

The "Postulates in Philosophy" in the "Biographia Literaria"

Author(s): Elinor S. Shaffer

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Sep., 1970), pp. 297-313

Published by: [Penn State University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40467910>

Accessed: 09/11/2011 06:00

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Penn State University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Comparative Literature Studies*.

The "Postulates in Philosophy" in the *Biographia Literaria*

ELINOR S. SHAFFER

ABSTRACT

The notion of the "postulate" was fundamental in developing, toward the end of the eighteenth century, a philosophy based on aesthetic and moral considerations. Schelling followed Kant in opposing the dogmatic rationalist pretensions to geometrical precision in philosophy, yet he wished to retain the possibility of "construction," or positive system-building. He transformed the geometrical notion of the postulate, with the help of Kant's "moral" postulate, into the free dialectical evolution of consciousness from a postulated self whose nature is fully defined only in and through the process of development. Coleridge transcribes in the *Biographia* a portion of Schelling's *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterungen des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre*; but in a characteristic reworking of a plagiarized passage, he alters its full idealist implications, adopting the later and less radical (but suggestive) notion from Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* that the internal development of consciousness can be known not by direct intuition but only indirectly, through the "empirical proof" offered by the work of art. Coleridge's cautious handling of the postulate governs his position on the nature of intuition, the validity of the dialectic, the means of gaining access to the unconscious, the relation of the imagination to other modes of cognition, and the relation of rational to aesthetic and moral thought. (ESS)

One of the most puzzling passages in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* is the discussion on "postulates in philosophy" in Chapter 12, just before the long excursus on subject and object that leads up to the celebrated definitions of imagination and fancy.¹ The

passage is worth elucidating, for in the new philosophic movement that toward the end of the eighteenth century began to seek its foundations in moral and aesthetic concerns, no notion was more crucial than that of the "postulate." Its meaning was shifted away from the mathematical connotations that had governed its adoption by the philosophical "geometers"—by Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Wolff—and toward a wholly new, idealist "construction" in philosophy.

This shift in meaning was accomplished most clearly in the work of Schelling. Against Kant, who maintained that philosophy could not construct but only analyze, Schelling wished to retain the "constructive," or positive system-building, possibilities of philosophy; but at the same time he followed Kant in opposing the dogmatic rationalist pretension to geometrical precision in a subject not capable of it. Indeed, in his revolutionary enthusiasm of the 1790s, Schelling welcomed this critical point as a liberation from all forms of dogma. The "constructive" process in philosophy became not the deduction of a system from postulates but the "free" dialectical evolution of consciousness from a postulated self whose nature was fully defined only in and through the process. The notion of the postulate involves the most central issues in the idealist movement, and to understand Coleridge's complex attitude to it (and to Schelling's use of it) helps explain much that seems baffling in the *Biographia*: the relation of the imagination to other modes of cognition, the nature of "intuition," the means of gaining access to "the unconscious," and even matters of composition and style.

Coleridge's remarks in the *Biographia* are a literal translation from Schelling's appendix to his *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterungen des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre* (1799).² Coleridge belonged preeminently to the movement that placed its emphasis on moral and aesthetic interests of the human race rather than on the search for objective knowledge of the external world. Many of his leading ideas, certainly, can be traced to German philosophers. Yet any detailed comparison of his work with the work of those who influenced him reveals that he declined to follow them in some of their most important doctrines and that he exercised a high degree of originality in treating the ideas they did hold in common. This can be seen even in a case of apparently outright plagiarism like the one we are considering.

One of the ideas Coleridge refused to adopt unreservedly was that of the postulate. Only in the unpublished work of his later years

known as the "Opus Magnum" do we find him openly employing it as the basis of his philosophical construction. His only use of it in his published work is this *Biographia* passage; and even here, as we shall see, he deliberately obscured its meaning in order to suppress its most radical implications. He was enabled to use the idea of the postulate by his general agreement with Schelling on the primary importance of consciousness; and he was attracted by the power and dignity accorded to art in Schelling's construction. Because of the peculiar turn given it by Schelling, the postulate is of special importance to a philosophy of literature such as Coleridge proposed to embark on in the subsequent sections of the *Biographia*. But throughout the *Biographia* he consistently declined to embrace a subjective idealist position, and this necessitated extensive alterations and revisions of his borrowed material. He was always, moreover, motivated by a desire to avoid any open breach between systems based on reason and systems based on aesthetic or moral interest. This, even more than his technical disagreements, guided his attempts to modify and mitigate all the elements in German idealism that lent themselves to irrationalism, paradox, and nihilism.

