

## *The Specter of Hegel in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria*

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Coleridge opens the abstruse twelfth chapter of the first volume of his *Biographia Literaria*—notorious for its “plagiarisms” of German philosophers—with a provocative remark: “In the perusal of philosophical works I have been greatly benefited by a resolve, which, in the antithetic form and with the allowed quaintness of an adage or maxim, I have been accustomed to word thus: ‘*until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding.*’”<sup>1</sup> Few critics have accepted the challenge of understanding Coleridge's ignorance, perhaps because they have tended simply to dismiss his remark as a defensive anticipation of the charges of willful obscurity and shameless plagiarism that the chapter was soon to provoke. I propose, however, to take seriously Coleridge's adage by arguing that the philosophical chapters of the *Biographia* should be understood in terms of his curiously *willed* ignorance of Hegel. The critical consensus on the question of Coleridge's relation to Hegel seems to be puzzlement.<sup>2</sup> Ger-

<sup>1</sup> BL: S.T. Coleridge, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 7: Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 232. I am grateful to Charlie Altieri, Dan Blanton, Celeste Langan, and the anonymous *JHI* readers for their valuable feedback on previous versions of this manuscript. Part One of the manuscript benefited from discussions with Dan Breazeale and Rolf-Peter Horstmann. Parts of this essay were written at the Institut für Philosophie, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin with the generous support of a Fulbright research grant.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Wheeler, for instance, writes: “Coleridge's unsympathetic reading of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* (the only work of Hegel's which Coleridge read) reflected in the marginal comments is strangely at odds with the many points of method and self-

ald McNiece is typical in observing, “Coleridge didn’t read much of Hegel, but he perhaps should have.”<sup>3</sup> Coleridge’s neglect of Hegel is especially puzzling in light of the startling intellectual affinities between these nearly exact contemporaries. Hegel, like Coleridge, was an early disciple of Schelling and eventually became disenchanted with him, so it would seem natural for Coleridge to have read Hegel’s work thoroughly. Strangely, though, Coleridge seems only to have read about the first hundred pages of Hegel’s 1812 *Science of Logic* before deciding not to read any more of Hegel’s work ever again. To explore this mystery, I first offer a brief account of the various forms of foundationalist intuitionism adopted by Fichte, Schelling, and the early Hegel, and then elaborate the grounds on which the later Hegel, in the preface to his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, decisively breaks with Schelling and Fichte by repudiating foundationalist intuitionism altogether. With this background in place, I argue that Coleridge’s critical comments on Hegel and Schelling in letters and marginalia betray a complex and ambivalent stance toward foundationalist intuitionism—one which places him somewhere *between* Schelling and the mature Hegel.

I will then be equipped to develop my central claim that the *Biographia* is a radically self-undermining text: the philosophical argument of volume one, far from slavishly recapitulating Schelling’s philosophy, remains haunted by a quasi-Hegelian skepticism toward intuition *even as it ad-*

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conscious composition which they both shared.” *Sources, processes and methods in Coleridge’s Biographia Literaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 196. Owen Barfield observes, “Surprise has sometimes been expressed at the scant attention Coleridge appears to have paid to Hegel. On the other hand I have heard him accused of borrowing his all from Hegel without acknowledgment. From the sparse marginalia to Hegel’s *Logic* and occasional references in the Letters it would appear that Coleridge considered Hegel as having mistakenly sought to deal with the *lumen a luce* as though it were itself the *lux intellectus*.” *What Coleridge Thought* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 228. See also Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 28–29; G. N. G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 242–45; John Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930), 87–88. The best general discussion of Coleridge’s relation to Hegel that I have come across is Tim Milnes’s “Through the Looking-Glass: Coleridge and Post-Kantian Philosophy,” *Comparative Literature* 51 (1999): 309–23. In an insightful recent essay, Thomas McFarland offers an extended discussion of Coleridge’s general affinities with Hegel. See especially pp. clxxxix–cxcciii of his “Prolegomena,” in *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 15: Opus Maximum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). However, neither Milnes nor McFarland addresses the profound affinities between Coleridge’s and Hegel’s respective stances toward intuition—affinities I wish to explore in this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald McNeice, *The Knowledge that Endures* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 39.

vances intuition as the foundation of its theoretical edifice. In particular, I try to reconstruct an incipiently Hegelian critique of Schelling's foundationalist intuitionism by applying Coleridge's critique of materialism in the early chapters of volume one of the *Biographia* to his own abortive deduction of the imagination at the end of the volume. Coleridge's palpable failure to deliver on his promised transcendental deduction of the imagination, then, stems from his inability to subscribe wholeheartedly to the metaphysics of intuition necessary for such a deduction to succeed.

## I.

In order to set into relief Coleridge's complex stance toward foundationalist intuitionism, it will first be necessary to rehearse—at the risk of some oversimplification—the evolution of the concept of intellectual intuition from Kant through Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Kant, in the 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason*, claims that there are “two stems” of human cognition: namely, sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*), through which objects are *given* in sensible intuition (*Anschauung*); and understanding (*Verstand*), through which objects are *thought* by being brought under concepts.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, on Kant's view, we are only able to intuit objects as they appear to us rather than as they are in themselves. At various points in the first *Critique*, Kant contrasts human cognition—irreducibly grounded in sensible intuition—with “intellectual intuition” (*intellektuelle Anschauung*), a hypothetical mode of cognition in which the distinction between sensibility and understanding somehow does not obtain. Kant sometimes goes so far as to claim that intellectual intuition would therefore afford direct access to things-in-themselves.<sup>5</sup> What should be stressed is that for Kant, such a faculty of intellectual intuition is strictly hypothetical since it would exceed the bounds of human cognition.

In the “Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*” (1797), Fichte follows Kant in dismissing such a faculty of intellectual intuition as a mere

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<sup>4</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 151–52. For original German, see Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Köln: Könneman, 1995), 70.

<sup>5</sup> Moltke Gram makes a persuasive case against the straightforward identification of Kant's notion of intellectual intuition with cognition of things in themselves. In fact, three logically independent accounts of intellectual intuition can be found in Kant's first and third *Critiques*. See his essay, “Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis,” *JHI* 42 (1981): 287–96.

