Slavery. He prepared the *mind* for the reception before he poured the Blessing —. (CL I 126)

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, perhaps, this particular ‘apostasy’ aligned him more closely with John Thelwall, who had always considered communal ownership a licence for ‘rascals and cut-throats’ to transfer ‘all property into their own hands’: John Thelwall, *Peaceful Discussion, and not tumultuary violence, the means of redressing national grievance* (London, 1795), 14, cited in Peter Kitson, ‘Political thinker’, *The Cambridge Companion* (op. cit.), 159.

<sup>21</sup> Coleridge’s *ad hominem* complaints regarding his fellow reformists also seem to have played their part: he claimed to have grown ‘disgusted beyond measure by the manners & morals of the Democrats’ (CL II 999).

Coleridge asserted active contemplation over reactive (and possibly intellectually passive) action, not as escapism, but as the best way of grounding lasting social reform. This propaedeutic attention to the mind was as much a part of his early political advocacy as it was in his later, more overtly philosophical work. In his lectures of 1795 he denounced physical violence: he wished 'to place Liberty on her seat with bloodless hands' (LPR 17), declared that 'truth wields no weapon, but that of investigation', and reminded his auditors that '[o]ur object is to destroy pernicious systems not their misguided adherents' (LPR 18).<sup>22</sup> This appeal to the mind provides the recurring structure of Coleridge's political engagement (and, it should be emphasised, his vocational activity as a whole). Published in the *Conciones ad Populum* of 1795, and reprinted in *The Friend* of 1818, the principle that 'general Illumination should precede Revolution', 'a truth as obvious, as that the Vessel should be cleansed before we fill it with a pure Liquor' (LPR 43; F I 334), was a constant of his thinking; Coleridge could still write in 1833: 'from the very outset I hoped in no advancement of humanity but from individual minds and morals working onward from Individual to Individual [...] This in my first work, the *Conciones ad Populum*, I declared, in my 23<sup>rd</sup> year: and to this I adhere in my present 63<sup>rd</sup>. Liberty without Law can exist *no where*' (CL VI 965).

In the past the allegation of later 'apostasy' from earlier 'radicalism' has turned on the question of whether Coleridge was ever truly a 'Jacobin'. In *The Friend* of 8 June 1809, Coleridge defied his 'worst enemy to shew, in any of my few writings, the least bias to Irreligion, Immorality, or Jacobinism' (F II 25): an act of defensiveness, in a rambling and somewhat bitter note, that provoked the very reaction he hoped to lay to rest. Southey was the first to bite, taking Coleridge's challenge to be 'worse than folly, for if he was not a Jacobine, in the common acceptance of the name, I wonder who the Devil was. I am sure I was, am still, and ever more shall be'.<sup>23</sup> This comment raises two important points. The first is that the argument (as with 'radical' and 'conservative') comes down to the use of the term; in this case, 'Jacobin'. As a categorical label, it can evoke any number of assumptions, a vagueness to which scholarship should of course be on its guard. In his 1802 article 'Once a Jacobin, Always a Jacobin', referred to above, Coleridge was careful to define the term in a particular sense, crediting 'Jacobinism' with a coherent philosophy, from which he distinguished his own. In 1795 however, he appears to have associated the term with a general threat of public violence, which as I have shown he sought to allay, while challenging the government to take the steps necessary to answer the popular grievances that made it likely (LPR 9-11, 38-9, 48, 362). Others must have seen Coleridge as a 'Jacobin' at the time, 'in the common acceptance of the name', and Coleridge was clearly

<sup>22</sup> Is it too daring to draw a parallel here with the tactics pursued by Gandhi against the Raj: *satyagraha* ('truth-force', or 'devotion to truth') and *ahimsa* (non-violence)? Perhaps not in a footnote.

