

Coleridge's Defense of Monarchy: Democracy and Commerce in a Modern Regime

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IN HIS 1795 WORK, *THE PLOT DISCOVERED*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge offers: 'all possible modes of Government are reducible to' three key types: 'Government *by the people*, Government *over* the people, and Government *with* the people', that is democracy, despotism, and monarchy (LPR 306). In this early work, Coleridge explicates this typology to argue against laws limiting freedom of speech and the press. This framework draws on a longer tradition made well known by the eighteenth-century French political theorist Montesquieu and mediated by figures such as William Blackstone. For Coleridge, this tri-partite schema remains consistent, beginning in the 1790s and stretching through his theorization of monarchy in the late works. The triumvirate representation of regimes goes back even further to the ancient world. More recently since Cold War, tripartite visions have been superseded by a dualistic approach, with despotism, on the one hand, and democracy, on the other. Nations range along the spectrum. The progress of modernity inexorably employs the twin forces of market economy and democratic political institutions to draw nations towards 'the end of history', where freedom and prosperity flourish simultaneously.¹ This 'fable of liberalism' as Joshua Mitchell terms it, takes for granted that capitalist economic development goes hand in hand with democracy, and that democracy marches inevitably forward.² Cracks appear in this narrative.³ Political realities bely a world imagined as a flat binary of regimes, driven by commercial progress. Countries backslide from democracy towards despotism, and others lacking free political institutions nonetheless have thriving economies. A complex world might benefit from a more nuanced framework.

The legacy of Coleridge's political philosophy remains mixed because it refuses to fit cleanly within this despotism-to-democracy continuum. His early pro-revolutionary period in the 1790s and the 'pantisocracy' scheme suggests one ahead of his time in advocating for democracy.⁴ However, his 'apostasy', as Hazlitt famously understands it, and late explications of monarchy leave Coleridge in a complicated space which at best some have defined as conservative and at worst as undemocratic, illiberal, and authoritarian.⁵ Coleridge's apparently retrograde movement on politics presents itself most fully

¹ Cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006) for the origins of the 'end of history' notion.

² Joshua Mitchell, 'Tocqueville on Democratic Religious Experience', in *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, ed. Cheryl B. Welch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 277–81.

³ Ross Douthett, 'The Post-Cold War Era is Finished: Liberalism and Democracy Will Go On', *New York Times*, November 22, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/22/opinion/trump-liberalism-cold-war.html>.

⁴ Peter J. Kitson, 'Coleridge's *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 127–43; John Colmer, *Coleridge: Critic of Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 1–9; John Morrow, *Coleridge's Political Thought: Property, Morality and the Limits of Traditional Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 11–31; Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 9–45; Carl R. Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 62–80; Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

⁵ Robert Keith Lapp, *Contest for Cultural Authority: Hazlitt, Coleridge, and the Distress of the Regency* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 131–52; Edwards, *Statesman's Science*, 11–16.

in his constitutional monarchism. Among political regimes, monarchy as a regime no longer holds much charm and mostly has been relegated to the dustbin of history as a conservative atavism. During Coleridge's time, support for monarchy contributed to venerable conventions of advocating for free and stable government. I will argue that Coleridge's monarchism both expresses typical concerns about avoiding arbitrary rule and uniquely transforms traditional theories of monarchy in ways that remain relevant today. Specifically, Coleridge's monarchism arises out of unease, inherited from Montesquieu and others, that a commercial economy is corrosive to democratic government.

In this essay I will first set Montesquieu's basic theory of regime types alongside Coleridge's similar descriptions in *The Plot Discovered* and *The Friend*, showing that he both adopts and adapts this tradition. Then, I will turn to Coleridge's theorizing of monarchy in *Constitution of the Church and State* and the late notebooks to explore how Coleridge defends monarchy not only in established terms, but also through the innovative language of symbolic imagination. In all of this, Coleridge offers contemporary readers a way of envisioning political regimes that transcends the two poles of democracy and despotism.

Montesquieu on Three Regimes

The three regime types that Coleridge addresses throughout his political corpus owe their modern form to Montesquieu. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu creates a 'distinctly modern constitutionalism', not reviving but moving beyond the 'substantive political ideals of the ancients'.⁶ Montesquieu identifies key characteristics and principles that attend each of his three regime types, namely, republic, monarchy, and despotism.

