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Samuel Taylor Coleridge on ideas actualized in history

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ABSTRACT

Situating Samuel Taylor Coleridge's thought on historically actualized ideas with reference to a range of classical thinkers, this article examines his intriguing philosophical theory about how ideas become progressively actualized in history. This cultural growth can be understood as contemplation-in-action, although it occurs through mainly fumbling – or else overenthusiastic – human agents. I distinguish Coleridgean first-order, transcendent ideas (such as God, infinity, the good, the soul) from second-order, historical ones (such as church, state, the constitution). It has been argued that Coleridge's theory of ideas develops from Bacon's inductive method for discovering laws of nature through experiment and natural law through common law. I further claim that Coleridge upholds the reality of "Forms" in science, and of rights in ethics and politics; that his later political thought is inherently more progressive than is generally admitted; and that his account differs from Schelling's and Hegel's respective theories by maintaining the transcendence of ideas above the immanence of their evolving historical actualizations. Coleridge's philosophy is therefore, whether political or metaphysical, ultimately an ontological defence of the transcendence of ideas above the immanence of their progressive but imperfect actualization.

KEYWORDS

Coleridge; ideas; history; reason; Platonism; contemplation; actualization; Heraclitus; Plato; Plotinus; Bacon; Schelling; Hegel; Mill

In his philosophical writings, Samuel Taylor Coleridge uses the word "Idea" in the Platonic sense to refer to human-mind independent truths and powers. He also gives the word a particularly Coleridgean inflection whereby "Idea" refers to an "ultimate aim" that becomes imperfectly actualized in and through a historically developing human institution. In this article, I differentiate what he calls "ideas" into two kinds. The first kind comprises the *sine qua non* of our humanity. We need them, but they do not depend on us. The second kind requires human society to embody them in developing institutions. They comprise, therefore, a second-order set of ideas that are evolutionary rather than timeless and fixed.

This article situates Coleridge's thought on historically actualized ideas with reference to a range of classical thinkers, notably Heraclitus, Plato, Bacon, Schelling and Hegel. I claim that Coleridge's theory develops from Bacon's inductive method for discovering both laws of nature through experiment and natural law through common law, and thus upholds the reality of rights; that his later political thought is inherently more

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progressive than is generally admitted; and that his account differs from Schelling's and Hegel's respective theories by maintaining the transcendence of ideas above the immanence of their evolving historical actualizations.

Section 1 explicates the Coleridgean sense of idea as a power constitutive of reality, and hence as having historical efficacy. Although transcendent, ideas such as freedom, the soul, the infinite, the morally good, and so on are intimated in experience as values which are worth striving for and which constitute our humanity. He also relates more historical, second-order ideas – such as the constitution, workers' rights and "the *idea* of an ever-originating social contract"[1] – to the first-order, archetypal transcendent ones. Both kinds are accessible through imagination and contemplation, and are knowable as the ultimate ends of meaningful action. In creating an ethos around an ultimate aim, each human institution imperfectly actualizes ideas. The idea of an institution is a second-order idea arising, usually only with vague consciousness, in the intersection of first-order ideas and human practices. Human agents, in this theory, begin to actualize ideas by gaining insight into values as "substantial beings",[2] and their practices subsist in ideas of state, nation, rights, the sacredness of the person, and the like.

Section 2 traces Coleridge's view that the laws and constitution of a nation embody ideas in human history. For him, history is contemplation-in-action, actualizing ideas, however imperfectly. His view comes from an unconventional blend of Platonic and Baconian theories of inductive reasoning. He found that Bacon's induction of laws of nature from observed phenomena parallels Plato's induction of ideas via dialectic discourse. Yet Bacon first applied his inductive method not to natural science but to jurisprudence, with his discovery of the natural law inherently recognized in common law, and recorded as judicial precedent, through collecting "similar rulings" to be used "for abstracting common underlying general principles".[3] Developing his realist theory of ideas, Coleridge accounts for civilization and culture as the dialectical channels of historical progress. Instituted laws, among other products of noetic contemplation, are then encountered as ideas-in-action that open up horizons in the social world. As such, they are human-made, socially constituted objects that correspond to subjective intuitions of freedom, conscience, culture and higher purpose.

Finally, in section 3 we shall arrive at Coleridge's theory of the idea becoming progressively, although defeasibly, actualized through history and human institutions. The key differences in his account from Schelling's are elucidated, and differences from Hegel's account are also identified and discussed. Coleridge argues for the rational necessity of historical development in a way that is consistent with human freedom. His argument for the reality of ideas fuses Platonic and Baconian insights to arrive at the principle that "[t]he solution of *Phænomena* can never be derived from *Phænomena*".[4] This principle leads to his theory that ideas are noetic objects that are approachable through, but not in, their instantiations, such as laws and social institutions. His philosophy is therefore, whether in its political or metaphysical expressions, ultimately an ontological one that promotes a view which he aptly calls "ideal Realism".[5]

1. Coleridge's constitutive idea

In *Church and State* (1829), Coleridge addresses the development of human institutions according to their ideas, a meaning picked up by John Henry Newman in *The Idea of a*

University. There, Newman develops Coleridge's notion of 'the Idea of [something]' as the ethos and essence of the ultimate aim that guides an institution or practice. A dozen years later, in his autobiography, borrowing its title from Coleridge's poem "Apologia pro Vita Sua", Newman maintains that Coleridge laid the "philosophical basis" for the Church of his age, and that "while he indulged a liberty of speculation" – much of which Newman found "heathen" – he nonetheless "installed a higher philosophy into inquiring minds, than they had hitherto been accustomed to accept".[6] The university and other institutions are not by any stretch timeless ontological (first-order) ideas; the point is that they are optimally guided by and, however imperfectly, actualize such ideas. The Coleridgean sense of idea picked up by Newman was carried on by T. S. Eliot in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1940), and a continuing sense is still much used today in works such as George Steiner's *The Idea of Europe* (2003), and in almost countless political and philosophical books and articles. This particularly Coleridgean sense of "idea" is not so much a repetition of Plato's sense of the ideas of justice, piety, courage, the true, the beautiful and the good as it is the relation of those noetic objects to human social endeavours through institutions. "On the Divine Ideas" is the title of Fragment 3 in Coleridge's *Opus Maximum*. There he affirms the timeless, unchanging nature of the archetypal, first-order ideas:

> Do we then affirm that a change can take place in the plenitude of the divine Idea, a change in the Eternal, a diminution of the Infinite, or rather in the measure of the Infinite? We recoil from the thought, and abhor it.[7]

Then, in an analogy by which God is the sun and the ideas its rays, he argues: "As long as the rays are part of the glory, radiant distinctly but without division, so long are they one with the sun, and such must be from eternity to eternity".[8] It is therefore integral to Coleridge's philosophical as well as religious faith that the first-order ideas are eternal and immutable. The second-order ideas, on the other hand, are historically actualized – the ideas of the church, the state, nation, the constitution, and the like, which develop institutions concretely through free agency, along rational and moral lines.

