

# Philosophy in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: Coleridge had his Own Doubts About It. Would the *Opus Maximum* Resolve Them?

**Patrick Hutchings**

## **Introduction**

Students of Literature who read the *Biographia Literaria: or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817), for Samuel Taylor Coleridge's criticism of William Wordsworth's poetry, or who try to make practical use of his Primary and Secondary Imaginations, go on bumping into bits of his philosophy which are supposed to open the door to his principles of criticism, but seem not to. The distinction between Fancy and Imagination does do some work, but is not novel. Most criticism in Aesthetics took it – more or less – as a given before Coleridge gave it a name. There were aesthetic judgements before Alexander Baumgarten 'discovered' Aesthetics: Plato's were often silly, see for example, *The Sophist*; while Aristotle's down to earth and useful. The *Poetics* and *The Ethics* are grounded. Think of Raphael's *The School of Athens*, and the images of Plato and of the dissenting Aristotle.

The *Biographia Literaria* is itself a series of "sketches,"<sup>1</sup> mixing biography, criticism and philosophy in the manner of an unsystematic scrapbook; no neat folders as in a filing cabinet, but scissors and paste and the odd loose leaf. As for the philosophy in the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge himself was unhappy about it. In the *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* for 28 June 1834 one finds this:

The metaphysical disquisition at the end of the first volume of "Biographia Literaria" is unformed and immature; – it contains fragments of the truth, but is not fully thought out. It is wonderful to myself to think how infinitely more profound my views now are, and yet how much clearer they are

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Patrick Hutchings holds an honorary position at the University of Melbourne.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas McFarland (ed.) with the assistance of Nicholas Halmi, *Opus Maximum, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 15, Series LXXV (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

withal. The circle is completing; the idea is coming round to, be and to be, common sense.<sup>2</sup>

There is a sad irony in “the idea is coming round” because “the metaphysical disquisition at the end of the first volume” in Chapter 12 of the *Biographia Literaria* can be seen at best as a circular argument, having no conclusion, true or false.

The ‘truth’ whose fragments are to be found in the *Opus Maximum*, now available, I shall briefly sketch in the third and final section of this article. Coleridge attempted a large metaphysic of the mind and its unaided powers. Chapter XII of the *Biographia Literaria* resonates with but, does not reveal the full measure of Coleridge’s unachieved and unfinished metaphysic. Now that we have Thomas McFarland’s absolutely splendid edition of the *Opus Maximum*<sup>3</sup> may we hope for the ‘truth’ of which the last chapter of the *Biographia Literaria* ‘contains the fragments’? The answer is: yes and no. No, if you are reading Coleridge simply to see how his philosophy underpins his critical practice. Yes, if you are interested in the history of ideas: Coleridge read a great deal of German *Naturphilosophie*, this was written on the cusp of largely non-empirical speculations on Nature and what today is real Natural Science. Coleridge once breakfasted with Humphry Davy, unfortunately before Davy had done the work which made him famous. However, Coleridge was interested in such real science as he encountered. In the twenty first century *Naturphilosophie* can be boring, as it has not much grasp on the actual facts of Nature. Yet, Coleridge hoped to understand then-current empirical science as well.<sup>4</sup>

Most of all he hoped to produce a *system* as Schelling and Kant had. The *Opus Maximum* is – McFarland – only ‘the torso’ of one; and it is unfinished – probably unfinishable. For most people who have read him, ‘Systematic Coleridge’ would seem an oxymoron. Yet he aspired, without ultimate success, to produce some kind of philosophical system. We now

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, second edition (London: John Murray, 1836), p. 308. This edition has a ‘Preface’ by Henry Nelson Coleridge.

<sup>3</sup> McFarland (ed.), *Opus Maximum*, vol. 15, Series LXXV. The editor’s ‘Prolegomena’ is divided into sections by capital Roman numerals, the page numbers are in lower case Roman numerals. See note 1 above on the *Biographia Literaria* as ‘a series of sketches’, P XXIX ‘Aids to Reflection’, ccii. Some of McFarland’s references – but not all – will be to the text, or fragments of, the *OM*. McFarland’s ‘Prolegomena’ is magisterial, and I make use of it with full acknowledgement and with deep gratitude.

<sup>4</sup> See P IX ‘*Naturphilosophie*’.

have a clean text of the *Opus Maximum* and it does not realise Coleridge's hope. It is full of interest, variety, and startling insights; and is worth reading. But like the *Biographia Literaria* material it does not add up to a draft-proof metaphysic. Opinions may differ, but that is mine, at least for now.

To make Coleridge's play with *cogito* and the I AM of Exodus tolerably intelligible I have simply borrowed a few passages from McFarland's 'Prolegomena'. Coleridge never asserts that *cogito* = I AM: at best he suggests – :: – a proportion between them. On this two things may be said: (1) God and humankind are both spiritual beings (as Coleridge thought), so even if there is an infinite distance between Coleridge and God, it is not a *type distance*;<sup>5</sup> and, (2) Coleridge with his spider-like weaving of a – 'would-be-argument' – out of 'the mind exerting all its powers' that constitutes the *working* of the *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XII, constitutes, equally, its *workings* and its *not working*. That is, the failing of the exercise.

### **From Thomas McFarland's Prolegomena: Indications of Coleridge's Philosophical Method**

- 0) **P V Reason and Understanding**, "Reason and Religion are their own evidence", lxiii : Reference, *Lay Sermons* (CC) 10. And '... CHRISTIAN FAITH IS THE PERFECTION OF HUMAN REASON (*loc. cit.*) Reference, *Aids to Reflection* (1825, 52).
- 1) **P V Reason and Understanding**, "All that we can or need say is, that the existence of a necessary Being is so transcendently Rational that it is Reason itself," lxx. Reference Brinkley. [*Brinkley*; Brinkley, Roberta Florence (1892-1967) *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*.] The existence of God is given "unproblematic indeed." Oddly Cardinal Newman thought something similar: "...two and two only supreme and supremely and luminously self-evident beings, myself and God."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See **P V 'Reason and Understanding'**, lvi. Note: Coleridge re-fashions Kant's distinction between Reason and Understanding, this is of great importance in *OM*, but it is not to our present purposes (see **P V, Reason and Understanding**, lxvii) The 'type identity' is a difficult concept: See **P V**, lvi, footnote 83.