“wraith [*Unding*] which fades in our grasp when we try to think it.”<sup>6</sup> However, Fichte nonetheless departs from Kant in grounding his philosophy of the pure *Ich* on a *non*-Kantian model of intellectual intuition. In the “First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*” (1797), Fichte succinctly defines intellectual intuition as the self’s immediate, pre-discursive awareness of itself and its acts:

This intuiting of himself that is required of the philosopher, in performing the act whereby the self arises for him, I refer to as *intellectual intuition*. It is the immediate consciousness that I act, and what I enact: it is that whereby I know something because I do it. We cannot demonstrate through concepts that this power of intellectual intuition exists, nor develop from concepts what it may be. Everyone must discover it immediately in himself, or he will never make its acquaintance.<sup>7</sup>

Fichte makes explicit the foundationalist intuitionism at the basis of his philosophical system in his declaration: “Intellectual intuition is the only firm standpoint for all philosophy. From thence we can explain everything that occurs in consciousness; and moreover, only from thence.”<sup>8</sup>

In his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*—a text which Coleridge read very carefully—Schelling clearly adopts Fichte’s foundationalist intuitionism. In a Fichtean vein, Schelling defines the absolute self as an “intellectual intuition,” which he calls “the organ of all transcendental thinking.”<sup>9</sup> However, he insists, against Fichte, that intellectual intuition is never fully immediate. On Schelling’s account, the self is “an infinite tendency to self-intuition” (*unendliche Tendenz sich anzuschauen*), so the self’s “complete self-intuition is impossible” (*eine vollständige Anschauung*

<sup>6</sup> J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 46; J. G. Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke I*, ed. J. H. Fichte (Berlin: Verlag von Veit und Comp, 1845), 472.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 38; *Sämtliche Werke I*, 463.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 41; *Sämtliche Werke I*, 466. For the sake of economy, I have had to restrict myself here to Fichte’s 1797 “Introductions” to the *Wissenschaftslehre*. For a comprehensive treatment of Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition in his Jena writings more generally, see Daniel Breazeale’s insightful essay, “Fichte’s Nova Methodo Phenomenologica: On the Methodological Role of ‘Intellectual Intuition’ in the Later Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*,” *Revue internationale de philosophie* 206 (1998): 587–616.

<sup>9</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 27. “Die intellektuelle Anschauung ist das Organ allen transzendentalen Denkens.” See F. W. J. Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000), 38.

*von sich selbst . . . ist unmöglich*).<sup>10</sup> In the short final section of the *System*, Schelling raises a deep worry about the possible subjectivism of his doctrine of intellectual intuition: “How . . . can it be established beyond doubt, that it [intellectual intuition] does not rest upon a purely subjective deception, if it possesses no objectivity that is universal and acknowledged by all men?” Tellingly, he responds to this skeptical worry by asserting that *aesthetic* intuition decisively secures objectivity for intellectual intuition: “This universally acknowledged and altogether incontestable objectivity of intellectual intuition is art itself. For the aesthetic intuition [*ästhetische Anschauung*] simply is the intellectual intuition become objective.”<sup>11</sup> For the Schelling of the *System*, then, the ultimate grounds of justification for postulating intellectual intuition are established by aesthetic intuition.

Early in his 1801 *Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (hereafter referred to as the *Differenzschrift*), Hegel declares his foundationalist intuitionism, but he notably prefers the term “transcendental intuition” to intellectual intuition, which serves in part to distance himself from Kant and Fichte—if not from Schelling as well: “It is of the profoundest significance that it has been affirmed with so much seriousness that one cannot philosophize without transcendental intuition [*transzendente Anschauung*]. For what would this be, philosophizing without intuition? One would disperse oneself endlessly in absolute finitudes.”<sup>12</sup> He soon goes on to criticize Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition from an ostensibly Schellingean perspective. First, he dismisses as misguided the very effort to “postulate” the category of intuition: “In general one can see that this whole manner of postulating has its sole ground in the fact that the onesidedness of reflection is accepted as a starting point.”<sup>13</sup> Second, he faults Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition for being merely “subjective,” therefore necessitating Schelling's corrective of balancing Fichte's subjective subject-object with the objective subject-object.<sup>14</sup> Thirdly, in the section devoted to elaborating Schelling's advance over Fichte, Hegel calls Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition an “intuition of colorless light” (*Anschauung des farblosen Lichts*), one that “lacks consciousness of itself”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 52; *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 229; *System*, 296.

<sup>12</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 110–11; G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden II: Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 33–34.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 112; *Werke II*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 117; *Werke II*, 50.

(*fehlt das Bewußtsein über sich selbst*).<sup>15</sup> He proceeds to credit Schelling with a richer conception of intellectual intuition that honors the claims of mediation a conception which, it must be said, seems more Hegelian than Schellingean): “In the absolute identity subject and object are sublated [*aufgehoben*], but because they are within the absolute identity they both have standing too. . . . The claims of separation must be admitted just as much as those of identity. . . . Hence, the Absolute is itself the identity of identity and non-identity.”<sup>16</sup> Hegel goes on to christen this model of intuition “pure transcendental intuition,” yet an unresolved tension remains between his earlier critique of a methodology based on postulation and what seems to be his own later postulation of the category of transcendental intuition.<sup>17</sup> What should not be missed is that while Fichte, Schelling, and the early Hegel offer subtly different accounts of intellectual intuition, all of them remain committed to some form of foundationalist intuitionism.

However, in the polemical preface and introduction to his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel vigorously renounces his own earlier foundationalist intuitionism and implicitly announces his break with Schelling. This break is achieved by, in effect, radicalizing his critique of Fichtean intellectual intuition in the *Differenzschrift*: he realizes now that this critique applies not just to Fichte’s foundationalist intuitionism but to foundationalist intuitionism *tout court*—including, that is, Schelling’s and his own. At the terminological level, this broadening of his target is reflected in his pervasive use of the blanket-term “intuition” (*Anschauung*) to cover the various forms of “intellectual” and “transcendental” intuition developed by Fichte, Schelling, and himself. Strikingly, Hegel’s three basic *Differenzschrift* criticisms of Fichte’s doctrine of intellectual intuition reemerge in the *Phenomenology* as criticisms of foundationalist intuitionism as such.

First, all forms of foundationalist intuitionism, Hegel now argues, exclude conceptual mediation and therefore smuggle in some form of “immediacy” (*Unmittelbarkeit*):

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 156; *Werke II*, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 156–57 (translation slightly modified). “In der absoluten Identität ist Subjekt und Objekt aufgehoben; aber weil sie in der absoluten Identität sind, bestehen sie zugleich. . . . So gut die Identität geltend gemacht wird, so gut muß die Trennung geltend gemacht werden. . . . Das Absolute selbst aber ist darum die Identität der Identität und der Nichtidentität” (*Werke II*, 95–96). For a helpful account of some of the differences between Schelling’s and the early Hegel’s conception of intellectual intuition, see pp. 285–86 of Kenneth Westphal’s essay, “Kant, Hegel, and the Fate of ‘the’ Intuitive Intellect,” in *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 282–305.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 174; *Werke II*, 115.