<sup>23</sup> Writing to Charles Danvers, 15 June 1809: *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Kenneth Curry, 2 vols (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965), I, 511.

aware of the association: ‘Two or three uncouth and unbrained Automata have threatened my Life—and in the last Lecture the Genus infimum were scarcely restrained from attacking the house in which the “damn’d Jacobine was jawing away.”’ (CL I 152). But it does not follow that he saw himself as one, nor that this opinion of him (whatever ‘Jacobin’ means) was justified in others. Asking which ready-made label best applies to Coleridge is likely to be critically unproductive. The second point raised by Southey’s letter is again obvious but often overlooked: the personal context of the criticism. It may come as some surprise, for example, that Southey, of all people, claimed the honourable political consistency for himself that he denied to Coleridge; and that in 1809 he might still consider himself a ‘Jacobin’. Southey’s comment easily lends itself as ‘proof’ of Coleridge’s ‘apostasy’: but whether it has value as such is open to question.<sup>24</sup>

I hope, at least, that it is clear from what I have said so far that Coleridge consistently took the well-being of society to depend on a cause much more complex than the ‘forms of government’: it was the state of human consciousness itself that really mattered. From his first public appearances, Coleridge sought ‘not so much to excite the torpid, as to regulate the feelings of the ardent; and above all, to evince the necessity of *bottoming* on fixed Principles, that so we may not be the unstable Patriots of Passion or Accident’ (LPR 5). While this approach was already decisive in Coleridge’s thinking in 1795, its consequences for his career, the vexed question of ‘bread and cheese’ (CL I 258), only came to a head in the years 1796 to 1798. With the financial failure of *The Watchman*, where he had endeavoured to serve ‘the cause of freedom by *thinking*’, and had stressed ‘the teaching of first principles, or the diffusion of that general knowledge which should be the basis or substratum of politics’ (W 13, 14), Coleridge announced: ‘[h]enceforward I shall cease to cry the State of the political Atmosphere’ (W 374).<sup>25</sup> In the gulf that followed, he came up with two alternative plans. The first involved translating Schiller in order to fund a trip to Germany, and on his return to set up a school under his own idiosyncratic and highly aspirational syllabus. The second plan was ‘to become a Dissenting Parson & abjure Politics & carnal literature’. This, however, was problematic: ‘Preaching for Hire is not right; because it must prove a strong temptation to continue to profess what I had ceased to believe, if ever maturer Judgment with wider & deeper reading should lessen or destroy my faith in Christianity’ (CL I 208-10). Coleridge was keen to avoid closure inside an established social and political form, and to assert his intellectual

<sup>24</sup> By inclination, Coleridge was more ‘Girondin’ than ‘Jacobin’, at least on his own terms; his 1795 description of the ‘Girondists’ is typical of Coleridgean self-depiction: ‘Men of genius are rarely either prompt in action or consistent in general conduct: their early habits have been those of contemplative indolence; and the day-dreams, with which they have been accustomed to amuse their solitude, adapt them for splendid speculation, not temperate and practicable counsels’ (LPR 34).

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Roe astutely draws attention to the telling syntax here: ‘as if “Henceforward I shall cease” was an ongoing process, rather than an end’: see the article cited at n. 6 above, 43. In his attempt to move beyond the immediacies of politics, Coleridge merely re-articulated his politics in a different way. As Deirdre Coleman puts it, ‘Renunciation was never Coleridge’s strong point’: ‘The journalist’, *The Cambridge Companion* (op. cit.), 126-141, 137.

freedom even over religion. By late 1796, he was hoping to achieve some kind of self-sufficiency, rather dramatically declaring to Thomas Poole that he was prepared 'to work *very hard*—as Cook, Butler, Scullion, Shoe-cleaner, occasional Nurse, Gardener, Hind, Pig-protector, Chaplain, Secretary, Poet, Reviewer, and omnium-botherum shilling-scavenger' (CL I 266). Coleridge was being flippant, but the point was that he could 'accept no place in State, Church, or Dissenting Meeting' (CL I 274).

Coleridge's professional crisis or, more accurately, the crisis brought on by the thought of having a profession, was answered in the winter of 1797 to 1798. In a letter to Josiah Wedgwood, Coleridge again objected to a life of Unitarian ministry on grounds that reveal the tenor of his thoughts: 'It makes one's livelihood hang upon the profession of *particular opinions*: and tends therefore to warp the intellectual faculty'; while 'the routine of Duty brings on a certain sectarian mannerism, which generally narrows the Intellect itself' (CL I 365, 366). Wedgwood, along with his brother Tom, responded with the offer of a £150 annuity for life, '*no condition whatever being annexed*' (CL I 370). This freed Coleridge of both doctrinal commitment *and* the deleterious effects of 'Duty': anxieties allayed, he immediately planned to spend the spring and summer of 1798 with Wordsworth (CL I 377-78).

