Coleridge and Contemplation

Emily Holman and Dillon Struwig,
introduced by Peter Cheyne

COLERIDGE AND CONTEMPLATION is a project involving a series of conferences (Kyoto, March 2015; and Cambridge, August 2015); articles (such as here in the *Coleridge Bulletin*);[1] and forthcoming books including a collection of original essays *Coleridge and Contemplation*, due for publication in 2016; my monograph on the subject due the next year; and a co-authored book that I will work on with Dillon Struwig, offering a new account of Imagination and Ideas in Kant and Coleridge.

'Imagination and Truth: Reflections after Coleridge', Roger Scruton's essay in the current *Coleridge Bulletin*, is an early draft of a longer essay being written for the forthcoming collection. That volume will be the first collection of essays containing the thoughts mainly of professional philosophers and historians of philosophy on Coleridge, considered primarily as a philosopher.[2] There will also be essays from Coleridge scholars in literary studies and theology.

Imagination, reason and contemplation are crucial terms in Coleridge's thought, yet none of them are entirely understood, and by definition, if Coleridge is right, the latter two at least can never be given complete and conceptual accounts. Perhaps this is one reason why imagination has since received an enormous amount of attention, while discussion of reason and contemplation has waned. That, and the fact that since analytic philosophy initiated, in Anglophone countries, the linguistic turn in the humanities there has been very little discussion of meaning and value involving any reference beyond empirical and conceptual bounds. Yet even Kant, the original critic of pure reason, acknowledged that while pure Ideas of Reason—such as God, the immortal soul, freedom, and the good—have no legitimate role in our search for knowledge, they are nevertheless essential for moral conduct and aesthetic judgement.

With other post-Kantian thinkers, Coleridge saw much to applaud here, yet wanted more. For him, this meant a commitment to Ideas of Reason not merely as subjective projections and the inner basis for hope, but as objective

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1 To date: Peter Cheyne, 'A Coleridge*an* Account of Meditative Experience', *Journal of Philosophy of Life* 3.1, January 2013, 44-67; Peter Cheyne, 'The Art of Poetic Life-Writing', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, Winter 2014, 77-88; Emily Holman and Dillon Struwig, 'Coleridge and Contemplation: A Conference in Kyoto', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, Summer 2015, 77-84; and Roger Scruton, 'Imagination and Truth: Reflections after Coleridge', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, Summer 2015, 85-94. Also, two journal special editions have developed from the Kyoto conference: eds Eamonn Wall and Saeko Yoshikawa, *Coleridge, Contemplation and Cultural Practice*, *POETICA*, June 2015; and ed. Philip Aherne, *Coleridgean Contemplation: Literature, Nature & Aesthetics*, *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, June 2016.

2 Jeffrey Barbeau's excellent collection, *Coleridge's Assertion of Religion: Essays on the Opus Maximum*, Peeters, 2006, focuses on Coleridge's philosophy of religion in the OM, whereas *Coleridge and Contemplation* (forthcoming, 2016) addresses Coleridge's philosophy as a whole through essays on the theological, political, epistemological, aesthetic, and meditative aspects of his philosophical (and poetic, with J. C. C. Mays' essay) oeuvre.

realities in the world-at-large beyond the human mind, that we can indeed come to know, and know better through contemplation of a thing according not merely to its place in any utilitarian or economic system, actual or prospective, but according to that alone which can reveal value, that is, to 'knowledge of its ultimate aim' (C&S 12). To return attention in philosophy and literary studies to this contemplative aim, and to do so by reflecting on Coleridge's poetic works and philosophical writings is the objective of this project.

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OUTSIDE OF THE CHERRY BLOSSOM SEASON, Kyoto is not a city whose beauty instantly strikes you when walking along main roads. From there, it seems a busy fury of buildings, blocks and towers. A bird's-eye view shows Kyoto sliced by a Y-shaped river, and finding your way towards the river is a good initial starting-place for finding a splash of the spectacular. It forms a charming focal point for locals, who gather on the banks in good weather to walk or read; runners enjoy the view of the water and delicate bridges. But it is only by walking off the main track, into unobtrusive entrances, that one discovers the real essence of the city. Kyoto's temples and gardens are rightly world-renowned, and reveal a perfection in arrangement and organisation. Nor are they by any means few or difficult to find: the city has almost 2,000 temples, many of which are set in gardens, with small waterfalls or little rivers that begin a tranquil, powerful experience of beauty long before the temple doors slide open.

