The 'Hedge-Girdle of the State': Coleridge and the Social Contract

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THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT rests on narratives about legitimate political authority. From Plato's myth of the cave to Rawl's veil of ignorance, stories help explain what rightful government looks like. No such narrative has dominated the modern world more than that of the social contract, which seeks a balance between the freedom of the individual and the authority of the state. Charles Taylor identifies it as a key aspect of modern Western civilization's social imaginary,[1] and Douglas Hedley describes the social contract as a "powerful… pervasive work of the imagination."[2] Traditionally, Hobbes stands as the originator of modern social contract theory, though it has been adopted and adapted by many since. "[T]old and retold by a host of different authors," its narrative lies at the bottom of many versions of liberalism, from Hobbes down to Rawls.[3] However, despite wide acknowledgement of the pervasiveness and importance of the social contract tradition in forming notions and expectations of government, both historically and in contemporary society, various incisive critiques have emerged. Most well-known, Hume and Burke in the eighteenth-century assert that the social contract is unhistorical, inaccurate, and inconsistent. In this paper, I will discuss Coleridge's critique of standard social contract theory, which I take to be more devastating that either Hume's or Burke's, but also more constructive. Coleridge not only criticizes standard social contract theory, but revisions it.

In Coleridge's time, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau provided the major three main versions of social contract theory. However, all social contract theories conceptualize "citizens' obligations to political authorities as grounded somehow in agreement.".[4] The standard narrative consists of three parts, according to Jean Hampton.[5] First, there is a state of nature, where individuals are imagined outside of political society. The next stage involves "agreements among the people… to create a commonwealth in order to escape the state of nature."[6] Finally, the social contract establishes "an agency relationship between the people and the ruler." In other words, "the people 'hire' the ruler (by obeying him and thereby empowering him) for as long as he uses his power to further… their aims in accepting subjugation."[7] Implicit in the principle-agent relationship is the right of the people to revolt against the government when it no longer benefits them.

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1 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 156 and *passim*.
2 Douglas Hedley, *Living Forms of the Imagination* (London: Continuum-T&T Clark,2008), 245.
3 Mark E. Button, *Contract, Culture, and Citizenship: Transformative Liberalism from Hobbes to Rawls* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 1.
4 Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, 22.
5 Jean Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 269-270.
6 Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract*, 269.
7 Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract,* 270.

State of Nature

First, Coleridge's conception of the human person sits at odds with the *homo economicus* anthropology of the social contract. Social contract narratives all begin with a "state of nature," in which human beings stand abstracted from society. Equality, autonomy, and instrumental rationality denote the key characteristics of human beings in the state of nature. For Hobbes, in the state of nature, every individual has "a right to everything." Such a situation leads to the war "of every man against every man."[8] In contrast, Rousseau describes this state as one of perfect "felicity." Here one finds the natural human being "sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied."[9] Contrasting this idyllic isolation, in Rousseau's version of the lapsarian narrative, the social state represents a fall from human innocence and perfection. Though in Rousseau's version, the advent of private property and sociability, rather than willful sin, serves as the culprit. Despite the difference between Hobbes and Rousseau in their description of a state of nature, they both agree on casting the natural human as solitary, autonomous, and self-interested. On this point, Coleridge differs, beginning early in his career. His pantisocracy scheme can be interpreted as an attempt to return to "nature," involving an abnegation of private property and a move to "virgin" territory. However, Coleridge's utopian "state of nature"—if we understand the pantisocracy scheme this way—remains fundamentally communal, rather than isolated. Coleridge's later discussions of a state of nature show continuity on this point. He posits human beings as situated within layers of community and capable of growth and development, rather than one-dimensional rational actors. In the marginalia to Algernon Sidney's version of the state of nature, Coleridge writes, "a man per se is a contradiction/ he is only *potentially* man, not *actually*."[10] In order for human beings to attain their full potential, they must grow within a community. In the late notebooks, Coleridge clarifies, "It is eminently distinctive of Man, that his state of Nature is necessarily *ideal*."[11] That is, human beings, unlike other creatures, do not begin in a natural state, but rather must develop to their natural end. Here, he turns both Hobbes's and Rousseau's theories on their head: the "state of nature" is not the precursor to civil society, but rather the goal toward which civil society progresses.