The *Abhandlungen* appear in Volume I of the two-volume 1809 edition of Schelling's *Philosophische Schriften*. Coleridge owned both volumes and made extensive use at one time or another of every one of the papers included there. The appendix, or "Anhang zu der voranstehenden Abhandlungen," is entitled "Über Postulate in der Philosophie." Coleridge has given Schelling as much, or as little, credit as is implied in the footnote he attached to the opening sentence of his long quotation: "See Schell. abhandl. zur Erläuter. des id. der Wissenschaftslehre."³

In most cases of his borrowing (for example, in the passages on subject and object, which, it is well known, are drawn from Schelling's *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*), Coleridge selected and modified his material in such a way as to transform it into a genuine expression of his own, often radically different, opinions. When he used the appendix to Schelling's *Abhandlungen*, however, he made only a few trivial changes in the quoted passages. He added the name of La Forge;⁴ and where Schelling wrote,

To such a man philosophy is a castle in the air, rather as the most apt theory of music to one born deaf, if he either did not know or did not believe that other men have one more sense than he, must appear a vain

play of notions, which in itself may have connection, but has, essentially, no reality,⁵

Coleridge wrote,

To such a man philosophy is a mere play of words and notions, like a theory of music to the deaf, or like the geometry of light to the blind. The connection of the parts and their logical dependencies may be seen and remembered; but the whole is groundless and hollow, unsustained by living contact, unaccompanied with any realizing intuition which exists by and in the act that affirms its existence, which is known, because it is, and is, because it is known.⁶

As usual, Coleridge did not supply the context of his borrowings; the casual, even the learned, reader of the *Biographia*, in his day or ours, would have little hope of understanding the significance of the *Abhandlungen* passage or its connection with what follows. Coleridge's prose is like an iceberg, or perhaps more like a whale: only a small fraction of his meaning is visible, and one can never be sure when a larger portion of the bulk will show itself or when it will submerge altogether. Without more information, the reader cannot see the extent to which Schelling's remarks offered a new conception of the function of philosophy, opening the way for and justifying the close alliance of poetry and philosophy characteristic of German romanticism. Even less can the reader see that Coleridge, although he translated from Schelling with scarcely an alteration, disagreed with him and took up a position closer to Schelling's own starting point in Kant.

At stake is the nature of the validity of philosophic thought. The discussion turns on the relation of philosophy to mathematics. It is crucial in any epistemology to account for the validity of mathematical propositions, for they are agreed to supply our most certain knowledge. According to Hume, only two kinds of judgment are possible: analytic (a priori) judgments, that is, those whose negative is a contradiction in terms; and synthetic a posteriori judgments, deriving from experience, verifiable by experiment or observation. Mathematical judgments were assigned to the former group, those of empirical science to the latter. Mathematics, therefore, owed its certainty to its sheerly logical, tautologous character.

Kant, combating Hume's skepticism, asserted the existence of a third kind of judgment: the synthetic a priori, that is, one that is not derived from experience (a priori) but is applicable to it and so pro-

ductive of new knowledge (synthetic). Mathematical judgments are of this form, in Kant's view; moreover, so are the concepts of the understanding (the Kantian faculty of "Verstand," which forms our experience by the application of a priori concepts to the sense manifold). Among these concepts of the understanding is that of causality in events, to which Hume had denied all a priori character, that is, any demonstrable idea of necessary connection, and which he accounted for merely by the repeated association of ideas based on contiguity of events.

The proliferation of mathematical systems since Kant's time has shown that mathematical judgments are not necessarily applicable to experience in any simple sense. Nevertheless, it is still possible to hold with Kant that mathematics requires a priori judgments which, despite their a priori nature, yield new information not known to be contained in the original proposition.⁷