Kyoto Notre Dame University's conference on Coleridge and Contemplation gathered Coleridgean and contemplative scholars from all over the world to discuss a wide range of literary and philosophical topics. Thirty-four Speakers presented lectures and shorter papers, eleven Guest Chairs added to that number, and a total of 107 people attended the three-day international colloquium, which focused primarily on the theme of contemplation and the different ways in which it informs Coleridge's poetic, literary-critical, and philosophical work.

As was evident throughout the conference, Coleridge's diverse and complex texts present a unique opportunity for considering the relationship between these different, but inter-connected branches of the humanities. The breadth of inquiry stimulated by Coleridge's work was epitomised in the range of topics covered by the keynote lectures presented at the beginning of each day of the conference.

The first day opened with a keynote lecture by the justly renowned Coleridge scholar Jim Mays, who discussed the nature of the contemplative reading that Coleridge's work prompts. Arguing that words as signifiers oblige an abstract thinking process not dissociated from aesthetic involvement, Mays advocated a calm and ruminative reading, one that allows meaning to emerge

more fully. His reference to 'a contemplation that rests in motion' suggests how the active and energetic nature of Coleridge's thought is far from incompatible with a lingering and luxurious reading. Mays's close reading of *First Advent of Love* was a delight to hear, proving his point that Coleridge's poetry cannot be read too carefully.[3] Attention repays. Mays observed a distinction between Coleridge's use of poetry and of prose, emphasising that the latter is used to gain clarity of mind, and the former as a medium of reflection, a way to 'work through arguments on his pulse'.[4]

Douglas Hedley opened the second day of the conference with a keynote lecture on Coleridge's relationship to Plotinus and the tradition of Neoplatonic metaphysics and theology more broadly. He began by considering philosophical views on the contemplation of Beauty, Form, and the Good, one of the characteristic themes of Coleridge's later Christian Platonism.[5] Then, taking Coleridge's definition of the imagination in *The Statesman's Manual* as the starting point of his analysis, Hedley considered the influence of a diverse range of Neoplatonic approaches to contemplation on Coleridge's thought, including Plotinus's notion of the Gift (central to his ontology and cosmogony) and Henry More's interpretations of Pythagoras and Ezekiel (in the context of Old Testament conceptions of contemplation and theophany).[6] Hedley's paper also sought to present Coleridge's Platonic views on form, symbols, and the workings of the imagination in relation to the Neoplatonic tradition of philosophy as 'essentially a hermeneutic exercise', exemplified by Plotinus's focus on developing the insights of Plato and Aristotle, and in Coleridge's own focus on interpreting the core philosophical and theological ideas of Plato, Plotinus, and Kant, amongst others.[7]

The final day began with philosopher David E. Cooper's consideration of the underlying relationship between the activities of walking outdoors and philosophical meditation. Cooper offered a detailed analysis of a range of meditative behaviours that require movement, which he developed alongside of a theory of inter-relating 'scales of bodily and cognitive engagement' (these scales could be compared to Coleridge's 'minute experiments' and records of his own sensory and intellectual activity in the early 1800s letters and notebooks, covering his introspective analyses of various psychological phenomena and his accounts of his fell-walking experiences). The central ideas of the paper were illustrated with examples from the writings of meditative

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[3] For the text of 'First Advent of Love', see *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), I, 994 (Poem 574). Hereafter *PW*.

[4] As representative examples of this method, Mays cites *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 16 (hereafter *BL*) and 'The Treatise on Method', *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H. J. Jackson, and J. R. de. J. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), I, 630 (hereafter, *SWF*); from Coleridge's prose, and 'Dejection: An Ode' (*PW*, Poem 293) and 'The Garden of Boccacio' (*PW*, Poem 652) from his poetry.

[5] See e.g. *SWF*, I, 384-6 (from 'Essays On the Principles of Genial Criticism') and *BL*, I, 115.

[6] For the relevant passages on Coleridge's account of the Imagination and of symbols as 'the wheels of the intellect', see *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 29ff, 69-70. On the connections with More and Plotinus, see 49n, 95n, 114 (hereafter *LS*). See also *Plotinus*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966-88), V, 271-3, *Ennead*, V.8.

[7] See e.g. *LS*, 59-61 and nn, 74-5n, 103, 111, 113-4, 172; cf. *BL*, I, 144, 240, 246, 251.

walkers ranging from Coleridge and Rousseau to Basho and Thoreau.[8] Cooper's themes were echoed by poet-scholar Eamonn Wall, whose paper analysed how walking importantly provided Coleridge the appropriate conditions for deep contemplation.[9] Wall also considered more contemporary writers such as Tim Robinson and Patrick Leigh Fermor.