Coleridge's critique of the state of nature goes deeper than most. Burke and Hume make the straightforward empirical criticism that no human being has ever existed in the state of nature. However, Coleridge's insights go further, for he asserts that human beings come to self-consciousness through a relationship

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[8] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 80, 76.

[9] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pt. 1.2, p.134.

[10] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, 6 vols., ed. by H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), V, 37.

[11] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 5 vols., ed. by Kathleen Coburn, (New York: Bollingen-Pantheon Books, 1961), V, n.5554.

with another, an I-Thou relationship. He takes the mother-child relationship as archetypal of this dynamic. In a late notebook entry, Coleridge expands the dyad into a community. One's personhood "depends, as it seems, on the narrow Circumstances & Inclosure of his Infancy, Childhood & Youth--& afterwards on the larger Hedge-girdle of the State,[12] in which he is a Citizen born."[13] Coleridge employs the image of successive concentric circles that also correspond to stages in life. The narrow community of the infant, occupied by family, becomes the nation and its citizens.[14] Elsewhere, Coleridge succinctly summarizes, "the Self is in & by itself a phantom," lacking full being, but yet "it is capable of receiving true entity by *reflection* from the *Nation*."[15] Thus, while "[a] male & female Tyger" are the same whether alone in the wild or living with others, "Man is truly altered by the co-existence of other men; his faculties cannot be developed in himself alone, & only by himself."[16] For Coleridge, the human person remains deeply embedded in a social and even physical landscape. By these particularities, the citizen "seems to be… influenced & determined (caused to be what he is, qualis sit = qualified, *bethinged*)… .Beyond this ring-fence he cannot stray, of these circummurations he can seldom overleap the lowest & innermost, and the outermost is his apparent horizon."[17] Just as the child find a mirror of itself within its mother's arms, so the individual comes to further self-knowledge within the context of the state. With this understanding of human relationality, Coleridge can find the "state of nature" myth not only historically inaccurate, but philosophically flawed as a representation of the human condition.

Agreement

Coleridge's view of human nature exposes the groundlessness of a state of nature, both as an empirical reality and as a heuristic for developing a theory of government. However, Coleridge does agree with social contract theory in that legitimate government "must have *originated* in Choice and an Agreement."[18] Yet, for Coleridge the nature of this contract differs from the theories forward by Hobbes and Rousseau, because he does not take this agreement as the product of instrumental rationality. In *The Friend*, Coleridge critiques both the Hobbesian and Rousseauian versions of social contract as misunderstanding the right relationship between reason and understanding, each in a different

[12] Here Coleridge's use of "State" corresponds to his notion of the nation. As explained in *Constitution of Church and State*, Coleridge utilizes "state" to refer to both the actual government of a realm and the entirety of the realm itself, which he also refers to as "nation." c.f. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State,* ed. by John Colmer (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 22, 24, 233-234.

[13] Coleridge, *Notebooks,* III, n4109, dated 1811-1816.

[14] Here, Coleridge gestures at the varying levels of community, but elsewhere he specifically identifies five levels of community—individual, race, family, commonwealth (nation), church (humankind). c.f. Coleridge *Notebooks*, V, n.5868, 6292, 6370; *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, I, 332.

[15] Coleridge, *Notebooks*, V, n6914, dated March-April 1834.

[16] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Letter to Thomas Clarkson, 13 October 1806, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols., ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 1197.

[17] Coleridge, *Notebooks,* III, n4109, dated 1811-1816.

[18] Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. by B.E. Rooke, 2 vols, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), II, 98.

way. Of the three possible grounds for legitimate government, Hobbes begins with fear (the power of the strongest), Rousseau uses reason, and Coleridge advocates for understanding, though as I shall show, Coleridge views both understanding and reason as bearing on politics in different respects.

