Does Coleridge Anticipate Bergson?

— Some Illustrations of "Genial Coincidence" —

Kazuko Oguro

> The Serpent by which the ancients emblem'd the Inventive faculty appears to me, in its mode of motion most exactly to emblem a writer of Genius. He varies his course yet still glides onwards—all lines of motion are his—all beautiful, & all propulsive—.
>
> If curves are more graceful than broken lines, the reason is that, while a curved line changes its direction at every moment, every new direction is indicated in the preceding one. Thus the perception of ease in motion passes over into the pleasure of mastering the flow of time and of holding the future in the present.[1]

THE FIRST QUOTATION IS FROM COLERIDGE'S *NOTEBOOKS* (CN I 609), the second is from Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, originally entitled *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (TF 12). Coleridge's text is found in his Notebook of 1799 when he was twenty seven years old, and Bergson's *Essai* was published in 1889, when he was thirty. Both were at the age of early maturity when they wrote these passages, though Bergson was born nearly ninety years after Coleridge, in France, the country which did not much attract Coleridge's favourable attention after the Terror, and then the Napoleonic wars, that followed the French Revolution.

Curved lines, with their "graceful," "propulsive" and "inventive" movement, suggest to both writers the processes of life—quite unmechanical, showing continuity of free will, with the energy of past movement pushing forward to the future. As we will see, Bergson's use of figurative language functions as a part of his philosophy which does not aim simply for abstraction or speculation. Coleridge, on the other hand, is originally a poet; his philosophical vocabulary is sometimes borrowed from past and contemporary philosophers, especially German.[2] Many of Coleridge's passages cited here are fragmentary, taken from his notebooks and sometimes letters, while those of Bergson come from his major works polished accordingly for publication. Bergson's writings, as known to any specialist, are characterized by their elaboration and elegance in expressing the complexity of the subjects treated. Coleridge, on the other hand, often seems to be fumbling for words to express the ideas which are perpetually coming up to his mind. He jotted them down but he never succeeded in integrating them in a comprehensive volume. What

---

[1] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* 1889); tr. by F. L. Pogson, 1913; Dover Publications, 2001. Cited as TF. Most of the English translations cited in this essay are authorized by Bergson himself.

[2] A reference should be made to Jack H. Haeger, "Coleridge and the Romantic Background to Bergson" in *The Crisis in Modernism—Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, ed. by Frederick Burwick & Paul Douglass, Cambridge University Press, 1992. Haeger discusses Coleridge's contribution to vitalist thought under the influence of German Naturphilosophie, and examines in what ways he anticipated the Bergsonian cast of thought.

is attempted in this essay is just to show that, reading the works of these two men, we may find very similar ways of thinking, expressed in their use of words and figures of speech. The contrast of a straight line with a curved line may itself be a commonplace, but we have to see their idea of duration, motion, freedom, and impulse for the future implied in the figure.

The similarity of their ideas may be called a "genial coincidence," as there is no evidence that Bergson read Coleridge. Coleridge used this phrase to explain his debt to Schelling in constructing his own philosophy of nature and of art, though he was, at the same time, critical of what he saw as Schelling's tendency to deify Nature. Incidentally, Bergson writes that Félix Ravaisson, a mid-nineteenth century French philosopher whom he highly esteemed, had "natural affinity" with Schelling, a kind of "pre-established harmony between two minds." Then Bergson quotes Ravaisson's favorite words of Leonardo da Vinci: "the living being is characterized by the undulous or serpentine line … and the object of art is to render this undulation distinctive." A "flexuous line," says Bergson, is the "generating axis" of things with life (CM 194–6).[3] We may assume that they shared the same tendency of thought of which Bergson was to be an outstanding exponent.