<sup>6</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890), *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864), 'History of my Religious Opinions to the Year 1833'. On 13 October 2019 Newman was canonised, so St John Henry Newman.

- 2) **P** XV Problem and Motive, “The Fall is a necessary Postulate of Science”, cii and ciii. Of ‘Science’ indeed, before it moved well away from metaphysics: perhaps.
- 3) **P** XVIII Subject and Object, “We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with an absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in God.” Reference *BL* CC I 283. See OUP vol. I pp.185-186; EI p.146; EII p. 154. Bold added.) (See also OUP vol. II p.212<sup>n</sup>; EI p.329<sup>n</sup>; EII p.284<sup>n</sup>.) **P** p.cxix.

McFarland comments on this well-known portion of the *Biographia Literaria*:

Even as he is repeating Schelling’s identity-formula of the coalescence of subject and object in the absolute he is also struggling to extricate his own authentic line [the ‘We begin...’ with’ cited above].<sup>¶</sup> But this understanding is still *liminal* in the *Biographia Literaria*; it occurs in the same paragraph in which Coleridge expressly adheres to Schelling’s ‘either/or’: ‘it must be remembered that all these Theses refer to the two Polar Sciences, namely to that which commences with and rigidly confines itself within the subjective, leaving the objective to natural philosophy, which is its opposite pole’ **P** XVII, Subject and Object, cxxix-cxxx: Reference *BL* (ccli 281-2).<sup>7</sup>

To all this I add that the Idealists’ attempt to wire ‘*cogito*’ and ‘I notice my *cogito*’ to the ‘I AM’ of Exodus is futile. The philosophical ‘wire’ just blows its fuse. (In 1817 I doubt that the fuse was even a notion in *real science* of the day: a pity).<sup>8</sup> Coleridge might have needed his own, “In other words philosophy would pass into religion, and religion became inclusive of philosophy.” It does with him: had he any misgivings? It depends on how one reads the last two sentences of Thesis IX. In *Table Talk* for 1 November 1833 we find “... none but one – God – can say ‘I am I’ or ‘That I am’.”

- 4) **P** McFarland writes, “It was not in the relation of ‘thing to thing’ that Coleridge came to base his hopes for the philosophical validation of Christianity but in the realm of ‘the mind exerting its powers, unaided, on such facts alone as are *found within its own consciousness*’.” [Italic added.] Quote from **P** XX Philosophical Fulcrum, cxxxvi. The reference is to *OM* Fragment 2 *f* i. This remark is perhaps the key to, (a) the

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<sup>7</sup> Thesis IX OUP vol. I p.185; EI p.146; EII p.153 & 153<sup>n</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> As well as a mention of Sir Humphrey Davy, *Table Talk* has references to magnetism, electricity and galvanism, nitrous oxide, heat, alchemy and astrology. A mixed bag of topics.

method used in the philosophical part of *BL* and, (b) the reason for the failure of the *BL* philosophical excursus.

- 5) **P XXIV** Conservations, clxv “I cannot conceive a supreme moral intelligence unless I believe in my own immortality,” Coleridge in response to St Paul I Corinthians 15-19. Does belief here trump reason/understanding?
- 6) **P XXV** Evolutionary Materialism, “I have ever thought... Atheism is the next best religion to Christianity” clxxi. Also, “Did philosophy commence with an “it is” instead of an *I am* Spinoza would be altogether true,” XXV. Evolutionary Materialism clxxiii. (Coleridge revered Spinoza, but could not accept his pantheism.)
- 7) **P XXV** Evolutionary Materialism, clxxiv, McFarland writes: “It was to avoid the danger of pantheistic identification of God and nature that Coleridge ... [engaged in] his exploration of ‘*facts that have their sole being in consciousness*’. (Reference *OM* Fragment 2 f 62.) To which one may add the next quotation on the same page.
- 7a) McFarland writes: “His endeavor was a ‘seeking for the first principles of all living & effective truth *in the constitution and constant faculties of the Mind itself*.’” It was the depth of the “*I am*,” not the *secrets of nature*,<sup>9</sup> that would ultimately provide Coleridge with what he needed, and at the same time obviated the ever-looming threat of pantheism. That he would find “That very principle, of which nature knows not, which the light of the sun can never reveal which we must either despair of finding or *must seek and find within ourselves*” (*OM* Fragment 2 f 62) “*That which we find in ourselves*,” he said in an ultimate statement, is “the substance and life of *all* our knowledge. Without this latent presence of the ‘*I am*’, all modes of existence in the external world would flit before us with no greater depth, root, or fixture, than the image of a rock hath in a gliding stream.” **P XXV** ‘Evolutionary

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<sup>9</sup> The Fall is not part of Natural Science. It is ‘due to’ Original Sin (St Augustine and Roman orthodoxy). I prefer John Henry Newman’s ‘... some aboriginal calamity’. For Coleridge the Fall was central to his theology.

Materialism', clxxiv-clxxv and 7a. Italic added. Reference, *Lay Sermons* (CC78).<sup>10</sup>

This set of quotations, shorn of their context as they appear in McFarland's 'Prolegomena' may seem to be, philosophically, unsupportable. Read in the 'Prolegomena', they make sense as part of a would-be Idealistic System.<sup>11</sup> Coleridge was attempting to produce a systematic work on the pattern of Friedrich Schelling's or Johann Gottlieb Fichte's: he hoped, even to go one better than Kant himself. Quotation Zero looks to be both an axiom and a conclusion: hence, O.<sup>12</sup>

Reading the quotes from McFarland one sees two things: (1) That the apparent solipsism<sup>13</sup> of Coleridge alone with his thoughts is not as acute as it may at first sight seem; and (2) as McFarland notes in quotation 3, the philosophical parts of Chapters XII and XIII of *Biographia Literaria* are *liminal*. They are doorsteps into a grand system of which only an unfinished portion remains: a system which might very well interest such Idealists as are still in practice. Additionally, it is significant for an historian of ideas. My tedious analysis of Chapter XII below which – I reckon – shows Coleridge as going around in a circle, was written for students of literature who found Thesis I – XII *Biographia Literaria* unhelpful. Chapter XIII, does offer some ideas with literary traction: Chapter XII does not.