For Hobbes, consent occurs because individuals, fearing death in the state of nature, find it in their best interest to give up their freedom and submit to the social contract. In Coleridge's view, Hobbes treats human beings as animals who can be dominated by fear of brute force. Conversely, Coleridge argues that human beings must be "governed" by something which speaks to their moral nature, namely by "the aweful power of Law, acting on natures pre-configured to its influences." On Coleridge's reading, Hobbes's theory does not in fact involve a contract insofar as its rests simply on the power of the stronger. In reply to Hobbes' famous quip that "Laws without the Sword are but bits of Parchment," Coleridge pithily responds that "without the Laws the Sword is but a piece of Iron."[19] Here, Coleridge is pointing to the sword as a symbol of the reciprocal moral duty on the part of the sovereign and subject. Hobbes conceives of human beings as merely sensually driven creatures, who utilize their instrumental rationality to gain pleasure and avoid pain. In other words, for Hobbes, human beings function entirely within the realm of the understanding, as Coleridge defines it. Fear is in fact a function of the understanding, which weighs consequences and chooses accordingly. In Coleridge's critique of Hobbes, he shows that Hobbes's human beings possess only understanding and lack reason entirely.[20] Conversely, Coleridge argues for the rule of law, as opposed to the rule of fear, which treats human beings as reason-bearing and capable of moral and immoral actions.[21] In Coleridge's view, through the rule of law acting upon reason, human beings come to see themselves as part of a whole, the nation, and thus, come to recognize certain moral duties and rights vis-à-vis the whole.

Coleridge critiques Hobbes neglecting human beings' moral nature and assuming them to be utility-maximizing actors. His criticism of Rousseau points out the opposite problem, namely assessing "all the relations of men in Society by the Laws of moral necessity" and founding a government solely on reason. If Hobbes strips human beings down to the one dimension of understanding, Rousseau envisions them with only reason. Rousseau argues that legitimate society must "be framed on such Principles that every Individual follows his own Reason while he obeys the Laws of the Constitution, and performs the Will of the State while he follows the Dictate of his own Reason."[22] From this premise Rousseau arrives at the idea of the general will. Coleridge finds Rousseau's chain of logic untenable because for Coleridge, "REASON… dwells in every Man *potentially*," but without the

[19] Coleridge, *The Friend*, II, 102.
[20] c.f. Coleridge, *The Notebooks*, 4, n.5209 for a discussion of social contract theory and the inadequacy of viewing human beings as possessing only understanding.
[21] c.f. Graham Davidson, *Coleridge's Career* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 269.
[22] Coleridge, *The Friend*, II, 125-127.

mediating role of the understanding, it cannot be expressed. All may have reason, but not all can equally express it because understanding is developed in different degrees in different individuals. Coleridge observes that if reason alone provides the standard for legitimate governance, then consistency would demand that both children and women be allowed suffrage, because they possess reason equally with men. Further, founding government on reason necessarily entails that there is only one possible frame of government: "Of course, as there is but one System of Geometry, so according to this Theory there can be but one Constitution and one System of Legislation." According to this system, "[w]hatever is not *every where* necessary, is *no where* right."[23] While Hobbes' mistakenly characterizes human beings as lacking reason, Rousseau fails to grasp that in "Creatures of Flesh and Blood" understanding must mediate reason, and understanding exists in different individuals to different degrees. While Coleridge agrees with Rousseau on the importance of morality and reason, he argues that "little or nothing is won by it [reason] for the institutions of Society; and least of all for the constitutions of Governments."[24]

In *The Friend*, Coleridge proposes to ground government in understanding, that is, in prudence: "we must rely on our *Understandings*, enlightened by past experience and immediate Observation, and determining our choice by comparisons of Expediency." However, Coleridge does not mean to jettison reason entirely, as Hobbes does, or to rely solely on reason as Rousseau does, but rather he means for understanding to mediate reason's role in politics. Coleridge's reliance on understanding sets a modest bar for government legitimacy: "every Institution of national origin needs no other Justification than a proof, that under the particular circumstances it is expedient."[25] Related is Coleridge's claim that government originated to protect necessarily unequal property.[26] Further, property defines rights; thus, rights can only be meaningfully understood within a given society and not in the abstract.[27] In many respects, Coleridge's respective critiques of Rousseau and Hobbes in *The Friend* appear to be quite Burkean. He defends convention, reciprocal rights and duties, and prudence against claims for abstract rights and universal reason. However, a careful reading of *The Friend* in light of his other works show what Douglas Hedley has argued, namely that Coleridge's political philosophy synthesizes Burke and Rousseau.[28] Coleridge indicates that his system rests on understanding, yet Coleridge acknowledges that "whatever Law or System of Law" disregards conscience and reason "disennobles our Nature, leagues itself with the Animal against the Godlike."[29] Coleridge criticizes both Hobbes and Rousseau for ignoring the mixed material of human nature—both