As a poet of early nineteenth-century England, Coleridge was sensitive to the current of thought which was beginning to see creation as a dynamic process still going on at present, not as something already given. Life implies the force of organization from within, not superadded from without. The scale of living things was traditionally considered as a Chain of Being created and suspended from heaven, but after the Enlightenment and the rise of Romanticism the downward process of creation was gradually reversed: it came to be considered as a rising process in time, which Lovejoy calls the "temporalizing of the Chain of Being."[4] The idea of ascent from the lower to the higher forms is seen, for instance, in the works of Charles Darwin's grandfather Erasmus in the late eighteenth century. Bergson was born in 1859, the year Charles's *Origin of Species* was published. Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, however, was conceived from a view-point different from that of Darwin's *Origin*; as Lovejoy says in one of his lectures, if Darwin's evolutionism can be called "quasi-mechanistic" in introducing the idea of the survival of the fittest, Bergson's natural philosophy is clearly "anti-mechanistic."[5] In his dynamic theory of life as an ever-ebullient power, Bergson is considered to be closer to the Romantics than to his immediate predecessors, in spite of his knowledge of early twentieth-century science.

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson explains the life force by comparing it to the impetus at a point of the water surface that makes waves spreading around it:

> Organization … works from the centre to the periphery. It begins in a point that is almost a mathematical point, and spreads around this point

[3] Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (*La Pensée et le mouvant*, 1934); tr. by Mabelle L. Andison, 1946; Dover Publications, 2007. Cited as CE.

[4] A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, Harvard University Press, 1939. It is the title of Chapter 9.

[5] A. O. Lovejoy, *Bergson and Romantic Evolutionism*, University of California Press, 1944, p. 29.

> by concentric waves which go on enlarging.… The organizing act … has something explosive about it: it needs at the beginning the smallest place, a minimum of matter, as if the organizing forces only entered space reluctantly (CE 97).[6]

Coleridge's image of concentric circles appears in his *Theory of Life*:

> That these degrees will themselves bring forth secondary kinds sufficiently distinct for all the purposes of science, and even for common sense, will be seen in the course of this inquisition: for this is one proof of the essential vitality of Nature, that she does not ascend as links in a suspended chain but as the steps in a ladder; or rather she at one and the same time *ascends* as by a climax, and expands as the concentric circles on the lake from the point to which the stone in its fall had given the first impulse. (SWF I 509)

Bergson says that the organizing power at first takes hold of the minimum amount of matter as if it entered it "reluctantly," but it is an "explosive" power that spreads endlessly around the centre. Elsewhere in *Creative Evolution* Bergson compares the initial point to "a center from which worlds shoot out like rockets in a fire-works display." This center is not a "*thing*," Bergson adds, and he continues: "God, thus defined, has nothing of the already made; He is unceasing life, action, freedom" (CE 262). This reminds us of the concluding passage of Coleridge's *Theory of Life* in which he says, "Life itself is not a *Thing*—a self subsistent *Hypostasis*—but an *Act* and *Process*" (SWF I 557).

The starting point of life is for Coleridge "*the punctum saliens*," an outbursting point pregnant with life force (SWF I 521). Also in his notebook of 1810 we find his memorandum on the words "*momentum*" and "*punctum*," in which he explains the significance of the adjectives "momentary" and "momentous." The words "moment" or "momentary" usually signify a very small, even infinitesimal, amount of time, but the adjective "momentous" signifies "of great importance." The latter sense is derived from the original Latin meaning "motion" or "the power to move," as we see in the technical terms "moment" or "momentum" in dynamics. A "moment" or a "point," says Coleridge, is almost a "null-point" when we think only of its extension in one dimension of "length," but when we think of it as a "*punctum saliens*" it bears an "intense quality" (CN III 3759). The fulcrum of a lever is only a point but it sustains and makes possible the work of great power. Elsewhere in his *Notebooks* Coleridge writes as follows, in relation to the indivisibility of the flow of time:

> what is a moment? Succession with *interspace*? Absurdity! It is only the Licht-Punkt, the *Sparkle* in the indivisible undivided Duration.
>
> (CN II 2370)

Gian Orsini, in his *Coleridge and German Idealism*, quotes this passage and

[6] Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (*L'évolution créatrice*, 1907); tr. by Arthur Mitchell, Macmillan, 1911. Cited as CE.

says, "this would have pleased Bergson."[7]

As has been noted, Coleridge often borrows terminology from contemporary philosophers such as Schelling, Steffens and Blumenbach. In 1799, while staying in Germany, Coleridge attended Blumenbach's lecture and learned the idea of *Bildungstrieb* or *nisus formatives* ("creative impulse" or "urge to form"), the words he applies not only to the life force but to the creative imagination in the works of art. Coleridge's idea of the organizing power, starting from a small point but "intense" with potentiality, reminds us of Bergson's idea of the impetus of life, his "élan vital."