The method by which mathematics creates new knowledge Kant called "construction."⁸ It is this method that Schelling described in the passage quoted by Coleridge. The geometrical line is a "primary intuition," that is, is supplied by the mind and not derived from experience; but its special characteristic is that it can be demonstrated in experience. Quite simply, it can be *drawn*. The importance of this argument (which does not appear in the passage) lies not in the mere fact that the intuition can be given an external form, but in the resulting possibility of construction of knowledge beyond the contents of the primary intuition. Kant supplies the following example: given the concept of a triangle, the problem is to discover what relation the sum of its angles bears to a right angle. The geometer alone can solve the problem. He begins by constructing a triangle. "Since he knows that the sum of two right angles is exactly equal to the sum of all the adjacent angles which can be constructed from a single point on a straight line, he prolongs one side of his triangle and obtains two adjacent angles, which together are equal to two right angles. He then divides the external triangle by drawing a line parallel to the opposite side of the triangle, and observes that he has thus obtained an external adjacent angle which is equal to an internal angle—and so on."⁹ The results of this construction could never have been reached discursively, by means of mere concepts. However long a philosopher meditates on the concept of the triangle, he will never produce anything new. "He can analyse and

clarify the concept of a straight line or of an angle or of the number three, but he can never arrive at any properties contained in these concepts." ¹⁰

Kant had been concerned to show that there was such a thing as a synthetic a priori judgment and, moreover, that judgments belonging to mathematics as well as those belonging to metaphysics could be so classified. But there the resemblance between mathematics and metaphysics ceases. Kant's system struck a balance: while combating skepticism it placed a strong limit on the sort of knowledge obtainable by reason. Mathematics can construct new knowledge on the basis of its primary intuitions; metaphysics cannot, because it goes beyond possible experience for its objects. The method of mathematics is constructive; the method of philosophy is merely analytic. Philosophy is only the exposition of given concepts. Kant's own philosophy, of course, is much more than this, for the transcendental method permits him to "give" the concepts as well as their exposition. Nevertheless, these statements reiterate a central doctrine of Kant's critiques: we must discriminate among the uses of reason, for if we apply the methods of one science to another science, the result must be false knowledge. The "constructions" of philosophical geometers are mere unverifiable assertion. ¹¹

Schelling wished to show that a method analogous to mathematical construction is possible in philosophy. Kant's conclusion that such a method is impossible hinged on his theory that "the only intuition . . . given a priori is that of the mere *form* of appearances, space and time" (*italics mine*). This meant that concepts of space and time, as quanta, can be exhibited a priori in intuition, that is, constructed (*geometrically*); whereas the *matter* of appearances, by which things are given us *in* space and time, cannot be exhibited a priori in intuition, but only represented in perception, and therefore a posteriori. We do have a synthetic a priori concept referring to the empirical content of appearances: the concept of the thing in general. But the concept of the thing is a priori, not constructed; it belongs to the structure of the mind. We cannot construct anything beyond it, for further knowledge of the thing can only be empirical. Properly speaking, the synthetic a priori in its philosophical use is only a "rule according to which we are to seek empirically for a certain synthetic unity of that which is incapable of intuitive representation *a priori* (that is, of perceptions)." ¹²

The intuition of mathematics, then, is nonempirical; but it can

be exhibited empirically. Schelling reasoned that if there were another type of nonempirical intuition besides the mathematical, then another type of construction than the mathematical would be possible. In a paper entitled *Über die Konstruktion in der Philosophie* (1801), he asserted that there is such a nonempirical intuition, and he pointedly inquired how Kant had arrived at his own a priori concepts, those which, like causality, belong to the Kantian faculty of the understanding ("Verstand"). The question is a good one. When Kant denied the possibility of further construction upon the original concept, he was on safe ground in terms of his own philosophy; but he also seems to deny the possibility of constructing the a priori concept itself. Where, then, does philosophy get the concepts it "expounds"? Kant himself seems to have borrowed his concepts of the understanding from Aristotle and Newton; but he was so certain that they were in fact categories of mind in general that they seemed to him to need no justification, nor could they be said to have been "constructed." They were the result of traditional logic's analysis of the types of judgment actually made.

