

Associationism, Self-Formation, and the Pursuit of Happiness in De Quincey's Early Writings

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THE NEUROLOGICAL TURN IN ROMANTIC-PERIOD studies from the early 2000s has resulted in a significant reassessment of the Lake writers' engagement with brain science. A key work was Alan Richardson's influential book, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (2001), which, as he acknowledged, built upon the work of earlier scholarship on the significance of materialist science to the Romantic concept of imagination. Twenty-first century reassessments of the Romantic poets moreover have been accompanied by recognition of Romantic-period brain science as laying the foundations for our contemporary psychological theory, which seeks to explain the mind and emotions as biological processes. In this context, Coleridge's vaunted overthrow of materialism and Hartleyan associationism in favour of an idealist theory of the imagination has been thoroughly re-examined by numerous scholars.¹ Specifically, Coleridge's *failure* to complete his argument against David Hartley in the *Biographia Literaria* has been deconstructed by Jerome Christensen in his fine study of Coleridge's philosophical method.² So, where does all this leave Thomas De Quincey, with his close association to the Lake writers and his interest in dreams and the unconscious?

Several recent critics have stressed a materialist and physiological aspect to De Quincey's conceptualisation of addiction, his dream theory, and his aesthetics. Nigel Leask, Barry Milligan and Menglu Gao have productively connected De Quincey's investment in the medical theory of Brunonianism with wider developments in the period relating to capitalism, revolutionary politics, and empire.³ More comprehensively, Markus Iseli's *Thomas De Quincey and the Cognitive Unconscious* deals with De Quincey's psychological theories in the context of nineteenth-century science, which he aligns with modern cognitive theory.⁴ All of these works have given us a clearer sense of De Quincey's undoubted investment in materialist science of the period. Drawing upon these works, my essay addresses itself to the formative years of De Quincey's career—the years in which develops his literary ambitions after a traumatic period of flight and wandering—to attempt a closer analysis of one form of materialist thinking, i.e. Hartleyan associationism, in relation to this period. In so doing I seek to extend the argument of the book I published

¹ See Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 39–65; Richard C. Sha, *Imagination and Science in Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 161–84; David S. Miall, “‘I See it Feelingly’: Coleridge's Debt to Hartley”, in *Coleridge's Visionary Languages: Essays in Honour of J.B. Beer*, eds. Tim Fulford and Morton D. Paley (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 151–63.

² Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

³ Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 170–228; Barry Milligan, ‘Brunonianism, Radicalism, and “The Pleasures of Opium”’, in *Thomas De Quincey: New Theoretical and Critical Directions*, eds. Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts (New York: Routledge, 2008), 45–61; and Menglu Gao, “‘Founding its Empire on Spells of Pleasure’: Brunonian Excitability, the Invigorated English Opium-Eater, and De Quincey's “China Question”’, *Literature and Medicine*, 38 (2020): 1–25.

⁴ Markus Iseli, *Thomas De Quincey and the Cognitive Unconscious* (London: Palgrave, 2015).

many years ago, *Revisionary Gleam*, regarding the revisionary nature of De Quincey's reminiscences and intellectual beliefs. As I argued in that book, De Quincey's works contain a strange and often disconcerting mixture of materialist and idealist conceptions, uneasily aligned with the polarised politics of the period, making him hard to pin down ideologically; in this article, I focus on David Hartley as a key element in De Quincey's materialist thinking, and one that was unusually compatible with Christian theology.⁵ Furthermore, I wish to argue here for a greater recognition of Hartley's role in De Quincey's early encounter with the Lake writers, and to provide closer textual evidence for his influence than I have been able to show hitherto.⁶