He describes each regime as an 'ideal type',⁷ with a motivating principle and a relative regime size. First, Montesquieu considers a republic to be a regime of equality wherein the whole people (a democracy) or a part of the people (aristocracy) rule.⁸ Importantly, democracy requires virtue in its citizenry, in other words, a willingness to sacrifice personal gain for the public good. Ancient democracies—during Montesquieu's time there were almost no modern democracies to consider—enacted strict sumptuary laws limiting the acquisition of wealth and demanded a rigorous education of their citizens to inculcate self-sacrificing 'love of one's country'.⁹ Sparta, Athens, and early Rome preserved equality through frugality and by remaining small in size to ensure alignment of the public good and individual desires. On the other hand, Montesquieu

⁶ Keegan Callanan, 'The Spirit of the Laws', in *The Cambridge Companion to Montesquieu*, eds. Keegan Callanan and Sharon R. Krause (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 57; Paul Cheney, 'Political Economy', in *Cambridge Companion to Montesquieu*, notes that Montesquieu's schema 'diverges from the classical tripartition into monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy . . . as a way of focusing attention on monarchy' (222).

⁷ C. P. Courtney, 'Montesquieu's Guiding Principles and Foundations,' in *Cambridge Companion to Montesquieu*, 101.

⁸ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, trans. and eds. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 10. Montesquieu distinguishes between democracy and aristocracy as both forms of a republic, but he focuses on democracy and sees aristocracy as a degenerate form of democracy (Cheney, 227).

⁹ Montesquieu, *Selected Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Melvin Richter (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990), 138.

identifies 'a large empire' with despotism—ruling a large population and territory requires concentrated and absolute power.¹⁰ Despotism is motivated by fear, carefully produced by the ruler, who demands slavish obedience, perfect isolation, and 'tranquility' in one's subjects.¹¹ For Montesquieu, the eastern governments of China and Persia serve as key examples of tyrannical government.

Between democracy and despotism, monarchy acts as a mixed type and best fits a 'medium-sized' state.¹² For Montesquieu, monarchy depends not on the self-sacrificing virtue and patriotic love of its citizens or the fear-inducing power of its ruler, but upon a government of laws. Individuals, subject to the law, act motivated by honor, meaning a self-regarding respect for one's own position and reputation.¹³ Although both monarchy and despotism involve the rule of one person, the presence of intermediate powers in a monarchy radically distinguishes it from despotism. In a monarchy, institutions—including the nobility, municipalities, guilds, universities, and the clergy—create layers of power between the people and the crown, establishing a system of checks and balances. Whenever a monarchy becomes absolute through the elimination of these intermediary powers, it degenerates into a tyranny. Monarchy also often institutionally separates governmental powers—legislative, executive, and judicial—to support a government of laws.

Montesquieu's portrayal of the three regime types and their corresponding principles and sizes discloses his evaluation of them. Vickie B. Sullivan notes that Montesquieu portrays despotism 'with such horrifying brutality that no reader can miss his intense disdain for it'.¹⁴ On the other hand, his descriptions of democracy and monarchy have instigated a 'great deal of debate among readers as to which . . . he preferred'.¹⁵ Of the three types, Montesquieu identifies monarchy as 'more fixed' and 'more unshakeable'.¹⁶ Democracies require unique circumstances, specifically 'a small territory'¹⁷ the size of a town or city-state, and 'singular institutions', carefully crafted by a lawgiver wherein 'all citizens pay a singular attention to each other' to inculcate and monitor one another's virtue.¹⁸ Montesquieu also identifies monarchy, a moderate government, as offering the most natural home for liberty.¹⁹ Despotism, by definition, always establishes an arbitrary government devoid of liberty, but importantly, democracies, while they repose power in the people through their collective rulership, are not 'free states by their nature'.²⁰ For Montesquieu, liberty requires a government of laws, and in a democracy, the people, not laws, ultimately rule. Further, democracy, like

¹⁰ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 126.

¹¹ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 60.

¹² Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 126.

¹³ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 27.

¹⁴ Vickie B. Sullivan, *Montesquieu and the Despotism of Europe: An Interpretation of The Spirit of the Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 217), 2.

¹⁵ Paul A. Rahe, 'Montesquieu: Life and Letters', in *Cambridge Companion to Montesquieu*, 13.