But how to get there? How are these ideas, not yet realized, to be reached? With his theory – most fully expounded in *The Statesman's Manual* – of symbols of imagination as conveyors of ideas of reason, Coleridge sees imagination bridging from conceptual, empirical understanding to the reason itself, which is for him a *lógos* independent of the human mind that consists in the ideas. Imagination in this view provides access to ideas through aesthetic symbols. Coleridge's romantic notion of an imaginative access to ideas was developed from the neo-Platonists and the Cambridge Platonists, and was further influenced by Schelling's notion of "intellectual intuition", which both authors used to challenge the limits Kant's conclusions set on human cognition. For Coleridge, the "Symbol […] is characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. It […] abides itself as a living part in that Unity […]".[9] This definition of 1816 is clearly indebted to Schelling's of 1802, which explains that "intellectual intuition […] is simply the capacity to see the universal in the particular, the infinite in the finite, the two combined into a living unity".[10]

Coleridge's symbol, like Schelling's intellectual intuition, describes a mode of "seeing in" that looks through particulars to think in universals.[11] With it, Coleridge accounts for the transcendent intimated in lived experience, arguing that ideas "correspond to

substantial beings, to objects the actual subsistence of which is *implied* in their idea, though only *by* the idea revealable".[12] These ideas, he continues:

> constitute […] *humanity*. For try to conceive a *man* without the ideas of God, eternity, freedom, will, absolute truth, of the good, the true, the beautiful, the infinite. An *animal* endowed with a memory of appearances and of facts might remain. But the *man* will have vanished, and you have instead a creature, "more subtile than any beast of the field, but likewise cursed above every beast of the field […]".[13]

While Coleridgean imagination provides a clouded, symbolic access to ideas, Coleridgean "Reason", as James Vigus glosses, "which posits transcendental ideas, also gives us real insight into those ideas".[14]

Moving beyond, and, to that extent, against Kant, Coleridge's ideas are not just regulative principles impressing an orderly, unified system of knowledge; they are not the rational concepts of Kant, because they are not concepts at all, but "energies of the Reason".[15] The "Idea", for Coleridge,

> is that which cannot be *generalized*, on which the mind [can] exercise no modifying functions —that which can only be *contemplated*—that which is deeper than all intelligence, inasmuch as it represents the element of the Will, and its essential inderivability.[16]

Coleridge agrees with the Plato of the Seventh Letter on the impossibility of expressing ideas in clear and definite terms,[17] holding that all attempts must end in aporia, as they do in the Socratic dialogues. For Coleridge, to ask for a definite conception of an idea is as absurd as asking "for the Image of a Flavor or the odour of a Strain of Music/and to ask for the *Conception* of an Idea, is, if possible, yet more irrational […]".[18] But it would be misleading to imply that Coleridge denigrates conceptions; he recognizes that human-mind-dependent concepts are organs of meaning and discernment that express actual facts and real differences.[19] As such, they make perception discerning and thought articulable.

Independent of the human mind, Coleridgean ideas are objective realities that we might nonetheless approach in thought and reach aesthetically through symbols. Through gaining insight into intelligible reality and the principles of value and meaning, human agents – to varying degrees – actualize ideas in history. Michael John Kooy succinctly expresses the importance of ideas and intelligibility in Coleridge's theory of historical development, and the rational understanding of history it implies:

> Coleridge treats […] history as an ideational field that is both created and then interpreted by an inquiring subject. First, at the literary and cultural level, history is conceived as the object of imaginative reconstruction, where subjectivity provisionally orders the mass of material according to an idea found nowhere within history itself.[20]

Kooy's claim that the Coleridgean idea is "found nowhere within history itself" is an uncontroversial statement regarding Platonic – i.e. first-order – ideas. Yet it is also true of second-order ideas, namely those of historically developing institutions such as the church, the constitution and the social contract. Coleridge argues in fact that the social contract is a fiction, if conceived as something that actually happened, yet is "certain and […] indispensable" as "the *idea* of" something "ever-originating".[21] These guiding ideas are not material, historical beings – but their incremental instantiations are. As

we shall explore in section 2, the difference is analogous to that between natural law and the common-law judgements that approximate it.

Coleridge contrasts this sense of ideas as realities comprising "*Positive* Reason",[22] with the understanding defined as negative reason, which fashions concepts, discovers and applies logical, analytic truth and is proficient in detecting self-contradiction. In contrast with the understanding, positive, intuitive reason provides "material truths, by IDEAS (*sensu Platonico*) or supersensual realities, the very existence of which is not of universal admission but which if allowed to exist might constitute a mathematical certainty and give birth to a […] science of metaphysics […]".[23] Because in his view ideas can be humanly approached, and can even be possessed by "the Fewest among the Few",[24] Coleridge can discuss ideas in their Platonic, first-order sense as being, firstly, objective realities beyond the human mind. Secondly, these realities are also held to operate as an ideal energy of reason within the human mind. Thirdly, they work not only within any human mind through dim awareness but are "possessed" more clearly by those who are aware of them through contemplation. Defining this third sense, of the idea as a reality contemplated in the human mind, Coleridge relates first-order (Platonic, eternal) to second-order (historical, evolving) ideas:

> By an *idea*, I mean, (in this instance) that conception of a thing, which is not abstracted from a particular state, form, or mode, in which the thing may happen to exist at this or at that time; nor yet generalized from any number or succession of such modes; but which is given by the knowledge of *its ultimate aim*.[25]

With this sense of ideas (of either order) as contemplated realities, Coleridge can discuss reason from the human perspective – especially in relation to the moral and practical sphere – without diminishing the fuller, Platonic sense of noetic ideas. Thus he writes of "Reason […] as the *practical* Reason, i.e. the power of proposing an *ultimate* end, the determinability of the Will by IDEAS; or as the *sciential* Reason, i.e. the faculty of universal and necessary truths from particular and contingent appearances".[26]

With the Jena romantics, including Schelling and Hegel, Coleridge rejects the Kantian separative division that, while allowing recourse to moral ideas in practical reason, nevertheless denies as illegitimate any cognitive role for ideas in speculative reason. Kant forecloses the attempt to use ideas to advance knowledge, because to do so would cross the bounds of sense, as Peter Strawson puts it,[27] beyond which concepts have no purchase – and for Kant, unlike Coleridge, ideas are but a higher-order (regulative) kind of concept. Kant's foreclosure is intended to prevent theory from becoming an impasse of antinomies. But Coleridge objects to Kant's inconsistency in allowing the use of ideas in practical reason while disallowing their use in the pursuit of knowledge. After all, is not moral knowledge itself knowledge? Coleridge objects to Kant's denial of the objective reality of ideas as self-defeating of all meaningful human projects:

> Now whether the objectivity given to the Idea belongs to it in its own right as an Idea, or is superinduced by moral Faith, is really little more than a dispute in terms, depending on the Definition of Idea. It is enough […] that the Objectivity is & must be admitted, and what more cogent Proof can we have, that a man must contradict his whole human Being in order to deny it. And yet the Kanteans […] separate the Reason from the Reason in the Will or the theoric from the practical Man.[28]

This objective, directing idea, Coleridge argues, suffuses our lives without losing its transcendence as "that more than man which is one and the same in all men".[29] To know that one would not be this humane self, holding to these moral aims and ends, without this ordaining idea is to acknowledge the idea as a real object that would be self-contradictory to deny. In this vein, Coleridge often talks of ideas as the subjectively contemplated side of an otherwise human-mind-independent, objective reality.

Coleridge's idea, then, is Plato's idea contemplated subjectively. His law is closer still to Plato's idea, and we shall examine his sense of law in section 2. Yet it would be wrong to think that Coleridge held idea and law as ultimately separate. For him, law and idea are not substantially different; rather, they are correlatives:

> Idea and Law are the Subjective and Objective *Poles* of the same Magnet—i.e. of the same living and energizing Reason. What is an idea in the Subject, i.e. in the Mind, is a Law in the Object, i.e. in Nature.[30]

In a notebook entry of 1825 entitled "Imagination", which discusses "the expression Ideas", Coleridge's sense of idea coincides positively with Plato's with respect to objective reality beyond the human mind: "What is expressed, delivered, must have been conceived. But Ideas are not *conceived* but contemplated. They may be apprehended but cannot be comprehended: *a fortiori* therefore, not expressed".[31]

The notion of ideas at work within our lives, despite our being largely unreflective or inadequately cognizant of them, is everywhere implicit in Plato, from the Socratic call to the examined life[32] through the doctrine of recollection in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*[33] to the simile of the divided line and the allegory of the prisoners in the cave in Books 6 and 7, respectively, of the *Republic*. With Coleridge, however, this thought becomes more explicit, and is subject to much reflection as the poet-philosopher draws out the involved themes for examination.

There is a tension, however, between first-order, Platonic ideas and second-order, temporal ones, which evolve and are more concretely actualized, such as the ideas of democracy, the university and the constitution, which are conceived and clearly expressed in their codification and regulation. Although Coleridge does not directly address this tension, he does argue that while a few contemplative thinkers "possess" ideas, the majority are "possessed by" them, and lack "the power of presenting [an] Idea to the minds of others, or even to their own thoughts, […] as a distinct which are proposition".[34] Nonetheless, many of their thoughts and feelings are composed and expressed with the idea, although they cannot articulate it conceptually.