As well as revealing an intellectual homelessness that would span his whole career (and, moreover, a deliberate homelessness) this important episode enabled Coleridge, at least in theory, to become something new, something still difficult to name today: what Marilyn Butler calls a 'professional intellectual', a 'man of letters' (Butler 70, 71), setting his own omnicompetent mandate. Coleridge's political will for the amelioration of humankind could now to be poured into the life of the mind, without distracting worries about how the next bill was to be paid. In the March of 1798 Coleridge declared to his brother George: 'I have for some time past withdrawn myself almost totally from *immediate causes*, [...] to the seeking with patience & a slow, very slow mind 'Quid sumus, et quidnam victuri gignimur?']—What our faculties are & what they are capable of becoming' (CL I 397). This was the first clear formulation of what I take to be the Coleridgean vocation: a commitment to explore the limits of the senses, together with the consciousness by which the sensible world is known, and therein the self-surpassing capacity of the mind. Coleridge's political commitment was to the emancipation of human potential through an educative, propaedeutic process, the process explicit in 'Frost at Midnight', where 'God' is conceived as the 'Great universal Teacher', uttering the 'eternal language' of being, which will 'mould' the 'spirit, and by giving make it ask' (PW I 1 456).

*The Friend* was specifically based upon '*what we are and what we are born to become*' (F II 17), the same aspirational dynamism to which Coleridge had dedicated himself eleven years earlier, and had since reiterated to Godwin in 1803 (CL II 949). With this journal (and its later *rifacciamento*) Coleridge aimed 'not so much to shew my Reader this or that Fact, as to kindle his own Torch

for him, and leave it to himself to chuse the particular Objects, which he might wish to examine by its light' (F II 276). Henry Nelson Coleridge remarked in his preface to the 1837 edition, that *The Friend* was 'to prepare and discipline the student's moral and intellectual being,—not to propound dogmas or theories for his adoption' (F I ci); F.D. Maurice echoed 'Frost at Midnight' when he wrote that *The Friend* 'puts us into a new way of seeking' (F I ciii). Coleridge called upon the reader to become aware of, and to actuate, the powers of his own consciousness through 'voluntary and self-originating effort' and 'the practice of self-examination, sincerely aimed at' (F I 394): '[t]he first step to knowledge, or rather the previous condition of all insight into truth, is to dare commune with our very and permanent self' (F I 115).

Correlative to the clear thinking necessary for self-knowledge, *The Friend* sought 'to expose the folly and the legerdemain of those who abuse the blessed machine of language' (F I 108). One of its original aims was to counter what Coleridge saw as the slogan-led demagoguery of William Cobbett's *Political Register*, a language which threatened thinking in its elision of complexity in the name of popularity. Coleridge saw in Cobbett's style the 'careless passionate Talk of a Man of robust common sense, but grossly ignorant and under the warp of Heat & Prejudice, on the subjects furnished by the Day' (CL III 142), and wished to 'strangle' the 'vicious Temper of mind' which Cobbett's appeal to 'Curiosity', 'sharp—and often calumnious—personality' and 'the names of notorious Contemporaries' (CL III 143) seemed to encourage. Coleridge knew that he was exposing himself to ridicule in adopting such a high-minded approach, and his anxieties over intelligibility led to a defensiveness that, as I have shown, made him even more vulnerable to attack;<sup>26</sup> he resented the complaint (common even among well-wishers) that *The Friend* was 'an unreadable Thing' (CL III 276). Coleridge's sense of awkward exposure also became manifest in the evasiveness that some readers detected in his re-narration of his political views; but at the same he could defiantly assert the continuing importance of the Pantisocratic ideals of his youth, in which 'my little World described the path of its Revolution in an orbit of its own': 'to the intense interest and impassioned zeal, which called forth and strained every faculty of my intellect for the organization and defence of this Scheme, I owe much of whatever I at present possess, my clearest insight into the nature of individual Man, and my most comprehensive views of his social relations' (F II 146-47).