Coleridge's play in Chapter XII of the *Biographia Literaria* with René Descartes' *cogito* and the 'I AM' of Exodus is: (a) a trifle solipsistic, and, (b) suggests that the promise, of quotations 4 and 7 & 7a are vain: "... *the mind exerting its powers **unaided**... on such facts **alone** as are found in its own consciousness...*" never delivered for Coleridge a metaphysical system. He was fascinated by the fact that the mind can be both subject –

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<sup>10</sup> These last two quotations – if you had read them before you encountered the philosophical parts of the *Biographia* – would have demystified you in advance.

<sup>11</sup> John H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (London and New York: Allen and Unwin/Humanities Press, 1930). Muirhead very much approved of Coleridge, crediting him as stating "... the fundamental principle of all later idealistic philosophy," p. 77. See also pp. 243-244. Muirhead had more limited access to the Coleridge Manuscripts than did McFarland, nevertheless, his *Coleridge as Philosopher* remains a useful work.

<sup>12</sup> See also XX 'Philosophical Fulcrum': "The mind exerting its powers unaided on such facts alone as are found within its own consciousness," reference Frag 2 f 1. See also XXV 'Evolutionary Materialism', the last paragraph of page clxxiv as already cited as 7a in the borrowings from McFarland.

<sup>13</sup> Considering Coleridge's "apparent solipsism," how far was he from Fichte whom he burlesqued in *BL* Ch. IX? (OUP1 p.101<sup>n</sup>, EI p.78<sup>n</sup>, II p.86<sup>n</sup>).

*cogito* – and object ‘I notice my *cogito*’: That it can be self-reflective. One feels that he expected to get more out of that fact than can be gotten.

In the critique of Thesis I – XII, I stipulate that Descartes’ *cogito* is an absolute. Putting aside *ergo sum* one might write “I think and I notice – am aware of – my act of thinking.” By turning *cogito*... into a simple self-reflection we bring it closer to what I take to be Coleridge’s notion. This will do to make it, in context, an *absolute*; and the I AM of Exodus is the utterance of an Absolute Being.<sup>14</sup> ‘God is Ens super Ens, the Ground of all Being... He is but therein likewise *absolute being*, in that he is the Eternal *Self-Affirmant* & the I AM...’ [Italic added] *P* XVII Subject and Object, cxxiv. Reference, (CC) *Coleridge Marginalia*.<sup>15</sup> God must be at once the *absolute person* and the ground of all personality (*P* ‘The Concept of Person’, cxv xvi. Reference *OM* Fragment 2 f 189). And a necessary Being (*P* VI ‘The Higher Criticism’ lxxi. Ref. Brinkley 128)

The *Biographia Literaria* was conceived by Coleridge as merely a series of “sketches.” Neither it nor the *Aids to Reflection* constitute a full and proper philosophical essay. See *P* XXIX “Aids to Reflection,” ccii. Coleridge’s philosophy is scattered about in various essays and so on. Ideally it was to be expressed fully in the *Opus Maximum*. We turn now to the philosophical tailpiece of the *Biographia Literaria* Volume I (1817) and see how that fares as philosophy. Coleridge himself though it fared badly. And he was right.

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<sup>14</sup> Note the Jacobi reference in *P* “... the true God is a living God, who knows and wants, says to himself that I THAT I am: not a mere I and absolute Not-I” (V Reason and Understanding lxv: Reference Jacobi *Werke* II 61.

Also note V “Reason and Understanding”, lxv “There is one heart for the mighty mass of Humanity, and every pulse in each vessel strives to beat in concert with it.” Coleridge, *The Friend* (CC) I 96. McFarland cites this as a Romantic trope rather than a philosophical claim.

<sup>15</sup> *S.T. Coleridge Marginalia*, ed George Whalley and H.J. Jackson (6 vols London & Princeton, 1980-2001) = cc XII.

## An Analysis of the Philosophical Sections of Chapter XII of the *Biographia Literaria*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge and 'I am' :: 'I AM'<sup>16</sup>

But if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality, the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are absolutely identical. Sum quia sum; I am, because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be, because I am.<sup>17</sup>

The difficulty here lies in, "But if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM..." What does this *elevation* cash out as? Is Coleridge simply finding an *analogy* between his – or anybody's – self-affirmation and God's? Or is he *elevating* himself as "I affirm myself to be," to "I AM"? The Epigraph is from Scholium to the famous Thesis VI in Chapter XII of the *Biographia Literaria*, it is the second paragraph of that Scholium. It looks to be septic, but in his Footnotes Coleridge applies the antibiotics.

I propose to examine Thesis VI of Chapter XII of the *Biographia Literaria*. I shall confine my arguments to: (i) the Scholium; and (ii) the footnote. However the whole Thesis VI needs to be quoted. But as the thesis begins "This principle" we need to go back to Thesis III before we go on to the puzzling Thesis VI. Thesis III sets out what "this principle" might be. Thesis III begins:

THEISIS III

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<sup>16</sup> Note: The array :: is the – usual – proportion sign. The Oxford University Press (OUP) edition of the *Biographia Literaria* edited by J. Shawcross is in two volumes, from the reproduced edition of 1817. This contains an invaluable 'Introduction' and Notes. The OUP edition was first published in 1907 and has been reprinted; the 1954 edition has corrections. There are two 'Everyman' editions – EI London JM Dent & Co, New York, E.P. Dutton & Co with an I have made great use of vol. 15 the *Opus Maximum* ed. Thomas McFarland (Princeton University Press, 2002). I again acknowledge my debt to Professor McFarland. It is important to note in his P XVII, 'Subject and Object', cxxvii, the remark that Coleridge translated the opening of Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* without direct acknowledgement into Ch. XII of the *Biographia Literaria*. Muirhead remarks that "There was a period of (Coleridge's) life at which he felt himself so much at once with Schelling's philosophy that he was prepared to risk his reputation for literary honesty by adopting whole portions of its text as the basis of his own theory of poetry. See Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher*, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I, pp.183-184; EI, pp.145-146; EII, pp.150-152.