¹⁶ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 57.

¹⁷ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 124.

¹⁸ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 38.

¹⁹ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 155.

²⁰ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 155–56.

despotism, can centralize all power, eliminating the salutary separation of powers that Montesquieu advocates. As he observes in *Spirit of the Laws*, 'In the Italian republics, where the three powers are united, there is less liberty than in our monarchies'.²¹

Further, for Montesquieu, monarchies offer a more robust context for modern commercial economies than democracies, and this provides a key reason why, in his characterization, democracy proves less viable in the modern world. Writing in the early 1700s, Montesquieu observes the significant upheaval arising from the new global trade kicked off by the discovery of the compass and modern navigation. He praises 'the natural effect of commerce . . . to lead to peace', and notes that commerce allows modern states to replace the bellicosity of the ancients with *doux commerce*.²² Even so, he believes commerce to be inimical to both a martial attitude and to self-sacrificing virtue. In a commercial society 'all moral virtues . . . are done or given for money'.²³ Thus, 'commerce is prejudicial to the virtue sustaining republics'. Because in a democracy, 'real equality is the soul of the state', this regime type necessarily restricts commerce and the accumulation of wealth.²⁴ Conversely, the 'self-interested pursuit of commercial wealth greatly benefits monarchies where the motivating passion is honor, not virtue, and where inequality is woven into the economic and social fabric'.²⁵ Montesquieu's recognition that typically commerce and democracy do not mix led him to reject the notion that 'the republican virtue displayed in ancient times was transferable to modernity'.²⁶ For Montesquieu, modernity and commercial economies are inescapably intertwined; thus, the modern political project centres on the creation of free and stable regimes that would survive the corrosive effects of the market.²⁷

Coleridge on Three Regimes

Returning to the 1795 lecture, *The Plot Discovered*, Coleridge's typology maps onto Montesquieu's. First, he explicates 'Government . . . by the people, when the affairs of the whole are directed by all actually present' or via representation. Coleridge, like Montesquieu, points to the ancient Greek city states as democratic examples (LPR 306). 'Government over the people, or Despotism' implies a structure where the 'majority are always acted upon, never acting' (LPR 307). Finally, Coleridge refers to a 'Government with the people' and takes the English constitution as this form's ideal type: 'The people by their proxies in the House of Commons, are a check on the nobility, and the nobility a check on the

²¹ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 157.

²² Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 338.

²³ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 338–39.

²⁴ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 46.

²⁵ David W. Carrithers, 'Montesquieu on Virtue, in *Cambridge Companion to Montesquieu*, 118.

²⁶ Carrithers, 126. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, observes that commerce was not a part of the Roman spirit (383).

²⁷ Interestingly Montesquieu sees in England an attempted 'republic based on commerce'—in contrast to ancient democracy. While he believes that England manages to combine liberty, commerce, and the rule of law, he also expresses 'grave misgivings' that England could become 'one of the most enslaved peoples on earth' (Rahe, 15–16; *Spirit of the Laws*, 19).

people: while the King is a check on both' (LPR 307).²⁸ Coleridge's language of 'checks' and 'separation of powers' draws on a Montesquieuian tradition of locating freedom within a monarchical mixed government of laws and balancing institutions.

In the 1795 lecture, Coleridge leverages the ideal type of the British constitutional monarchy as a weapon against current legislation that limits free speech and the press, and which transform the ideal type into a tyranny. Importantly, he does not locate the freedom of the British constitution in its Parliament, which he argues represents not the people but a handful of 'Peers, Gentlemen, and Treasury' (LPR 308). Conversely, even in this early stage of his career, Coleridge identifies the monarch as 'the majestic guardian of Freedom', maintaining the separation of legislative and executive powers. The English monarch 'is regarded as the voice and will of the people', in keeping with the original meaning of 'majesty', which refers to the 'unity of the people; the one point in which ten million rays centered' (LPR 295). Moreover, one key argument against limiting the freedom of the press is that it would 'shut out his Majesty from the possibility of hearing truth' and insulate him from the 'influential sovereignty' of the people as expressed in the press (LPR 294, 312). In *The Plot Discovered*, Coleridge locates English freedoms within the institutions, specifically the press and crown, which 'limit the expectations of the people and the discretionary powers of the legislature' (LPR 300).