From the time of *The Friend* onwards, Coleridge's chief exemplar in the form of his vocational exertions was Plato, whose writings he saw as essentially propaedeutic, preparative to the mind's reception of its own potential.<sup>27</sup> In the philosophical lectures of 1818 to 1819, Coleridge argued that these works were 'disciplinary of the intellect', written 'to actuate the minds of men' and 'lead

<sup>26</sup> See, further, Deirdre Coleman, *Coleridge and 'The Friend' (1809-1810)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), and Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Coleridge also saw Kant in this way, as indeed did Kant himself: the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) was a 'Propaideutik' (BL I lxxvii).

them to seek further' (LHP I 190, 195, 189); and it was in this respect that Plato was 'the Prophet & Preparer for the New World' (LHP I 200)—'the new world of intellectual form',<sup>28</sup> perhaps, that Humphrey Davy saw as Coleridge's to define. Plato was, for Coleridge, one of the first to dilate human consciousness beyond the limits of its circumstances, that is, beyond the world as perceived by 'the senses', which functioned under '*the Tyranny of Association*' (LPR 47). Plato was a prophet of the 'Super-sensuous' (F I 156), the self-surpassing powers of reason and imagination by which the sensible world is rendered intelligible, and consciousness *active* within the greater order it apprehends. In this liberation, language was essential: words were 'living Things' for Coleridge (CL I 626), constitutive of reality. As the communicative nexus of self-consciousness and the world into which it was born, language expressed the mind's power to actively alter that world, as well as be altered by it. In a piece of 'metaphysical Etymology' spun out in his notebook on 1 January 1806, Coleridge connected the Latin verb 'to think' ('Reor') with the word 'thing' ('res') (CN II 2784), finding an original identity between 'thought' and 'thing' in the history of human consciousness, and therein an expression of the mind's active participation in the universe; this he repeated more succinctly to Derwent in 1818: 'To think (Ding, denken; res, reor) is to *thingify*' (CL IV 885). Language was the *life* of this unity of thoughts and things. A revolution in self-consciousness was inseparable, for Coleridge, from what he came to describe as 'the Science of Words' (AR 6-7); or, one might say, language is power, as Coleridge's work on *Logic*, the more technical aspects of this art, made clear: 'For that alone is truly knowledge in relation to the individual acquirer which reappears as power, and the improvement of the faculties, the only sure measure and criterion of the attainments' (L 42).

Coleridge's insistence that the exercise of reflexive consciousness, of which in principle all human beings are capable, is the only condition necessary in the search for wisdom, together with his commitment to its cultivation through contemplation, over and above specific accomplishments, have major implications for any social order. It prioritises 'the science of EDUCATION [...] as the nisu formativus of social man, as the appointed PROTOPLAST of true humanity' (F I 493-94); and, further, promotes the exhilarating idea that intellectual authority is qualitative, and cannot logically be assumed to exist on the basis of hereditary rank, financial wealth, property qualifications, academic qualifications, religion, or institutional affiliation.<sup>29</sup> And yet, this very openness raises a practical problem: how is society to recognise and accommodate such a person, such a vocation, the man of letters in the Coleridgean tradition? Coleridge allowed himself to envisage a political economy utterly different to that which prevailed in his own time, where even material wealth might be

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 346.

<sup>29</sup> In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge translated some 'observations from a contemporary writer of the Continent', i.e. a passage from Schelling's *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zu der verbesserten Fichte'schen Lehre* (1806), to defend the contribution of those whose 'names had never been enrolled in the guilds of the learned' against their exclusion by a cowardly and unambitious 'learned class' (BL I 147-49).

attached to the contemplative life: 'You say,' he wrote to Southey in 1800, 'I illuminize—I think, that Property will some time or other be modified by the predominance of Intellect, even as Rank & Superstition are now modified by & subordinated to Property, that much is to be hoped of the Future' (CL I 563-64).<sup>30</sup> It is tempting to see in Coleridge's striking idea of the Clerisy, the order of cultural guardians dedicated to the well-being of self and society (C & S 46ff), an ideal projection of the public class to which he felt he might belong, were such an order actually to exist: a home, possibly, for the intellectually homeless.<sup>31</sup>