## Philosophy in Coleridge

We are to seek ... for *some absolute truth* capable of communicating to other positions [*sic*] a certainty that is not itself borrowed; a truth self-grounded, *unconditional* and known *by its own light*...<sup>18</sup>

The italics are mine, and the omission in the first line of the quotation is the word ‘therefore’. I do not intend to go through Thesis I and II. That that might be a useful thing to do I concede. However my point is to focus on Thesis VI, not Thesis III.

Of Thesis III one might be tempted to say: Oh, Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* yet again! This – after all – might well be taken for an *absolute* – Coleridge wants an *absolute*, but Descartes’ one is just what he does not want. Of course, Descartes’ *cogito* haunts Coleridge’s text – as it does much philosophy: and it is an ‘absolute’ in some sense of that word. Coleridge’s mentions of Descartes occur very often in the *Biographia*. One suspects that there is a tension – always there – between Coleridge’s *absolute(s)* and Descartes’.

### THESIS VI

This principle, [*some absolute truth*] and so characterized, manifests itself in the SUM or I AM, which I shall hereafter indiscriminately express by the words spirit, self and self-consciousness<sup>19</sup>. In this, and in this alone object and subject, being and knowing, are identical, each involving and supposing the other. In other words, it is a subject which becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject. It may be described therefore as a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject, which presuppose each other, and can exist only as antitheses.

SCHOLIUM. If a man be asked how he *knows* that he is, he can only answer, *sum quia sum*. But if (the *absoluteness* of this certainly having been admitted) he be again asked how he the individual person, came to be, then in relation to the ground of his existence, not to the ground of his knowledge of that existence, he might reply, *sum quia deus est*, or still more philosophically, *sum quia in deo sum*.

Here this *absoluteness* which I have Italicized has a Cartesian ring to it. The “*sum quia deus est*” any Christian believer – and Coleridge was very much one – might answer to the question, “How do you know that you are: and what is the ground of you?” The reply would be ‘*cogito*’ and ‘God made me’:

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<sup>18</sup> Coleridge, OUP, vol. I p.180; EI p.143; EII p.150. Bold and Italics added.

<sup>19</sup> See Patrick Hutchings, ‘S.T. Coleridge and the Desolation of Aesthetics’, *Philosophical Studies*, vol. XV (1966), pp. 7-27. The superscript indicates the point at which I criticized Coleridge. This article, much of which deals with a now dated controversy, is not, I think, available on the Internet.

But as is seen below, Coleridge makes the latter answer unclear by invoking Paul, Acts 17:28.

We come now to the second paragraph of the Scholium, the one used as the epigraph to the present article. Coleridge's second paragraph is the philosophically and theologically disturbing one:

But if we elevate our conception to the *absolute self*, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality, the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are *absolutely* identical. Sum quia sum; I am, because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be, because I am.<sup>20</sup>

The difficulty here lies in, 'But if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM...' what does this *elevation* cash out as? Is Coleridge simply finding an *analogy* between his – or anybody's – self-affirmation and God's? Or is he *elevating* himself as 'I affirm myself to be', to 'I AM'?<sup>21</sup>

In a footnote Coleridge makes the important distinction between 'I am' and 'I AM': does the *elevation* eliminate the distinction? Or does it leave it intact? Here I cannot entirely put off the hermeneutics of suspicion. However, one gives Coleridge the benefit of the doubt, one which he is at pains to clear up, in a footnote, which for clarity's sake has been reduced in type-size more or less to echo Coleridge's printed text. It reads:

It is most worthy of notice, that in the first revelation of himself, not confined to individuals, indeed in the very first revelation of *his absolute being*, Jehovah at the same time revealed the *fundamental truth of all philosophy, which must either commence with the absolute*, or have no fixed commencement; i.e. cease to be philosophy...<sup>22</sup>

Descartes' *cogito (ergo sum)* is an absolute: and it is very much a beginning. Coleridge does not like the *ergo sum* 'conclusion' from *cogito*: but if one needs an *absolute to begin with*, a 'bare' *cogito* might serve. '*Cogito ergo sum*' is altogether more elegant than the ramshackle arguments which Descartes seeks to balance on it. It is a neat self-affirmation. It is a neat *absolute*. It is not – as Descartes very well knew – the *absolute* of Absolute Being, 'I AM'. Coleridge himself knew this, but...

What one is uneasy about is whether – for all his drawing the distinction in his footnote – Coleridge elides the immense distance between

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<sup>20</sup> Vol. I (OUP), vol. I, pp. 183-184; EI, pp. 145-146; EII, pp.151-152. My italics on the word 'absolutely' is a trifle more than an irony.

<sup>21</sup> See above quotation 3 from McFarland and my comment on it.

<sup>22</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I pp.183-184; EI pp.144-145; EII p.152. Bold and italics added.

self-affirmation=*cogito*, **and** 'I AM'. The latter part of the footnote is very important. It reads:

Here then we have, by anticipation, the distinction between the conditional finite I (which as known in distinct consciousness by occasion of experience is called by Kant's followers the empirical I) and the absolute I AM, and likewise the dependence or rather the *inherence* of the former in the latter; in whom 'we live, and move, and have our being,' as St Paul divinely asserts, [Acts 17:28] differing widely from the theists of the mechanical school (as Sir I. Newton, Locke, etc.) who must say from whom we *had* our being, and with it life and the powers of life.<sup>23</sup>

What does Coleridge mean by *inherence*? If we are, in any way, 'in' God we still are not God, and are not Absolute. It is not possible to be Absolute by osmosis. Acts 17-28 "...in him we live, and move and have our being..." does not, with its 'in' imply an osmosis.

Coleridge had written earlier in Chapter XII, "The postulate of philosophy, and at the same time the test of philosophical capacity, is no other than the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF."<sup>24</sup> Knowing oneself is not altogether easy: knowing that one is not God is. Coleridge's footnote indicates that he knew this very well: his text however seems, to me at least, to smudge it. Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* at 5.63 reads, "I am my world," but this itself is not as septic as it seems. Perhaps the same can be said of Coleridge's Thesis VI in the end. The niggle is: Coleridge read Kant: but he also read Schelling, a very Master of Illegitimate Idealism and borrowed from him, as is well known.