If . . . the True exists only in what, or better *as* what, is sometimes called intuition [*Anschauung*], sometimes immediate knowledge of the Absolute, religion or being . . . then what is required in the exposition of philosophy is, from this viewpoint, rather the opposite of the form of the Concept [*Form des Begriffs*]. For the Absolute is not supposed to be comprehended [*begriffen*], it is to be felt and intuited [*gefühl und angeschaut*]; not the Concept of the Absolute, but the feeling and intuition of it, must govern what is said, and must be expressed by it.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel's attack on the immediacy of intuition becomes increasingly polemical as the preface progresses: intuition is disparaged as "only the bare feeling of the divine in general" (*nur nach dem dürftigen Gefühle des Göttlichen überhaupt*) and, a little later, as "the indeterminate enjoyment of this indeterminate divinity" (*unbestimmten Genusse dieser unbestimmten Göttlichkeit*).<sup>19</sup> Hegel's purportedly Schellingean critique of Fichtean intuition as an "intuition of colorless light" in the *Differenzschrift* is suddenly turned against Schelling himself in the *Phenomenology*. The "rapturous haziness" (*Begeisterung und Trübheit*) of intuition is a mere "empty depth" (*eine leere Tiefe*)—"an intensity without content, one that holds itself in as a sheer force without spread, and this is in no way distinguishable from superficiality."<sup>20</sup> Hegel's polemic culminates in the vicious dismissal of the Schellingean identification of intuition with the "Absolute" as a "monochromatic formalism" (*ein einfarbiger Formalismus*): "To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black—this is cognition naïvely reduced to vacuity."<sup>21</sup> For

<sup>18</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 4; translation slightly modified. "Wenn nämlich das Wahre nur in demjenigen oder vielmehr nur als dasjenige existiert, was bald Anschauung, bald unmittelbares Wissen des Absoluten, Religion, das Sein—nicht im Zentrum der göttlichen Liebe, sondern das Sein desselben selbst—genannt wird, so wird von da aus zugleich für die Darstellung der Philosophie vielmehr das Gegenteil der Form des Begriffs gefordert. Das Absolut soll nicht begriffen, sondern gefühlt und angeschaut [werden], nicht sein Begriff, sondern sein Gefühl und Anschauung sollen das Wort führen und ausgesprochen werden." See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4; *Phänomenologie*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6; *Phänomenologie*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 9; *Phänomenologie*, 21–22.

Hegel, the cognition afforded by intuition is doomed to be vacuous so long as intuition is conceived in terms of straightforward immediacy. And despite Schelling's insistence in the *System* that intellectual intuition is never fully immediate, the Hegelian point would be that Schelling nonetheless smuggles in immediacy in his dogmatic recourse to immediate *aesthetic* intuition.

Second, Hegel generalizes his *Differenzschrift* critique of the underlying subjectivism of Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition to apply to all forms of intuition: the doctrine of intuition, he argues, "merely gives free rein both to the contingency [*Zufälligkeit*] of the content within it, and to its own caprice [*Willkür*]." <sup>22</sup> Even if Schelling *claims* to correct for Fichte's subjectivism by incorporating an objective moment into his model of intellectual intuition, the claim itself—Hegel now realizes—collapses into a merely subjective "caprice."

Third, in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel's *Differenzschrift* critique of postulation takes the form of a more fundamental interrogation of foundationalism itself—the very urge to "ground" philosophy on some purportedly absolute principle or assertion. Philosophy must not be grounded on a "bare assurance" since "one bare assurance is worth just as much as another." <sup>23</sup> Instead of starting with some absolute ground, philosophy must be "an exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance" (*die Darstellung des erscheinenden Wissens*). <sup>24</sup> Such an exposition is "the path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge; or as the way of the Soul which journeys through the series of its own configurations as though they were the stations appointed for it by its own nature. . . ." <sup>25</sup> For Hegel, the Absolute is only achieved at the *end* of this journey of natural consciousness through the various imperfect stages of knowledge. In the preface, Hegel calls this journey "the Science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through" (*Wissenschaft der Erfahrung, die das Bewußtsein macht*). <sup>26</sup> Hegel crucially replaces the purported immediacy of intuition with "experience" (*Erfahrung*), an immediacy earned by incorporating mediation into itself:

Spirit becomes object because it is just this movement of becoming an *other to itself*, i.e. becoming an *object to itself*, and of suspend-

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 6; *Phänomenologie*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 49; *Phänomenologie*, 71.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 49; *Phänomenologie*, 72.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 49; *Phänomenologie*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 21; *Phänomenologie*, 38.

ing this otherness. And experience is the name we give to just this movement, in which the immediate, the unexperienced, i.e. the abstract, whether it be of sensuous being, or only thought of as simple, becomes alienated from itself [*sich entfremdet*] and then returns to itself from this alienation, and is only then revealed for the first time in its actuality and truth, just as it then has become a property of consciousness also.<sup>27</sup>

If, according to Hegel, Schelling's philosophy begins with the immediacy of intuition, Hegel's "phenomenology of spirit" *begins* with mediation and *ends* with an immediacy earned through mediation. Hence, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel earns the right to use the effusive claims for intuition (attacked in the preface) to describe not intuition but "experience": "nothing is *known* that is not in *experience*, or, as it is also expressed, that is not *felt to be true*, not given as an *inwardly revealed* eternal verity, as something sacred that is *believed*, or whatever other expressions have been used."<sup>28</sup> What should be emphasized is that Hegel, far from straightforwardly rejecting intuition, incorporates (or, to use the Hegelian term, "sublates") intuition *into* his concept of "experience," a form of immediacy generated from mediation itself.

## II.

There is no evidence that Coleridge ever read Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but it is likely that he had at least heard about it—and if so, he would no doubt have taken it to be an outright rejection of Schelling's foundationalist intuitionism.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, this is how Schelling himself interpreted Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology*.<sup>30</sup> That Coleridge perceived Hegel's stance in general

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 21; *Phänomenologie*, 38–39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 487; *Phänomenologie*, 585.

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that in an editorial footnote to Coleridge's *Opus Maximum*, Thomas McFarland mistakenly writes that Coleridge "annotated some of Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* because of its pantheism, but was not enthusiastic about what he read" (*Opus Maximum*, 304, n. 47). The *Wissenschaft der Logik* is the only work of Hegel's which Coleridge is known to have annotated.

<sup>30</sup> After having read the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Schelling wrote to Hegel: "I confess that so far I do not comprehend the sense in which you oppose the *Concept* to intuition. Surely you could not mean anything else by it than what you and I used to call the *Idea*, whose nature it is to have one side from which it is *Concept* and one from which it is *intuition*." Cited in Robert Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 250.

as an implicit repudiation of Schelling's metaphysics of intuition is borne out by his fascinating marginalia to Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Critics have tended to read Coleridge's marginalia to Hegel as straightforward dismissal.<sup>31</sup> There is no doubt a dismissive tone in such a remark as "This is Spinosism in its most superficial form"<sup>32</sup>—but it is worth examining the precise terms of some of Coleridge's more substantive criticisms.

In the first volume of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel offers an implicit critique of Kant in his sarcastic comment that "for some while," the thing-in-itself "counted as a very important determination, something superior, as it were, just as the proposition that we do not know what things are in themselves ranked as a profound piece of wisdom."<sup>33</sup> A bit later, he continues: "The thing-in-itself is the same as that *Absolute* of which we know nothing except that all is one in it." Hegel's critique of Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself doubles here as an implicit critique of Schelling's vacuous conception of the Absolute, which—as we have already seen—is dismissed in the *Phenomenology* as "the night in which all cows are black." Now notice the terms of Coleridge's marginalia objection to Hegel's statement: "No! not the *same* as the *absolute*; but as its *Idea* in *God*. In the mere Absolute (i.e. the *Almighty*) there is neither Division nor Distinction; but in God, *whose* is the Almighty, there is *each* as well as *all*, perfect unity, but yet *distinction!*"<sup>34</sup> Coleridge oddly mistakes Hegel's sarcastic jibe against Kant and Schelling for a positive statement of Hegel's own doctrine. Ironically, what Coleridge stages as an objection to Hegel turns out to be a decidedly Hegelian polemic against Schelling's "mere Absolute": the *true* Absolute, Coleridge argues, must be a "perfect unity" and contain "distinction" at once.<sup>35</sup> We need only recall Hegel's claim in the *Differenzschrift* that the true Absolute is "the identity of identity and non-identity."