Still more at odds with the political and economic trends of nineteenth century Britain, the Coleridgean vocation enacts a quiet but decisive rebellion against what would later become known as the 'Protestant work ethic'.<sup>32</sup> It expresses an altogether different world-view. In 1799 Coleridge insisted to Southey (who was no doubt nonplussed): 'You should [do] nothing that does not absolutely *please* you. Be idle—be very idle! The habits of your mind are such that you will necessarily do much—but be as idle as you can' (CL I 553).<sup>33</sup> To be a Coleridgean idler was (whatever else it entailed) not to do nothing; but rather to trust that the cultivation of the mind would bring its own reality-altering fruits. It was to resist the mechanisation of humanity threatened by the processes now prevailing over every aspect of social life, a threat all too evident in Coleridge's lifetime. Coleridge's emphasis on the inviolability of the person demanded that those social processes should be subject to the accommodation of the sentient individual as an *end*, not a means. Coleridgean idleness was based upon a 'moral and religious awe for freedom of thought' and 'the right of free communication', on which 'the progressive improvement of all and each of us depend' (F I 279), and as such, it was an idleness that did not, could not rest. It would (ideally) not *cause*, but *overcome* social inertia, through the constant self-renewal entailed in the cultivation of each thinking mind, thereby reconciling 'PERMANENCE' and 'PROGRESSION' (C & S 24).<sup>34</sup> In addressing himself to the mind, and to ideas that might seem remote from the 'world at large', Coleridge was quick to point out (as he did in a letter to Lord

<sup>30</sup> Well, we're still waiting!

<sup>31</sup> It is also tempting to read Coleridge's idea of the Clerisy in the light of E.M. Forster's version of an open elite: 'I believe in aristocracy, though – if that is the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory [...] over cruelty and chaos [...] They are sensitive for others as well as for themselves, they are considerate without being fussy, their pluck is not swankiness but the power to endure, and they can take a joke.' From 'What I Believe' (1939), in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 75-84, 81.

<sup>32</sup> See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-05), tr. and ed. T. Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

<sup>33</sup> David Fairer has observed Coleridge's use, in 1796, of images of visionary idleness, such as his 'wish, like the Indian Vishna [sic], to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotos' (CL I 350), to bait Thelwall's 'commitment to virtuous action': "A little sparring about Poetry": Coleridge and Thelwall, 1796-8', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 21 (NS), Spring 2003, 20-33, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Coleridge (along with Wordsworth) earns a mention in the chapter 'The Importance of Loafing' in Lin Yutang's classic work *The Importance of Living* (1937; repr. New York: William Morrow, 1998), 151, where Lin praises the 'romantic cult of the idle life as essentially democratic'.

Liverpool in July 1817) that:

the Taste and Character, the whole tone of Manners and Feeling, and above all the Religious [...] and Political tendencies of the public mind, have ever borne such a close correspondence, so distinct and evident an Analogy to the predominant system of speculative Philosophy, whatever it may chance to be, as must remain inexplicable, unless we admit not only a reaction and interdependence on both sides, but a powerful, tho' most often indirect influence of the latter on all the former. (CL IV 759)

It was surely with this in mind that Coleridge had aimed *The Friend* not at 'the multitude of men', but those who 'are to influence the multitude' (CL III 141). This was in keeping with the principle of pleading 'for the oppressed, not *to* them' (LPR 43) that he had advanced in 1795, reiterated in the *Lay Sermon* of 1817 (LS 148), and *The Friend* in 1809 (F II 137) and 1818 (F I 210, 334): Coleridge worried that political agitation which addressed the public to the exclusion of those who held political power would incite repression from the latter and violence in the former, and so prove counter-productive.