Coleridge provides a later iteration of his regime types in *The Friend*, which confirms and clarifies how Coleridge both draws on and adapts the Montesquieuian framework. In *The Friend*, Coleridge distinguishes among governments based on fear, Reason, and Understanding, each 'correspondent to the three different points of view, in which the Human Being itself may be contemplated' (*Friend* II 98). Government based on fear, exemplified by Hobbes's *Leviathan*, fails to treat human beings as moral, choosing subjects, instead dominating them through tyranny. Coleridge argues that 'while a 'vast Empire *may* perhaps be governed by fear', ultimately, this 'whole Theory is baseless'. In fact, 'fear itself is utterly incapable of producing any regular, continuous and calculable effect . . . and that the Fear, which does act systematically upon the mind, always presupposed a sense of Duty' (*Friend* II 98–99). Coleridge goes beyond Montesquieu's argument that government based on fear is corrupt and argues that government can neither 'originate' nor persist when grounded on fear.

Coleridge also critiques the second form of government he identifies: government grounded in Reason. Espoused by Rousseau and others, a government of Reason insists on a perfect equality of citizens and treats politics as a mathematical formulation, universally homogenous and binding. This vision identifies 'all rightful origin to Government' in the 'Principles contained in the Reason of Man' and holds as its mantra, 'Whatever is not *every where* necessary, is *no where* right' (*Friend* II 105). Coleridge agrees that human beings possess free

²⁸ Importantly, Coleridge is here describing an ideal English constitution. He then spends several pages addressing the concern of whether the English regime actually comes close to this ideal type.

will and conscience born of Reason—this is why government cannot reside only in fear. For Coleridge, however, Reason ‘dwells in every Man *potentially*, but actually and in perfect purity is found in no Man and in no Body of Men’ (*Friend* II 128). Coleridge’s critique of governments of Reason and Montesquieu’s reservations about democracy both take aim at perfectionistic political theories, requiring, respectively, high levels of virtue and unadulterated Reason.

Coleridge advocates for a middle option, or government based on Understanding because governments must be suited to the particularities of time and place as well as to the mixed nature of human beings. Coleridge avers that ‘[e]very Man is born with the faculty of Reason’, which endows persons with equal moral weight (as opposed to things), yet he does not believe that Reason can serve as the foundation for political regimes (*Friend* II 125, 105). Instead, Coleridge declares himself a ‘zealous Advocate for deriving the origin of all Government from human *Prudence*’ (*Friend* II 104). First, Coleridge tracks with Montesquieu’s emphasis on the relevance of climate and culture for political institutions when he quips that ‘A Constitution equally suited to China and America, or to Russia and Great Britain, must surely be equally unfit for both’ and understood as a ‘Quack’s panacea’ (*Friend* II 105). Second, Coleridge observes that people, both individually and collectively, may fall under the sway of passions and error rather than be governed by Reason. Lastly, Coleridge argues that the purpose of government lies in protecting inherently unequal property, and ‘it is impossible to deduce the Right of Property from pure Reason’ (*Friend* II 132). Here human laws depart from the moral Law: the former seeks to preserve private property, and the latter governs the relationships of persons. Both Coleridge’s government via Understanding and Montesquieu’s monarchy offer a mediated and mixed regime grounded in law, rather than in Reason or virtue. Montesquieu’s monarchy relies on mediating institutions (aristocracy, municipalities, etc.), while Coleridge’s relies on the mediation of Reason through Understanding. Inequality, of property for Coleridge and of social rank for Montesquieu, remains a core feature of their political systems. Both thinkers advocate regimes they believe to be most amenable to the exercise of human freedom, given an unequitable world.

The emphasis on property and inequality in *The Friend* demonstrates the importance of economics to Coleridge’s politics. Such an emphasis is furthered in the second *Lay Sermon*, where Coleridge expresses worry about the ‘Overbalance of the Commercial Spirit in consequence of the absence or weakness of the counter-weights’ (*LS* 169). Coleridge understands the ‘commercial spirit’ to lie in the tendency to ‘look at all things thro’ the medium of the market, and to estimate the Worth of all pursuits and attainments by their marketable value’ (*LS* 189). Coleridge’s concern about market economies invites comparisons with Montesquieu’s similar worry: ‘all moral virtues . . . are done or given for money’.²⁹ Commercial markets render all things fungible and for sale to the highest bidder. Montesquieu envisions that the complex institutions