In Thesis IX Coleridge clears himself of all hermeneutic suspicion: *à propos* the Scholium of Thesis VI. He writes:

THESIS IX

We are not investigating an *absolute principium essendi*; for then, I admit, many valid objections might be started against our theory; but an *absolute principium cognoscendi*. The result of both the sciences, or their equatorial point, would be the principle of a total and undivided philosophy, as for prudential reasons I have chosen to anticipate in the Scholium to Thesis VI and the note subjoined. In other words, philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive of philosophy. We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the *absolute* I AM. We proceed from the self, in order to lose and find all self in GOD.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I p. 184; EI p. 145; EII p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I p. 173; EI p. 136; EII p. 144.

<sup>25</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I pp.185-186; EI p.146; EII p.154. Bold added. See also OUP vol. II p.212<sup>n</sup>; EI p.329<sup>n</sup>; EII p.284<sup>n</sup>.

Is Coleridge here giving the wrong reading of the ‘in’ in St Paul’s ‘In whom we live and have our being’? I fear so. If he is not giving an over-strong reading, Thesis IX may be all right and proper for one who had considered being a clergyman of the Unitarian persuasion, but became a firm defender of the Anglican Church and its doctrines: One moves from self-knowledge to ‘the absolute’. Schelling haunts this passage, one fears. However: how does Coleridge get from ‘I am’ to ‘I AM’? Even Thomas Aquinas needed five ways! Coleridge seems to rise too easily from a relative I am (*cogito*) to an *absolute* I AM: from a *cogito* absolute, to an *absolute* I AM, from *a* to *A*, where the absolutes are distinct (a) in type,<sup>26</sup> and (b) in ontology. God is the Necessary Being. But we are not-Necessary.

In *Italicizing* or putting in **bold** ‘absolute’ in quotations from Coleridge I hover between, on the one hand *philosophy* and on the other *hermeneutics and literary criticism*. In the very footnote which lets Coleridge off the hook – the one in which he exculpates himself from the imputation that he does reckon that: *cogito* ≡ I AM – Coleridge, just possibly, hankers for the very *a*/Absolute which he cannot have. Here, again, is part of the footnote which shows us precisely what Coleridge was hankering for: here, again, is the crux:

It is most worthy of notice, that in the first revelation of himself, not confined to individuals, indeed in the very first revelation of *his absolute being*, Jehovah at the same time revealed the fundamental truth of all philosophy, which must either commence with ***the absolute***, or have no fixed commencement; i.e. cease to be philosophy (bold and italic added).

One cannot start a philosophy from I AM. Did Coleridge hope that he could? Descartes did not manage to erect everything that he wanted to on *cogito ergo sum*, for all that it is a small ‘a’ *absolute*. The consequent text of the *Discourse on Method* is a *bricolage*, but the beginning seemed hopeful. Coleridge in the short piece of the footnote quoted above seems either: (a) taking it from God/Revelation that philosophy must *start* from an *absolute* – if so *whence this?* Or, (b) did Coleridge yet-still-somehow imagine that ‘I AM’ answered our question ‘*whence this?*’? Did Coleridge think that I AM could be an *a priori* Absolute on which to build? Reading the *Biographia Literaria* one must keep one’s philosophical spectacles on, *but* at the same time accept – up to a point – a Poet’s ticket to indulge in ambiguity, and puns.

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<sup>26</sup> I am in a quandary here: I have conceded that as *souls* we are of the same type as God in being – in part – spiritual beings. However, as Absolute (and as Necessary) God so outranks us that one seems to need to qualify ‘type’: or find another word. Perhaps Thomas Aquinas’ ‘analogy’ is the best that can be found.

Coleridge needs an a/Absolute: he infers this from the *absolute* 'I AM's' revelation of His Absolute-ness. A curious inference indeed. However the 'I AM' does not provide Coleridge with an *absolute*. Coleridge rejects Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, *absolute*: but he comes up with no *absolute* of his own. *Stalemate!*

The philosophy of the British and American Absolute Idealists did not *start* from The Absolute: it got, laboriously, to it. This is particularly true of Francis Herbert Bradley. That it was not much use when got to is another matter, one which will not be gone into here. As for Schelling – that is another story into which I shall not go here.

In the middle of the footnote quoted above (but not printed here), Coleridge takes Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* apart. He makes the point often made since: *sum* being the necessary condition of *cogito* it is logically odd to derive the former from the latter. This done, Coleridge shows us that he does not make the mistake: of going directly from *cogito*, to I AM, because *cogito* and I AM are both – if differently – *absolute*. He writes, with a consequential 'here' on which I make no comment:

... object and subject, being and knowing, are identical, each involving and supposing the other. In other words, it is a subject which becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject. It may be described therefore as *a perpetual self-duplication* of one and the same power into object and subject, which pre-suppose each other, and can exist only as antitheses.

The phrase '*a perpetual self-duplication*' might look like a conflation of 'I am' and 'I AM', but the Scholium is reassuring:

SCHOLIUM. If a man be asked how he *knows* that he is, he can only answer, *sum quia sum*. But if (the *absoluteness* of this certainly having been admitted) he be again asked how he the individual person, came to be, then in relation to *the ground of his existence*, not to the ground of his knowledge of that existence, he might reply, *sum quia deus est*, or still more philosophically, *sum quia in deo sum*.

The *sum quia deus est* is orthodox: the *sum quia in deo sum* is Pauline: if prone to an Idealist misreading. However if I am *quia in deo sum* that does not allow me to assert of myself 'I AM'. The best that I can do is: *cogito (ergo sum)*. I am not an Absolute as is the utterer of 'I AM'. Even if I am – in some sense – 'in' God I am not 'I AM'.

But if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality, *the ground of existence*, and the *ground of the knowledge of existence*, are ***absolutely identical***. *Sum quia sum*; I am, because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be, because I am.