Our misconception of the continuity of time and motion, considered in relation to the divisibility in spatial magnitude, is what Coleridge and Bergson point out repeatedly. They explain it referring to Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, a frequently used illustration in philosophy. If we follow Zeno's logic, Achilles, who starts running some yards behind the tortoise, can never overtake the tortoise. "The conception of a continuous progressive Motion," writes Coleridge,

> thro' a finite Space in a finite time is incompatible with the notion of a finite space as composed of an infinite number of Spatiuncles.—needed not so many conundrum instances to prove it! … for the same reason that Achilles could not overtake the Tortoise, the Tortoise could not have got a yard before him.…
>
> But something less obvious may be said on occasion of these Sophisms, and of some value—viz. that phænomena must be treated as phænomena, and that the infinite partibility of Body is the result of a deviation from this rule. The Phæn.[omenon] is treated as Noumenon.
>
> (M V 712–13)

And Bergson writes as follows in this regard:

> the possibility of applying the movement *to* the line traversed exists only for an observer who, keeping outside the movement and seeing at every instant the possibility of a stop, tries to reconstruct the real movement with these possible immobilities. The absurdity vanishes as soon as we adopt by thought the continuity of the real movement, a continuity of which every one of us is conscious whenever he lifts an arm or advances a step. We feel then indeed that the line passed over between two stops is described with a single indivisible stroke. (CE 327)

"Phænomena must be treated as phænomena" (Coleridge), and the absurdity vanishes "as soon as we adopt by thought the continuity of real movement" (Bergson). For them the factual phenomena are the basis of judgment, not the abstraction or translation of them.

The flow of time, like the motion of Achilles or the tortoise, cannot be divided; it has no intervals. It is pure duration, and Coleridge calls it "time *per*

[7] G. N. G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969, p. 89.

se, as contra-distinguished from our *notion* of time" because our "*notion*" of time is likely to be "blended with the idea of space, which as the contrary of time, is therefore its *measure*" (BL I 126). Bergson takes for an illustration the succession of the images on a cinematographic film. If we divide the film into its constituent frames, we cannot grasp the movement in the aggregate. It is our weakness to consider movement as a series of positions, and time as a succession of distinct parts. "Time thus considered," Bergson writes, "is no more than a space in idea where one imagines to be set out in line all past, present and future events, and in addition, something which prevents them from appearing in a single perception" (CM 7–8).

The flow of time is taking place within ourselves as pure duration. We are being renewed moment by moment both physically and mentally, in sense perception, emotion, intellection and physical construction. The novelty "arises from an internal impetus which is progress or succession … or *continuity of interpenetration* in time, irreducible to a mere instantaneous juxtaposition in space" (Bergson, CE 360). A new experience is not merely superadded to the pre-existing mass of experiences, but it is interfused in the whole body of our consciousness so that our nature is somehow constantly renewed. The idea of multiple elements interfused with each other, distinct but not divided, appears many times in both these philosophers. There are two different kinds of multiplicity, "the multiplicity of juxtaposition and that of fusion or interpenetration," says Bergson (TF 85, 162), and Coleridge on his part introduces the word "*multëity*", meaning organic unity of the many as distinguished from mere plurality in juxtaposition (SWF I 369, 510). This idea of the organic unity is one of the most fundamental concepts for the two philosophers on which their ideas of time, life, consciousness and creative work of human beings are grounded. The following passages from Coleridge and from Bergson explain the idea using the image of a crystal:

> wherein would the Sport of a Plant differ from a chrystal? The latter is formed wholly by apposition ab extra.… But indeed Evolution as contra-distinguished from apposition … is implied in the conception of *Life*; and is that which essentially differences … the Floscule, or any other of the Fairy Shapes of animalcular Life, from the Frost-plumes on the window-pane. (CL VI 598–9; cf. C&S 180–1; SWF I 508)