The conference also offered many fine examples of the diverse array of intellectual-historical approaches encouraged by the study of Coleridge's manifold yet always subtly interconnected interests in fields as different as literary criticism, philosophical theology, education, and political and economic theory.

Kaz Oishi, a prominent Japan-based Romanticist, offered a detailed history of the personal and intellectual relationship between Robert Owen and Coleridge. Taking Coleridge's Reason-Understanding distinction in *Lay Sermons* as its guiding thread, and also drawing on Coleridge's letters and pamphlets on child labour, Oishi considered Coleridge's critical response the theory of moral formation which informed many of Owen's philanthropic and industrial projects.[10] While noting Owen and Coleridge's shared sense of a need for a decisive refutation of Malthusian social and economic theory, the paper also emphasised the significant differences between them, particularly on questions concerning educational methods, eighteenth-century Poor Law reforms, the role of secularism in society, and the philosophy of mind.[11]

Andy Hamilton considered the status of Coleridge as a conservative political and social theorist. He set Coleridge's thought, particularly his concept of the balance of permanence and progression (as developed in *Lay Sermons* and *On the Constitution of Church & State*),[12] in clearly defined relief against the political philosophies of Burke on one side and J. S. Mill on the other. Hamilton also considered Mill's interpretation of Coleridge's writings as 'a necessary counterweight to Benthamite utilitarian and classical liberal values' in the context of Coleridge's critical engagement with the 'conservative constitutionalism' that he shared with Burke, but to which Coleridge attempted to bring a renewed understanding of the relationship between political theory and practice.[13]

Two notable conference contributions to Coleridgean intellectual history

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[8] For representative accounts of such 'minute experiments', see *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (London: Oxford University Press, 1956-71), II, 707, (16 Mar 1801), hereafter *CL*; *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957-2002), I, 886-7 (Dec 1800/Jan 1801), 921-3 (Mar 1801), hereafter *CN*. For fell-walking exploits, see e.g. *CL*, II, 835-44 (Aug 102), 915-8 (Jan 1803); *CN*, I, 1218 (Aug 1802). See also the 'Hill Walking Poems' collected in *Selected Poetry*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1996) 137-56.

[9] See e.g. *CL*, II, 916.

[10] For the relevant passages from Owen, see *A New Vision of Society and Other Writings*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 16, 52-4. For Coleridge's responses to Owenite thinking, see e.g. *SWF*, I, 701; *LS*, 192, 206.

[11] Oishi focused on passages such as *LS*, 59-60 on Reason and Understanding and *SWF*, II, 946 on the mind as 'an *armed* eye, which meditation had made contemplative'.

[12] See *LS*, 20, 109n; *On the Constitution of the Church and the State*, ed. John Colmer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pt I, ch. 2.

[13] See *The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), I, 215 (in Essay VII 'On the Errors of Party Spirit').

were the papers of Joseph O'Leary and Jerry Chia-Je Weng. O'Leary charted the development of Coleridge's intellectual relationship to Plotinus, drawing extensively on the notebooks and marginalia, as well as the accounts of Coleridge's Plotinian streak by Charles Lamb and Thomas De Quincey.[14] Chia-Je Weng considered the ways in which the different versions of Coleridge's play *Osorio* critically engage with the moral philosophy of Hartley and Godwin, focusing on Coleridge's responses to Associationist accounts of the cultivation of moral sense and the problem of evil.[15]

The conference provided excellent opportunity for the presentation of new developments in research on Coleridge's philosophy. Conference co-ordinator Peter Cheyne analysed Coleridge's 'Order of the Mental Powers' (as outlined in his Tennemann marginalia), discussing how what Coleridge characterises as the higher mind subordinates the lower as it approaches contemplation through an active cognitive process that gives a role to passive associating and 'mechanical' forces in the mental activity Cheyne calls 'the ordination of thought'.[16] Philip Aherne explored the extent of Coleridge's often unnoticed influence on various prominent nineteenth-century British philosophers and theologians, particularly those based in Cambridge, ranging from J. C. Hare and F. D. Maurice to William Whewell and Henry Sidgwick.[17] Dillon Struwig offered an account of the ways in which Coleridge's philosophy of geometry and constructive imagination in the *Logic* draws on Plotinus's theory of productive contemplation and Kant's theory of figurative synthesis (an intuitionist account of mathematical construction).[18]