On this notion of people being animated or possessed by ideas, even when they deny any knowledge of or acquaintance with them, Coleridge provides the examples of the "self-complacent student" and the common-sense person next door, who in their different ways mock or refute the idea of free will. Yet with such people, he argues, one must only "attend to their actions, […] feelings, and […] words: and you will be in ill luck, if ten minutes pass without […] proof, that the *idea* of man's moral freedom possesses and modifies their whole practical being […]".[35]

Such perceptive examples are intended to show that ideas are essential to social life and expressed wherever forms of humane culture exist, and not only in art, philosophy and other refined modes of cultivation. Yet even in art, which – as Schelling famously

argues – is often more expressive of ideas than philosophy, the idea articulates the expression but remains itself beyond articulation.

Cultivation through the expression of ideas therefore requires what T. S. Eliot called "a raid on the inarticulate, | With shabby equipment always deteriorating".[36] It is a mission that must be renewed in each generation, and for each region, in its own idiom. Ideas act in the "*discourse of reason*"[37] as the articulation of enlightened understanding, as we move within and find our being "in the participation τῆσ αχρόνου ζωοποιουσῆσ ΙΔΈΑΣ [of the timeless, living idea] […] a fountain of *actualization*".[38] Those who contemplate ideas clearly have an intellectual vision but cannot transmit it conceptually; for others, they can only help to educe the idea. Although only a rare few intellectuals possess ideas, the rest being possessed by them,[39] rural laborers talking at the tavern about the injustices of the current working conditions and wage rates,[40] to cite another of Coleridge's examples, are still powerfully, however opaquely, pervaded by relevant ideas such as the sacredness of the person above mere things.

As Coleridge describes it, ideas work through people in their daily lives and relations. Although most people get by with a dim intimation of ideas, all are nonetheless in touch with ideas. As the constitution is developed and refined through court judgements, the legislative process, and so on, the ultimate aim of the idea of the constitution is further actualized, although sometimes in need of pendulum-like corrections. Whereas contemplation of the idea aims at divine ends, its actualization is undoubtedly rough-hewn. The constitution evolves dramatically over time, and differently for different nations, e.g. as practical sovereignty shifts from the monarch to the parliament. Yet every new right felt with resurgent passion at the timely historical circumstance, Coleridge argues, is claimed not merely as some contingent desire, but rather

> this or that is contained in the *idea* of our government, and it is a consequence of the "Lex, Mater Legum [Law, Mother of Laws]," which, in the very first law of state […] was pre-supposed as the ground of that first law.[41]

The highest term in Coleridge's system is reason. Imagination is central, mediating between understanding and the ideas of reason which are independent of the human mind. While imagination is the most divine of the human attributes for Coleridge, reason is not exactly a human attribute, but something higher, towards which imagination aims. Thus in Coleridge, reason is not – contra Kant – our faculty, and ideas of reason are "eternal verities",[42] and not only prerequisites of a rational mind. Coleridge contrasts Kantian ideas as mental entities with the Platonic realism of ideas as powers. While imagination has been disparaged and praised in different eras, its existence has not been expressly denied by philosophers. Reason, however, in the Coleridgean sense has always been a contested notion – that is, as Plato's *noûs*, and as *lógos*, whether as the Heraclitean cosmic harmony beyond yet responsible for flux or as the divine Word of St John's Gospel.[43] This contested reason is conceived as a power independent of the human mind which is analogous to the laws of nature or even, in Coleridge's view, as their mental correlative. Attempts to explain and promote the notion of reason as independent of the human mind go back to: the Heraclitean *lógos* as a constant intelligence behind the cosmic flux; the Parmenidean reality–appearance distinction; Plato's *nóēsis–diánoia* distinction; Plotinus's *logoí spermátikoi* informing soul and nature; Boethius's eternal versus temporal knowledge; and Spinoza's revival of the scholastic *natura naturans–*

naturata distinction. For each of these different thinkers, *lógos* is not merely the rational operation of a thinking mind: it is the principle of order throughout the universe. Heraclitus observes the contradiction in denying the universality of reason, lamenting that while all humans – and indeed the cosmos itself – partake of the same *lógos*, each nevertheless opines it as something peculiar to his or her individual self:

> But of this account [*lógos*], which holds forever, people forever prove uncomprehending […]. For, although all things happen in accordance with this account [*lógos*], they are like people *without* experience [… . who] fail to be aware of what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do while asleep.[44]

Coleridge (following Schleiermacher) quotes a related Heraclitean fragment in *The Statesman's Manual*,[45] making the point – too seldom recognized – that this *lógos* is not only common to all minds but obtains throughout the universe: "That is why one must follow that which is common. Though the account [*lógos*] is common, the many live, however, as though they had a private understanding".[46]

Challenging the illusion that everyone has their own idiosyncratic reason, Heraclitus claims that this *lógos* is a divine and rational power suffusing the entire universe and all possibility. He acknowledges a universal *lógos* on which all particular instances of reasoning and action depend, consciously or otherwise. He is the founder of that Ancient Greek tradition which sees *lógos* not simply as the operation of a thinking mind but as the principle of order throughout the universe, so that even the Sun cannot overstep its measure – for if it does, it will be rectified by the Erinyes (Furies), the handmaids of Justice.[47] Coleridge agrees that it is indeed erroneous to identify "universal Reason with each man's individual Understanding",[48] for each understanding creates most of its concepts from experience, and each such concept is nuanced to all manner of idiosyncrasies familiar to biographers, confessors and psychoanalysts. It is to this notion of ideas, understood as laws running through human society and history, that we now turn.

2. Idea behind laws: *lex sacra, mater legum*

In Coleridge's account of mind and ideas, following Plotinus, "the act of contemplation makes the thing contemplated".[49] Throughout the faltering contemplation-in-action that is history, in this account, ideas are stumblingly, imperfectly actualized. Coleridge adjoins to this Francis Bacon's view that as phenomena illustrate and instantiate laws of nature, the common law embodies in judicial acts the moral and divine law that is their noumenal rationale.

When Coleridge discusses ideas as correlative of laws of nature, it can be surprising to find him describe Bacon as "the British Plato".[50] An early destroyer of classical idols, and an empiricist who advanced the experimental method, Bacon is generally considered an anti-Platonist. Aware of the stretch, Coleridge, in mitigation, describes "Lord Bacon, who […] taught pure Platonism in his *great* work, the *Novum Organon*, and abuses his divine predecessor for fantastic nonsense which he [Plato] had been the first to explode".[51] The Bacon scholar Harvey Wheeler describes how he gained deeper insight into the Baconian method by following up on

> an enigmatic reference by Coleridge to Bacon's "Platonism". Consulting Plato's dialogues turned up his theory of *schematismos*, a term prominent in both Bacon and Kant. Coleridge

> was right. Bacon had been there and reversed Plato's idealism into a Platonism of things rather than words.[52]

As Wheeler says, Bacon invented a reverse "Platonism of things", not words, with both thinkers ascending inductively from examples to laws or ideas. Where Plato developed a method in which conceptions and definitions arise from examining sensible examples, with those definitions then giving way in the dialectic ascent to intelligible ideas themselves, Bacon developed a counterpart, experimental induction from sensible, physical things and events towards their intelligible laws. Yet Platonic induction is no mere conceptualism; it aims towards knowledge of the idea, where hitherto accepted conceptual formulae and definitions fail. Bacon himself says that Plato provides the only precedent for the inductive search for essences, or forms:

> But the induction […] for the discovery and proof of sciences and arts should separate out nature, by appropriate rejection and exclusions; and then […] conclude on the affirmatives. This has not yet been […] tried except only by Plato, who certainly makes use of this form of induction or demonstration, which have never occurred to anyone to think about, so that more effort needs to be put into this than has ever been spent on the syllogism […]. And we may certainly have the greatest hopes for this kind of *induction*.[53]