In his *System der transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800), Schelling elaborated his notion of the "intellektuelle Anschauung," the nonempirical (intellectual) intuition, which he claims is the basis of the method of transcendental philosophy, the means of constructing the concepts that in Kant appear as given. In the earliest of the three papers we have referred to (the *Abhandlungen*), however, Schelling had not yet dared to part company with Kant so completely. He was still embarrassed by the fact that the mathematical intuition can be exhibited *in concreto*, empirically demonstrated, whereas any other so-called nonempirical intuition must remain undemonstrable, the barest assertion. He therefore provided a different sort of justification of a nonempirical intuition, this time fetched from Kant's account of the postulates of moral philosophy.¹³ In the body of the paper from which Coleridge borrowed part of the appendix, Schelling wrote that only mathematical postulates are binding, because they are externally demonstrable; "theoretical postulates in philosophy, however, . . . can receive their binding force only through affinity with moral demands, because the latter are categorical, self-validating."¹⁴

Now, the three postulates of moral philosophy according to Kant are the freedom of the will, immortality, and the existence of God. These postulates can never be shown to be true; at most, they cannot

be shown to be false. But without at least the first of these postulates, there can be no moral law binding on a man. If a man accept and follow the moral law, however, his action is a kind of practical proof of the assumptions necessitated by the existence of the moral law (that is, the postulates). Moral demands are self-validating in the sense that if they are fulfilled, they exist.

Schelling thus extended Kant's view of moral philosophy to philosophy as a whole. Since a "constructive" philosophy, as opposed to one which merely analyzes concepts, cannot have the theoretical certainty of mathematics, it will share the peculiar practical certainty of postulates validated by observance of the moral law. Philosophy changes its nature; its lack of mathematical certainty is turned to advantage: "Philosophy is itself no science which one can learn like any other, but a scientific spirit [*wissenschaftliche Geist*] which one must bring to learning, if it is not to deteriorate into merely historical knowledge. It ought always to have something about it that distinguishes it from other disciplines. Its distinguishing mark is that freedom and the activity of the self play a much larger role in it than in all other disciplines. Philosophy ought to be a measure of a man's culture, and conversely ought to cultivate him still further."¹⁵

For Schelling then, philosophy, like morality, is an activity which creates the validity of its own postulates; it is not a body of theoretical knowledge. It must first construct its postulate: "If philosophy is a discipline that demands a certain degree of intellectual freedom, it cannot be Everyman's thing, that is, it cannot proceed from a theoretically general and a priori valid postulate. . . . It must proceed from a principle that is not generally valid, but which *ought* to be generally valid."¹⁶

The principle which "*ought* to be generally valid" is the non-empirical intuition. Its existence cannot be asserted theoretically in any satisfactory manner; rather, it may be considered a cultivated ability, a means of knowing a class of objects which in somewhat the same manner as "moral freedom" is otherwise opaque to us. In this case, since the end of constructive philosophy is not moral (its method is merely analogous to that of moral philosophy), the objects of a nonempirical (intellectual) intuition are the activities of the mind itself. The concept constructed by philosophy is the *Ich*, the *self*, or, as Coleridge translated it, the *I AM*.

The crucial and difficult balance, precariously maintained by Kant

throughout the critical philosophy, between protecting the claims of reason against the attacks of skeptics and limiting them against the geometrical excesses of dogmatic rationalists was overturned by his idealist followers. Once again, the claims of reason grew grandiose. Nevertheless, there is nothing in Schelling's remarks here in the *Abhandlungen* that is not suggested by Kant; he operates within the Kantian system even while denying some aspects of it or transforming its sense. The possibility of enlarging the sphere of mind was held out by Kant's own method of attempting to extricate the functions of the mind from its total experience and treat them separately. Moreover, it was from what is often regarded as a weakness in Kant's system—the uncertainty as to the source of his list of the concepts of the understanding—that Schelling was able plausibly to conclude that there must be a species of philosophical construction: Kant's own system is based on a larger claim for philosophy than Kant was willing to grant. Finally, it was from Kant that Schelling's solution came: Kant, although denying that we are possessed of an "intellectual intuition," went so far as to say what we could see with it *if only* we had it; and he painstakingly elaborated the peculiar basis of the validity of moral judgments.

Schelling's *Abhandlungen*, as we have seen, asserted the existence of another nonempirical intuition, although he wavered as to the degree of proof possible and, therefore, as to the status of the philosophic postulate. But Schelling remained dissatisfied with his version of the "intellektuelle Anschauung"; it was still undemonstrable, and by his own definition a capacity belonging to few men. At the end of the *System* he arrives at the position that the "intellektuelle Anschauung" can, after all, be empirically demonstrated: just as the nonempirical intuition of mathematics can be represented by an empirical construction (that is, as a mental triangle may be, however imperfectly, drawn and thus made generally accessible), so the nonempirical intuition of philosophy can be represented by works of art.