There were a number of papers which offered new insights into Coleridge's wide influence on different approaches to the theory and practice of literature. Emily Holman, drawing on thinkers from Newman to Maritain, and following a line of thought inspired by Coleridgean literary theory, advocated contemplation as a mode of knowing, in the context of F. R. Leavis's writings on the relationship between emotion and thought in composing and interpreting poetry by Wordsworth and Shelley.[19] David Vallins's talk provided a rich consideration of possible affiliations and non-affiliations between Coleridge and Derrida. He argued that while both thinkers wish to assert that the subject cannot be objectified, they each perceive a quite different significance in this hypothesis. Derrida's emphasis upon the impossibility of

[14] See 'Coleridge and Opium Eating', *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. Frederick Burwick (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 108; Charles Lamb 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' (1835), 23. For some examples of what O'Leary calls 'Coleridge's Plotinian Speculations', see *CN*, IV, 4538; *SWF*, II, 1118-9; see also *Marginalia*, ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981-2004), IV, 742-3, V, 757 (hereafter *CM*).

[15] This account of Coleridge's criticism of Godwinian necessitarianism draws on *Lectures, 1795, On Politics and Religion,* ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 162-4; *The Watchman*, ed. Lewis Patton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 98-100.

[16] See *CM*, V, 798.

[17] See e.g. James Martineau's account in 'Personal Influences on Our Present Theology' in Essays and Reviews (London, 1890); published in his *Essays, Theological and Philosophical* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1883) 329-405 (see esp. 334, 335).

[18] See *Logic*, ed. J. R. de J. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 72-6, 215-24. See editor's notes for the connections to Plotinus and Kant, esp. 74n, 215n.

[19] See esp. Coleridge's approach in *BL*, II, ch. XVII-XX.

escaping the subjectivity of self-consciousness is used to undermine the possibility of achieving truth or objectivity; Coleridge, however, seeks to transform this subjectivity through an act of faith into a meaning towards truth. For him faith leads to knowledge; faith is the only thing that can certainly be known. Coleridge does not doubt this, even while doubting the human agent, thereby avoiding the radical scepticism of Derrida, who rests at the fallible human agent, and pursues that to its implications.[20]

Matthew Sharpe's paper also tied together literary and contemplative themes, presenting a consideration of Camus and Pierre Hadot as unique voices in twentieth-century French literature, with each exploring, in different ways, a form of *philosophia* as grounded in formative experience and calling insistently for contemplation; this approach might be compared with Coleridge's emphasis, particularly in *Aids to Reflection*, that Christianity is 'Not a *Philosophy* of Life, but a Life and a living Process'.[21] The Kant scholar James Kirwan offered a new assessment of Coleridge's views on eighteenth-century aesthetics, rethinking the Coleridgean criticism of Associationism, and particularly Coleridge's take on the problematic implications of Associationist aesthetic theory for moral and religious philosophy.[22] Masako Fujie placed Coleridge's contemplative aesthetics in the context of his collaboration with Wordsworth in searching for a genuine 'philosophical poem'.[23]

Other speakers focused on links between Coleridge and other literary figures, and inter-relations between different Coleridgean texts. Leading Japanese Romanticist Saeko Yoshikawa, uncovered and analysed traces of Coleridgean influence in the contemplative nature poetry of Edward Thomas.[24] Jin Lu offered a new account of some of the subtle and relatively unexplored parallels between Keats's and Coleridge's views on poetry and philosophy, in the context of their conceptions of imagination, sense-perception, and aesthetic experience.[25] Mikako Nonaka discussed the possibility of Coleridge's influence (via Emerson) on the work of Japanese late-Meiji Romantic poet Tokoku Kitamura. Yoshiko Fujii considered the textual and thematic relations between Coleridge's mysterious 'Woman in White' in the multiple versions of his 'Allegoric Vision' and the poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*. Mark Lussier discussed Buddhist perspectives on mental operations alongside neuro-scientific theories of the mind, considering the implications of both for Romanticism, and analysing these approaches to mind in relation to Coleridge's poetic practices. Setsuko Wake-Naota offered an account of Coleridge's philosophical engagement with Schelling and Tom Wedgwood and its influence on his interpretation of Shakespeare's genial psychological method

[20] For Coleridge's theory of subjectivity, see *BL*, I, 263-86; *Logic*, 69-85.
[21] See *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John B. Beer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 202.
[22] See 'Essays On the Principles of Genial Criticism', *SWF*, I, 353-86, esp. 372ff.
[23] See e.g. Coleridge's famous letter to Wordsworth on this subject, *CL*, IV, 570-7 (May 1815).
[24] For Thomas's hints concerning such influence, see *In Pursuit of Spring* (London: Wildwood House, 1981), 272-3.
[25] Some parallels cited include *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. H. E. Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), I, 238-9 (hereafter *KL*) and *BL*, I, 14; II, 12 on poetry; *KL*, 280-1 and *BL*, I, 165-6 on 'Philosophic Mind'; and *KL*, I, 242, 265 and *BL*, I, 202 on perception and imagination (these Coleridge citations are taken from *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907).

in poetic creation.[26] Her paper also compared Coleridge's spiritual, contemplative aesthetics with the Buddhist aesthetics of Japanese philosopher Kukai.