Bacon sought to discover laws of nature by performing the same kind of Platonic inductive, dialectic research into natural phenomena that he applied to legal precedent in his search for the principles of English common law. The Baconian method, despite being an induction of experiences, is no pure or radical empiricism, because it aims at the forms, or laws, that by governing any set of phenomena are necessarily beyond them. Bacon believed that although nothing beyond physical bodies exists in nature, philosophy must posit laws as powers beyond those physical bodies as the foundation of human knowledge, and as the principles on which we should base our actions:

> For though nothing exists in nature except individual bodies which exhibit pure individual acts in accordance with law, in philosophical doctrine, that law itself, and the investigation, discovery and explanation of it, are taken as the foundation both of knowing and doing. It is this law and its clauses which we understand by the term Forms, especially as this word has become established and is in common use.[54]

Bacon then divides the various sciences of physics from those of metaphysics. In a notable correspondence to Bacon's division, Coleridge also divides the physical and the metaphysical sciences in his table of "The sciences pure and mixed and in the order of their senses".[55] Bacon sees metaphysics as the "inquiry after […] eternal and unmoving" laws or "forms", whereas he sees the focus of physics as "the common and ordinary course of nature, not the fundamental, eternal laws":

> The inquiry after *forms*, which are (at least by reason and their law) eternal and unmoving, would constitute *metaphysics*; the inquiry after the *efficient* and material causes, the *latent process* and *latent structure* (all of which are concerned with the common and ordinary course of nature, not the fundamental, eternal laws) would constitute *physics* […].[56]

Michael Raiger finds that Coleridge uses Bacon's own formulations and method to attenuate the Baconian attack on Platonic ideas by

> uncovering the concealed Baconian metaphysics linking the idea that physical causes are the impressions on creation written by God, with the proposed methodology which discovers

> laws of nature. While their subjects of inquiry and methodologies differ, for Coleridge, Plato and Bacon are both concerned with revealing the source of all sensible things in the ideal realm.[57]

As Wheeler notes,

> Bacon's term for this generalized noumenal law was "Form", which […] appears to be a Platonism […] "Form" refers to implicit structure and is most familiar from Plato's distinction between ideal Form and "appearances". Bacon adapts it to refer to an empirical phenomenological scientific law.[58]

Wheeler argues that Bacon's legal training led him to this method, as "Bacon started from law rather than mathematics. He studied the deep structure of systems rather than motion and time-sequences".[59] Thus Bacon applied to science the practical knowledge he gained from serving on the Commission for the Union of the Laws of England and Scotland, which gave him the idea of systematizing the common law roll and the judicial records of the land. His plan was to discover the law behind laws and procedures by examining the folklore and common memory of accumulated wisdom. Essentially, Bacon was honing a method of discovering laws, and this led him to seek the unwritten English constitution, inspiring John Locke to do the same in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). Encouraged by his success in discovering noumenal law from case laws, Bacon set about applying his new method to interpreting the *abecedarium* of nature in search of her laws too. Thus Bacon sought the "law behind the ruling in a judgment at the English 'unwritten' common law. Bacon's science looks for that kind of 'thingness' in all departments of the environment, social as well as natural".[60]Accordingly, civil and criminal law indicate a higher and logically prior unwritten law – the noumenal law. Bacon's account of reaching this noumenal law held great appeal for Coleridge. Part of this appeal lies in Bacon's reference to the non-sensible, intelligible form inductively sought through the empirical objects of observation. Thus Coleridge finds Bacon, like Plato, and contrary to the Lockean empiricists, to hold that truth "may indeed be revealed to us *through* and *with*, but never *by* the senses".[61]

Seeking noumenal laws through phenomena, and proceeding inductively, Bacon cannot therefore be identified with an empiricism that holds all we know and can know to be contained within sense impressions. The objective reality of Bacon's noumenal law is a model for Coleridge's sense of the reality of ideas. Baconian law, like Coleridgean idea, is a reality to be approached asymptotically, and not a theorem to be hypothesized. As Bacon suggests, we may find ourselves ultimately incapable of truly understanding laws, yet our approach to the law steadily advances and is based on a knowledge of history:

> For knowledges are as pyramides, whereof history is the basis. So of Natural Philosophy, the basis is Natural History; the stage next the basis is Physic; the stage next the vertical point is Metaphysic. As for the vertical point, "*Opus quod operatur Deus à principio usque ad finem*",[62] the Summary Law of Nature, we know not whether man's enquiry can attain unto it.[63]

Coleridge shares Bacon's confidence in the possibility of discovering laws in and through history. Like Bacon, he sees the constitution as an idea (or Baconian form) by which the noumenal law unfolds and develops through countless social activities and certain nodal legal judgements, with error being corrected incrementally, or else in the violence of

history. Coleridge criticizes empiricist historians such as Hume and Gibbon for being "mere chroniclers", and throughout *The Statesman's Manual* he laments the state of contemporary, "idea-less" historiography.[64] In all of this, he criticizes the growing tendency to "read history for the facts, instead of reading it for the sake of general principles".[65] In *Church and State* he presents his theory of ideas as ultimate aims that become progressively realized in history:

> But a Constitution is an idea arising out of the idea of a state; and because our whole history from Alfred onwards demonstrates the continued influence of such an […] ultimate aim, on the minds of our fore-fathers […] in the institutions and forms of polity which they established […] and because the result has been a progressive, though not always a direct, or equable advance in the gradual realization of the idea […] we […] have a right to speak, of the idea itself, as actually existing, *i.e.* as a principle […] in the minds and consciences of the persons whose duties it prescribes […].[66]

This historically developing constitution, a second-order idea, is active in the minds of citizens, working as a sense of rights and duties, though many might never contemplate such ideas directly. It is a noumenal idea, a thing thought that is nonetheless real:

> In the same sense that the sciences of arithmetic and of geometry, that mind, that life itself, have reality; the constitution has real existence, and does not the less exist in reality, because it both *is*, and *exists as*, an IDEA.[67]

Unlike the empirical concept of a thing, which is an *a posteriori* abstraction, the idea is prior to its instances, and is "always and of necessity contemplated as antecedent".[68] Commending the old sense of "*Lex Sacra*, *Mater Legum* [Sacred Law, Mother of Laws]", a thoroughbred notion in the stable of "spiritual, platonic old England",[69] Coleridge describes the constitution as inherent in reason, and evolved from it as

> a law not to be derived from Alured, or Alfred, or Canute, or other elder or later promulgators of particular laws, but which might say of itself – When reason and the laws of God first came, then came I with them.[70]

The idea thus contemplated is a first-order, organizing principle, from which evolve second-order, actualizing ideas that develop historical institutions such as the constitution, the church, schools, the university, and the state. According to this view, to contemplate the idea is also to instantiate it. The idea is progressively actualized as noetic acquaintance or intuition of the organizing principle becomes embodied in the works and deeds of the contemplator. Thus artefacts and institutions can symbolize ideas in ways that concretely interweave with one's life. This idea-in-action speaks to the latent ideas of, for example, freedom, rights and duties in people who might ordinarily think they have given up thoughts of such things. Yet, as Coleridge points out, regarding people who repudiate ideas or confess that they have "no idea" of them, one would be "in ill luck, if ten minutes pass" without "satisfactory proof" appearing in the connections of their speech, and the pursuit of their enjoyments, to show that they are indeed possessed of the idea of moral freedom and the expectation of the right to justice that is recognized within that idea.[71]

Coleridge claims to present a viewpoint, at once practical and theoretical, that goes deeper than the empiricist and increasingly utilitarian theories of his day. The crux of his theory regards *theōría* itself, in presenting a contemplative view of ideas such as

constitution, church (representing nation) and state (represented by government) whereby an "Idea" is, to reiterate,

> that [non-empirical] conception of a thing, which is not abstracted from any particular […] form […]; but which is given by knowledge of *its ultimate aim*.[72]