If Coleridge's stance was mediatory, it was far from neutral: he deplored the 'OVERBALANCE OF THE COMMERCIAL SPIRIT' (LS 169) that appeared to be sundering society, and although, as I have shown, no friend to Cobbett's style, he praised him in 1819 for his attack on 'the hollowness of *commercial* wealth' (CL IV 979). As Kaz Oishi has remarked, '[f]or Coleridge, it was "well-being", rather than "wealth", that counted most in human welfare'.<sup>35</sup> In 1815, Coleridge was active in the protests against the 'Injustice & Cruelty' of the Corn Law, which he saw as a 'Poll Tax' in which 'the poorest pay the most': he drew up a petition to Parliament and gave a public speech at Calne, to which, he claimed, he received such 'loud Huzzas' that, 'if it depended on the Inhabitants at large, I believe they would send me up to Parliament' (CL IV 549-50). In 1818, Coleridge lobbied intensively for the passage of Peel's Bill to regulate the working hours of children in cotton factories, writing three pamphlets in its support (SWF I 714-751), which came down, in his eyes, to one question: 'Whether some half score of rich Capitalists are to be prevented from suborning Suicide and perpetrating Infanticide and Soul-murder' (CL IV 854). Invoking 'the glorious precedent of the Abolition of the Slave Trade', the full power of Coleridge's rhetoric was turned on the 'utterly sophistical' idea that the children could have willingly offered their '*free* Labour' (SWF I 724, 719). These actions were in keeping with his progressive view of the 'positive ends' of national government, put forward in *The Friend* of 30 November 1809 (F II 201-02, 206-07), of 1818 (F I 251-53, 261-62), and in the *Lay Sermon* of 1817: '1. To make the means of subsistence more easy to each individual. 2. To secure to each of its members THE HOPE of bettering his own

<sup>35</sup> 'Coleridge's Philanthropy: Poverty, Dissenting Radicalism, and the Language of Benevolence', *The Coleridge Bulletin* 15 (NS), Spring 2000, 56-70, 70.

condition or that of his children. 3. The development of those faculties which are essential to his Humanity, i.e. to his rational and moral Being' (LS 216-17). These are not the actions, or thoughts, of disenchanted conservatism.

In terms of 'pure' politics, then, Coleridge is perhaps best regarded as a progressive constitutionalist in the British tradition;<sup>36</sup> a defender of the rule of law as the means securing liberty for the whole of society; and, as Peter Kitson suggests, a 'Commonwealthsman'.<sup>37</sup> But my point in this essay is that he goes further than this: while Coleridge knew the importance of, and participated in, political and legal reaction to immediate issues, in his appeal to the mind he attempted to found a 'more permanent revolution'. He wanted human beings not merely to *react* to their circumstances, but to become *active* in the constitution of their consciousness, and thereby the human habitat as a whole. Coleridge was, from this perspective, a psychosocial revolutionary, seeking stability not in dogma or fustiness, but in the dynamic powers of self-consciousness itself.

Despite what I have said so far, the suggestion that Coleridge was a kind of revolutionary might still seem excessive; to many, Butler's description of him as a 'Christian apologist' (Butler 91) would appear more reasonable. But that term is likely to mislead by exclusion. While Christianity—both as a tradition and (in its Unitarian form) as a self-consciously modern vehicle of political dissent—clearly informed and influenced every aspect of Coleridge's thinking throughout his life, Butler's term is reductive, even taking only the range, and not the content, of Coleridge's vocational activity into account. While Coleridge thought religion to be 'the only means universally *efficient*' (LPR 44) 'with and through which Philosophy acts on the community in general' (CL IV 759-60), in practice, as Kathleen Coburn remarked, 'he never found any one church (nor any political party) completely to satisfy him'.<sup>38</sup> As the decisive professional crisis of the mid-to-late 1790s showed, Coleridge's calling resisted 'dogmatism' (CL I 138) of all kinds. He was not prepared to sink

<sup>36</sup> 'Constitutionalism means that all power rests on the understanding that it will be exercised according to commonly accepted principles, that the persons on whom power is conferred are selected because it is thought that they are most likely to do what is right, not in order that whatever they do should be right': F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 181. Coleridge defended the British-style unwritten constitution on the basis that, as an 'Idea' that 'demonstrated its actuality by its practical influence', such a constitution was permanently beyond any claim on the part of any government to absolute authority. This he distinguished both from a constitution based on electoral authority alone (what most people today, most of the time, mean by 'democracy'), and an autocracy, both of which came to the same thing, for Coleridge, insofar as both pretend to absolute authority: 'A democratic Republic and an Absolute Monarchy agree in this; that in both alike, the Nation, or People, delegates its whole power. Nothing is left obscure, nothing suffered to remain in the Idea, unevolved and only acknowledged as an existing, yet indeterminable Right' (C & S 96). The political chemistry produced by British history resisted such absolutism. In 1832 he remarked that, 'Monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, as such, exclude each the other: but if the elements are to interpenetrate, how absurd to call a lump of sugar, hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon! nay, to take three lumps, and call the first, hydrogen: the second, oxygen; and the third, carbon! Don't you see that each is in all and all in each?' (IT II 169). 'The Democracy of England', he went on to observe, demonstrated that '[t]he power in a democracy is in focal points without a Centre' (IT I 297): it subsists in the self-ordering vitality of the wider culture, rather than the legal authority of a single text or electoral system.