²⁹ Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 338–39.

within a monarchy do more to channel commercial impulses, which dissolve the virtue needed in democracies. Similarly, Coleridge identifies three possible antidotes to these 'habits . . . of utility, practical knowledge, and so forth': the landed aristocracy; the 'austerer studies', such as philosophy; and religion (*LS* 170–75). Importantly, neither Coleridge nor Montesquieu equate the 'commercial spirit' simply with wealth or privilege. Coleridge opposes the market economy, where all is bought and sold, to 'ancient feeling of rank and ancestry', in which land is held in trust and where reciprocal obligations constrain choice. Coleridge concedes that each of the three available counter-weights to the overbalance of commercialism shows signs of failing in this important goal. For Coleridge, as for Montesquieu, the modern political question appears to be how to best direct and 'circumscribe the Spirit of Barter' with political institutions that do not succumb to its control (*LS* 195).

Mature Mixed Constitution

In his late works, Coleridge takes up again this concern of political economy and in response offers a fuller explication of a mixed constitution, drawing on the notion of balance and separation of powers, but expanding from the traditional triad of three estates (crown, nobility, and commons) to a pentad of five constitutional elements. In *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, Coleridge praises the English constitution's 'equipoise and interdependency', describing its government 'as a monarchy, at once buttressed and limited by the Aristocracy' (*C&S* 23, 95). Coleridge, like Montesquieu, contrasts his nation's balanced regime with the servitude and volatility of Italy's governments and pronounces England freer than any of the 'democratic, Commonwealths of ancient or of modern times' (*C&S* 95–96). Coleridge attributes this freedom first to the balance created by 'polarization' among the different institutions within the constitution—more about that in a moment. Second, England's constitution sets in tension 'potential' and 'actual' power, defining the limits of all institutions. In both a 'democratic Republic and an Absolute Monarchy . . . the Nation or People, delegates its whole power' (*C&S* 95–96). Under such conditions, '[n]othing is left obscure, nothing suffered to remain in the Idea, unevolved and only acknowledged as an existing, yet indeterminable Right. A Constitution such states can scarcely be said to possess. The whole Will of the Body Politic is in act at every moment' (*C&S* 96). Conversely in the English constitution, a government of laws, 'the Nation has delegated its power, not without measure and circumscription, whether in respect of the duration of the Trust, or of the particular interests entrusted' (*C&S* 96–97).³⁰ The nation gives up some of its power to its representatives in the state, but still retains rights and liberties.

Coleridge visualizes this distinction between nation (the people) and its government (state) in the pentad.

³⁰ Compare this with Coleridge's discussion in favor of decentralized government: 'Freedom exists only in diffused Government, where the Aristocratic Portion is collected in the Representative Body or Legislature, and the Democratic in the Municipal' (*CN* V 5925).

a. State [Nation]

b. State.

c. the Press.

d. the Church.

e. the Crown. (*C&S* 233)

The state encompasses the balance between the forces of permanence, that is, the landed nobility, and progression, or commerce as represented by ‘cities, ports, and boroughs’ (*C&S* 27). The king ‘in whom executive power is vested’ serves ‘as the beam of the constitutional scales’ (*C&S* 29–30, 77). Coleridge, however, moves beyond this standard description of the British constitution as crown, Lords, and Commons, setting this tripartite system of the state opposite the Church, as thesis and antithesis. While the state governs interests, landed and commercial, the church concerns itself with the development of persons through the work of the clerisy. In other words, a ‘Church is therefore in Idea the only pure Democracy’, organized according to the principle of equality. Conversely, the state necessarily involves inequality and a government of ‘an aristocracy’, or the ‘best men’ (*TT* I 133, 155, 189). While ‘the proper object of a State is *Things* . . . the proper Object of a Church is Persons’ (*CN* V 6411). Coleridge describes the ultimate mixed government, insofar as it combines the democracy of the church with the necessarily inequality of interests expressed in the state.