<sup>31</sup> Mary Anne Perkins falls prey, I think, to the opposite danger of reading too much into Coleridge's marginalia to Hegel. See *Coleridge's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 283–88.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 995.

<sup>33</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 121; G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 130.

<sup>34</sup> *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia II*, 995.

<sup>35</sup> McFarland notes an important affinity between Coleridge and Hegel in their shared "visceral commitment to the Christian trinity" ("Prolegomena," clxxxiii). McFarland also offers an excellent discussion of Coleridge's subtle revision of Kant's fundamental distinction between Understanding (*Verstand*) and Reason (*Vernunft*). Though Coleridge basically accepts this Kantian distinction, Coleridge departs from Kant in aligning Christian faith with *Vernunft*. Accordingly, Coleridge insists, against Kant, "that CHRISTIAN FAITH IS THE PERFECTION OF HUMAN REASON" (qtd. in McFarland, "Prolegomena," lxiii).

Earlier in his marginalia to Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Coleridge complains: "I seem to perceive a logical informality in this reasoning—viz. that the 'To be' (Seyn . . . ) is opposed to the 'Nothing' (Nichts) whereas the true Opposite of 'To be' is 'Not to be'."<sup>36</sup> Shortly thereafter, he offers his most revealing criticism of Hegel: "the first 40 or 50 pages of the First Book seem to me bewilderment throughout from confusion of Terms—originating in the *πρωτον ψευδος* [first misstep] of overbuilding the *Προθεσις* [Prothesis] by the Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis."<sup>37</sup> This is a muddle of Schelling and Hegel, for Hegel himself never uses the terms "thesis," "antithesis," or "synthesis," while Schelling and Fichte often do. It soon becomes clear, however, that Coleridge's complaint about Hegel's "overbuilding" the Prothesis (Coleridge's term for the "Absolute") is simply a cover for his more fundamental complaint about Hegel's system: namely, that it omits the category of intuition.<sup>38</sup> Notice how Coleridge's complex objection proceeds:

The Presuppositum is confounded with the Position and Counterposition—and thus that which is exclusively Subjective (ex. gr. Nichts) assumed in that which is neither Sub. or Obj. because it is the Identity of Both.

According to me my insight, the following is the truer Genesis of our primary notions

	Prothesis	
	= The*	
	Identity of Sub: and Ob:ject	
	= Reines Seyn [Pure Being].	
Thesis		Antithesis
=		=
Subject	⋈	Object
=		=
Nichts		Existenz
Seyn	⋈	Existenz
=		=

<sup>36</sup> *Marginalia* XII.ii 989

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 990.

<sup>38</sup> Orsini interprets Coleridge's "extension of [Hegel's] dialectic from three moments to four" as an effort to "out-Hegel Hegel." See *Coleridge and German Idealism*, 243. This does not seem right to me since the way Coleridge extends Hegel's dialectic is by adding intuition (*Anschauung*) at its base—and this constitutes a regression from, rather than an advance over, Hegel.

Nichts	⋈	Etwas
=		=
Denken	⋈	Ding
Synthesis		
Das Werden [Becoming]. Anschauung [Intuition]. <sup>39</sup>		

Coleridge attempts here to out-Hegel Hegel by reducing Hegel's equation of being and nothing to the thesis position of his more all-encompassing dialectic. It would be more accurate to say, however, that Coleridge's schema places him somewhere between the Hegel of the *Differenzschrift* and the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*. Unlike the Hegel of the *Differenzschrift*, Coleridge does not seem to subscribe to foundationalist intuitionism since the category of intuition is the *product*, rather than the presupposition, of his dialectical schema. However, unlike the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*, Coleridge still retains the category of intuition itself. Ironically, then, Coleridge's alternative to the mature Hegel's account of "our primary notions" constitutes a regression to an earlier stage in Hegel's own thinking. What Coleridge seems to miss is the fact that the mature Hegel would reject the grounding of a system in the Prothesis as an illegitimate philosophical move. Accordingly, the mature Hegel would flatly dismiss Coleridge's derivation of the category of intuition from the Prothesis as a spurious attempt to lend dialectical status to a fundamentally non-dialectical category.

### III.

Coleridge's searching criticisms of Schelling in letters and marginalia reflect the complexities of his stance toward foundationalist intuitionism. I hope to demonstrate that while there are profound affinities between Coleridge's and Hegel's respective critiques of Schelling's foundationalist intuitionism, Coleridge never seems willing to take the decisive Hegelian step of repudiating the category of intuition altogether. Critics tend to assume that Coleridge's so-called "disenchantment" with Schelling happens *after* the writing of the *Biographia Literaria*—an assumption encouraged by Coleridge himself.<sup>40</sup> In a remarkable September 1818 letter to J. H. Green, written a year

<sup>39</sup> *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia II*, 991.

<sup>40</sup> For post-*Biographia* datings of Coleridge's disenchantment with Schelling, see, for instance, McNeice 37–39, Muirhead 55, Leask 125–26.

after the publication of the *Biographia*, Coleridge writes, referring to Schelling's system, "I was myself *taken in* by it, retrograding from my own prior and better Lights, and adopted it in the metaphysical chapters of my Literary Life."<sup>41</sup> In this same letter, Coleridge lays out the precise terms of his disenchantment with Schelling, which prove to be strikingly Hegelian in character. He begins by questioning the dogmatic foundationalism present in Schelling's 1799 *Introduction to the Sketch of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*:

I seem to see clearly the rotten parts and the vacua of his foundation.—Turn to p. 10, last line but 8—. *Here* I had to ask, *Warum* angenommen werden *muss*? [*Why must* be accepted?] *Warum* *nothwendig*? [*Why necessarily*?] Needful for *his* system it may be! *Susceptible* of proof it may be—but assuredly *requiring* proof! Who can believe on the strength of a mere assertion, that a position, the *contrary* of which is assumed by nine out of ten . . . can be *self-evident*?<sup>42</sup>

For Coleridge, the "vacua" of Schelling's "foundation" consists in the fact that the foundation is "a mere assertion." We should recall that this is precisely Hegel's critique of Schelling's foundationalism in the *Phenomenology*: "*one* bare assurance is worth just as much as another."<sup>43</sup> Coleridge's letter quickly becomes as viciously polemical an attack on Schelling as Hegel's own—and it deserves to be quoted at length:

In the following §§ p. 11, Schelling affirms, that this Voraussetzung ihre Nothwendigkeit in sich selbst tragen müsse [this presupposition must carry its necessity within itself]—and YET auf empirische Probe gebracht worden [*sic*] muss [must be subjected to empirical verification]—but how are these intercompatible? Why—in p. 12, all who dare question it are knocked down for poor feeble creatures, whose reasoning is so contemptibly absurd dass selbst Einwürfe dagegen Mitleid verdienen!! [even objections to it deserve sympathy]—Argumentum valde Warburtonianum! You open your mouth to ask a modest question: and he *spits clean*

<sup>41</sup> *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 4: 1815–1819*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 874.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 873; my translations.