[23] Coleridge, *The Friend*, II, 105.
[24] Coleridge, *The Friend*, II, 128.
[25] Coleridge, *The Friend*, II, 129, 103-104.
[26] Cf CN V 6909: 'I would [make] sacred the Holy Law of Property, & therefore<perforce> of Unequal Property…'
[27] Coleridge, *Table Talk*, 2 vols., ed. by Carl Woodring (London: Routledge, 1990), II, 128; *The Friend*, II, 131-132; *Constitution of Church and State*, 82; *Shorter Works*, II, 1481; *Notebooks*, III, n.3835; *Notebooks*, V, n.6509 and 6510; *Lay Sermons*, 25; *Shorter Works*, I, 409.
[28] Hedley, *Living Forms,* 250-259.
[29] Coleridge, *The Friend*, II, 126.

divine and physical, containing reason and understanding—in favor of either one or the other. In a notebook entry from the same period as *The Friend*, Coleridge makes a distinction between "Laws made to regulate the claims & duties of Individuals, which remain for the greater part unaltered thro' all the changes of national Progression," which remain consistent "and those Laws which regulate the forms of Civil Polity," which change over time with the polity.[30] Coleridge, thus, associates the founding and basis of society, with reason, while understanding governs the functions of the government. For Coleridge, human relationality occurs through reason; thus, reason allows individual human beings to become a self-conscious nation. Coleridge writes in *The Friend*, to Reason, "we owe the privilege that of all we can become one, a living *whole*! that we have a COUNTRY!"[31]

In his discussions of Rousseau and Hobbes in *The Friend*, Coleridge does not clarify exactly how both reason and understanding impinge on politics. However, his explicit discussions of social contract theory, in *The Friend* and *Church and State*, evince some possibilities. In both places, he quickly dismisses any historical accuracy to the social contract, calling it a "pure fiction" and "an idle fancy."[32] Tellingly, Coleridge goes on to argue that even if such a contract had occurred, it would only "bind the contracting parties to act for the general good, according to their best lights and opportunities." Thus, expedience provides the only criteria for a particular government. However, after dismissing the idea of an original social contract, Coleridge goes on to argue that "if instead of the *conception* or *theory* of an original social contract, you say the *idea* of an ever-originating social contract, this is so certain and so indispensable, that it constitutes the whole ground of the difference between subject and serf, between a commonwealth and a slave-planation."[33] Coleridge's reference to "idea" as opposed to "conception" points to the difference between social contract as a theory arrived at by empirical generalizations and social contract as a guiding normative idea known to reason. Ultimately, Coleridge's defense of the social contract as an idea "is evolved out of the yet higher idea of *person*, in contra-distinction from *thing*." While things can be used as a means to an end, a person "must always be included in the *end*."[34] As a result, "if there be any difference between a Government and a band of Robbers, an act of consent must be supposed on the part of the People governed."[35] Coleridge's notion of the social contract demands that the people consent to government, because to do otherwise would be to treat persons as things. In Coleridge's understanding, however, this consent does not rest on a utility maximizing calculation, but rather on imagining oneself as part of a community of reciprocal moral duties. It seems that for Coleridge, the grounds of the social contract rest on personhood and

[30] Coleridge, *Notebooks*, III, 3840.
[31] Coleridge, *The Friend* II, 126.
[32] Coleridge, *Constitution of Church and State*, 14; *The Friend*, II, 102-103.
[33] Coleridge, *Constitution of Church and State*, 14-15.
[34] Coleridge, *Constitution of Church and State*, 15.
[35] Coleridge, *The Friend*, II, 103.

its identifier, reason, but the specifics adapt to the particular needs and character of the community, as known through understanding. The social contract joins together both the universal and the particular.