I will start with a brief introduction to David Hartley (1705–57) and suggest why his work was so influential to several of the early Romantics before it was gradually sidelined later in the period. Hartley commenced his thinking from a position of Lockean empiricism, and developed, through his theory of association, a comprehensive theory of epistemology, psychology, theology, and moral philosophy—what his Romantic-period champion Joseph Priestley described as ‘a new and most extensive science’.⁷ His ‘doctrine of vibrations, which underlay his broader epistemological thinking, was analogous to Newtonian optics, positing a neurophysiological model whereby sensations were carried through the nervous system by means of vibrations, and smaller offshoots of vibrations (termed ‘vibratiuncles’) running through what he called ‘medullary substance’ of the nerves. This explained how mental phenomena including sensory stimuli, linguistic elements, emotional responses, and the like, were amalgamated or ‘associated’ within the nervous system resulting in increasingly complex ‘ideas’ (or forms of thought), including memory, being developed. So much for the physiological aspect of Hartley's theory, which Romantic-period literary specialists are often acquainted with through Coleridge's slighting comments in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Yet Hartley offered much more than physiological account of the mind; his theory was embedded in a comprehensive social, religious, and ethical framework. Hartley's crucial discrimination between pleasurable and painful sensations formed the basis for his elaboration of a theory of psychological and moral development. This he described as a process of achieving sympathy with one's fellow creatures, resulting in an attitude of benevolence to all, and of what he calls ‘theopathy’ or a relationship to God. To put this in philosophical terms: the sum total of our experience, embodied in the nervous system and brain, constitutes our entire mental world, breaking down the Cartesian dualism between body and mind, and positing an embodied notion of mind through which one could think, grow, and have one's being.

⁵ Daniel Sanjiv Roberts, *Revisionary Gleam: De Quincey, Coleridge and the High Romantic Argument* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

⁶ See also my essay “‘The Opium-Eater Boasteth Himself to be a Philosopher’: Bodily Subjection and Intellectual Self-fashioning in De Quincey's 1821 “Confessions””, *Romanticism* 27.3 (2021): 237–49.

⁷ Joseph Priestley, *An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, Dr. Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald's Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion* (London: J. Johnson, 1774), xix.

This psychological world-view included aspects of socializing, moralizing and theologizing that implied, respectively, sympathy for others, moral understanding of God's creation, and, ultimately, a mystical union with the creator that could be effected by one's actions and relationships on earth. Coleridge's early subscription to Hartley is well known, and, as Dorothy Waples has suggested, he expresses this world-view perfectly towards the end of 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', where he offers the brief homily:

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small:
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.⁸

These simple lines compressed what was in fact an elaborate psychological and moral truth for Coleridge at this time, that God's love was all-encompassing, hence connecting human life and that of the natural world together organically as 'one life'.⁹ Although Hartley did not subscribe to a Pythagorean/Hindu view of animals as sharing in the same cycle of reincarnation as human beings, and held animals to be intellectually inferior, he did not maintain the strict Cartesian separation between human and animal life, arguing that he did not 'suppose them to be destitute of perception, but that they have this in a manner analogous to that which takes place in us; and that it is subjected to the same mechanical laws as the motions'.¹⁰ This led him to conclude animals and humans enjoyed an intellectual and emotional kinship (in the 'mind' and in the 'passions') so much so that our relationship to them was placed within a hierarchy of moral obligations in which human beings were placed above animals in a manner comparable to God's power over humans:

We seem to be in the place of GOD to them, to be his viceregents, and impowered to receive homage from them in his name. And we are obliged by the same tenure to be their guardians and benefactors.¹¹

These lines, taken in relation to Coleridge's poem of 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', offer a clue both to the albatross's propensity to follow the mariner 'for food or play' and to answer to his 'hollo', as well as the mariner's disastrous failure to recognize the bird's affinity to him as an analogous spiritual being that had been 'hail'd . . . in God's name' (*PW* I.1 377).

⁸ *PW* I.1 419. I quote from the 1798 edition (which is the version De Quincey first encountered).

⁹ See Dorothy Waples, 'David Hartley in "The Ancient Mariner"', *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 35.3 (1936): 337–51. Citing these lines from 'The Ancient Mariner', Waples quotes an equivalent passage in Hartley's *Observations* which serves as a gloss: 'we are led by the love of good men to that of God, and back again by the love of God to that of all his creatures in and through him; also as it must be the will of an infinitely benevolent being, that we should cultivate universal unlimited benevolence'. (349)

¹⁰ David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 2 vols. (London: S. Richardson, 1749), I 413.

¹¹ *Observations*, I 415.