<sup>43</sup> PS, 49.

*into it* by way of answer. But when I have once seen cause for withdrawing my faith from a Man, it is not Bullying that will bring it back again. Undeterred therefore by the contemptuous language, with which Schelling is *in the habit of chevaux de friezing* rash assertions, I dare contend that—*If* his position, that a Principle of *Natur-philosophie*, *belonging to Physics*, and yet notwithstanding this a Principle strictly a priori, nay, an absolute principle, can involve it's [*sic*] own necessity and be properly *self-evident*—if (I say) this Position were true, we should *have a right* to infer, dass die Natur-wissenschaft müsse der Erfahrung . . . ganz und gar entbehren können [that natural science can do without experience altogether]: and the following sentence, *all in Italics*, is but a paltry evasion grounded on a mere equivoque of the word, Experience. . . . But the Position is false, false in it's [*sic*] first grounds—and being a fundamental Position, it weakens the whole Superstructure. Our second point therefore is—eine Voruassetzung *relativ* der *sinnlichen* Natur, oder der Natur in der Welt, kann *nicht* ihre Nothwendigkeit in sich selbst tragen—kann gar keine absolute *Nothwendigkeit* haben [a presupposition *relative* to *sensible* nature, or nature in the *world*, cannot carry its necessity within itself—can have absolutely no absolute *necessity*]. It is an *Anticipation* that *acquires* necessity by becoming an IDEA. . . . I need not point out to you, my dear Green! the practical Importance of this Correction. For as it stood in Schelling, the necessity of resorting to Experience is a mere assertion in contradiction to the assertion preceding—and so annulled by it. . . .<sup>44</sup>

Coleridge points to an apparent contradiction between Schelling's insistence, on the one hand, that the principle of *Naturphilosophie* must involve its own necessity, and on the other, that it must be confirmed empirically. Coleridge argues that Schelling would be forced to admit that "Naturwissenschaft müsse der Erfahrung . . . ganz und gar entbehren können" (natural science can do without experience altogether). But Coleridge goes on to argue that such a position is untenable: "But the Position is false, false in it's [*sic*] first grounds—and being a fundamental Position, it weakens the whole Superstructure."<sup>45</sup> Coleridge then plays on the etymology of "Voraussetzung" ("presupposition"), which he earlier defined as "principle": "It

<sup>44</sup> *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 4, 875–76.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 875.

is an *Anticipation* that *acquires* necessity by becoming an IDEA."<sup>46</sup> Coleridge's subtle critique of Schelling's foundationalism could not be any more Hegelian in nature.<sup>47</sup> Instead of unwarrantedly asserting a principle's necessity at the outset, Coleridge suggests that in the unfolding of the principle itself, it can thereby "acquire" necessity. This is nothing other than Hegel's "phenomenology of spirit" as described earlier, in which the Absolute is earned only at the end of spirit's journey through the various imperfect stages of knowledge. Crucially, in the final turn of Coleridge's criticism of Schelling, he suggests that construing the "Voraussetzung" as "an *Anticipation* that *acquires* necessity" is precisely the dialectic of actual "Experience" (as opposed to Schelling's "mere assertion" of "Experience"). Once again, the affinities with Hegel are striking: Hegel, as we have seen, argues in the *Phenomenology* that "experience [*Erfahrung*] is the name we give to just this movement, in which the immediate . . . becomes alienated from itself and then returns to itself from this alienation. . . ."<sup>48</sup>

In his marginalia to Schelling's *Introduction to the Sketch of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, written at about the same time that he wrote the letter to Green, Coleridge emphasizes, "It is not the doctrine itself that I am here blaming but the *method*."<sup>49</sup> I would suggest that this remark can be fruitfully applied to Coleridge's stance toward Schelling's foundationalist intuitionism: Coleridge shares Hegel's skepticism about Schelling's foundationalist methodology but he sides with Schelling *against* the mature Hegel in retaining the category of intuition itself.<sup>50</sup> Coleridge then goes on

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 876.

<sup>47</sup> Here I must take issue with Tim Milnes's observation that "Coleridge remained, like Schelling, a foundationalist" ("Through the Looking-Glass," 320). Milnes fails to address Coleridge's deep ambivalence toward Schelling's foundationalism. Douglas Hedley makes an interesting case for Coleridge's preference for Schellingian intuition to Hegel's dialectic due to his mystical leanings. See pp. 132–33 of "Coleridge's Intellectual Intuition, the Vision of God, and the Walled Garden of 'Kubla Khan,'" *JHI* 59 (1998): 115–34. Catherine Wallace explores many of the technical differences between Coleridge's and Schelling's positions but fails to discuss the more fundamental ones that I foreground here. See *The Design of Biographia Literaria* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 68–72.

<sup>48</sup> PS, 21.

<sup>49</sup> *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia IV*, ed. H. J. Jackson and G. Whalley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 375.

<sup>50</sup> In fact, Coleridge explicitly links his distinction between doctrine and method to *Anschauung* in a marginal comment on Fichte (dated 1815 or later): "Here as elsewhere I complain not as so much of the *doctrine*, as of the Chasms in the Proof of it—. For the actual existence of such a Faculty as that of *Anschauung* = Intuitio, Fichte might refer to our Dreams: and then he would have to shew, why our Waking Perceptions are so different. I may fancy myself awake when I am in sleep—but not asleep when awake." See *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia II*, 607.

to offer his version of Hegel's critique of Schelling's Absolute as "the night in which all cows are black" in his likening of Schelling's method to "a Candle placed horizontally and lit at both ends."<sup>51</sup> "At least," Coleridge elaborates, "a Plot to be found out in the last Scene of the 5th Act, but so shallow that it is seen thro' in the first of the first Act."<sup>52</sup> In a Hegelian vein, Coleridge complains that Schelling dogmatically presupposes the Absolute instead of arriving at it dialectically. Coleridge neatly sums up his fundamental objection to Schelling's foundationalism by emphasizing once again the etymology of "Voraussetzung": "An *absolute* voraussetzung [*sic*] is little less than a contradiction in terms, if the voraus be more than a superfluous word."<sup>53</sup>

In his marginalia to Schelling's *Philosophische Schriften*, referring to the system of Fichte and Schelling, Coleridge writes: "the more I reflect, the more [am] I convinced of the gross materialism, [which lies under the whole system]."<sup>54</sup> His quasi-Hegelian doubts about Schelling specifically concern intuition in his marginalia to Schelling's *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*. In response to Schelling's argument for arriving at "the *self of self-consciousness itself*," Coleridge admits, in a moment of startling honesty:

When I sink into myself, I have ever possessed intuitions like these; but when I read Fichte or Schelling, & of course judge by my discursive Intellect, then I am puzzled. For in order to account for the first limit or [o]bject, [S]elf-Consci[o]usness is [p]re-assumed—[as] the [c]ause—& [ye]t again [f]ind it a new [bi]rth, & [its] product a [co]mpound [ac]tivity [re]sulting from the presence of the Bound [or] Obstacle. It is true, the Author warns us, [th]at these predicabilia of Time, fore & after, [a]re but metaphors of necessity, but then an unnecessary verbal Confusion! At leas[t] it seems exposed to Schelling's own objection [to] Hypotheses, that they are made for the Fact, [or] rather f[or] the Sys[tem].<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>54</sup> *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia IV*, 412. Editors H. J. Jackson and George Whalley note that according to Coleridge himself, Schelling's *Philosophische Schriften* "was one of only three volumes of Schelling's works that C[oleridge] had acquired by Sept 1815 when *Biographia Literaria* was written," thus leaving open the possibility that Coleridge's marginalia to Schelling's *Philosophische Schriften* preceded the writing of the *Biographia Literaria*. See *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia IV*, 402.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 458. Editors Jackson and Whalley leave open the possibility that Coleridge's marginalia to Schelling's *System* were written before the composition of the *Biographia Literaria*. See *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia IV*, 447.