<sup>37</sup> 'Political thinker', *The Cambridge Companion* (op. cit.), 168.

<sup>38</sup> Kathleen Coburn, *The Self-Conscious Imagination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 68.

into 'a wilful Stupor with the sacrifice of Reason under the name of Faith': 'I fear', he wrote, 'the Tyranny of *Dogmas*' (CN V 5636). Coleridge typically justified Christianity in psychological terms, for its emphasis on the self: it 'demanded the direct reformation & voluntary act of each Individual prior to any change in his outward circumstances' (CL II 999). Christianity held value for Coleridge not for its own sake ('Truth' took precedence: AR 107), nor merely as a prop in times of personal despair (although it is clear it served that purpose for him too), but insofar as it directed human consciousness to its own self-surpassing potential: 'Godliness is Godlike-ness, and is paraphrased by Peter—"that ye may be partakers of the divine nature."—i.e. act from a love of order, & happiness, & not from any self-respecting motive—from the excellency, into which you have exalted your *nature*, not from the keenness of mere *prudence*' (CL I 284). To take as read even his Christianity (on the face of it, a 'given' in Coleridge's writings) is to risk eliding the import in the form. He did not defend the Christian tradition as an unquestionable authority, least of all merely as an institution, but for its assistance in cultivating self-consciousness, by 'turning the mind in upon itself' (CN III 3743). Coleridge's treatment of Christianity, then, is best seen not as merely doctrinal, but as part of his vocational commitment to the realisation of human potential: his omnivorous metaphysics excluded nothing except that which seemed to him to exclude such potential. Christianity was made to serve his revolutionary ideal.

Finally, Coleridge himself spoke in terms of revolution. In 1820 he cherished the hope that his work would bring about 'a revolution of all that has been called Philosophy or Metaphysics in England and France' since the Restoration (CL V 28); and in the 'Treatise on Method' published for the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana*, Coleridge explicitly related the seemingly apolitical cultivation of the mind to the highly charged political context of England in 1818:

Without advocating the exploded doctrine of human *perfectibility*, we cannot but regard all that is human in human nature, and all that in nature is above herself, as together working toward that far deeper and more permanent revolution in the moral world, of which the recent changes in the political world may be regarded as the pioneering whirlwind and storm. (SWF I 685)

'Man', he observed in a lecture of 1811, 'might be considered in a secondary sense *his own creator*[,] for by the improvement of the faculties given him by God he enlarged them & even created new ones' (LL I 192). Coleridge's most ambitious hopes for humanity lay in this 'more permanent revolution': the revolution sustained in and by the reflexive, creative and constitutive powers of

consciousness.<sup>39</sup>

By way of conclusion, I will expand this point a little further. T.S. Eliot once remarked that by middle-age, Coleridge was ‘already a ruined man. Sometimes, however, to be a “ruined man” is itself a vocation’.<sup>40</sup> This intriguing comment suggests (perhaps deliberately) another possibility, running counter to Eliot’s argument: that what appears as ‘ruin’ on one interpretation, might appear as ‘vocation’ on another. Eliot takes this suggestion no further, and his reading of Coleridge indicates that his use of the term ‘ruin’ implies the generally accepted meaning, of decay and change for the worse. The view of Coleridge’s vocation that I have put forward here is the very opposite: a quest for renewal in the face of change, the cultivation of the human capacity to effect that renewal through consciousness, and thereby to unite personal and social well-being. As such, it is a vocation committed not only to the amelioration of human reality, but also to change itself, to reality conceived as a flow; and in this, Eliot’s remark might be more appropriate than he knew. The etymology of the word ‘ruin’ indicates a motile, dynamic origin: the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the Latin word *ruina*, from the verb *ruere*, ‘to fall’. Stephen Medcalf, writing on the analysis of the word ‘ruin’ by (the Coleridgean) Owen Barfield, expands upon this:

The Latin word *ruina* and the corresponding verb *rūo* always suggests a falling, and seems to derive from an Indo-European root, meaning rush-fall-collapse. When ‘ruin’ first appears in English it still has this dynamic meaning; by Elizabethan times it has acquired a static sense of something that has fallen, and its subsequent history in English is of an interplay between these two senses [...]