Schelling's constructive philosophy in the *System*, then, creates "nonempirical intuitions" exhibited *in concreto* in works of art. Here again, the inspiration is Kant's notion, elaborated in the *Critique of Judgment*, that the ideas of reason, which have no objective counterparts in experience, are provided with objects in art. But in Schelling's conception, art does not merely fill in the interstices left after criticism has destroyed the false pretensions of

reason; philosophy now avowedly constructs its own objects through intuition, and art is the culmination and proof of the process of self-knowledge rather than a temporary indulgence of the desires of reason while the mind rests from sterner labors. Philosophy was rendered an aesthetic activity, art a philosophical activity. The implication is that a successful piece of philosophy must itself be a work of art or carry no conviction—its intuitions will be doubted. A work of art must in turn represent intuitions worthy of philosophy.

It could well be argued that Schelling merely relocated an analogy which Kant had successfully questioned. The “geometrical” propositions into which much eighteenth-century philosophy was cast, Kant had said, had none of the validity of geometry itself; now Schelling made a similar analogy between “empirical demonstrations” of the two sciences (of geometry, constructed figures; of philosophy, art objects). This is a brilliant stroke; but Kant accepted this analogy no more than he did the other.

Nevertheless, for art it was an idea endlessly suggestive and exhilarating. Coleridge found it so, though as usual he nowhere put forward Schelling’s technical justification for it. Indeed the *Biographia* is built upon this idea even more uncompromisingly than is Schelling’s *System*, just because Coleridge rejects so much of the idealist doctrine that makes other, philosophical proofs of the system possible. Without full acquiescence in the postulate, without the dialectical motive power, without the intuition in the form specified by Schelling, art was left as the only empirically satisfactory illustration of nonempirical modes of experience.

In one sense, of course, Coleridge’s reluctance to adopt the postulate and fully to expose its implications involves the whole range of his disagreements with idealism. We shall be able to touch here only on those most directly related to the use of the postulate.

It is clear that Coleridge’s leading motive here was to play down Schelling’s radical enthusiasm, his urge toward substituting a moral or aesthetic mode of cognition for rational modes—indeed to conceal that this was at stake. Schelling himself, as we have seen, had changed his views between the writing of the *Abhandlungen* and the writing of the *System*; but his expressions of enthusiasm for what he viewed as a new revolutionary freedom were in the later work only a little muted. The fact that this form of philosophy does not claim to compel belief by its objectivity, but proposes a free choice

of its postulate, is, according to him, a liberation from dogma of every kind. Coleridge makes only a few glancing references to freedom in the *Biographia*, and they do not carry these connotations.¹⁷ He certainly shares Schelling's insistence on free will as the basis of this philosophy, yet he in no way wishes to seem to justify an idiosyncratic employment of freedom or a release from rationality. It is symptomatic that in the "Opus Magnum," where at last he employs a postulate without concealment, the postulate is "the actual being of a Responsible Will."¹⁸

Coleridge, too, asserted the existence of a nonempirical intuition, but it is a very different affair from Schelling's. Without going too far afield, we can adduce, as negative evidence, the fact that Coleridge omitted from his borrowings from Schelling all specific account of the operation of the intuition as Schelling described it. His initial mention of "a system which aims to deduce the memory with all the other functions of intelligence"¹⁷ is, I believe, a reference to Schelling's use, in the *System*, of the intuition as a means to recovering knowledge of those first, unconscious activities of the mind of which we retain no memory, but Coleridge makes no further reference in the *Biographia* to this function of the intuition. Neither is there any hint of what the intuition supposedly discovers thereby, namely, the dialectical motion of consciousness and its "creation" of the categories through which the external world is experienced. We are restricted in the main to such negative evidence, for not in the *Biographia*, but only later, in his religious writings, did Coleridge arrive at his own version of the "intellectual intuition."