Any idea is to be contemplated as a permanence projected as the ideal aim of theoretical or historical progression. This notion of what political theory is ultimately about – namely, the permanent principles of a progressive society – is an intellectual challenge to the revolutionaries who held that a constitution based on conceptual models could be written clearly and afresh, yet missing or obstructing none of the ideals that are necessary for genuine social progression. It also reveals the later Coleridge to be less of a conservative than is usually admitted. An important prong in Coleridge's challenge is that the greatest good, as the ultimate aim of progressive thought, is the object of a contemplative vision requiring imagination. Such a vision, he demonstrates, cannot be reached via empirical observation or utilitarian calculation according to Enlightenment notions of reason that denigrate or dismiss that very imagination. Thus Coleridge exemplifies the romantic challenge to the Enlightenment by setting up "one Enlightenment in conflict with another", in J. G. A. Pocock's phrase.[73] This context clarifies Coleridge's distinction between ideas and concepts; while ideas are contemplated by reason and intimated by imagination, concepts are abstracted from experience, yet never arrive at principles or ultimate aims, just as figures added to the right of 0.999 can never arrive at 1.[74]

3. Ideas in history

Before continuing with Coleridge's account of ideas actualized in history, it will help to distinguish it from Schelling's account of the same.[75] While Coleridge found the main themes of the historical actualization of ideas in Schelling, they give very different, indeed conflicting, accounts. Schelling argues as early as 1800 that "[h]istory as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the absolute".[76] Yet while Coleridge also gives a progressive account of ideas actualizing gradually through history, he cannot agree with this statement. For him, history is the imperfect human attempt to live nearer to God through his "Divine Ideas", and not a revelation of the self-manifesting acts of God himself (nor of the "Absolute"). Schelling's theory follows Jakob Böhme's account of the world arising, through dynamic polar oppositions, from God's act of self-manifestation. In this act, the divine will as *Ungrund* (primal being) becomes manifest as the Trinity. As Coleridge recognized, Schelling tidied up Böhme's mystical theogony and gave it a more abstract form,[77] a description recently supported by Cyril O'Regan, who asserts: "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that Schelling's *Essay on Human Freedom* is a paraphrase of Böhme's account of the becoming of the divine".[78]

Following Böhme, then, Schelling posits an *Ungrund* from which God arises in the desire to become self-manifest, which then results in the creation of the world and the gradual unfolding of divinity within it. "Why not have quoted all this from Böhmen […]?" asks Coleridge, annotating *Of Human Freedom* (1809), and finding it an unlikely story – more "Hypop[oiesis (subfiction)]" than "Hypothesis".[79] His marginal notes show his frustration with Schelling's Behmenist, contradictory logic:

> A Nature, Ground […] of God himself which y[et] is not "e[r] selbst"[—]not God himself, but out of whic[h] God exists, and which y[et] is bego[t] by the self-existent[,] & yet is evil […] yet the […] very essence o[f] Freedom, without which […] das Böse [evil] cann [ot] be—what is all this?[80]

Unsurprisingly, then, Coleridge's account of ideas in history is very different from Schelling's Behmenist, theogonic account, in which all events are infinite and only apparently finite, and express God's self-manifestation. Perhaps most importantly, Coleridge's theory is based not on the pantheist identity of God and world but on the imperfect, human encounter with the eternal ideas of reason. This central role of imperfect human thought and action gives Coleridge's theory an emphatically moral dimension that highlights both the goodness of the intention and the fallibility of the realization. Consequently, his theory describes a finite striving towards ideas that are sources of moral progress yet unattainable in any complete sense implied by Schelling (and later Hegel). Instead, for Coleridge, the historical actualization of ideas must always involve the human contemplation of "eternal verities", whether directly, in thought, or indirectly, in action. A definition of history given by Coleridge in a footnote to his *Logic* supports my interpretation of his account accommodating both human, free (moral) agency and divine creative activity: "Experience in application to acts, that is, manifestations of a will; acts simultaneous or successive of men […] = history".[81]

From the Coleridgean perspective, wherein imperfect humans attempt to reach perfect ideas, the actualization of ideas on Earth must necessarily be incomplete, a view foreclosed by Schelling's theogonic account of full and divine self-manifestation in history. This incompleteness prevents the intersection of ideas and historical existence from being interpreted along the pantheist lines drawn by Böhme and Schelling.[82] The human intention of aiming towards ideas is, for Coleridge, redemptive, but not in itself salvific. It is insufficient for salvation because human frailty and finitude prevent the perfect realization of idea-directed action. Schelling, on the other hand, implies the eventual realization of Heaven on Earth. The "Divine Ideas" become actualized, Coleridge contends, in dimly cognizant but profoundly yearning human acts, and not in any gradual transformation (or self-realization) of the world into God or the absolute. Still, in this recognition of an inchoately cognizant yearning there is a fertile area of agreement between Coleridge and Schelling, as the latter sees that from

> out of the darkness of unreason (out of feeling, out of longing […]) grow clear thoughts. We must imagine the primal longing in this way—turning towards reason, though not yet recognizing it, just as we longingly desire unknown, nameless excellence.[83]

Emphasizing, however, the human responsibility for historical progress, and blaming human fallibility for its reverses, Coleridge cannot agree with Schelling that "History is one epic composed in the mind of God".[84]

The constitution, for Coleridge, is an idea actualized gradually and imperfectly via the opposing forces of permanence and progression. The idea behind laws and other elements of the constitution, is, he holds, accessible to conscience and contemplation. The appeal to an idea such as that of the constitution is not confined to conservative thought and practice. It underlies progressive social ambitions promoting a visionary and idealistic set of principles that aim to secure, in the revolutionary words of the American Declaration of Independence, those "self-evident" and "inalienable Rights", "endowed by their

Creator", of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness". Such noble principles are not abstractions from facts; they are asserted ideals expressing intellectually intuited ideas. Thus Coleridge can claim: "I am neither describing what the National Church now is, nor determining what it ought to be. My statements respect the idea alone, as deduced from its ultimate purpose and aim […]".[85] Intellectually, the constitution is approached as a noetic object to be contemplated. By contrast, while utilitarianism can discover the means for a certain progression of civilization – namely, the increased efficiency of the city and its bureaucracy – it is blind to the ends of cultivation; that is, to the ideas that constitute humanity. The neglect of cultivation will therefore lead to a rootless and inhumane civilization: "We must be men in order to be citizens".[86]

Coleridge's arguments for the inherent value of cultivation and "ultimate ends" helped J. S. Mill to acknowledge both the limits of utilitarianism and the need to distinguish the values of higher from lower pleasures, in which distinction even misery at the higher level is more valuable than the simple pleasures of the lower. Arguably, the pursuit of higher values is indeed a worthier end, because here ultimate aims are contemplated – that is, approached in self-awareness – whereas these ideals remain blank so far as the pursuit of lower pleasures is concerned. As Mill puts it, leaning towards Coleridge and away from Bentham on this point, it is

> better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is only because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.[87]

Coleridge's hierarchy of value led Mill to his arguments for the importance of distinguishing higher from lower pleasures:

> By reason we determine the ultimate end: by the understanding we are enabled to select and adopt the appropriate means for the […] approximation to, this end, according to circumstances. But an ultimate end must of necessity be an idea, that is, that which is not representable by the sense, and has no entire correspondent in nature, or the world of the senses.[88]

Whereas utility has *a* value, reason *is* value. One might object that it is difficult to understand what reason is in this sense – and value too, for that matter. Coleridge argues that it is not merely difficult – it is altogether impossible to *understand* reason, and the ideas and value that comprise it, for value and things "of the spirit" are for him "truths" that "surpass all understanding, because they are felt and known".[89] We know ideas, dim and defeasible though this knowledge usually is, through intuitive self-reflection within the flow of life. Take *friendship* as an idea. Any utilitarian, calculative account of friendship will fall short – sometimes insultingly so – of our intuitive knowledge of it as a value. Reductive accounts of any value fall short of the idea, which is known from an intuition made possible through reflection on lived experience. We may also reflect on the accounts of others, as we imaginatively place our lives within their history: "In the unfolding and exposition of any idea, we naturally seek assistance and the means of illustration from the historical instance, in which it has been most nearly realized […]".[90]

Arguing that ideas are realized through history, Coleridge holds that the permanency of a nation – as well as its progressiveness – and the security of personal freedom are

grounded in cultivation. Civilization without cultivation, on the other hand, actually hinders personal freedom:

> But civilization is itself but a mixed good, if not far more a corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health […] where this civilization is not grounded in *cultivation*, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our *humanity*.[91]

Here he continues an argument, first formulated in the 1818 *Friend* in terms of education, where he expresses regret at the young people of his highly civilizing age becoming "most anxiously and expensively be-school-mastered, be-tutored, be-lectured, any thing but *educated*; who have received arms and ammunition, instead of skill, strength and courage; varnished rather than polished; perilously over-civilized, and most piteously uncultivated!"[92] This crucial but easily overlooked distinction between civilization and cultivation becomes central in romanticism, especially in anti-utilitarian arguments. As Michael Moran notes,

> in Coleridge's *Church and State* the idea of culture as something independent of material progress was first systematically introduced into English thinking, and was from then onward available in various forms, not merely to influence society, but also to judge it.[93]

In his essay on Coleridge, Mill uses the poet-philosopher's civilization–cultivation distinction to contrast the romantic and cultural ideals of the historically minded, hermeneutic thinkers whom Mill calls the "Germano-Coleridgean school" with the bureaucratizing, Enlightenment tendencies of Benthamite utilitarianism, which neglects the value of cultivation. Echoing Coleridge's view that "civilization is itself but a mixed good", Mill argues that despite "the multiplication of physical comforts", the "diffusion of knowledge", "the decay of superstition" and "the progressive limitation of the tyranny of the strong over the weak", we must nonetheless consider "the high price which is paid" for "the value of these advantages" – namely, a diminished cultivation, a smothering bureaucracy and technocracy and a reduction in the freedoms of self-realization, independence and aesthetic exploration.[94]

Church and State traces the realization of ideas in history through: the development of nationality; permanence through landed interest; progression through the personal interest of the mercantile, commercial and professional classes; acknowledged duties; and socially recognized freedoms. Coleridge's thesis here is strikingly Hegelian, and both thinkers notably use the organicist imagery of "the bud" to convey their theories of logical and historical development. Coleridge's first use of unfolding-bud imagery – six years after Hegel's – was in a lecture of 1813 on the "New System of Education", wherein he defines "the word Education" as a Socratic encouragement "to educe, to call forth, as the blossom is educed from the bud, the vital excellencies are within; the acorn is but educed or brought forth from the bud".[95]

Hegel, in the different context of the transformation of logical concepts, uses the image of "the bud" being "broken through" by the blossom, which is itself "refuted" by the fruit, describing these moments as the logical unfolding of an "organic unity".[96] With the same image, Coleridge describes "the full development and expansion of the mercantile and commercial order, which in the earlier epochs of the constitution, only existed […] potentially and in the bud […]".[97]

These similarities, however, are probably not due to direct influence, seeing as all Coleridge read of Hegel was the first ninety-one pages of *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol. 1 (1812), finding in it "bewilderment throughout" and accusing the author, in his marginal notes, of the "neglect of sound Logic".[98] The similarity with Hegel stems, I suggest, from: their mutual disavowal of Kant's transcendental ideas as subjective projections; their both having had Schellingian periods; and their affirmation of ideas as objective, constitutive principles. Both therefore see history as the transformation of the world through the progressive realization of ideas. They agree, also, that while "in the order of thought"[99] certain terms in the relations of ideas have a logical priority over others, in the highest reality logical truth is atemporal (and thus, in a sense, eternally prior). For both thinkers, it is only at the level of existence – e.g. human history and natural history – that the unfolding of ideas occurs over time. This is why Hegel says that the theme of his *Science of Logic* is "God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind".[100]

Yet while history is for Hegel the dialectic evolution of this logic over time, Coleridge's view is inherently humbler in seeing history not as the necessary and exhaustive unfolding of divinity but as a dynamic from the other direction, as humans aim for perfection yet inevitably fail "by the imperfection of means and materials".[101] Consequently, history cannot be purely aprioristic, for while the idea is its life, contingency is its body. As Charles de Paulo puts it: "Historical inquiry, thought Coleridge, must, therefore, proceed circumspectly: any application of preconceived Ideas to historical reality should refrain from unsubstantiated predictions and treat history, appropriately, as a complex and inscrutable field of knowledge".[102]

For Coleridge, it is not God or the unfolding absolute that determines history, but the ever-flawed human intuition of ideas, actualized in turn by the opposed interests of different classes: the parties of permanence and progression. Suggesting a process analogous to natural law theory, where intuitions of justice, rights, duties, and so on lead to legal expressions and judgements from which more refined ideas of laws can be reached, Coleridge argues:

> The line of evolution, however sinuous, has still tended to this point, sometimes with, sometimes without, not seldom […] against, the intention of the individual actors, but always as if a power, greater, and better, than the men themselves, had intended it for them.[103]

Hegel, too, thinks that the perfect idea is "disfigur[ed]" within "the sphere of arbitrariness, contingency, […] error, and bad behaviour"; his conception of history, however, is not a working out of the idea *as if* intended by a higher, better power – it is, rather, divine activity itself such that "The State consists in the march of God in the World, and its basis is the power of reason actualizing itself as will".[104]

As Joel Rasmussen observes, in Hegel's theory of the "temporal outworking" of God in "world history" we see "the immanentalization of the Trinity that Schelling sought to explicate and, like Schelling, Hegel too acknowledged Böhme as the source for his recognition of 'the presence of the Trinity in everything and everywhere'".[105]

Coleridge's account of ideas in history is thus distinguished from Hegel's, as it is from Schelling's, in rejecting the pantheist immanence of the Trinity, thereby ascribing greater responsibility – and room for error – to human striving. For Coleridge, then, while institutions and laws develop over time and across pendulum-like swings of conflict and controversy, they originate in intuitions of an ideal reality given in conscience and moral

sense, in ideas as ultimate aims and in the sacredness of the person. Analogous to Bacon's inductive case-law studies which reveal an unwritten, natural law that gradually becomes manifest in nations,[106] Coleridge maintains that the reality of the British constitution lies in its being a second-order idea that evolves an interconnected group of first-order ideas.

Although constitutional law is a rational object that benefits all, it is actualized through the oppositional balance of different social groups. Naturally, there are struggles involving fear and coercion, but Coleridge agrees with Plato that the Thrasymachian opinion that "might makes right"[107] is indefensible. Thus Coleridge challenges Hobbes's dictum that "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all".[108] Against this brute materialism, Coleridge defends the authority of just law beyond the physical power of its enforcement, replying: "Well! but without the Laws the sword is but a piece of iron".[109] Unless fear alone be the rationale, as in slavery, the relation between government and subjects must involve community, implicit contract and loyalty or faith – and these are ideas formed in reason.

Throughout *Church and State*, Coleridge argues for the balance of permanence and progression, with the former maintaining cultivation and a sense of humanity, and the latter advancing civilization and technology. Progress is ensured by the constitution of the state, and deals with transience, of which property is clearly an example. Permanence is secured by the constitution of the nation, and cultivates character by connecting new generations with tradition and what Matthew Arnold later formulated as "the best that has been known and thought in the world […] to establish a current of new and fresh ideas".[110]

Although cultivation is the higher tendency, it depends upon civilization:

> Opposite powers are always of the same kind, and tend to union, either by equipoise or by common product. Thus the + and − poles of the magnet, thus positive and negative electricity are opposites. […] Even so in the present instance, the interest of permanence is opposed to that of progressiveness; but so far from being contrary interests, they, like the magnetic forces, suppose and require each other.[111]

For his epigraph to the second edition of *Church and State* (1830), Coleridge adapts three lines from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*:

> THERE IS A MYSTERY IN THE SOUL OF STATE,
>
> WHICH HATH AN OPERATION MORE DIVINE
>
> THAN OUR MERE CHRONICLERS MEDDLE WITH.[112]

The mystery is that the state is guided by ideas that are inconceivable to the mere understanding. The historians of mere understanding simply chronicle events, and fail to recognize the principles connecting them. Michael John Kooy comments that Coleridge's "historiography [is] the notion that ideas make history and that the way to get at these ideas is aesthetically".[113] But without any insight into the political and civil power of ideas, historians can produce only "mechanical" studies depicting, through "the hollowness of abstractions", "a shadow-fight of Things and Quantities".[114]

In Coleridge's day, ideas were beginning to be seen as unstoppable motors of social and political change, as historical grand movements swept through nations and across

continents. Once manifest in the network of history, ideas become actualized in laws and institutions. Indeed, a *Zeitgeist* was pervading Europe, with romantic nationalism elevating – often even inventing – folklore and traditions, creating the states of Germany, Italy, Poland, Greece, Bulgaria and Hungary and inspiring independence movements in European colonies around the globe. Coleridge gives testimony to Polish nationalism in the following verse lines:

> Shall I compare thee to poor POLAND's Hope,
>
> Bright flower of Hope kill'd in the opening bud?[115]

These lines refer to the Russo-Prussian defeat of Commander Kościusko's uprising in October 1794, thereby dashing Polish nationalist hopes and leading to the 1795 partitioning of Poland and its disappearance as a sovereign nation.