Despite his early enthusiasm for Hartley, even naming his first son after him, Coleridge would later turn against Hartley, denouncing his theory as mechanistic and flawed. De Quincey's reminiscence of Coleridge published in the wake of the latter's death in 1834 appears to follow Coleridge in this regard, faulting Hartley's logic in attempting to 'explain the act of ratiocination' through a process that was both mechanical and arbitrary.¹² Yet De Quincey's reminiscence also recalls his carrying a rare pamphlet of Hartley's as a present to Coleridge upon their first meeting in 1807, and pays tribute to the 'perfection' of Hartley's '*dialectic* ability' which possessed, as he declared, the 'spotless beauty' and 'ideal proportions of some Grecian statue'.¹³ His tone of admiration for Hartley's impeccable theory, bespeaks a deep early engagement with his work that is overwritten by his later revisionary interpretation. Between the 1790s when De Quincey first began to read Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the 1830s when he reminisced about them, there were many factors that conspired to render Hartley's work both less understood and less acceptable in intellectual circles. For one thing, Hartley's work had been popularized by Joseph Priestley in his 1775 abridgement of Hartley's *Observations* titled *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*, which jettisoned Hartley's ethical and religious framework, focusing merely on the 'doctrine of association' which laid out Hartley's psychological theory, but deleted his providential argument regarding the construction of the mind through a process of divinely ordained formation. Coleridge's and De Quincey's criticisms of Hartley are far more applicable to Priestley's somewhat simplistic and mechanistic view of associationism divested of its spiritual content than they are to Hartley's original work, an important qualification that both of them chose to overlook even though they were surely familiar with his work in its entirety. A second reason for Hartley's eclipse lay in the conservative backlash against materialist science that was strongly linked in this period to French revolutionary thinking and atheism. Coleridge's rowing back from Hartley was undoubtedly linked politically to this phenomenon. What I wish to stress here is that far from providing a merely mechanistic view of the human mind as being created through the random associations generated by individual sensations (as Coleridge and De Quincey later implied), Hartley offered both an optimistic theology and a model of psychological growth that could underpin moral and educational theory. A third, and related, point of difficulty in Hartley's theory, for the later Coleridge at least, lay in the theological implications that were widely understood to inhere in Hartley's 'doctrine of necessity', which seemed to dispel the possibility of virtue in any voluntary sense. Hartley, who was conscious of the objection, addressed this point explicitly in his 'Preface' to the *Observations* in which he sought to allay such fears by the positing the notion of 'practical free will', which he described as

¹² Similarly, Iseli argues that De Quincey stresses an active and creative aspect to mental activity as opposed to Hartley's more passive view of the brain's absorption and processing of sensory impressions; however, his view is based on De Quincey's later statements; see *Thomas De Quincey and the Cognitive Unconscious*, 186–87.

¹³ *Works*, X 297.

‘the voluntary power over which our affections and actions, by which we deliberate, suspend, and choose, and which makes an essential part of our ideas of virtue and vice, reward and punishment’.¹⁴ Hartley’s firm belief in God’s providential oversight allowed him therefore to accept the idea that action could be voluntary in practical ways (as in the writing of his own book or the resisting of temptation, which could generate specific rewards or punishments) even as God’s infinite benevolence ensured the necessary culmination of human history in ‘the ultimate happiness of all mankind’.¹⁵ Writing to Robert Southey in 1794 Coleridge was reflecting such views when he declared: ‘I would ardently, that you were a Necessitarian—and (believing in an all-loving Omnipotence) an Optimist’ (*CL* I 145). For the young Thomas De Quincey who in the early 1800s, as he later recounted, ‘looked east and west, north and south, for all known works or fragments’ by Wordsworth and Coleridge,¹⁶ such radically challenging views were clearly filtering into his own differently shaped thinking. By 1803 when he first wrote to Wordsworth, Thomas was also a rebel who had run away from school in the previous year; he was stubbornly at odds with his mother’s repressively disciplinarian and evangelical outlook, and, by the evidence of his *Diary* of 1803, was devouring a heady mix of established and popular literary works the merits and implications of which he debated furiously with acquaintances.