Of more positive significance is the fact that Coleridge opened Chapter 12 with a series of references to the intuition as it appears in Plato and, especially, Plotinus, with mention of other names from Synesius and Wordsworth to Giordano Bruno and Jakob Boehme, as well as "our elder divines and philosophers" to whom is attributed the Kantian distinction between transcendental and transcendent. It might be thought that Coleridge was merely trying to conceal his substantial borrowings from Schelling behind a screen of other names; but the motive is surely the more fundamental Coleridgean one of desiring to assert a traditional ground and justification for a position which in Schelling appears newfangled and contrived. Coleridge, it is true, was attracted by the air of exotic and obscure profundity wherever he found it, and often assumed it; but stronger than the impulse to mystification was his desire seriously to show

that this organ of philosophy is not an invention, but the highest human faculty, long-established within the Platonic tradition. It is worth recalling that Coleridge quoted with approval Schiller's judgment of Kant's philosophy: though its "form shall one day be destroyed, its foundations will not have this destiny to fear; for ever since mankind has existed, and any reason among mankind, these same first principles have been admitted and on the whole acted upon."²⁰

The effect of Coleridge's treatment is both to dispense with the idiosyncratic and questionable detail of Schelling's account, and yet to confirm his main insight by referring the reader for a knowledge of intuition to the imagination, that is, to the aesthetic form of intuition, which alone offers the possibility of empirical "proof" in the work of art. Coleridge characteristically points to tradition as justifying an idea of cognition wider than that current, while cautiously limiting his claims to the one most nearly acceptable to empiricist presuppositions.

From this attitude it follows that Coleridge was not, as has sometimes been claimed, putting forward his theory of the imagination as "general noetic," that is, as a description of the cognitive process as a whole.²¹ Nor, on the other hand, was he claiming for imagination the "autonomy" that has often been attributed to it in his name. He was, certainly, proposing the imaginative process as a mode of cognition; it is this, rather than Schelling's subjective idealism of the *System*, that he is attempting to isolate and describe in the *Biographia*. But everywhere he enters caveats against considering it as separable from the whole complex of functions which cooperate in the making of knowledge. He insists, within the operations of imagination itself, on certain rules and procedures, which relate not to the imagination alone but to its proper functioning in the full context of human knowing. To misunderstand this is to misunderstand altogether the nature of imagination for Coleridge; for the purpose of the imaginative mode is to transform other (the dominant) modes of cognition. Coleridge, in short, still hoped that the split between the rational or scientific on the one hand, and the aesthetic and moral on the other, could be avoided; with Kant and Schiller, he viewed the imagination essentially as a mediator. This requires a more thorough-going transformation of the "objective" world, and therefore a more powerful imagination, than they

envisaged; but he did not with Schelling suggest an aesthetic usurpation.

The effect of this is, paradoxically, to place greater burdens on the imagination than Schelling did, for the imagination is called into service to accomplish ends which the use of the postulate accomplishes in the *System*. Coleridge's avoidance of the postulate is part of his persistent attempt to incorporate certain aspects of empiricism into his philosophy.²² He holds to the importance of objects in our experience and to the immediacy of our sense of their reality. He would not reduce this sense, as Schelling did, to our certainty of self. Self, indeed, for Coleridge, has as little certainty as the object. The postulating of the self, even in the "Opus Magnum," is an altogether more tentative affair: it is presented as "a possible idea" only.²³ Neither the direct intuitional inspection of the activities of the self nor the automatism of Schelling's dialectic is available to validate it. Imaginative means are the only means to the fulfilling of possibility; and the imagination must always come to terms with objective modes. Art, then, is more laborious, more difficult, more painstaking, and more threatened with failure at every turn, just because its task is greater. Finally, the "empirical" proof through art is the only possible proof of the postulate.

Coleridge's use of the notion of "the unconscious"—the notion so strikingly developed by Schelling—displays the same attitude of caution in handling the characteristic doctrines of idealism, the same desire to maintain contact with objective modes, and the consequent burdening of the imagination with the task of assimilating the external world to itself. In Schelling's *System*, the unconscious represents the early activities of the self, up to and including the formation of the world of objects, through its dialectical self-development. Coleridge never refers to the unconscious in terms of metaphysics; rather, he employs the sort of physiological and psychological analysis familiar throughout the eighteenth century. Even in the "Opus Magnum," where he discusses at length the process by which the self loses touch with itself and comes to believe in the superior reality of objects, he offers a psychological explanation based on the experience of infant and child. The unconscious for Coleridge is not capable of direct investigation or description by introspection or philosophical intuition. We can know it only obliquely. Once again, the nearest we can come to it is to observe it in the artistic products

of the imagination. And here again, Coleridge throws the greater weight onto the imagination, for there is not for him, as there was for Schelling, any philosophical faculty that offers an alternative route to such knowledge.