Principle-Agent Relationship

Coleridge's idea of an ever-originating social contract, grounded in a relational understanding of the human condition, allows for him recast the relationship between ruled and ruler, breaking out of the principle-agent model. In classic social contract theory, all members of a community agree to give up certain liberties in favor of the protections of government. Such an exchange rests on utility calculations. Essentially, the people contract the ruler to rule on behalf of themselves. Though both Hobbes's and Locke's theories can hold in monarchies (in fact Hobbes advocated some sort of one-person rule), the French Revolution, drawing on Rousseau, combined social contract theory with popular sovereignty, resulting in representative government and universal suffrage. Several empirical and normative problems arise from this model. David Hume has observed that in fact, "the far greatest part of the nation" would never say that "the had ever consented to the authority of their rulers or promis'd to obey them." Rather, they "wou'd certainly reply, that the affair depended not on their consent, but that they were born to such obedience."[36] Locke, foreseeing this objection, developed a theory of tacit consent, which equates inheriting property with consent.[37] But, this solution neglects all landless members of society. Others argue that citizens tacitly consent by not leaving the country or by voting. Yet, emigration is often not a feasible possibility and voting, even in the best circumstances, involves a relatively uninformed public, fails to account for children, and always creates a minority who lost the vote. These objections point to a deeper normative critique. Contractarians assume "that both our capacity to behave wrongly and our capacity to do (and know) what is right are neither socially created nor subject in any significant way to manipulation."[38] In other words, contract theory assumes a static human nature, neglecting the moral and cultural education that individuals receive in a given society.

For Coleridge, the relationship between citizen and sovereign has less to do with elections or proportions of representation, but rather points back to his notion of human development within society. Coleridge argues that citizens have moral duties to a specific community because it has enabled them to fully develop as persons. Here Coleridge's definition of education encompasses both what is normally thought of under education, namely specific skills that allow for material success, as well as a moral and spiritual education. In the second *Lay Sermon*, Coleridge gives three positive ends of government, namely

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[36] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 348-49.

[37] John Locke, "Second Treatise, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 346-48.

[38] Hampton, *Hobbes and the Social Contract*, 270.

"[t]o make the means of subsistence more easy to each individual"; "to secure to each of its members THE HOPE of bettering his own condition or that of his children;" and "the development of those faculties which are essential to his Humanity."[39] In *Church and State*, Coleridge clarifies this last item, which he calls a "national education," that involves "eliciting, the latent *man* in all the natives of the soil, *trains them up* to citizens of the country, free subjects of the realm."[40] Citizenship grows out of the educating work of the nation, which both fosters the specific skills needed for material success and develops the moral faculties that allow the individual to identify as a member of society.

Coleridge's emphasis on socialization and education is born out in the institution of the National Church, which stands in opposition to the state or government. The state expresses the landed and commercial interests of the nation—the propriety of the nation—through the two houses of Parliament, and advances the civilization or material well-being of the nation. For Coleridge, the King, Lords, and Commons *"collectively"* comprise "an Organ for the Representation of the Interests of the Nation, not as a Means for the transmission and collection of the Opinions or Wishes of the People."[41] Now, Coleridge does argue for an institution to express public opinion, but for him, that rests on the press, rather than Parliament.[42] Conversely, the National Church forms "the ground, the necessary antecedent condition" of the state through its education of the people and preservation of the nationalty. It shoulders responsibility for the people's cultivation, or "the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our *humanity*." Coleridge explains that "civilization is itself but a mixed good, if not a far more corrupting influence."[43] On the other hand, a people can never be too cultivated. This distinction between civilization and cultivation, state and church, corresponds to the respective workings of understanding and reason in the polity. While the state considers the unequal distribution of things in the realm, the national church, the only true democracy, recognizes and values persons equally.[44]

At the apex of both church and state stands the King who acts "as the majesty, or symbolic unity of the whole nation, both of the state and of the persons."[45] For Coleridge, "When an indefinite Many have constituted a Whole… acquiring Unity from Totality, it claims of right… the title of *Majesty*."[46] In a notebook entry, Coleridge defines "Majesty" as "the Major Numerus contemplated as one, the godlike image in the optic Cylinder from