Turning to De Quincey’s *Diary* of 1803, his early correspondence with Wordsworth, and his ‘Constituents of Happiness and two related manuscripts of 1806’ with this context in mind, it becomes easier to see how Hartleyan thinking provides the framework for the young De Quincey’s hero-worship of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and his overwhelming desire to share in the community life in which their poetry was so firmly embedded. Despite De Quincey’s rebellious relationship to his evangelical mother, my approach here is to suggest a degree of discursive continuity between Hartleyan thinking and De Quincey’s response to the poets that receives its fervency from his evangelical upbringing. Yet, in other respects, particularly with regard to notions of guilt and sinfulness, evangelicalism, at least of his mother’s kind, was clearly at odds with Hartleyan optimism regarding universal salvation, a point I will come back to in a moment. De Quincey’s 1803 *Diary*, which details his thoughts, habits, and reading during a significant period in which his educational plans were being reassessed by his guardians, includes several indications of his early interest in the Lake poets with whom he was clearly developing a fixation. An entry of 9 May 1803 finds the young De Quincey asking: ‘What shall be my character?’, a speculation he follows up with several variations on sublimity and the gothic, citing in particular the ‘ancient mariner’. His ‘character’—the word, as the *OED* reminds us, denoting ‘a distinctive mark’, a ‘symbol’, especially one used to represent ‘linguistic elements’, and ‘moral and mental qualities’ indicative of personality—is thus a project under

¹⁴ *Observations*, I vii–viii.

¹⁵ *Observations*, I iv–v.

¹⁶ *Works*, X 288.

formation in this document with strongly literary, aesthetic and generic elements to it. By 26 May he is also planning 'An essay on character,' one of several literary projects.¹⁷ On the 5th of June he engages in a discussion with William Clarke (the banker and family friend who had introduced him around 1801 to the Liverpool circle of intellectuals, James Currie, William Roscoe, and others) on 'free-will—origin of evil—association of ideas—the incompatibility of eternal punishment—first with God's *justice* and secondly with his mercy'.¹⁸ Though not mentioning Hartley directly, these topics, without a doubt, relate closely to Hartley's *Observations*, in particular its second volume (often overlooked), which discusses 'the being and attributes of God' and 'Natural Religion'. In fact, the issue of free will and the problem of evil are both central points of Hartley's argument and entrenched in theological debates of the time. And, as I will indicate more clearly in a moment, this was an argument of deep interest to the young De Quincey.

In his 'Preface' to the *Observations* Hartley explains that his work had been developed from John Gay's ideas regarding association which had in turn been prefaced to the English translation of Archbishop William King's essay 'On the Origin of Evil' (1731). King's argument had explained the problem of evil—how could an infinitely benevolent God allow for evil to exist in the world?—by arguing that though God had created the best possible world (as Leibniz had proposed), evil arose from the existence of free will. Eternal punishment in his view was required in order to 'make the Blessed approve themselves in their Choice'; in other words, hell was required to justify to good people that their virtuous lives had been worthwhile after all.¹⁹ Such a prospect of those who were saved having to gaze into hell in order to 'approve themselves' was however problematic in that it smacked of self-righteousness and could hardly be reconciled with a supposedly benevolent God who was well disposed to all his creation. Gay's argument, which he prefaced to King's work, avoided this problem by proposing that God intended eternal happiness for all humanity; however, it was left to humans to use their reason in determining what was good, and then to associate that goodness with their pleasure and ultimate happiness. Hartley, as he acknowledged, took that idea of association from Gay; however, he disagreed with the idea that reason, itself a constructed and slippery tool, could help determine where goodness lay. Rather, he argued that moral good was discernible through the instruments of pleasure and pain, which were divinely ordained to propel us in the direction of happiness. It is through the harmony of virtuous friendships that God's benevolence is embodied in us, enveloping others so that, in Hartley's words, 'they would all become *Members of the mystical Body of Christ*; all have an equal Care for each other; all increase in Love, and come to their *full stature*, to perfect Manhood . . .'²⁰

¹⁷ *Works*, I 38.

¹⁸ *Works*, I 47.

¹⁹ William King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, 2 vols, second edition (London: J. Stephens, 1732), II 504.

²⁰ *Observations*, II 287.