Coleridge's conflicted attitude toward intuition seems to involve a recognition of the force of the charge of radical subjectivism that Hegel lodges against Schelling in the *Phenomenology*. That is, *when Coleridge sinks into himself*, he has no doubt about these "intuitions," but as soon as these same intuitions are made the basis of a discursive philosophical system, he becomes "puzzled." At the end of this passage, Coleridge brilliantly applies Schelling's objection to hypotheses—"that they are made *for* the Fact, or rather for the System"—to Schelling's own hypothesis of intuition. Coleridge seems painfully aware here of the vicious circularity involved in making intuition the basis of a philosophical system: "For in order to account for the first limit or [o]bject, [S]elf-Consci[o]usness is [p]re-assumed—[as] the [c]ause—& [ye]t again [f]ind it a new [bi]rth." Schelling's philosophy, which sets out to *prove* that intuition is the Absolute, begins by *asserting* that intuition is the Absolute: it is in this sense that his methodology is like a candle lit at both ends. A little later in the marginalia, Coleridge questions whether intuition (*Anschauung*) can do all that Schelling wants it to do for his system: "I more and more see the arbitrariness and inconveniences of using the same term, Anschauen, for the productive and the contemplative Acts of the Intelligential Will, which Schelling calls das Ich."<sup>56</sup> That Coleridge does not dismiss the concept of intuition altogether at this point suggests that his investment in the concept runs deep.

I do not mean to imply, by demonstrating these "affinities" between Coleridge and Hegel, that Coleridge must have been familiar with Hegel's critique of Schelling in the *Phenomenology* (though I would not be surprised if he had been). Rather, what is perhaps most remarkable about Coleridge's critique of Schelling is that it is *almost*, but not quite Hegelian—in that Coleridge never seems willing to take the final step of rejecting Schelling's premise of intuition altogether. Considering Coleridge's engagement with Schelling in light of Hegel's philosophy should give us a clue as to why. Recall from Part One of this essay that Hegel singles out three basic features of intuition for attack: its subjectivism, its foundationalism, and its immediacy. It has emerged that while Coleridge shares Hegel's reservations about intuition's subjectivism and foundationalism, he departs from Hegel in leaving wholly uninterrogated the *immediacy* of intuition.

#### IV.

Admittedly, there is no conclusive evidence that any of Coleridge's recorded doubts about Schellingian intuition actually preceded the composition of

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

*Biographia Literaria*. However, by framing our ensuing examination of the *Biographia* in terms of Coleridge's critique of Schelling, I hope to counter the prevailing assumption that Coleridge went into the writing of the *Biographia* as a straightforward disciple of Schelling.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, traces of Coleridge's post-*Biographia* critique of Schelling can be discerned in the *Biographia* itself. Specifically, I want to make a case for attributing the failure of the transcendental deduction of the imagination in chapters twelve and thirteen of the *Biographia* to Coleridge's implicit doubts about Schelling's foundationalist intuitionism.

Critics have not fared well in trying to reconcile Coleridge's critique of materialism in the early chapters of volume one of the *Biographia* with his later attempted deduction of the imagination in chapters twelve and thirteen. I think we can apply Coleridge's charge that Schelling's system collapses into a "gross materialism"<sup>58</sup> to Coleridge's own deduction of the imagination (based heavily, of course, on Schelling's system). So instead of trying to reconcile his critique of materialism with his deduction of the imagination, I suggest that we read volume one of the *Biographia* as a self-undermining text in which the critique of materialism articulated in the early chapters vitiates the attempted deduction of the imagination in the final chapters.

Coleridge's critique of materialism in chapter eight of the *Biographia* is a sustained attack on materialism's pretense to foundationalism. I wish to isolate two of Coleridge's fundamental objections to materialism. First, Coleridge criticizes materialism's effort to ground itself in what he sarcastically calls "wonder-promising MATTER":

And what is become of the wonder-promising MATTER, that was to perform all these marvels by force of mere figure, weight, and motion? The most consistent proceeding of the dogmatic materialist is to fall back into the common rank of *soul-and-bodyists*; to affect the mysterious, and declare the whole process a revelation *given*, and not to be *understood*, which it would be prophane to examine too closely. Datur non intelligitur. [It is given, not under-

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<sup>57</sup> I am in basic agreement with the following insightful claim of Friedrich Uehlein's: "Das 12. und 13. Kapitel der *Biographia Literaria* ist keine bloße Zusammenstellung Schelling'scher Gedanken [the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of *Biographia Literaria* are not a mere summing-up of Schelling's thoughts]" (VII). For an elaboration of his claim, see pp. 7–9 of his *Die Manifestation des Selbstbewußtseins im konkreten 'Ich bin': Endliches und Unendliches im Denken S.T. Coleridges* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1982).

<sup>58</sup> *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 12: Marginalia IV*, 412.

stood.] But a revelation unconfirmed by miracles, and a faith not commanded by the conscience, a philosopher may venture to pass by, without suspecting himself of any irreligious tendency.<sup>59</sup>

What Coleridge attacks here is materialism's reliance on a ground (namely, matter) that is merely "given" rather than rigorously "understood." This critique of the mere *assertion* of a ground for a philosophical system—in the case of materialism, the shibboleth of "matter"—is repeated at various points throughout the later chapters of volume one of the *Biographia*. Take, for instance, the end of chapter eight:

It is a mere *sophisma pigrum* [slothful sophism], and . . . the arrogance of pusillanimity, which lifts up the idol of a mortal's fancy and commands us to fall down and worship it, as a work of divine wisdom, an ancile or palladium fallen from heaven. By the very same argument the supporters of the Ptolemaic system might have rebuffed the Newtonian, and pointing to the sky with self-complacent grin have appealed to *common sense*, whether the sun did not move and the earth stand still.<sup>60</sup>

Once again, Coleridge insists that merely appealing to the "given" is a slothful sophism—and the example of the "given" he offers in this case is "common sense." The second major objection Coleridge lodges against materialism is that of infinite regress. Coleridge argues:

It would be easy to explain a thought from the image on the retina, and that from the geometry of light, if this very light did not present the very same difficulty. We might as rationally chant the Brahmin creed of the tortoise that supported the bear, that supported the elephant, that supported the world, to the tune of 'This is the house that Jack built.'<sup>61</sup>

This criticism of materialism is so general that it could apply to any philosophical system that attempts to ground itself on an absolute ungrounded ground. The trouble with any such attempt, Coleridge suggests, is that there

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<sup>59</sup> BL, 135.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–38.

will always be some more primordial ground than the purportedly “absolute” ground—which then requires further explanation, *ad infinitum*.