It is not surprising, then, that we find Coleridge rejecting the elitist and obscurantist implications of Schelling's doctrine. Although he agrees that there is some form of intuition and that it is not a universal possession, he does not agree that it is, like Schelling's nonempirical intuition, by its very nature closed to all but a few initiates. "I say, then, that it is neither possible nor necessary for all men, or for many, to be philosophers. . . . But in all ages there have been a few who, measuring and sounding the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls, have learnt that the sources must be far higher and far inward; a few, who even in the level streams have detected elements which neither the vale itself nor the surrounding mountains contained or could supply. How and whence to these thoughts, these strong probabilities, the ascertaining vision, the intuitive knowledge, may finally supervene, can be learnt only by the fact."²⁴

Whatever the distance between the "multitude below" and the select spirits, says Coleridge, the potentiality is in all men for the development of the philosophic consciousness. "In short, all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense, and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit: though the latter organs are not developed in all alike. But they exist in all, and their first appearance discloses itself in the moral being."²⁵ We may glimpse here the continuity between the radical fervor of Coleridge's *Watchman* days and the later, more sedate conception of the "clerisy," the educated laymen who would go as missionaries to the masses. The people can, and must, be educated to understand their new rights; all the highest potentialities of the human race must be developed in them which hitherto have lain dormant. In principle, the highest degree of human consciousness is within the reach of every man. Considered as an esoteric organ of a particular philosophical system, that consciousness is valueless.

Some of the puzzles about Coleridge's mode of composition, and, in a more extended sense, his style, are illuminated by his complex attitude toward Schelling's constructive method. Coleridge's has been dismissed as a "neurotic" method of composition; unable to

create a full, fresh exposition of his ideas, it is said, he pasted together scraps from other men's work, producing a conglomerate, inchoate, and directionless prose. That he had psychological difficulties about composing, we know; yet there are reasons for his procedure much closer to his intellectual purposes. He was concerned to exhibit the relationship and ultimate unity of the thought of apparently divergent thinkers within his historical tradition. His juxtapositions are not fortuitous. It is necessary to look beyond the maddening eclecticism of the surface of his prose, with its jumble of borrowed terms, and realize that he intended by it a history of the developing human consciousness. In this reduced but significant sense, Coleridge employs a partially dialectic mode based, like Schelling's, in however suppressed and concealed a fashion, on a conception of human consciousness as "the postulate of philosophy." Characteristically, he prefers a historical justification to an overt construction.

Even more important, though related, is his use of terms and juxtapositions of terms to produce a tone in and through which rational concerns can be joined to and extended by moral and aesthetic ones. The simplest way to do this was to employ the phraseology of a former period or of a particular philosopher in which such connections were taken for granted. This was not a foible of Coleridge's, but a widespread literary technique of men of the Enlightenment for whom certain forms of belief were no longer readily available. This technique is more sophisticated in Coleridge's later work, but even here he uses his contemporary Schelling in a complicated double way to conjure up an appropriate atmosphere, an aura of the extravagant, marvelous, and inexplicable, behind which argument could proceed undetected.

The technique is dangerous, like the irony by which the seventeenth century concealed its radical arguments against church and state. Coleridge conducts a criticism of Schelling's views; he employs them to produce a screen of the marvelous, behind which he can present his own views, which, though more moderate than Schelling's, were too radical for his audience; and he presents his own views. He runs the risk that his readers will take the marvelous at its face value; that they will dismiss the marvelous at its face value; and that they will fail to see that an argument is going on, or what it portends. Coleridge has been the victim of all these misunderstandings, sometimes simultaneously. He courted these misunder-

standings to avoid greater ones, as he thought, and to play for higher stakes; ideally, the argument and the atmospherics would coalesce into a style signifying the marriage of rational and moral-aesthetic considerations.

The *Biographia*, then, cannot be understood without detailed reference to Schelling's treatment of the postulate; but Coleridge's suppression of its full meaning, a suppression entailed both by his dissent from some major idealist doctrines and by his acceptance of others, is deliberate. He adopts as the leading idea of the *Biographia* Schelling's conception of the work of art as the place where the normative development of the potentialities of human consciousness can be observed, but he rejects its technical occasion and justification, seeking instead a general consensus, through cunningly deployed precedent, for a radical shift in the significance and function of philosophy. His style becomes an instrument, however imperfect, of this shift.