Susan Warley discussed Coleridge's views on the relationship between the psychology of metaphor and the analysis of sensory experience in the context of contemporary cognitive theory and philosophical analyses of metaphor. Fiona Tomkinson analysed the role of Coleridgean literary allusions as plot devices in the novels of Iris Murdoch, also considering the influence of Coleridge's poetry on Murdoch's handling of the themes of contemplation and violence. Keren Mock investigated contemplation through Hebrew Scriptures as manifested in Spinoza's translation of the Bible in Hebrew, and Coleridge's linguistically grounded experience of contemplation through the act of translating the scriptural language. Adopting an Augustinian approach, Noriko Naohara considered the role of will in Coleridge's faith and his understanding of justification, claiming that his definition of reason with regard to spiritual truths should be understood as informed by faith rather than critical epistemology.[27] Elaine Sponholtz explored parallels between the mythopoetic dreamworlds shown in Coleridge's imaginary *Kubla Khan* and William Bertram's contemporary travelogue of Florida.

A number of speakers explored the notion of contemplation itself. Christopher Kluz and Lucas Scripter discussed the relationship between contemplation and (neo-)Aristotelian virtue, with Kluz considering the ways in which Spinoza attempts to engage critically and expand upon Aristotle's core insights. Scripter presented a critical overview of the limitations of contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, focusing on the lack of detailed discussion of the nature and function of contemplation in many influential works in this field. Leesa Davis's paper provided a fascinating insight into contemplation as a philosophical practice. Drawing on Pierre Hadot's idea of philosophy as primarily concerned with practically reshaping the lives of those who study and practise it, she explored philosophy as an intellectual endeavour and a practised discipline that employs rational, empirical and contemplative methods of inquiry. Ve-Yin Tee provided a political perspective on the contemplation of landscape, arguing that the urban elite, including, for example, Coleridge, have been distanced from the land, and that this led to a crisis of aesthetics (a phenomenon contrasted by James Woodhouse and his design of Leasowes Park, which was designed to induce reflection). Jonathan Parker discussed conflicting approaches to environmental aesthetics – one creative and the other governed by concepts – arguing that whilst they are arguably incommensurable, both have contemplative value and enhance an appreciation of the world. In an impressive and thought-provoking paper,

[26] In particular, Wake-Naota focused on parallels between Coleridge's claims about the nature of time and the cognitive process of association at *BL*, I, 91-2, 96, 126, and Wegdwood's account of perception in 'An Enquiry into the Origin of our Notion of Distance', published in Eliza Meteyard, *A Group of Englishmen (1795-1805*) (London: Hardpress, 1871), 305-406, esp. 306, 401-2, 406.

[27] Naohara analysed Coleridge's speculation about the nature of the will in passages such as *CL*, V, 48; *CM*, II, 676, III, 736-7, VI, 436; and *CN*, V, 5825, 6378.

Jonathan Britten contemplated the significance of Coleridge's poetry in providing emotional and intellectual metaphor and framework to understand modern environmental catastrophe, with particular reference to Fukushima.

Conference co-ordinator Peter Cheyne is currently compiling and editing an essay collection developing from some papers given at the conference and including other original essays from invited authors. The book will contain chapters by the three keynote speakers, Jim Mays, Douglas Hedley, and David Cooper, as well as some new work in Coleridge and contemplation studies from Peter Cheyne himself and a number of others present at the conference. There will also be contributions from leading philosopher and aesthetic theorist Roger Scruton, the distinguished historian and philosopher of science David M. Knight, and the eminent Coleridge scholars Raimonda Modiano and Kathleen Wheeler. The foreword is being written by Baroness Mary Warnock, who readers of this journal will know as the philosopher whose book *Imagination* contained an illuminating chapter on Coleridge and Wordsworth.

This was an engaging, lively, and successful conference that not only stimulated profound scholarly discussions on Coleridge, but also significantly enhanced local and international scholarly exchange for Humanities research in Japan. All attendees would like wholeheartedly to thank The Friends of Coleridge and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for their support.