> while the subdivision of matter into separate bodies is relative to our perception, … the living body has been separated and closed off by Nature herself. It is composed of unlike parts that complete each other. It performs diverse functions that involve each other. It is an *individual*, and of no other object, not even of the crystal, can this be said, for a crystal has neither difference of parts nor diversity of functions. (CE 13)

It is this organic unity that differentiates even a primitive animal life from a crystal, because a crystal is formed by "apposition *ab extra*," and their parts have no "diversity of functions." The individuality of life is more "intense" as it embraces more diverse elements that are related to one another. The word

"intensity," as contrasted to the extensity in size, is noticeable both in Coleridge and in Bergson. The word signifies the strength or fullness of inner dynamic power with potentiality to change, to create, to move onward.

In the letter to his nephew Edward quoted above, Coleridge continues to write on the indivisibility of time and of our consciousness. If we divide a second into a million parts, and yet if there are chasms between those instantaneous points of time, "the chasm of 1/100,000,000 would be equal to all time." A living thing may exist for a certain continuity of time, but if each moment is separated by a chasm from the preceding and the following moments, it "would not exist *for itself* at all" (CL VI 599). It would not exist *for itself* as an individual, as a living being, because its life is cut into pieces. Likewise, if Achilles's movement were divided into an infinite number of pieces Achilles would not be moving, and even Achilles himself would not be existing, because "if there had been no self-*retaining* power, Self-finding would be a perpetual Self-*losing*" (Coleridge, *ibid.*). The same idea is seen in Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. "*A world that dies and is reborn at every instant*" is the world of the mathematician, he writes, but evolution cannot take place in that sort of a world: "Evolution implies a real persistence of the past in the present, a duration which is, as it were, a hyphen, a connecting link" (CE 23, 24).

The idea of time as pure duration is related to the idea of our memory which is considered to be retained for an indefinite time as an interfused whole in our subconscious. In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge records a fact that a young woman, seized with a nervous fever, was in delirium speaking Latin, Greek and Hebrew which she had never learned. The doctor found out that the woman was once employed as a house-maid at a pastor's house, and that the pastor had a habit of reading the texts aloud where the girl could hear his voice. The doctor was sure that the impressions of his voice remained in her mind in a latent state, and the feverish state of her brain acted as a stimulus to awaken the unconscious memory (BL I 113). This retention of memory leads Coleridge to the idea of the Last Judgement where every act or word in one's lifetime is spread out before the eye of God:

> This authenticated case furnishes both proof and instance, that reliques of sensation may exist for an indefinite time in a latent state, in the very same order in which they were originally impressed…. And this, perchance, is the dread book of judgment, in whose mysterious hieroglyphics every idle word is recorded! (BL I 113–14)

Bergson elaborates on what he calls "pure memory," a whole body of recollections which underlies our daily practical consciousness, in his *Matter and Memory*. He also refers to an instance that "we speak languages which we no longer even remember to have learnt," that we live over again the forgotten scenes of childhood. A man who was drowned or suffocated but luckily came back to life again, stated that he had seen "all the forgotten events of his life passing before him with great rapidity, … and in the very order in which they

occurred" (MM 200).[8] Bergson explains this as caused by the fact that our attention to the active present is extremely slackened in the face of death so that we pass from the state of action to the state of dream, and then the hidden memories of the past rise up to our consciousness. Also in his lecture on "Dreams" he explains that in our sleep the stimulus from outside such as sound or touch arouses the corresponding images from a hoard of hidden recollections that give shape to the dream (ME 115–17 et al).[9] It is interesting to hear from Coleridge a similar explanation: he dreamt of his son as a little boy vaguely mumbling to the questions of the pastor, and this irritated Coleridge, but waking up he found the irritating stimulus to be the ticking of a watch that "fretted" on his ears (CN I 1620). In another notebook entry, Coleridge ponders the nature of sleep: "A consciousness within a Consciousness, yet mutually penetrated, each possessing both itself and other—distinct tho' indivisible" (CN II 2999).