ELINOR S. SHAFFER · Clare Hall, University of Cambridge

NOTES

-
1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (Oxford, 1907), I, 171 (line 6) through 173 (line 20).
 2. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterungen des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre*, in *Philosophische Schriften*, Vol. 1 (Lands-hut, 1809). The section quoted by Coleridge is on pp. 329-332.
 3. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 171 (lines 7-10).
 4. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 173 (line 7).
 5. Schelling, *Abhandlungen*, p. 332. All translations of Schelling not made by Coleridge are my own.
 6. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 173 (lines 15-23).
 7. S. Körner, *Kant* (Bristol, 1955), p. 41.
 8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (New York, 1961), p. 577.
 9. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 579.
 10. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 578-579. Corresponding to the "ostensive construction" of geometry is the "symbolic construction" of algebra.
 11. For Kant's discussion of the difference between the method of philosophy and the method of mathematics, see the *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 576-593.
 12. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 581.
 13. Kant speaks of "postulates of empirical thought in general" and of "postulates of practical reason." Schelling's employment of the term is confusing. In the *Abhandlungen* he uses it in Kantian fashion to mean a necessary prerequisite to thinking in a particular way; but he collapses the distinction between theoretical and practical postulates. In *Über Konstruktion*, however, he denounces the term: "To postulate is to renounce construction" (see *Sämmtliche*

Werke [Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1856], V, 144). Schelling's point seems to be that a postulate is merely assumed and that construction begins only upon its basis, whereas he wishes to say that the first act of philosophy is itself a construction. "The line of the geometer is a postulate because—and insofar as—he does not construct it" (V, 144). The reason for this turnabout in terminology is found in another. The method of construction in philosophy is opposed to the geometrical or demonstrative method. By "geometrical" Schelling here means not the method of geometry as Kant described it but the methods of philosophers who mistakenly imitated the form of geometrical proofs, setting out from arbitrary assumptions—mere postulates—and elaborating an empty system of "definitions," "axioms," and "demonstrations." (This argument, too, is drawn from Kant.) In *Über Konstruktion*, then, both "geometrical" and "postulate" refer to "false" method in philosophy; whereas in the *Abhandlungen* they refer to "true" method. In both cases, however, Schelling opposes Kant in the essential point: according to Schelling, construction in philosophy is possible.

14. Schelling, *Abhandlungen*, pp. 290–291.

15. Schelling, *Abhandlungen*, pp. 291–292.

16. Schelling, *Abhandlungen*, p. 292.

17. "There is a philosophic (and inasmuch as it is actualized by an effort of freedom, an artificial) consciousness, which lies beneath or (as it were) behind the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings"; "Where the spirit of a man is not filled with the consciousness of freedom (were it only from its restlessness, as of one still struggling in bondage) all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others but even with himself"; "The self-conscious spirit therefore is a will; and freedom must be assumed as a *ground* of philosophy, and can never be deduced from it" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 164 [lines 5–9]; I, 168 [lines 24–28]; I, 185 [lines 6–8]).

18. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Opus Magnum," Bk. III, p. 23 of the manuscript in the possession of Victoria College, Toronto. These notebooks have been misnumbered, as Alice D. Snyder pointed out long ago in the preface to *Coleridge on Logic and Learning* (New Haven, Conn., 1929); whether "Book III" is actually the first book, and "Book I" the third, or whether Books II and III have been reversed, is still a matter of controversy. I adhere to the present faulty numbering as, in the absence of satisfactory editing, the least confusing procedure. I am grateful to the library of Reading University for allowing me access to a microfilm copy of the Victoria College MS, and I thank Mr. A. H. B. Coleridge for permission to quote from it.

19. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 170 (line 16) through 171 (line 1).

20. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Literary Remains*, III, 157 (quoted by Sara Coleridge, ed. *Biographia Literaria* [London, 1847], I, cxxxv).

21. An example of this view is to be found in J. A. Appleyard, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 202.

22. I have tried to deal with one aspect of this as it pertains to Coleridge's theory of literature in "Coleridge's Theory of Aesthetic Interest," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXVII (Summer 1969), 399–408.

23. Coleridge, "Opus Magnum," Bk. III, p. 161. See n. 18 above.

24. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 164–166.

25. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 167.