This may well be true: but – again – Coleridge cannot have the ‘I AM’ as his *Absolute*. And the phrase ‘*absolutely identical*’ gives Coleridge no ground on which to claim that he *can* find – his missing – *absolute*. By enrolling ‘I AM’ in his philosophy as, (a) its paradigm, ‘philosophy needs an absolute ground’, with this he gets nowhere, he achieves nothing. And, (b) his philosophy remains groundless. The best that he *could* do – but didn’t – is re-run *cogito ergo sum*. In fact, Descartes did not in fact get far – anywhere? – beyond that. The text of the footnote continues:

Here then we have, by anticipation, the distinction between the conditional finite I (which as known in distinct consciousness by occasion of experience is called by Kant’s followers the empirical I) and the absolute I AM, and likewise the dependence or rather the inherence of the former in the latter; in whom ‘we live, and move, and have our being,’ as St Paul divinely asserts... (Acts 17:28).<sup>27</sup>

Here, then, Coleridge shows himself to be in the totally respectable company of Kant: Kant, the philosopher who – virtually – quashed metaphysics and ‘rational raving’.<sup>28</sup>

The reader may agree with my judgement that Coleridge does not: (1) muddle his *absolutes*; (2) or recklessly take the Absolute I AM as a foundation for philosophy, or the reader may not agree with me. Coleridge

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<sup>27</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I p. 184; EI p. 145; EII p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (See *CoJ* Part I, ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgement’ in Book II, The analytic of the Sublime, p.128. Sidenumber 275.) Kant’s topic here is “the inscrutability of the idea of freedom.” This is an issue still vexed. On the one hand, ordinary language’s locutions presume our knowledge/ ‘knowledge’ of our own freedom-of-will. In Oxford, in my day, ordinary language was put forward as *solving* the problem of freedom, while – at the same time – it was believed that *language* could not solve *material mode* problems. Brain science in the twenty-first century may take its own line on freedom/ ‘freedom’ – as Kant would have, more or less, expected – leaving freedom now ‘inscrutable’ because non-existent. This is not the place to settle this issue. However, Coleridge in Thesis VI may have had what Kant called in the freedom context: “... some VISION *beyond all the bounds of sensibility*; i.e. would dream according to principles, **rational raving**” (bold added). Poets may do this sort of thing in their philosophical moments, even? The whole of serious, philosophical aesthetics has before it the Question: metaphor, poetic ambiguity, analogy, *or* rational raving? One thinks of William Butler Yeats, Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky, Wallace Stevens and sundry poets, writers, painters too numerous to list. (See: T.H. Gibbons, *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel*, University of Western Australia Press, 1973.) Kant’s own *noumenon* itself “beyond all the bounds of sensibility” no longer seems, in the twenty-first century to do any work. We now tend to read Kant in a positivist way. Kant’s ‘thing-in-Itself’ one more or less ignores: it is too like John Locke’s “*Primary* v *Secondary* qualities.” It may, indeed, do even less work than do Locke’s pair.

has more to say in Thesis X which is still foundational. Or is a search for a foundation:

THESIS X

*The transcendental philosopher* does not inquire what ultimate ground of our knowledge there may lie out of our knowing, but what is the last in our knowing itself, beyond which we cannot pass. The principle of our knowing is sought within the sphere of our knowing. It must be something therefore which itself can be known. It is asserted only that the act of self-consciousness is for us the source and principle of all our possible knowledge. Whether abstracted from us there exists anything higher and beyond this primary self-knowledge, which is for us the form of all our knowing, must be decided by the result.<sup>29</sup>

Here Coleridge may be referring to ‘is there a real world outside my consciousness?’ Or he may be in search of his Absolute: ‘result’ may just be ambiguous.

The trouble is, as we have already noted, ‘the result’ is a fizzer. Coleridge never finds the *absolute* that he reckons he needs. Philosophy – he infers from the Absoluteness of I AM’ – must begin with an Absolute. However he never found it. And that, one reckons, is the end of the matter.

### **Coleridge’s Imagination Primary and Secondary: I AM :: ‘Repetition’ and ‘Echo’**

Chapter XIII of the *Biographia Literaria* has, like Chapter XII, a strong reference to I AM: a stronger one, possibly more curious than that to be found in Chapter XII. In Chapter XII Coleridge footnotes himself into – relative – orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup> Chapter XIII looks flighty by comparison. On the other hand Ch XIII has literary traction – of a sort. Chapter XII lacks any literary-critical use.

### ***Coleridge’s ‘Repetition’ and ‘Echo’***

Coleridge in Thesis X of Chapter XII styles himself a ‘Transcendental Philosopher.’<sup>31</sup> He has, in a footnote in Chapter XII, marked the/a distinction between the transcendental and transcendent,<sup>32</sup> but he has not marked it quite

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<sup>29</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I pp. 186ff; EI p. 147; EII p. 154.

<sup>30</sup> The passage of *Biographia Literaria* which are under discussion may be found in the Oxford University Press edition, vol. I pp. 198-202 (the end of vol. I); EI pp. 156-160; EII pp. 164-167). The array :: is the – usual – proportion sign.

<sup>31</sup> OUP, vol. I p.186; EI p.147; EII p.154.

<sup>32</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I p. 164; EI p. 159; EII p. 173.

clearly enough. That becomes obvious when we come to the interesting part of Chapter XIII where it is the Transcendent which is up: this when Kant himself would have been careful to go no higher than the transcendental. Here is Coleridge:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception<sup>33</sup>, and as a **repetition** in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.<sup>34</sup>

The crucial word here is ‘repetition’. In what sense does or could the ‘finite mind’ *repeat* ‘the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’? At first reading it seems that Coleridge is too close to taking ‘infinite and finite’ in the God :: humankind context as, if not quite commensurable, at least as opposite ends of the one spectrum. God and humankind are type consistent in being S/spiritual. However no person is God except God. At second reading one may bluntly ask: “What have humankind ‘created’ to match ‘Creation’?” The answer must be fairly dusty. Poems, fictions, music, civilizations (prone to catastrophic rise, and mega-catastrophic fall) and, latterly, Natural Sciences which scrutinize Creation as they could not in Coleridge’s day, and this to marvellous effect. Among the results of such scrutiny is the atomic bomb which some idiot may well set off in the near future. Civilizations – tend to – rise only at the expense of ‘lesser’ ones: and the fall of the present One World Civilization – itself an absolute fiction probably – may end in the fall of the whole lot. “We’ll all go together when we go!” As c/Creators humankind do not find themselves in the same league as the ‘I AM’ of Exodus III 14. So ‘repetition’ in Coleridge’s text cashes out, to use an Irishism, at ‘a very low zero indeed!’