The idea of the organic unity of our consciousness, like that of our living body, leads to the criticism of the association theory of Locke, Hume and Hartley. Our consciousness is not a row of single independent ideas which follow one after another. It may be true to a certain extent that an idea may recall another idea by the proximity of time or space in which they were once perceived, or by their similarity, but the fact is not so simple as to be cleared away only mechanically. If we stand at the top of St Paul's church, Coleridge writes, we will have an immense sphere of impressions, and "any one part of that impression might recall any other part" if we follow the law of proximity or contemporaneity without taking into account the determining cause of our will (BL I 112). "Who ever *felt a single* sensation?" he writes, "Is not everyone at the same moment conscious that there co-exist a thousand others in a darker shade, or less light … the pretended single sensation is it anything more than the *Light*-point in every picture either of nature or of a good painter?" (CN II 2370) And he writes in a letter to Southey that association depends in a greater degree "on the recurrence of resembling states of Feeling than on the Train of Ideas." He continues as follows in the same letter:

> I almost think, that Ideas *never* recall Ideas, as far as they are Ideas—any more than Leaves in a forest create each other's motion—The Breeze it is that runs thro' them / it is the Soul, the state of Feeling— . If I had said, no *one* Idea ever recalls another, I am confident that I could support the assertion. (CL II 961)

Bergson recalls his childhood at the smell of a rose:

> I smell a rose and immediately confused recollections of childhood come to my memory. In truth, these recollections have not been called up by the perfume of the rose; I breathe them in with the very scent; it means all that to me. … Associationism thus makes the mistake of constantly

[8] Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (*Matière et mémoire*, 1896); tr. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, 1913; Dover Publications, 2004. Cited as MM.

[9] Bergson, *Mind Energy* (*L'Énergie spirituelle*, 1919); tr. by H. Wildon Carr, NY, Henry Holt, 1929. Cited as ME.

> replacing the concrete phenomenon which takes place in the mind by the artificial reconstruction of it given by philosophy. (TF 161, 163)

It is not possible here to explain Bergson's criticism on this point elaborated in his *Matter and Memory*. Here let me only point out his remark that associationism cannot tell us how a choice is made among an infinite number of recollections if we simply "intellectualize" or mechanize ideas and "overlook the relations which they bear to the activity of the will" (MM 213–14).

Retaining and unifying the past recollections, time works as the creative force for the present and the future. Time necessary for the formation and change in the material world furnishes a proof of its efficacy. "Tanning is an obvious instance," says Coleridge (his neighbor and friend Thomas Poole was a tanner by trade), and he also refers to the time taken for the chemical and geological process of the formation of silex crystals (CN III 4455). This reminds us of the well-known passage on the sugared water in Bergson:

> when one wishes to prepare a glass of sugared water one is obliged to wait until the sugar melts. This necessity for waiting is the significant fact. It shows that if one can cut out from the universe the systems for which time is only an abstraction, a relation, a number, the universe itself becomes something different. If we could grasp it in its entirety, inorganic but interwoven with organic beings, we should see it ceaselessly taking on forms as new, as original, as unforeseeable as our states of consciousness. (CM 10, CE 10)

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson also writes on the importance of time taken by an artist in creating a work of art; that "the duration of his work is part and parcel of his work…. The time taken up by the invention is one with the invention itself" (CE 359). If the time is lengthened or shortened the work itself will not be of the same quality. This is what, in part, distinguishes the work of creativity from the children's puzzle game of arranging ready-made pieces of paper into a picture.

The principle of life, for Coleridge, is not superadded or infused at some definite state of development; it is inherent from the beginning of creation, and in the course of development comes to appear "as life" through the primitive stages of functions such as reproduction, irritability and finally sensibility, as we see in his *Theory of Life*.