Medcalf goes on to highlight the correspondence between Barfield and the physicist and theorist David Bohm,

who demanded, in response to the philosophical difficulties raised by quantum physics, a new kind of thought, directed at processes rather than objects, and a more verb-based language. It seems no mere coincidence that Bohm described what he was looking for as the ‘rheomode’, from the Greek word *rheo*, ‘flow’, which comes from the same root as *rūo* and *ruina*.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> With this in mind, it is surely wrong to regard Coleridge’s *magnum opus* (not the *Opus Maximum* as we have it, but the ‘ideal entity’ to which Coleridge’s sense of vocation was directed), with Thomas McFarland, as merely ‘a work in the service of the Christian religion’, ‘a conservative venture, undertaken as a reaction against the Enlightenment’: *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 355, 356.

<sup>40</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 69.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Medcalf, ‘Feel the Flow’ (Review of Simon Blaxland-de Lange, *Owen Barfield: Romanticism Come of Age – A Biography* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2006)), *TLS*, No. 5415, 12 January 2007, 10-11. George Santayana saw in the dynamic sense of the word ‘ruin’ a distinctive virtue of English culture. He wrote that, ‘everything, in its ruin, seems in England to live a new life; and it is only this second life, [...] that is English’: ‘English Architecture’, in *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (1922; repr. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 77-83, 80.

In a late notebook entry, with parallels to the one in which he connected ‘reor’ with ‘res’ (i.e. ‘to think’ with ‘thing’), Coleridge relates the ancient Greek *rheo* (flow), from which Medcalf derives ‘ruin’, to the English verb ‘to read’. He speculates that ‘*ρεω*’ might relate to a ‘Stream of words’ or ‘Flow of Eloquence’, and that in English, ‘Read it to me’ originally meant ‘Make it flow for me’ (CN IV 4832).<sup>42</sup> If, for Coleridge, ‘to read’ is to make words flow as meaning, then similarly, ‘to write’ is to make human reality flow through words. This, I think, is the clue to Coleridge’s vocation as a writer: to be an agent of change through the *poiesis*, the *making*, of language, with all its power. It is, as I have suggested, in his attention to language—‘the sacred Fire in the Temple of Humanity’ (CL III 522)—that Coleridge most clearly reveals the substance of his politics. Words, as the ‘living powers’ of consciousness, the means by which reality is articulated, and thereby carried forward and renewed in the human habitat, enact and enable (or disable) human freedom. As Coleridge advised a correspondent: a ‘severe propriety of words, appear[s] to me more and more, the especial Duty of a Poet—who whatever political party he may favor, ought in this respect to be at once a *Radical* and a *Conservative*.<sup>43</sup> Coleridge’s passion for language was the continuous medium for his authentic interfusion of both. In 1796, he declared, ‘I am not fit for *public* Life; yet the Light shall stream to a far distance from the taper in my cottage window’ (CL I 277). I hope to have shown that this light streams towards, in the words of Philip Allott, ‘a revolution not in the streets but in our minds’.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Of related derivation, one of the distinctive elements of Coleridge’s *Logic* was ‘hematic’: the art of ‘arranging words and sentences perspicuously’ (L 22), a branch of study lying ‘between’ grammar and rhetoric (L 101). Its subject is the qualitative order of verbal communication, a central Coleridgean concern (and, I hope to have shown, not an apolitical one). The *Oxford English Dictionary* credits Coleridge with introducing the noun ‘hematic’ into the language.

<sup>43</sup> South African Library, MSB 393, 1 (8), ‘Thomas Pringle’. For a discussion of the context of this advice, see Peter Anderson, ‘Home Truths: Samuel Taylor Coleridge advises Thomas Pringle’, *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 28 (NS), Winter 2006, 21–28.

<sup>44</sup> Allott, *Health of Nations*, 421 (In Chapter 14, ‘International Law and International Revolution: Reconceiving the World?; first publ. *International Law and International Revolution: Reconceiving the World*: Josephine Onoh Memorial Lecture 1989 (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989)).