In Coleridge’s pentad, the middle terms of press and crown mediate church and state to the people. The press, as the mesothesis, renders to the people ‘an *influential* sovereignty’, allowing for information to disseminate and for the people to express their grievances with government. Coleridge avers, referring to freedom of the press, that ‘[t]his unrestricted right of over-awing the Oligarchy of Parliament . . . is the sole boundary that divides us from Despotism’ (*LRR* 312–13). Distinct from the role of the press, the monarch, or Coleridge’s synthesis, symbolically represents the whole nation, or the prothesis. The king rules as the ‘sovereign head’ of both church and state, both ‘the Protector and Supreme Trustee of the NATIONALTY’ and the master of Parliament (*C&S* 29–30, 77). The king acts ‘as the majesty, or symbolic unity of the whole nation, both of the state and of the persons’ (*TT* II 130; *C&S* 41).

He differentiates constitutional monarchy from absolute monarchy by noting that the monarch’s majesty derives from the people as a whole. Coleridge’s fixation on the language of ‘majesty’ as a way to differentiate monarchy from despotism goes back to the 1795 lectures where he defines ‘majesty’ as the ‘unity of the people; the one point in which ten million rays concentered. . . . In our laws the King is regarded as the voice and will of the people’ and the ‘majestic guardian of Freedom’ (*LRR* 295, 308). In the late notebooks, Coleridge expounds further on the term ‘majesty’, arguing that it applies properly ‘to Republics only’, but ‘the title was transferred from the Commonwealth . . . to the Emperors, per metaphoram’ (*CN* V 6763). The royal ‘we’ denotes this representation of the people as a whole. Coleridge’s monarch is thus not absolute. Coleridge clarifies that the idea of the monarch as the

'majestatic Plural-Singular' remains 'Unknown to the Despots of the East', who fail to recognize the people as the source of their power (CN V 6763). In an obscure notebook entry on popular sovereignty, Coleridge invites a complex conception of the term. Through an analogy with magnetism, he describes the potential sovereignty of the people as the ground of the state, while actual sovereignty is exercised by the monarch, as the nation's symbol (CN IV 4942 and n.). Coleridge drives his point home: 'I know of no moral, no legitimate, right of a *Sovereign*—no duty of any other power toward him—but what is grounded on the presumption, that he is truly the representative of a Nation—that he is a People in it's unity—the *Majestas*' (CN V 6599).

Even while Coleridge differentiates constitutional monarchy from despotism, he also distinguishes it from simple parliamentary democracy. He takes aim at the notion of the 'Omnipotence of Parliament', which 'would contain mischief in it, were it only that it tends to provoke a detailed analysis of the material of the joint-stock company, to which so terrific an attribute belongs, and the competence of the shareholders in their earthly omnipotence to exercise the same' (C&S 98; cf. CN V 5870). Coleridge refers here to a passage of Edmund Burke, where Burke argues that society cannot be 'considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico, or tobacco'.³¹ Coleridge, like Burke, identifies the management of material interests of the state with Parliament. Parliament itself is bifurcated in the representation of 'the two antagonist powers or opposed interests of the state . . . Permanence and Progression' (C&S 24). The landed interests of the 'Major and Minor Barons' further the 'permanency of the state, its institutions, rights, customs, manners, and privileges' (C&S 26–27). On the other hand, the commercial interests of the 'manufacturing, mercantile, distributive, and professional classes', foster the 'the progression of a state, in the arts and comforts of life, in the diffusion of the information and knowledge, useful or necessary for all; in short, all the advances in civilization, and the rights and privileges of citizens' (C&S 24). Parliament represents both the landed and commercial interests of the realm, but Coleridge, like Burke, maintains that the nation as a whole does not consist merely of an economic enterprise.

Coleridge's pentad can be understood as a critique of parliamentary democracy that emerges from his worry that modern commercial economies will supersede all else politically. Fundamentally, in commerce, 'from its most innocent form' to the slave trade, 'no distinction is or can be acknowledged between Things and Persons' (LS 219–20). Thus, Coleridge acknowledges the benefits of commercial economies in raising the standards of living and fostering personal liberties, but he also invites their critique: 'civilization is itself but a mix good, if not far more a corrupting influence . . . where this civilization is not grounded in *cultivation*' (C&S 42). In the *Lay Sermon*, Coleridge explicates three weakened counterbalances to commerce, and in the pentad, he envisions an institutionalization of those counterbalances, designed to preserve the dignity of

³¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. A. Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 84–85.

persons over and against the valuing of things. Within the state (Parliament), commercial interests are balanced against landed interests via Lords and Commons—permanence and progression. Meanwhile the state as a representation of all economic interests is set against the National Church, which concerns itself with the cultivation of persons instead of the realm's civilization. The National Church fosters, directly or indirectly, the other two counterbalances that Coleridge identifies in the *Lay Sermon*. The clerisy directly inculcate the growth of learning, and their financial independence permits them to pursue learning not immediately useful for economic gain, the 'austerer studies'. While the National Church is not the Christian Church, it nonetheless indirectly carves out space for religion's flourishing. The pentad strategically poises the commercial against the aristocracy within the state (or government), and the government as a whole is offset by the National Church.