Or: one might take another view and compare the creativity of artists, in music, sculpture, painting *etc.* as ‘echoing’ the creativity of God. This view has been taken often enough. I shall here not argue for it; or against it. However it seems to be, (a) a metaphor, and (b), at once hackneyed, and expected to do more work than a metaphor can. Even the Thomist *analogy* notion, in which I once believed, I now find less convincing than once I did. However, one may have to fall back on it, and so on a different ontology. Kant’s transcendental Imagination ‘raised’ to the I AM, just collapses. As Kant would have warned Coleridge had they been colleagues. The transcendental is not the Transcendent – the latter needs the honorific capital

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<sup>33</sup> This is Kantian and perfectly acceptable. However, it is ‘repetition’ at which one must cavil.

<sup>34</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (OUP), vol. I p. 202; EI p. 159; EII p. 167. Bold added.

‘T’ to mark the point. Coleridge is here embracing Schelling and not the more sober Kant.

Finer than Schelling’s or Coleridge’s expression of the Romantic Imagination is Wordsworth’s:

Imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood  
(*The Prelude*, bk. xiv, l. 190)

The secondary imagination may go the way of the first – into a cloud of hyperbole – though something may be salvageable.

The secondary [Imagination] I consider as an **echo** of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify<sup>35</sup>. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead (bold added).

What is salvageable is the part, “It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create.” Ordinary experience is subjected to this process, and poetic ‘creation’ (irony quotes and approval quotes) occurs. What literary critics have found useful is the section: “... at all events, it struggles to idealize and to *unify*...” Most Organic Unity talk in the Old-New Criticism could take off from here. And literary critics used to, and still can, use: ‘It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects are essentially fixed and dead’.

Then, Coleridge goes on to mention ‘fancy’ and we are suddenly in the realm of the imagination v fancy, well known to literary critics and still of use to them, if they choose to take it up. You cannot mount a “Lit Crit nineteenth and twentieth century, 101” course without visiting this bit of the *Biographia Literaria*. Whether you still use it in your literary criticism is your choice. It has vernacular look-alikes: ‘He played the Diabelli Variations perfectly’; ‘It was a seamless performance’; ‘The performance of the choir was patchy.’ Our ordinary critical language uses Coleridge’s idea already. ‘Their *Hamlet* was all over the place’; ‘The lecture was spot on, not a word out of place’; ‘I felt as though *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* was so well crafted that you could not alter a sentence in it’; ‘*Frankenstein* by Mary

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<sup>35</sup> ‘To Idealize and to unify’ is an Idealist’s tautology. Idealists thought – correctly – that everything was related to everything else. They thought – incorrectly – that philosophy could make omni-relationship perspicuous. It can not. It is, however, an heuristic of natural science to seek, and eventually to find, a Unified Science.

Shelley is very uneven, but it's so gripping that one does not mind this'; 'Wagner could have done with a good editor!'

Even if we do not have the Idealist's passion for unity, we notice it when it is not there.<sup>36</sup> Literary Criticism may have moved on from Coleridge: but it might well move back. Coleridge is part of the History of Ideas. And Postmodernism has been all too successful: it made straight the way for 'post-truth' and 'alternative facts'. These do not seem things with much of a future. And they are 'a present danger' if ever there was one.

Chapter XII of the *Biographia* is small beer: for the extent of Coleridge's philosophical ambitions, and for another taste of philosophical style the reader may be interested in the last section of the present paper below.<sup>37</sup>

### **The *Opus Maximum* and the Development of "The Fragments of Truth" in *The Biographia*, Chapters XII and XIII**

#### ***The Style and Type of Coleridge's Philosophy: "The Circle is Completing"***

Probably the most arresting remark made by Coleridge in the *Table Talk* is this from 15 October 1833:

The Trinity – Incarnation – Redemption,  
The Trinity is the idea: the Incarnation,  
which implies the Fall, is the fact:  
The Redemption is the mesothesis  
of the two – that is – the religion.<sup>38</sup>

One might argue in a contrarian way that the Fall 'implies' – that is makes necessary – the Incarnation. This remark from the *Table Talk* seems a too neat statement – a too neat *account?* – of the major mysteries of the Christian

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<sup>36</sup> See Patrick Hutchings, 'Organic Unity Revindicated?' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3 (1965), in reply to Catherine Lord's 'Organic Unity Reconsidered', *JAAC XXII* (1964), and her very considered 'Kinds and Degrees of Aesthetic Unity', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 18, No.1 (1978). The whole question remains a question.

<sup>37</sup> Both Muirhead and McFarland deal fairly extensively with Coleridge's adjustments to Aristotelian logic. This is beyond the scope of the present article. On the topic there are two books by Alice D. Snyder of which I have sighted only, *Coleridge on Logic and Learning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929).

<sup>38</sup> This is so pithy that one half expects a QED: a proof if only in one bit of Cambridge's numerous amendments to Aristotelian logic. I shall have to reread the *OM* yet again. There is a great deal in it about the Trinity – in which Coleridge believed – but so far I have not found enough to make good the (implied) claim that *TT* Oct. 15, 1833 is more than a theological *bon mot*.

religion. It would indeed merit a metaphysic. It is not the case, nevertheless that the *Opus Maximum* gives us this saving philosophical justification of this pithy – but too pithy – item from the *Table Talk*. A few quotations from McFarland’s Prolegomena may show how Coleridge did his philosophy. McFarland writes in *P XV Problem and Motive*, cxii-cxiii:

Coleridge’s inability to work at self-assigned tasks was devastating and his opium addiction filled him with self-loathing. In this massive context of woe, Coleridge found only one hypothesis that made sense of his situation: the Christian essential of the Fall of Man: “I profess a deep conviction that Man was and is a *fallen* Creature, not by accidents of bodily constitution, or any other cause, which *human* Wisdom in a course of ages might be supposed capable of removing; but diseased in his Will.” He placed the Fall of Man at the very summit of Christian truths, second only to faith in God himself: “Now next to the knowledge – for in this case Faith is Knowledge – of an Almighty God, the Father of Spirits...the most momentous truth is the Fact of a FALL, and that all the miseries of the World are the consequences of this Fall...” If the dogma of the Fall of Man corresponded exactly to the facts of life as Coleridge himself experienced them, another Christian essential, that of redemption into a future blessedness, was equally ineluctable: “My Faith is simply this – that there is an original corruption in our nature, from which & from the consequences of which, we may be redeemed by Christ...and this I believe – not because I *understand* it, but because I *feel*, that it is not only suitable to, but needful for, may nature.