How does chapter eight’s critique of materialism relate to the remaining chapters of volume one? Coleridge himself offers us a natural way of understanding this relation: “Thus as materialism has been generally taught, it is utterly unintelligible, and owes all its proselytes to the propensity so common among men to mistake distinct images for clear conceptions.”<sup>62</sup> Coleridge leaves mysterious what these “distinct images” and “clear conceptions” might mean, but fortunately, in an 1815 letter to Wordsworth, he clarifies these terms: “for the philosophy of mechanism . . . in every thing that is most worthy of the human Intellect strikes *Death*, and cheats itself by mistaking clear Images for distinct conceptions, and . . . idly demands Conceptions where Intuitions alone are possible or adequate to the majesty of the Truth.”<sup>63</sup> Here, Coleridge seems to align “clear Images” with “Intuitions,” which would mean that “clear conceptions” would belong to the realm of discursive understanding. It appears, then, that the fundamental problem with materialism is that it “mistakes” intuitions for discursive concepts; materialism fails to honor intuitions *as such*.

Coleridge’s defense of the mystics in chapter nine becomes understandable in this light. The mystics, Coleridge argues, “contributed to keep alive the *heart* in the *head*; gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentment, that all the products of the mere *reflective* faculty partook of DEATH.”<sup>64</sup> So Coleridge’s defense of mysticism becomes the crucial pivot from his critique of materialism to his introduction of intuition in chapter ten. The mystics gave Coleridge a vague “presentment” that there is more to heaven and earth than is dreamt in the philosophy of materialism. Coleridge will soon turn to Schelling to make this vague “presentment” the basis for a philosophical deduction of the imagination.

Toward the end of chapter nine, in fact, Coleridge prepares us for a strictly Schellingian theory of intuition: “With exception of one or two fundamental ideas, which cannot be withheld from FICHTE, to SCHELLING we owe the completion, and the most important victories, of this revolution in philosophy. To me it will be happiness and honor enough, should I succeed in rendering the system itself intelligible to my countrymen, and in the application of it to the most awful of subjects for the most important of purposes.”<sup>65</sup> Curiously, however, Coleridge’s first mention of

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 163–64.

intuition in the *Biographia* occurs in the digressive chapter ten, where it is defined as immediate knowledge (and without reference to Schelling): “I have followed Hooker, Sanderson, Milton, &c. in designating the *immediateness* of any act or object of knowledge by the word *intuition*. . . .”<sup>66</sup> Tellingly, he lumps the poet John Milton with the theologians Richard Hooker and Robert Sanderson as his authorities for defining intuition *tout court* as immediacy, thereby tacitly collapsing Schelling’s distinction between the irreducible *non*-immediacy of intellectual intuition and the compensatory immediacy of aesthetic intuition.

In a revealing footnote in chapter twelve of the *Biographia*, Coleridge attempts to justify his construal of the term “intuition”: “I take this occasion to observe, that here and elsewhere Kant uses the terms intuition, and the verb active (Intueri, *germanice* Anschauen) for which we have unfortunately no correspondent word, exclusively for that which can be represented in space and time. He therefore consistently and rightly denies the possibility of intellectual intuitions. But as I see no adequate reason for this exclusive sense of the term, I have reverted to its wider signification authorized by our elder theologians and metaphysicians, according to whom the term comprehends all truths known to us without a medium.”<sup>67</sup> What is perhaps most astonishing about this passage is that Coleridge views Kant’s denial of the possibility of intellectual intuitions as a strictly *terminological* issue: on Coleridge’s account, it is because Kant defines *Anschauung* as strictly sensible that he denies the possibility of intellectual intuitions. Obviously, this reasoning is exactly the wrong way round. In fact, it is because Kant denies the possibility of intellectual intuitions in the first place that he restricts his definition of *Anschauung* to the sensible domain. As a consequence of this egregious misreading, Coleridge blithely expands the Kantian notion of intuition to *include* the very intellectual intuitions that Kant denied.<sup>68</sup> In this respect, Coleridge departs from Fichte, Schelling, and the early Hegel, all of whom took great pains to distinguish their respective models of intellectual intuition from Kant’s own. It could be said, therefore, that Coleridge’s model of intuition is *pre*-Kantian insofar as he defines the term by recourse to the very “elder theologians” that Kant chastised in the first *Critique* for indulging in dogmatic metaphysics.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>68</sup> I am in basic agreement with Manfred Pütz’s claim that Coleridgean intuition “carries reverberations of *intellectual* intuition as a form of intuition that goes beyond immediate apprehension by the senses in space and time” (470). See his short article, “Coleridge’s Use of *Intuition* in the Kantian Sense and *OED*,” *Notes and Queries* 232 (1987): 468–70.

We can now turn to Coleridge's attempted justification of his theory of intuition in chapter twelve. Chapter eight's attack on materialism's mere assertion of a groundless ground has prepared us for some kind of reasoned argument for the category of intuition. Early in chapter twelve, however, Coleridge cites Plotinus in an attempt to *exempt* "intuitive knowledge" from the need for such an argument: "it is not lawful to enquire from whence it sprang, as if it were a thing subject to place and motion . . . it either appears to us or it does not appear. So that we ought not to pursue it with a view of detecting its secret source, but to watch in quiet till it suddenly shines upon us. . . ." <sup>69</sup> This ought to strike any reader as unacceptable argumentative legerdemain. We need only recall the way Coleridge mocks materialism for relying on "a revelation *given*" and not "*understood*," and for insisting that "it would be prophane" to examine such a revelation "too closely." <sup>70</sup> Here in chapter twelve, however, Coleridge simply seconds Plotinus's remark that it is "not lawful" to interrogate intuitive knowledge.

Pages later, Coleridge declares his foundationalist intuitionism by asserting that "original intuition" is the absolute ground of all our knowledge: "On the IMMEDIATE, which dwells in every man, and on the original intuition, or absolute affirmation of it . . . all the *certainty* of our knowledge depends. . . ." <sup>71</sup> Soon, however, Coleridge himself seems to recognize that such a bare assertion will not do—since he would remain vulnerable to the very charge that he leveled against materialism several chapters earlier. So he suddenly backtracks and proceeds to plagiarize Schelling's attempt to account for why intuition is uniquely suited to serve as the ungrounded ground of philosophy. He points out that "geometry . . . supplies philosophy with the example of a primary intuition, from which every science that lays claim to *evidence* must take its commencement." <sup>72</sup> A page later, Coleridge emphasizes the apodictic quality of intuition: any "realizing intuition . . . exists by and in the act that affirms its existence, which is known, because it is, and is, because it is known." <sup>73</sup> But the reader should rightly feel chagrined by this point, for every time Coleridge promises to give reasoned explanation for making intuition the absolute ground for philosophy, he simply gives us another groundless assertion. Even more troublingly, these assertions amount to the deeply problematic insistence

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 251.

that there is simply no way to provide a reasoned explanation for such a concept as intuition. Thus the promised *argument* for intuition is infinitely deferred.