Crown as the Beam

Integral to all this constitutional balancing and counterbalancing is the crown, the beam, which is needed as an active agent to check institutions when they overreach. Coleridge recognizes the persistent threat that commercial interests may pose to the health of the realm as a whole. Thus, the crown may need to check a majoritarian assembly, specifically when it comes to 'what virtually concerned their humanity . . . duties more awful, and more precious privileges' not 'to be voted up or down, off or on, by fluctuating majorities' (*C&S* 103). In these situations, the king, 'whose comparative height . . . would exempt him from the gusts and shifting currents, that agitate the lower region of the political atmosphere', might defend the citizen's personhood, particularly the work and independence of the national church (*C&S* 105).³² Though the monarch should normally defer to Parliament's will, at times the royal veto can protect the constitution and prevent the neglect of persons in favor of property.³³

Balancing between the institutions of church and state, the crown also functions as the symbol of the nation and its majesty or unity. Coleridge explains, 'When an indefinite Many have constituted a Whole . . . acquiring Unity from Totality, it claims of right . . . the title of *Majesty*' (*CN* V 6763, 6905). Majesty describes the many 'contemplated as one, the godlike image in the optic Cylinder from the collection of surrounding fractions, unintelligible, or insignificant in themselves singly' (*CN* V 6914). The notion of fractions becoming whole in the nation echoes language used by Rousseau to describe the general will. However, while Rousseau adopts the language of 'general will' to describe how individuals 'are forced to be free' and subject to the democratic will of the whole, Coleridge describes a unity that occurs through the power of imagination. The nation itself cannot be seen but only imagined, as Benedict Anderson famously claims.³⁴ As Coleridge explains, the 'Idea is the Reality of the State, yea *is* the State'. While

³² Morrow, *Coleridge's Political Thought*, 141–42.

³³ Cf. *CN* III, 3742, 3743.

³⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Political Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

the idea remains 'necessarily universal', lacking concreteness, the crown embodies and symbolizes that idea. In the king 'alone the majesty of the nation is *apparent*, and by whom alone the unity of the nation in will and in deed is symbolically expressed and impersonated' (*C&S* 77). As a symbol, the monarch holds together the universal and particular and 'is characterized by the translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General . . . the Eternal through and in the 'Temporal' (*C&S* 30). The monarch, 'while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative' (*CN* V 6400; *LS* 30). The symbol implies the consubstantiality of the symbol with the reality of the whole.³⁵

The consubstantiality of monarch and nation becomes clear in the reflexive relationship that Coleridge describes between monarch and subject. Coleridge observes in a late notebook entry, 'we seek to behold our Individuality in the Symbol—the Sovereign of the State' (*CN* V 6400). Coleridge unpacks this statement in a later entry: 'The Subject who kneels in homage before a rightful King, as the Symbol and acknowledged Representative of the Unity of the Nation . . . that Subject by virtue of the infinity & immortality in himself, recognizing in the Symbol of the Nation simultaneously an image of his *very Self* successively, becomes a King' (*CN* V 6914). Reciprocally, 'a King *indeed* would in receiving his Homage inwardly perform the same, and repeat it in his own Soul as a homage to the great *Idea*, of which Providence had made him the Outward Word, the material Exponent' (*CN* V 6914). Here, through an act of imagination, citizens recognize themselves in the king, and the sovereign in turn recalls the unity of the whole nation, which the king symbolizes. In this entry, Coleridge explicitly compares this mirroring between citizen and sovereign to that which occurs between child and mother.³⁶ The citizen recognizes the sovereign as a reflection of self, and in turn the whole nation as a larger self. The nation itself symbolizes the whole of humanity, past and present. The nation 'being the highest Product and epiphany of the Humanity—represent[s] the immortality of the finite Person *in extenso*, as the ever surviving Presence in the Successive' (*CN* V 6400). The nation, like the sovereign monarch, simultaneously invokes both universality and particularity.