Faith for some believers is so intensely felt that both exceeds understanding, and does not beg for any rationalization. Coleridge both felt and philosophized his faith.

Indeed, few thinkers can have placed so much emphasis on the need for redemption as did Coleridge. “I have prayed with drops of agony on my Brow, trembling not only before the Justice of my Maker, but even before the Mercy of my Redeemer. ‘I gave thee so many Talents. What hast thou done with them?’” He speaks of “the two great Moments of the Christian Faith, ORIGINAL Sin (i.e., Sin, as the *source* of sinful actions) and Redemption; that the *Ground*, and this the *Superstructure*, of Christianity”. In July 1825 Coleridge says that “the Redemption of the World must needs form the best central Reservoir for all our knowledges<sup>39</sup>, physical or personal.” Certainly it formed the central reservoir that watered the conception and necessity of the *Magnum Opus*.

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<sup>39</sup> This ‘knowledges’ perhaps reflects Coleridge’s never being quite clear about the difference between *Naturphilosophie* and real science. See above number 3 in the set of quotations borrowed from McFarland: “The Fall is a necessary Postulate of Science.” How Adam and Eve were responsible for the Earth’s being full of tectonic plates which cause earthquakes etc. I do not know.

The *Magnum Opus* was to be an *ancilla* – the usual ‘handmaid’ – of theology, and Faith. St Thomas Aquinas – whom Coleridge regarded as an ‘original mind’ – argued in a similar way, although he was not an Idealist, as was Coleridge.

While his commitment to Christian fundamentals was deeply existential, Coleridge was intellectually aware that the truth of those fundamentals alone led to any theoretical meaning in human existence, and that they depended on the postulate of immortality. “If in this life only”, said St. Paul in a passage quoted by Coleridge, “we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”; “If there be no resurrection of the dead then is Christ not risen: And if Christ not be risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (St Paul, 1 Corinthians 15 : 12-19).

Coleridge is here in line with Christian Faith in general. Faith is always in an epistemological fix: Christ could rise from the dead once and once only. Doubting Thomas had empirical verification of the fact of the resurrection; we have not.<sup>40</sup>

We easily see why Coleridge wanted the Fall, the first condition of his Redemption – a Redemption he needed, and this with great passion. But why does the *Opus Maximum* not show us the working out of the 15 October 1833 notion? The 1833 text is so neat. It suggests that Coleridge might – somehow – explain the Trinity, show the Fall to be a necessary consequence of the Son’s being the Son. That the Incarnation was needful for the Redemption of humankind is familiar doctrine. For my own part I find as mysteries of Faith, The Trinity, and the Fall, mysteries indeed! Like the Greeks I find the Crucifixion-as-the-Atonement if not ‘folly’, at least not – fully or even partially – comprehensible<sup>41</sup>. Would the *Opus Maximum* open it all to – prosaic – reason? It would not and does not. Joseph Henry Green, Coleridge’s amanuensis and literary executor, did not publish the *Opus Maximum* but instead two volumes of *Spiritual Philosophy* based on Coleridge’s dictation to Green of the would-be ‘Great Work’ – the present *Opus Maximum*. In *P* of that work we find XXXIII ‘*Spiritual Philosophy*’, ccxxxix: McFarland writes:

Green’s second volume is as faithful to central Coleridgean emphasis as the first, Chapter III is entitled “The Blessed Trinity”. Chapter IV, “The Fall

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<sup>40</sup> I have kept McFarland’s footnote numbers to the new standard Collected Coleridge series: 327 (*Letters* vi 940; 328 *Ibid.* xi; 329 *Ibid.* iii 476; 330 v 406; 331 *Ibid.* v 481). I have however inserted the chapter and verse from St Paul, 1 Corinthians 15: 12-19.

<sup>41</sup> Paul, Corinthians I: 22-23. The Roman Catholic ‘explanation’ of the Atonement for the Fall as an act of ransom is a mere – unconvincing – metaphor. Here Faith gets little support from reason. Apologetics runs close to Apology.

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and the Redemption (though here one finds an apologetic note from the editor [Green] the “*intended chapter of the Fall and Redemption had not been written out in readiness for publication...*” (italic added).

It would seem that Coleridge may not have been up to writing it. And Green was not confident that – even with all the dictations from Coleridge at hand – that he could fill the – here crucial – gap.

There is yet another claim which Coleridge could not make good: Coleridge said in *Table Talk*, September 1, 1831:

My system, if I may venture to give it so fine a name, is the only attempt, I know, ever made to reduce all knowledges into harmony. It opposes no other system, but shows what was true in each; and how that which was true in the particular, in each of them became error, *because* it was only half the truth. I have endeavoured to unite the insulated fragments of truth, and therewith to frame a perfect mirror. I show to each system that I fully understand and rightfully appreciate what that systems means; but then I lift up that system to a higher point of view, from which I enable it to see its former position, where it was indeed, but under another light and with different relations; - so that the fragment of truth is not only acknowledged but explained...

There is more – but despite Coleridge’s vast erudition one does not reckon the task which he set himself was ever finished – even in the *Opus Maximum*: See *P VII* the “Magnum Opus” as System, lxxvi.

### **Conclusion**

One must read – yet again – *the Opus Maximum* to see how much of this text is of more than historical interest in the twenty first century. One’s mind remains open, but the task is daunting. Coleridge had large and noble philosophical ambitions: and in their failure something noble remains.