As powerful as such movements are, for Coleridge the progressive furtherance of ideas through changes to national civilization requires cultivation if it is to take root and have moral and humane value. Cultivation of souls occurs with "the annunciation of *principles*, of *ideas*",[116] whose realization is the true end of government. As Alan Gregory explains, for Coleridge, the historical conveyance of ideas of reason through the imagination "awakens the mind's germinal power to the consubstantialities of past and present" and thus "contributes to the creation of social and political community".[117]

On the other hand, the idealess understanding, or "the Faculty of means to medial Ends",[118] nevertheless advanced Britain's physical infrastructure in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century in an unprecedented advance of organized civilization: "Inventions, Discoveries, Public Improvements, Docks, Rail-Ways, Canals, &c. […] in England and Scotland. […] We live […] under the dynasty of the understanding: and this is its golden age".[119]

Without balanced cultivation, however, and the impress of ideas, we are left culturally impoverished, possessing knowledge of utilitarian means and technical skill only. Coleridge diagnosed the malaise of medial conceptions outweighing ultimate ideas when he wrote, in *The Friend* (1818 revised edition), that "a nation can never be a too cultivated, but may easily become an overcivilized, race".[120]

By 1829, in *Church and State*, Coleridge is recommending a national clerisy to disseminate the liberal arts and sciences, thereby serving as "an essential element of a rightly constituted nation" to secure both its permanence and its progression.[121] He is sometimes cited as coining the word "clerisy", which he does, although Elinor Shaffer rightly notes that in doing so he effectively translates Kant's *Klerisei*. Although *Klerisei* is standard German for *clergy*, and no Kantian coinage, Kant proposes an idealizing church of reason that frees faith from historical forms and directs it towards true moral law discoverable by reason. We can, therefore, agree with Shaffer that this is likely the source of Coleridge's notion.[122] While Kant suggested the term, however, Coleridge thoroughly developed the clerisy idea from his 1818 revision of *The Friend* to its fullest form in *Church and State* (1829–1830). In the latter work, the clerisy represents a stable intelligentsia whose purpose is to ensure the steady cultivation of humanity and counterbalance the technological and bureaucratic progress of civilization. Yet continuity in Coleridge's social thought, and his hopes for national cultivation, can be recognized in the echo in this clerisy idea of the following lines from his three-decades-earlier "Religious Musings" (1794, 1796):

O'er waken'd realms Philosophers and Bards

Spread in concentric circles; they whose souls

Conscious of their high dignities from God

Brook not wealth's rivalry.[123]

Coleridge's development of the clerisy idea coincides with the philosophical class of guardians in Plato's *Republic*, who are compelled to leave their contemplation in order to attend to the practical affairs of the state. Coleridge applies the notion in his criticism of the materialism and utilitarianism of his age, bemoaning, *inter alia*, "lecture-bazaars under the absurd name of universities" as "spurious" and as feeding the disease they set out to cure – a national education should arise from the font of ideas, not from an "attempt to *popularize* science" which might well "only effect its *plebification*".[124] With Plato, who distinguishes the ideas of *nóēsis* from the *mathēmatiká* of *diánoia*, Coleridge describes ideas as "distinguished *in kind* from logical and mathematical truths, which express not realities, but only the necessary *forms* of conceiving and perceiving, and are thus named the *formal* or *abstract* sciences".[125] Contemplating the transcendent, non-abstracted ideas, one can "rightly appreciate, the permanent *distinction* and occasional *contrast*, between cultivation and civilization".[126]

While civilization and the forces of technical, bureaucratic and economic progress can advance without ideas, the cultivation of humanity and the nourishing of social and cultural permanence are, as we have seen, dependent, for Coleridge, on the contemplation of ideas.

4. Concluding reflection

In *The Friend*, Coleridge lists some of the ideas that he claims are necessary for humanity and moral thought: "Being, Form, Life, the Reason, the Law of Conscience, Freedom, Immortality, God!"[127] Paraphrasing St John's Gospel, he later, in *Church and State*, calls such ideas "*spiritual realities that can only be spiritually discerned*", realities which – with our "inherent aptitude and moral *preconfiguration*" to them – constitute "what we mean by ideas, and by the presence of the *ideal* truth, and of *ideal* power, in the human being".[128] Thus thought, as truths and potencies, they give rise in human minds and practices to the ideas of rights, the "ever-originating social contract", the sacredness of the person, the church, the state, the constitution, and the like. These human, historically instantiated, second-order ideas bodily connect us back to the primary, first-order "Divine Ideas" by engendering "deep feelings which belong, as by a natural right to those obscure ideas that are necessary to the moral perfection of the human being".[129]

Coleridgean ideas, then, transcend our humanity yet are also constitutive of it, and are necessary for the experience of value. That Coleridge grapples over many years and in many works with such an existentially important matter is cause enough to reflect on the significance of his account. In his view, our deepest feelings resonate with the highest intellectual principles, and thus, as Coleridge said of his "Obligations to the Mystics", they contribute "to keep[ing] alive the *heart* in the *head*" with "an indistinct yet stirring presentment".[130] This "stirring presentment" is an intuitive anticipation

which turns out, for Coleridge, to be the motor of history and the link between his theory of (Platonic) ideas and his critique of the historical development of institutions.

Through an embodied and socially rooted contemplation, the ideas behind institutions such as the church, the state, the nation and the constitution – and, moreover, grand movements such as liberalism, nationalism and romanticism – take hold to find expression in public consciousness. As Richard Niebuhr notes, Coleridge helps "to bring into relief the developmental, evolutionary character of Reason".[131] His philosophy has, accordingly, an inherently progressive political tendency, yet this is necessarily balanced by an equal and opposite respect for the ideas and values preserved in culture and tradition. Therefore, whether in its political or metaphysical forms, his philosophy is ultimately an ontological defence of the transcendence of ideas above the immanence of their progressive but imperfect actualization. In his own words, his philosophy is an "ideal Realism",[132] in which the intelligible substance of our social life and personal freedom consists of laws, rights and ultimate aims that are the historical actualizations of ideas, and are therefore based on a universal reality independent of human minds,[133] that, as a transcendent power, constitutes our humanity.

Notes

1. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 15–16.
2. Ibid., 47 fn. In works by Coleridge, "fn" denotes Coleridge's original footnotes and "n" those by his editors.
3. Wheeler, "Semiosis of Bacon's Scientific Empiricism", 49.
4. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 500. See also Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1, 256.
5. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1, 303.
6. Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, 105. Coleridge's poem was first published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, January 1822.
7. Coleridge, *Opus Maximum*, 243.
8. Ibid., 245.
9. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 30.
10. Schelling, "Further Presentations", 377; Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 4, 362.
11. For Schelling's and Coleridge's return to the Platonic tradition in order to move beyond Kant's doctrine against human intellectual intuition, see Vigus, *Platonic Coleridge*, 45.
12. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 47 fn.
13. Ibid.
14. Vigus, "Philosophy of Coleridge", 528.
15. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 29.
16. Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 4, §5294 f20 (1825–1826).
17. In an editorial introduction to the attributed letters, John M. Cooper holds that the Seventh Letter is "the least unlikely to have come from Plato" and if genuine is of "significance for working out his final positions", especially "his commitment to the Forms, and […] the defectiveness of language to express […] any philosophical treatise"; see Plato, in *Complete Works*, 1635.
18. Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 4, §5294 f20 (1825–1826).
19. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 167.
20. Kooy, "Coleridge's Idea of History", 718.
21. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 15.
22. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, vol. 5, 798.
23. Coleridge, *Logic*, 212.

24. Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 5, §5495 f63 (April 1827). See also, Coleridge, *Church and State*, 13.
25. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 12.
26. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, 249.
27. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*.
28. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, vol. 5, 789, notes on W. G. Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 13 (Leipzig, 1811).
29. Coleridge, "Ideal of an Ink-Stand", in *Shorter Works and Fragments*, vol. 2, 947.
30. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 497 n, printing a note that Coleridge wrote in Copy D, 23 June 1829.
31. Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 4, §5288 (December 1825).
32. The *locus classicus* of the statement is at Plato, *Apology*, *Complete Works*, 38a5–6, where Socrates says that "the unexamined life is not worth living". See also Plato, in *Complete Works*, *Apology*, 30b; Plato, in *Complete Works*, *Gorgias*, 500a–b, 507c.
33. Plato, *Meno*, in *Complete Works*, 82b–85c; Plato, in *Complete Works*, *Phaedo*, 72e–78b. See also Plato, in *Complete Works*, *Phaedrus*, 249b–c for the account of our un-forgetting (*aná-mnēsis*) of the ideas as recalling knowledge of all true being not as individuals but as within divine unity.
34. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 13, 16.
35. Ibid., 17–18.
36. Eliot, "Dry Salvages", ll. 179–80, *Four Quartets*, 31.
37. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 156, quoting *Hamlet*, 1.2.150.
38. Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 5, §6562 (December 1830).
39. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 13.
40. Ibid., 16.
41. Ibid., 30–31.
42. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 177 n.
43. Perkins, *Coleridge's Philosophy* gives a thorough intellectual history of the notion of *lógos* as it concerns Coleridge.
44. Heraclitus, *The Fragments*, 11 (Fragment 1).
45. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 97.
46. Heraclitus, *The Fragments*, 11 (Fragment 2). See also Ibid., 178 (Ancient Testimonia 16 1 b): "Man is not rational; only the surrounding substance is intelligent".
47. Ibid., 57 (Fragment 94).
48. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 171. See also Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 97, quoting a related fragment of Heraclitus.
49. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1, 251–52, quoting Plotinus, *Enneads*, vol. 3, 3.8.4. Quoted also in Coleridge, *Logic*, 74.
50. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 488; Coleridge, *Church and State*, 13.
51. Coleridge, 14 January 1820, in *Letters*, vol. 5, 15.
52. Wheeler, "Semiosis of Bacon's Scientific Empiricism", 47.
53. Bacon, *New Organon*, Bk 1, §55, 83.
54. Ibid., Bk 2, Aphorism 2, 103. The "common use" of the term "Form" he refers to is derived from the Platonic theory of forms and the Aristotelian formal cause.
55. Coleridge, *Logic*, 44–45.
56. Bacon, *New Organon*, Bk 2, Aphorism 9, 109.
57. Raiger, "Coleridge's Theory of Symbol", 314.
58. Wheeler, "Semiosis of Bacon's Scientific Empiricism", 54.
59. Ibid., 45.
60. Ibid., 55.
61. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 492.
62. Latin: "[No man can find out] the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end"; see Ecclesiastes 3:11.
63. Bacon, "Advancement of Learning", Bk 2, 197.

64. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 30.
65. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 10. See also Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 11.
66. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 19.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 20.
69. Ibid., 21. See also Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 2, §2598 f80^{v} (1805).
70. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 22.
71. Ibid., 18.
72. Ibid., 12.
73. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time*, 7.
74. This analogy is from Sartre's argument that "it is just as impossible to attain the essence by heaping up the accidents as it is to arrive at unity by the indefinite addition of figures to the right of 0.99"; see Sartre, *Theory of the Emotions*, 4.
75. See Whistler, *Schelling's Theory*, esp. 70–94 for a helpful account of Schelling's early-to-middle-period metaphysics and *Ideenlehre* (theory of ideas).
76. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 211; Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 3, 603.
77. Coleridge, November 1818, in *Letters*, vol. 4, 883.
78. O'Regan, "The Trinity", 263.
79. See Coleridge, *Notebooks*, vol. 3, §3587 (July–September 1809): "Where both the position and the fact are imagined, it is Hypopoiēsis not Hypothesis, subfiction not supposition".
80. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, vol. 4, 432–33.
81. Coleridge, *Logic*, 45 fn.
82. The early, Fichtean Schelling discusses absolute knowing but sees it as an infinite task or an unrealizable though constantly pursued goal for human intellectual activity. However, with his *Naturphilosophie*, and certainly after 1801, as Beiser summarizes, "Schelling now naturalizes the absolute, or he absolutizes nature, so that the absolute is identical with the universe itself"; see Beiser, *German Idealism*, 551.
83. Schelling, *Essence of Human Freedom*, 35; Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 7, 360.
84. Schelling, *Philosophical Religion*, 31; Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 4, 47.
85. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 83.
86. Ibid., 43.
87. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1861), in *Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society*, 212.
88. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, vol. 3, 423, notes on Lacuna y Diaz's *The Coming of the Messiah* (trans. Edward Irving, 1827).
89. Coleridge to his brother-in-law, George Fricker, 4 October 1806, in *Letters*, vol. 2, 1190.
90. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 35–36.
91. Ibid., 42–43.
92. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 500.
93. Moran, "Coleridge", 137.
94. Mill, "Coleridge" (1840), in *Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society*, 123.
95. Coleridge, *Lectures: On Literature*, vol. 1, 585.
96. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 68.
97. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 50.
98. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, vol. 2, 990, 994. Coleridge's annotations to Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812–1816), made c. 1818, amount to around 1250 words and are reproduced in Coleridge, *Marginalia*, vol. 2, 988–97.
99. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 20.
100. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.
101. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 21.
102. De Paolo, "Coleridge, Hegel, and the Philosophy of History", 33.
103. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 30.
104. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, 279.
105. Rasmussen, "The Transformation of Metaphysics", 20. Rasmussen quotes Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 431.

106. Bacon inductively derives the principles of English law from common law, in a process analogous to discovering laws of nature; see Bacon, *Elements of the Common Lawes*.
107. Plato, *Republic*, in *Complete Works*, 338c.
108. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Pt 2, Ch. 17, vol. 2, 254. Coleridge renders Hobbes's Thrasymachian dictum as: "Laws without swords are but bits of parchment"; see Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 172–73.
109. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 173. Coleridge alters and abbreviates James Harrington's riposte to Hobbes, transforming it to make an anti-materialist point; see Harrington, *Political Works*, Pt 1, 165.
110. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 37.
111. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 16 n.
112. Ibid., 10.
113. Kooy, "Romanticism and Coleridge's Idea of History", 718.
114. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual* 28.
115. Coleridge, "On Observing a Blossom" (1796), in *Poetical Works Part One*, vol. 1, 257, ll. 17–18.
116. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 24.
117. Gregory, *Coleridge and the Conservative Imagination*, 96.
118. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 59.
119. Ibid.
120. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 494. This clause is repeated a dozen years later in Coleridge, *Church and State*, 49. Another instance of the distinction is given in Coleridge, *Lectures: On the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, 81.
121. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 69.
122. Shaffer, "Religion and Literature", 148. For Kant on the visible and the invisible church, and "the true universal church", see Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, passim.
123. Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, vol. 1, 61.
124. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 69.
125. Ibid., 47 fn.
126. Ibid., 48–49. See also Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 500.
127. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 106.
128. Coleridge, *Church and State*, 47 fn.
129. Coleridge, *The Friend*, vol. 1, 106.
130. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1, 152.
131. Niebuhr, *Streams of Grace*, 58.
132. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1, 303.
133. For a variety of perspectives on the importance of *nóēsis*, or contemplation, to Coleridge as an access to ideas independent of the human mind, see ed. Peter Cheyne, *Coleridge and Contemplation*.

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