Recovering Coleridge's Mixed Constitution

Recovering Coleridge's tripartite representation of regimes and setting them alongside Montesquieu's comparable vision reveals a consistency in Coleridge's constitutionalism from 1795 through the end of his life. The recent political theorizing that condenses regime possibilities has hampered the retrieval of Coleridge's political vision and forced a mapping of his three types onto the current preference for two basic possibilities. Throughout, Coleridge speaks unswervingly of Parliament as the representative of material interests, and he does not locate his hopes for freedom in this institution. Rather, he consistently

³⁵ Nicholas Halmi, 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol', in *Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 345–58; cf. J. Robert Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3–21.

³⁶ Compare this to his reflection on the problem of existence in *OM* 130–33.

identifies mediating institutions such as the monarchy and free press as responsible for protecting the dignity and liberty of persons. Coleridge persistently opts for a mixed constitution and critiques unitary government—either democratic or despotic. The advantage of England's mixed constitution, for Coleridge, lies in the multiplicity of pieces, the dynamic tension and polarity of the system.

Coleridge's preoccupation with mediating institutions and his relative lack of faith in Parliament demonstrates a consistent concern with the challenges that commercial markets pose to modern regimes. Coleridge, like Montesquieu, understands that commerce is a feature of the modern condition. While it offers significant improvements to the standards of living of many people, commerce also inexorably conflates persons and things. Trade renders everything for purchase including morals, persons, and even governments. Over the course of his writing, Coleridge seeks to address this issue through an increasingly nuanced constitutionalism. The three counterweights of the second *Lay Sermon* later become an even more complex pentad wherein Lords, National Church, monarch, and press are all meant to keep the dignity of persons firmly in view, preserving them from being swept away by the utilitarian calculus of the marketplace.

While Coleridge builds upon a framework explicated by Montesquieu and others, he moves beyond Montesquieu in three key ways. First, through his emphasis on the church, Coleridge institutionalizes the importance of education and culture to the success of any nation. In fact, this is the aspect of Coleridge's political thought that captivated John Stuart Mill, who identified Coleridge and Jeremy Bentham, as 'the two great seminal minds of England in their age'.³⁷ Second, Coleridge's notion of mediating institutions implies a distinct understanding of monarchy. In Montesquieu's vision, institutions such as the aristocracy and municipal governments mediate between monarch and the people, but Coleridge turns this concept on its head. In his pentad, crown and the press together function as mediating institutions between 'the Nation' as 'an actual living Idea' and the people as individuals (*C&S* 234). Specifically, Coleridge's crown does less actual governing, the job of Parliament, but rather it balances, intercedes, and serves as the symbolic head of the people's unity (its majesty, as Coleridge calls it).

Finally, Coleridge goes beyond Montesquieu in theorizing politics in a way that is attentive to the shared imagination and symbols that instantiate a sense of community. Coleridge describes the need for a sense of belonging that creates a nation. If Benedict Anderson rightly conceives of the nation as an 'imagined political community', then its members must conjure up, or 'imagine', their co-

³⁷ John Stuart Mill, 'Bentham' and 'Coleridge', *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, v. 10, ed. John M. Robson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); accessed from The Online Library of Liberty, 19 June 2012; Mill, Letter to John Pringle Nichol, 15 April 1834, in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, v. 12, pt. 1, ed. Francis E. Mineka, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), accessed from The Online Library of Liberty, 19 June 2012; cf. Robert D. Cumming, 'Mill's History of His Ideas', in *John Stuart Mill's Social and Political Thought: Critical Assessments*, ed. G. W. Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), 149–70; Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 96–102 for a discussion of Mill's debt to Coleridge.

nationals.³⁸ Yet Coleridge goes beyond Andersen to theorize how institutions, specifically the crown, can facilitate and enable the imagination that serves as the foundation for all political community. Coleridge's political theory refuses to be limited to material considerations and instead foregrounds persons and the unity of those persons. In this, Coleridge attempts to restrict the sway of market economies and prevent them from dominating politics, according primacy to persons even while recognizing the inevitability of economic considerations in any political regime.

³⁸ Andersen, *Imagined Political Communities*, 6.