Bergson takes a seemingly more dualistic approach; he explains that the life force enters matter by "insinuation":

> life proceeds by insinuating, and the force which drew matter away from pure mechanism could not have taken hold of matter had it not first itself adopted that mechanism. In such wise, the points of the railway coincide at first with the lines from which they will shunt the train. (ME 26)

Life does not directly penetrate into matter that resists it. Both life and matter

have to wait, to endure. Life proceeds as if to "insinuate" the matter, adopting the mechanical features of matter, while leading the matter to acquire some characteristics of life. The word "insinuate" is effective in suggesting the sinuous line that characterizes the movement of life. Bergson writes in *The Creative Mind* using the mathematical terms: "the idea of differential, or rather of fluxion, was suggested to science by a vision of this kind" (CM 21).[10]

Life, says Bergson, cannot manifest its "interwoven potentialities" unless it "seizes upon" matter and becomes individuated (CE 265):

> regarded in itself [life] is an immensity of potentiality, a mutual encroachment of thousands and thousands of tendencies…. Matter divides actually what was but potentially manifold; and, in this sense, individuation is in part the work of matter, in part the result of life's own inclination. (CE 272)

Bergson continues to apply this idea to the work of a poet:

> a poetic sentiment, which bursts into distinct verses, lines and words, may be said to have already contained this multiplicity of individuated elements, and yet, in fact, it is the materiality of language that creates it. (*ibid.*)

Coleridge also explains the unification of the material and the spiritual in a work of art, which is an eminent manifestation of the principle of life. In one of his "Lectures on the History of Philosophy" he takes as an example the works of Raphael and Michelangelo and says as follows:

> There the mighty spirit still coming from within had succeeded in taming the untractable matter and in reducing external form to a symbol of the inward and imaginable beauty. (LHP I 237.)

Beauty is expressed through a physical, material medium. Not only in plastic art but also in poetry and music. Matter, however, is "untractable" and it has to be "tamed"; it has to acquire something congenial to our inner nature. Likewise in his *Essays on the Principle of Genial Criticism* Coleridge writes:

> The Mystics … define beauty, as the subjection of matter to spirit so as to be transformed into a symbol, in and through which the spirit reveals itself; and declare *that* the *most* beautiful, where the most obstacles to a full manifestation have been most perfectly overcome. (SWF I 378)

For holistic, anti-reductionist thinkers, life strives to overcome the resistance of matter. The words "effort" and "strife" as applied to life are frequently seen both in Coleridge and in Bergson. The words "endure" and "wait" which are related to the "duration" of time, have the same implication. "All things strive to ascend, and ascend in their striving," writes Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection*

[10] Coleridge's intuitive understanding of differential calculus and his interest in the fluxional movement observed in nature are discussed by Dometa Wiegand Brothers in her essay "The Mathematics of Dreams: The Psychological Infinity of the East and Geometric Structures in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'", *Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient*, ed. by David Vallins, Kaz Oishi and Seamus Perry, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp.177-190.

(AR 118), and in his *Table Talk* he says, "there is in the whole chain of being, even in the lowest … an effort at individualization" (TT I 82). "Matter calls forth effort," writes Bergson in *Mind Energy* (28), and in *Creative Evolution* he says: "Life as a whole, from the initial impulsion that thrust it into the world, will appear as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter" (284). The ascending movement of life continues to overcome the descending movement of matter, and when the ascent of life is temporarily arrested, life takes on a material form.

Bergson says that matter is a fulcrum for the life force to ascend. "Man will only rise above earthly things if a powerful equipment supplies him with the requisite fulcrum (point d'appui)" (TS 267).[11] In the same way Coleridge writes that when we want to ascend we counteract gravitation but we use its resistance as a tool for us to ascend. He describes the motion of a water insect as an illustration: "the little animal *wins* its way up against the stream … now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion" (BL I 124).

What, then, was the original "matter", if there were any, from which the world was created? Coleridge turns to the biblical account for the creation of the world. Though the studies in natural history, biology and chemistry had considerably developed before his lifetime, it was not easy for popular thought to accept the idea of evolution. The first several verses of Genesis were interpreted either literally or in the pseudo-scientific way of the naturalists. Coleridge was one of the thinkers who had foresight to read into those verses not only the result of creation but the creative force itself. In his letter to Tulk Coleridge argues against the contemporary naturalists who interpret the original formless void (in the second verse of Genesis) as a kind of chaos, a fluid mixture of all the component substances of the world, which by some chemical or physical affinity combine themselves into material and animal beings. This, he thinks, is only the mechanical combination of substances already made, not the growth from within. What Coleridge emphasizes is not the material but the divine power of creation:

> an aggregate of Distinctions, which had each and all a beginning, pre-suppose a state of Indistinction, in which all these were in their *possibilities* alone. And what can this be, but the abysmal Might of the Eternal, in whose MIGHT all things have their *Being* even as from his Wisdom, and Will, (= his Love, or from GOD sensu eminenti)… ?
>
> (CL IV 805)

The original "formless void" is indistinction which "did yet contain in itself a *posse* [possibility] of infinite Distinctions" (*ibid.*). For this original unity Coleridge uses the word "prothesis" signifying, on the physical level, the primal unity that grew into innumerable individuals at the decree of God. It is equivalent to "multëity in unity", the organic interpenetration of many in one.

[11] Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (*Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 1932); tr. by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, Macmillan, 1935. Cited as TS.

With the latent life force of prothesis, multëity in unity is manifested at various stages of life's development, with different degrees of intensity. For Bergson, on the other hand, it is the "original impulse" of life that goes on to produce a "prolific unity (unité féconde)" of the world with its unpredictable variety of creatures:

> Before the evolution of life … the portals of the future remain wide open. It is a creation that goes on for ever in virtue of an initial movement. This movement constitutes the unity of the organized world—a prolific unity of an infinite richness…. (CE 110)

The incarnation of spirit is not the fall but the individuation of life, and the individuals thus created make integral parts of the Unity. The chain of being created and sent down from heaven by the hand of the Absolute now became a ladder for the creatures to climb upward. Coleridge, after discussing with Charles Lamb how a person's identity is kept after the physical change inevitable in the process of time, comments as follows: "the World not a total present, like a circle in space—but a manifest Spiral or infinite Helix in time & motion" (CN IV 4988).

From the classical philosophers onward, "time" was traditionally considered inferior to eternity. The highest and absolute being was conceived to be eternal, immovable and immutable. Bergson is the philosopher who saw a greater importance in motion, growth, and transformation in the process of time. "*Not one of* [the philosophers in general] *has sought positive attributes in time*," he writes (CM 8), that they have "intellectualized" time, and that our conceptual thought of time (like Coleridge's "notion of time") is time transferred to space. To have the sense of real duration we have to "reach the core of the mind" (*ibid.* 19), the domain of spirituality. Real duration of time, like eternity, can only be contemplated by "the direct vision of the mind by the mind" (*ibid.* 20) without the intervention of space or even language.

Almost a century before Bergson, we see Coleridge pondering over the importance of time as opposed to space, as one of the elementary two poles on which the creation of nature and of art subsisted. "To speak of north as being south is not more absurd than to describe Spirit under any relation of space," he writes in *Opus Maximum*:

> for we have seen that for each individual the spirit itself is Time. Time, in one sense, namely, as the sense of succession, and in the other sense as the cause of this sense, we must still refer to something that is the opposite to space, or mere extension, and we know no other opposite but is, or is included in, the idea of Spirit. (OM 190)

His "conjecture" appears also in *The Stateman's Manual*:

> To the touch (or feeling) belongs the proximate; to the eye, the distant. Now little as I am disposed to believe, I should be still less inclined to ridicule, the conjecture that in the recesses of our nature, and

> undeveloped, there might exist an *inner* sense, (and therefore appertaining wholly to Time,)—a sense hitherto "without a name," which as an higher Third combined and potentially included both the former. (LS 81)

For Coleridge time corresponds to spirit, and the sense of real duration is "an inner sense" which is "a sense hitherto without a name." It is equivalent to Bergson's "direct vision of the mind by the mind" which he calls intuition. Intuition transcends our physical sense perception but it is not in a separate realm. "Sensuous intuition is likely to be in continuity with it," says Bergson, "sensuous intuition itself … is promoted" (CE 380). Similarly, Coleridge writes that "sensation itself is but vision nascent" (*BL* I, 286). Our sense perception has a potentiality to be raised to a higher level by removing its blinders. In the idea of the possibility of this superior "intuition" Coleridge, and Bergson too, differ from Kant. For their criticism of Kant we may refer, for instance, to Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (I 289) and to Bergson's *Creative Mind* (115–6) and many other parts of his writings. To discuss this problem, however, we need a further study.