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[39] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. by R. J. White (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 216-217.
[40] Coleridge, *Church and State*, 48.
[41] Coleridge, *Church and State*, 43, 31.
[42] Coleridge throughout his life supported the free press (in spite of his awareness of the baseness of some printed works.) He believed that the press, particularly in conveying the deliberations of Parliament allowed the people to become part of the government of their nation; c.f. Coleridge, *1795 Lectures*, 308-313; *The Friend*, I, 64-95; *Notebooks*, 4, n.4923. See Josh King, 'Coleridge, the Clerisy and Print Culture' in this issue.
[43] Coleridge, *Church and State*, 43.
[44] Coleridge, *Table Talk*, I, 133, 155, 189.
[45] Coleridge, *Church and State*, 41.
[46] Coleridge, *Notebooks*, V, n6763, 6905.

the collection of surrounding fractions, unintelligible, or insignificant in themselves singly."[47] The reference to individuals as "fractions" points to another entry in which Coleridge contends that "[i]n order to be awakened to the sense of his personal~~ity~~ individuality the Man must become a *Citizen*--& as such, a fraction--/and this individuality in it's outward exponent/exclusive ~~ipseity~~ particularity, he sacrifices in order to contemplate, ~~his~~ and in the contemplation, *resume*, his *integrity* in the State."[48] The individual, in order to fully flourish as a person, must submit to the majesty of the whole in the person of the sovereign. Coleridge contends, "we seek to behold our Individuality in the Symbol—the Sovereign of the State." In one of his last notebook entries, Coleridge unpacks this brief description: "The Subject who kneels in homage before a rightful King, as the Symbol and acknowledged Representative of the Unity of the Nation… that Subject by virtue of the infinity & immortality in himself, recognizing in the Symbol of the Nation simultaneously an image of his *very Self* successively, becomes a King." Conversely, "a King *indeed* would in receiving his Homage inwardly perform the same, and repeat it in his own Soul as a homage to the great *Idea*, of which Providence had made him the Outward Word, the material Exponent."[49] Here, through an act of imagination, citizens recognize themselves in the king, and the sovereign in turn recalls the unity of the whole nation, which the king symbolizes. Again, in this entry Coleridge compares this mirroring between citizen and sovereign to that which occurs between child and mother. For Coleridge, the nation is an "imagined community," as Benedict Anderson has so aptly put it.[50] It exists insofar as the members can recognize the whole as a larger self, and recognize the sovereign as a reflection of self. Thus, the consent of the citizen is the assent of an individual who has come to find selfhood in the nation; rather, than the approval of one assessing the utility of an agreement.

Conclusion

In 1840, JS Mill wrote an essay on the recently deceased Coleridge, naming him, along with Jeremy Bentham, "the two great seminal minds of England in their age." Specifically, Mill argues that Coleridge provides the antidote to the dominant view of the time, which "commit[s] the very common error, of mistaking the state of things with which they had always been familiar, for the universal and natural condition of mankind." In Mill's day, as in ours, social contract theory dominated the popular imagination and obscured "the host of civilizing and restraining influences" required for a healthy polity. Social contract theory implies that any random assortment of individuals with temporarily coincident interests can form a functioning polity. In contrast, Mill

[47] Coleridge, *Notebooks*, V, n6914.
[48] Coleridge, *Notebooks*, V, n6400.
[49] Coleridge, *Notebooks*, V, n6914.
[50] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed, London: Verso, 2006, 5-7.

claims that even the "very first element of the social union, obedience to a government of some sort, has not been found so easy a thing to establish in the world." Specifically, Mill applauds Coleridge for recognizing three preconditions for a healthy polity: first, a system of education, second, "the feeling of allegiance or loyalty," and last, "cohesion among the members of the state." In these three items, Mill summarizes Coleridge's insightful revisioning of standard social contract theory. And even though Coleridge's thought remains under-appreciated among political scientists, Mill mediates aspects of Coleridge that have now become a part of liberalism's repertoire. Even so, perverse aspects of social contract theory, specifically the state of nature myth and its blindness to cultural particularity, persist. Recovering Coleridge's thought challenges the status quo and calls for a recognition of the role social context and imagined community plays in politics. While consent forms an indispensable aspect of just politics, that consent arises, not out of a vacuum, but out of a relational and generational community perpetuated through patterns of socialization and education.