Yet Coleridge himself seems aware of the deep problem with his methodology, which is why he attempts once again to justify his invocation of intuition. He argues (borrowing from Schelling) that the “fundamental presumption, THAT THERE EXIST THINGS WITHOUT US” is “nothing more than a prejudice.”<sup>74</sup> He then immediately insists on the “immediate certainty” of the “I AM” and meekly insists that it “cannot so properly be intitled a prejudice.”<sup>75</sup> Finally, perhaps Coleridge will deliver on the argument we have been waiting for. But notice how he proceeds: The “I AM . . . is groundless; but only because it is itself the ground of all other certainty.”<sup>76</sup> Coleridge is clearly spinning his wheels; each time he promises to give us a *justification* for grounding his system in intuition, he gives us yet another *assertion* for it. By this point, the reader seems perfectly justified in applying Coleridge’s 1818 polemic against Schelling’s system to Coleridge’s own mode of argumentation here in the *Biographia*: “You open your mouth to ask a modest question: and he *spits clean into it* by way of answer.”<sup>77</sup>

All of this wheel-spinning is preliminary to the purportedly systematic exposition of philosophical “theses” to follow. It is at this point that Coleridge makes his notorious promise of a transcendental deduction of the imagination: the “results” of chapter twelve “will be applied to the deduction of the imagination, and with it the principles of production and of genial criticism in the fine arts.”<sup>78</sup> Of course, without an argument for intuition—the foundation of his philosophical system—a “deduction of the imagination” is utterly hopeless. In the Scholium to Thesis II, Coleridge raises the danger of infinite regress that he earlier raised as an objection to materialism:

A chain without a staple, from which all the links derived their stability, or a series without a first, has been not inaptly allegorized, as a string of blind men, each holding the skirt of the man before him, reaching far out of sight, but all moving without the least deviation in one strait line. It would be naturally taken for

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 4, 875.

<sup>78</sup> BL, 264.

granted, that there was a guide at the head of the file: what if it were answered, No! Sir, the men are without number, and infinite blindness supplies the place of sight?<sup>79</sup>

The profound irony of this passage is that it can be read as damning commentary on Coleridge's own infinitely regressive "argument" for intuition. There seems to be an "infinite blindness" at the bottom of Coleridge's elaborate philosophical edifice. For his attempt in the ensuing theses to establish the intuition of the "I AM" as his fundamental philosophical principle proves to be as question-begging as his earlier efforts. Thesis IV suggests that there can only be "one such principle," and Thesis V argues that "such a principle cannot be any THING or OBJECT"<sup>80</sup> but it is also not to be found "in object or subject taken separately."<sup>81</sup> He concludes: "it *must* be found in that which is neither subject nor object exclusively, but which is the identity of both."<sup>82</sup>

We are entitled to ask at this point—as Coleridge does in his 1818 attack on Schelling—why "*must*"? Coleridge's criticism of Schelling seems all too appropriate here: "Needful for *his* system it may be! *Susceptible* of proof it may be—but assuredly *requiring* proof!"<sup>83</sup> Thesis VI thus amounts to nothing more than a dogmatic assertion: "This principle, and so characterized manifests itself in the SUM or I AM. . . . In this, and this alone, object and subject, being and knowing, are identical, each involving and supposing the other."<sup>84</sup> There is a revealing moment in Thesis VII which registers Coleridge's own anxieties about the inadequacy of his justification of intuition: "Only in the self-consciousness of a spirit is there the required identity of object and of representation. . . . If this could be proved, the immediate reality of all intuitive knowledge would be assured."<sup>85</sup> Suddenly, in what is supposed to be a systematic proof for establishing self-consciousness as the basis of all knowledge, Coleridge resorts to the conditional: *if* this could be proved, *then* "the immediate reality of all intuitive knowledge" would be assured. Yet such a systematic proof for self-consciousness is never given, so we have no right to trust in "intuitive knowledge" after all.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., my italics.

<sup>83</sup> *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 4, 873.

<sup>84</sup> BL, 272–73.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 278.

Due to this lack of a foundation, the promised deduction of the imagination is never given. Instead, the sixty-page chapter twelve is followed by a scant twelve-page chapter thirteen, where he offers his famously cryptic theory of the imagination.<sup>86</sup> The discontinuity between the two chapters could not be any starker. Coleridge's quasi-Hegelian doubts about Schelling's foundationalist intuitionism seem, in a way, to paralyze him—thereby preventing him from theorizing adequately the intuitional base necessary for his deduction of the imagination to succeed.<sup>87</sup>

## V.

Near the end of his life, Coleridge himself acknowledged the profound failings of the philosophical argument of the *Biographia*. A month before his death, he wrote, regarding the *Biographia*: “The metaphysical disquisition at the end of the first volume . . . is unformed and immature;—it contains fragments of the truth, but it is not fully thought out.”<sup>88</sup> This verdict ought to be understood, I think, in relation to an astonishing statement he made several years earlier, in 1831 (the year of Hegel's death):

My system, if I may venture to give it so fine a name, is the only attempt I know, ever made to reduce all knowledges into harmony. It opposes no other system, but shows what was true in each; and how that which was true in the particular, in each of them became error, *because* it was only half the truth. I have endeavoured to unite the insulated fragments of truth, and therewith to frame a perfect mirror. I show to each system that I fully understand and rightfully appreciate what that system means; but then I lift up that system to a higher point of view, from which I enable it to see its former position, where it was, indeed, but under another light and with different relations; so that the fragment of truth is not only acknowledged, but explained.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 304–5.

<sup>87</sup> Kathleen Wheeler offers an interesting interpretation of Coleridge's theory of imagination in the *Biographia*. See “Coleridge's Theory of Imagination: a Hegelian Solution to Kant?” in *The Interpretation of Belief*, ed. David Jasper (London: Macmillan, 1986): 16–40. However, she neglects what seems to me to be the crucial fact that Hegel would never have sanctioned Coleridge's “deduction” of the imagination in the first place since he would have rejected its foundationalist basis in intuition.

<sup>88</sup> Cited in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 4, 874, fn. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Cited in McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 49.

Thomas McFarland notes how similar this ideal is to “what Hegel actually achieved.”<sup>90</sup> It is as if Coleridge finally “comes clean” here by admitting the force of Hegel’s methodological revolution in philosophy. In contrast to the foundationalism of the *Biographia*, Coleridge articulates a philosophical ideal strikingly resembling Hegel’s phenomenology of spirit, in which “all knowledges” are reduced “into harmony.” It must be said, however, that in Coleridge’s philosophy, this projected ideal was never ultimately realized—perhaps because Coleridge, unlike Hegel, was never quite prepared to give up on the dream of intuitive immediacy.

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<sup>90</sup> McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, 49.