I shall turn in a moment to how these ideas relate to De Quincey's early correspondence with Wordsworth, but it is worth noting in relation to the discussion he has with Clarke, that De Quincey's insistence that eternal punishment was incompatible with both God's justice and his mercy indicates pretty clearly that he has travelled along with Hartley, rather than his predecessor Gay, in this development of ideas towards an optimistic idea of divine benevolence that would ultimately result in universal salvation. De Quincey continues his note of the discussion with Clarke by adding,

I say that I think it not impossible with regard to the question of free agency, that God's omniscience may be as much limited and no further extended as to a knowledge of our future actions—as his power is necessarily limited with regard to the possibility of changing the *past* . . .²¹

Here De Quincey evidently extends Hartley's argument against the notion of free will since this was inconsistent with God's foreknowledge of our actions. As Hartley presses this point,

Nor does it alter the case here to allege, that GOD's infinite knowledge must extend infinitely farther than man's, and, consequently, may extend to things uncertain in themselves, since the very terms *knowledge* and *uncertain* are inconsistent.²²

In other words, you can't know something to be a fact, and at the same time be uncertain about it. So, God's omniscience too is limited by that logical necessity, thus precluding free will for human beings. This is the point De Quincey responds to by pointing out that God's omnipotence too was limited by his inability to change the past. Though brief, De Quincey's diary note of the discussion suggests his overall agreement and close engagement, at this time, with Hartley's theory. He shares with Hartley, whom he knows to be an influence on Coleridge and Wordsworth, an optimistic and materialist theology, at some variance perhaps with the sterner evangelical views of his mother, but not necessarily incompatible with the broader benevolent aspects of evangelicalism which of course at this time displayed politically oppositional and abolitionist tendencies often expressed in highly affective language.

While Hartleyan theory adopted in many ways a Lockean epistemology of learning through sensory impressions, a key difference lies in their respective views regarding language learning. Whereas for Locke, language use followed the development of complex ideas through combining simpler ones—for instance our notion of trees could be compounded from leaves, branches, shade, etc.—for Hartley, language learning preceded meaning (as children babble words before using them correctly) and would only cohere into sense through experience. This aspect of language learning in which meanings were

²¹ *Works*, I 47.

²² *Observations*, II 69.

attached to experience was developed in a somewhat mystical way by Hartley, who interpreted the multiplicity of languages as the consequence of the biblical Fall; he expressed the hope that the process could be reversed to regain the earlier state of linguistic happiness and simplicity that characterized ‘the language given to *Adam* and *Eve*, before the fall’.²³ These prelapsarian and antediluvian ideas were later developed from the 1780s by orientalists like Sir William Jones who, while noting similarities between ancient European and Asian languages, attributed these to the dispersion of peoples through migration following the biblical Flood.²⁴ With particular reference to Wordsworth and Coleridge in the 1790s, such ideas, derived from Hartley and the radical linguist Horne Tooke, have been related to the Romantic primitivism of the linguistic theory of the 1800 ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads*, which argued that the language of rustic people was more suitable for poetry than that of city dwellers and more elevated people because ‘such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived’.²⁵ The linguistic argument was part of a communitarian approach to poetry and politics, and embedded not only in the explicit statement of the ‘Preface’, but also in the sentimental and moving poetry of the collection which was so powerfully affecting to the young De Quincey.

De Quincey’s early letters to Wordsworth have generally been read as a somewhat hyperbolic expression of admiration from an overwrought young man—a ‘man of sensibility’—and there is much truth no doubt in that view. Nevertheless, as I am arguing here, we can begin to understand them better if we understand the shared discursive elements that underlie them. In his famed first letter to Wordsworth, De Quincey tortures himself by the thought that his friendship would be unacceptable to a person of Wordsworth’s social sufficiency:

to me, unknown and unhonored as I am, why should anyone—the meanest of God’s creatures—extend his friendship?—What claim can I urge to a fellowship with a society such as your’s—beaming (as it does) with genius so wild and magnificent?²⁶

He answers his own question by presenting himself innocently as ‘but a boy’ with ‘no connection’ that ‘could draw’ the poet ‘one step farther from the sweet retreats of poetry to the detested haunts of men’; his acquaintance would provide Wordsworth with the ‘opportunity of offering to God the pleasant and grateful incense of a good deed—by blessing the existence of a fellow-

²³ *Observations*, I 316.

²⁴ For De Quincey’s knowledge of, and later scepticism regarding, the Mosaic ethnology and theology of Sir William Jones’s version of orientalism see my essay “‘Mix(ing) a little with Alien Natures’”: Biblical Orientalism in De Quincey’ in *Thomas De Quincey: New Theoretical and Critical Directions*, eds. Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts (New York: Routledge, 2008), 23 (19–45).

²⁵ *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W. J. B. Owen and J. Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I 124.

²⁶ John E. Jordan, *De Quincey to Wordsworth: A Biography of a Relationship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 31.

creature'.²⁷ The blessing a lowly creature recalls, of course, the resolution of 'The Rime of the Ancient Marinere', through the blessing of the water snakes, and the emphasis on the fellowship of a particularly wholesome nature, its benefits radiating outwards in a manner that was pleasing to God himself, conforms to the Hartleyan ideal of community spirit. As his *Diary* records, the figure of the Ancient Mariner entered De Quincey's dreams at this time, and it is clear that De Quincey was so deeply influenced by the poem that he began to identify with its guilt-ridden and melancholic narrative even as Coleridge seems to have done.²⁸ Such emotions were, of course, far removed from the healthful aspects of Hartleyan association—linked to the beautiful landscape and benevolent feelings of the Lake denizens—that De Quincey was learning to attach to Wordsworth's poetry. There is much more in the letters in the same vein that is hyperbolic no doubt but easily related to precisely the Hartleyan language of radical optimism that animates the *Lyrical Ballads*. It is evident too that the Wordsworths recognized exactly this pious aspect of De Quincey's appeal. As Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont in December of 1807:

I think of this young man with extraordinary pleasure, as he is a remarkable instance of the power of my Brother's poems, over a lonely and contemplative mind, unwarp'd by any established laws of taste . . . — a pure and innocent mind!²⁹

De Quincey's words had clearly found a receptive echo among the Wordsworths. Yet, as we have seen, De Quincey's self-presentation as a 'pure and innocent' young man brought up in the midst of nature was not exactly accurate. His education was stringently classical, and his 1803 *Diary* records his use of prostitutes at this time, around the age of seventeen. Unsurprisingly, this was not an image of himself he would be able to sustain with the Wordsworths for long.

The final portion of evidence I will examine here is the series of early manuscripts presented in his *Works* as 'Constituents of Happiness and two related manuscripts'. These three fragmentary manuscripts, held at the Jerwood Centre library, and first published in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, indicate the kind of life choices De Quincey regarded as most significant to his notion of 'happiness' at the time he was a student in Oxford and in epistolary contact with the Wordsworths. Barry Symonds, editor of 'Constituents of Happiness' for the *Works*, observes perceptively—and with surprise—in his headnote that 'one might observe in them something of the ethical utilitarianism and perfectibilist spirit to be found in . . . William Godwin's influential *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*', adding that 'it is an unusual text to associate with De

²⁷ Jordan, *De Quincey to Wordsworth*, 31.

²⁸ Roberts, *Revisionary Gleam*, 6–8.

²⁹ Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (revised), *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, Part I, 1806–1811*, ed. E. De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 180.

Quincey, and certainly a work the first edition of which he would later repudiate as a “virus” full of “raw anti-social Jacobinism”.³⁰ While agreeing with Symonds that in 1806 ‘De Quincey’s views on society and the individual had more than a little utopian idealism in them’, I wish to suggest here that it is not *Godwin* (whose explicit radicalism would *not* have appealed to the conservatively raised young De Quincey) but rather *Hartley* that is De Quincey’s more likely and obvious source.³¹ Certainly, Hartley’s optimistic theology held more than a smidgeon of utopian idealism to it, and was much more attuned to the evangelical sensibility of his upbringing. Furthermore, the key utilitarian word of the title, ‘happiness’, was clearly a term freighted with meaning for him throughout his life, recurring notably in the 1821 ‘Confessions’ where he reflects on happiness as being never of a momentary nature but of ‘enduring character’ likely to ‘shed [its] felicity’ over a period of time; it was not to be equated with mere pleasure in other words, but was a worthy pursuit for a philosopher such as himself.³² What is fairly obvious even from a fairly cursory examination of the points De Quincey lists as his ‘Constituents’ is the ease by which they can be mapped both on to Hartleyan thinking and on to the communitarian poetics of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The twelve points listed by De Quincey may be summarized as follows:

1. ‘A capacity of thinking—i.e. of abstraction and reverie’
2. ‘The cultivation of an interest in all that concerns human life and human nature’
3. ‘residence in some spot of eminent beauty’
4. ‘an interchange of solitude and interesting society’
5. ‘Books’ from which ‘double pleasure’ may be gained from ‘that furnished by the matter’ as well as ‘that furnished by the consciousness of <adv> intellectual advancement’
6. A ‘great intellectual project’
7. ‘Health and vigor’
8. ‘mastery over all unworthy passions . . . and . . . appetites . . . together with . . . benevolence’
9. ‘predominance of contemplation’
10. ‘emancipation from worldly cares’
11. ‘education of a child’
12. a ‘respectable’ appearance³³

Those familiar with the details of De Quincey’s biography will recognise here many of the elements of his early approach to the Lake poets: his dreamy and abstracted intellectual quality (itself comparable to Coleridge’s); his vaunted breadth of interest in human life and nature (recalling Wordsworth’s emphasis

³⁰ *Works*, I 71.

³¹ Hartley’s vital influence on the English utilitarian tradition and specifically on Godwin has been traced in Elie Halévy’s classic study, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), 193.

³² *Works*, II 55.

³³ *Works*, I 72–74.

in his 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* on the 'inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind'); his desire to live in the Lake region (or some comparable place of 'eminent beauty'); the mixture of solitude and pleasurable social interaction that might be imagined in such a place; a sense of literary ambition founded on an already well-marked bibliophilic tendency on his part; good health; an ability to overcome 'unworthy passions' and 'appetites' to achieve a morally elevated attitude such as he associated with Wordsworth; and a predominantly contemplative rather than active disposition, though not precluding the latter. In keeping with this list and in relation, as he puts it, to 'the history of [his] own mind', De Quincey records in his continuation of the manuscript, '*The sudden swell and growth of my interest in the origin of association amongst men*' and his new perception of the relationship between 'political economy', which he now sees as being related to 'the division of labour &c' and 'the philosophy of society'.³⁴ Clearly, these ideas, underpinned by the theory of associationism, were shaping his newly-found broader understanding of political science. They would also animate his later work including the 1821 'Confessions' significantly.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper for a renewed attention to Hartley's theory of associationism in relation to De Quincey's early thinking. Though, later in life, De Quincey belittled Hartley's theory, as Coleridge famously did too, it is evident that in the years between 1798 and 1806, when he first encountered the *Lyrical Ballads* and came under the spell of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Hartley was still a significant influence on their work and indeed on the ethos they sought to live by. The *Diary* of 1803, De Quincey's early letters to Wordsworth, and the papers entitled 'Constituents of Happiness and two related manuscripts' all record the growth of associationist thinking in De Quincey's formative years. Its language theory and religious ideology permeate his engagement with the *Lyrical Ballads*, his intellectual identification with Coleridge, and his epistolary approach to Wordsworth. Hartley's optimistic theology was undoubtedly far more congenial to De Quincey's conservative and evangelical sensibility than the more explicitly radical theories embraced by the Lake writers in their early phase, and may well have served as his intellectual entry point into their writings. Moreover, Hartley's psychological theory was well adapted to offer solace and direction to the young man's search for happiness after a somewhat traumatic period in his youth. By reading and associating with the Lake poets and sharing in their social fellowship, De Quincey might have hoped to improve himself and achieve the imagined felicity of their lives as poets. Undoubtedly, De Quincey moved away later from Hartleyan associationism as its connection with political radicalism became clearer to him, and as Coleridge vociferously distanced himself from the radical implications of necessitarianism and perfectibility. Nevertheless, its

³⁴ *Works*, I 75 (italics added).

discursive effects may be seen at work in his thinking, underlying the mechanics and the aesthetics of dreaming, and illuminating his later disillusionment with his early idols and ideals. The persistence of its logic, like the 'accursed chain' of opium dependency which he spoke of in his 1821 'Confessions', could not be 'unwound' from his thought.³⁵

³⁵ *Works*, II 74.