Coleridge and Energy

Stuart Peterfreund

Coleridge had a lifelong fascination with the concept of energy and the implications of that concept. In 1794, the year in which he composed *Religious Musings*, Coleridge celebrated a God who is “Nature’s essence, mind, and energy!”¹ The antithesis of Newton’s Lord God Pantocrator, who is the source of “action at a distance,” Coleridge’s God is an indwelling divine presence. Energy (as its etymology from *en-ergeia* suggests) means either the potential to accomplish work or the actual work itself, latent or actualized within the object, rather than impinging upon the object from without, as does Newtonian “action at a distance.” For Coleridge in 1794, energy was an indwelling principle responsible for all levels of outcome, up to and including the theodical. Moreover, the Coleridge of 1794 held that energy resided alike in the mind of God and in the human mind, the principal distinction between the two manifestations of energy being one of degree rather than of kind.² The heavenly provenance of energy as it exists in the human mind and the assumption that energy constitutes the human maker in the image of the divine Maker³ are the two articles of faith behind another statement by the Coleridge of 1794; this one is found in the now justly obscure “Lines on a Friend Who Died of a Frenzy Fever Induced by Calamitous Reports”: “To me hath Heaven with bounteous hand assign’d/Energetic Reason and a shaping mind” (*PW* 1:77, ll. 39–40).

Statements like those above are testaments to a belief on the part of the young Coleridge in a Unitarianism or Pantheism that he was later to abandon in favor of a more nearly orthodox, Trinitarian Christianity.⁴ There is evidence for the shift from the former creed to the latter in an undated MS. note to *The Destiny of Nations*, begun in 1796, first published in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), and revised and republished by Coleridge again
in 1828, 1829, and 1834. Glossing his own lines, in which Joan of Arc is
made to exclaim,

"Glory to Thee, Father of Earth and Heaven!
All-conscious Presence of the Universe!
Nature's vast ever-acting Energy!"

Coleridge at the same time repudiates their heterodoxy and yet defends
their celebration of energy as a vital principle. "Tho' these Lines may bear
a sane sense, yet they are easily, and more naturally interpreted with a very
false and dangerous one. But I was at that time one of the Mongrels, the
Josephidites [Josephides = the Son of Joseph], a proper name of distinc-
tion from those who believe in, as well as believe Christ the only begotten
Son of the Living God before all Time" (PW 1:146-47,ll. 459-61; 147n.).

Indeed, to the very end of his life, Coleridge maintained a belief in
energy as a vital principle that existed in all living creatures in varying
degrees and that gave human beings, in whom energy existed in the great-
est degree, the ability to participate in theodical or providential design by
understanding (though no longer enacting) it. In the Table Talk entry for
December 3, 1827, Coleridge states that "Internal or mental energy and
external or corporeal modifiability are in inverse proportions. In man, in-
ternal energy is greater than in any other animal; and you will see that
he is less changed by climate than any animal. For the highest and lowest
specimens of man are not one half as much apart from each other as the
different kinds even of dogs. . . ." And in the entry for March 1, 1834,
Coleridge gives some insight into the purpose of such "internal energy"—
the discernment of theodical or providential design in the universe. "My
mind is always energic—I don't mean energetic; I require in everything
what, for lack of another word, I may call propriety,—that is, the reason
why the thing is at all, and why it is there or then rather than elsewhere
or at another time." The energetic-energetic distinction marks Coleridge's
abdication of his claim for the mind's creative efficacy, celebrated in the
Biographia Literaria (1816) as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal
act of creation in the infinite 1 AM." Some twenty years before the 1834
Table Talk entry Coleridge had, in The Friend (1809-10), distinguished be-
tween nature as process and nature as object, nature as creative and nature
as created. The former is the "energetic (= forma formans); the latter, the
"material (= forma formata)."

The preceding examples merely suggest rather than exhaust the range
of Coleridge’s use of the word energy and its derivative forms. Moreover, these examples hardly touch on those instances in which Coleridge discusses the concept of energy without employing the word itself verbatim. For example, the discussion of imagination, on which chapter 13 of the Biographia concludes, advances implicitly the claim that the secondary imagination energizes its object by becoming the indwelling vital principle of that object. The secondary imagination, responsible for artistic outcome if not for the theodical kind, “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.”

As important as the concept of energy was to Coleridge, he did not discover it, nor did he even popularize it to any extraordinary degree. Virtually all the English Romantics used the word and the concept it denotes with approbation. Even Coleridge’s archcritic Carlyle, notwithstanding his reservations about Coleridge’s philosophical cogency, paid tribute along with Coleridge to “the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all of which have a truly vital and infinite character. . . .”

Speaking of Blake’s lifetime, the dates of which are nearly the same as those of Coleridge’s, Morton D. Paley has, with some justification, concluded that the term energy was, during the last third of the eighteenth century and the first third of the nineteenth, “fashionable,” approaching the status of a “cult-word . . . employed with an aura of positiveness and varying degrees of precision.”

The two-thirds of a century of which Paley speaks may be regarded as an “age of energy,” a period in which Blake, Coleridge, and virtually all others who used the term without satirical intent did so with decidedly anti-Newtonian motives and in the service of a decidedly anti-Newtonian program. It was during this period that Thomas Young, writing in A Course of Lectures on Natural Philosophy and the Mechanical Arts (1807), first used the word energy in its modern physical acceptation, thus replacing the Newtonian vis-body explanation of physical phenomena with an explanation based on an indwelling ability, actual (kinetic) or potential, to do work.
especially those distinctions to be observed between dead bodies and living ones. The latter manifest an energy that is responsible for creation, development, and outcome. "It is by the energy of this same living power, resident in the seed of plants, and in the fecundated ova of animals, that the acorn becomes evolved into an oak. . . ."13 Saumarez, as Coleridge notes in the *Biographia*, demonstrated to his satisfaction that no infinite power could be immanent in a finite substance.

The anti-Newtonianism of Young in mechanics and Saumarez in what was to become genetics may at first seem anomalous, not at all part of the whiggish version of the history of science that denies pride of place to Young in favor of Rankine's "energetics" (1855) or Thomson and Tait's "rediscovery" of energy (1879), or denies pride of place to Saumarez in favor of Darwin (1859) or Haeckel's "recapitulation" theory (1866).15 Such a history postulates the orderly, if revolutionary replacement of the Newtonian "paradigm" by a successor only when the "normal science" of the laboratory fell prey to enough "anomalies" to dictate the need for a new "paradigm."16 But such an account, although it may be narratively satisfying, loses sight of the facts. The same *caveat* that Thomas S. Kuhn advances for those who would treat the development of electrical theory as illustrative of the whiggish scenario of progress and development applies to those who would treat the development of science at large in that way. Just as electrical theory cannot be separated from a larger context of the physical sciences as a discrete discourse with a progressive etiology, science at large cannot be separated from a similar larger context of the human sciences.17 Young and Saumarez may write as scientists, but they are fully aware of what Gerald Holton would call the "themata" that constitute their larger agenda, as well as the scientific one.18

Although it only gained scientific currency later on, when it had been cleansed of its theodical implications, the term *energy*, as used by scientists like Young and Saumarez, represented the attempt to unify the discourses of the human sciences by showing the essential unity of process and theodicy by postulating an indwelling principle responsible for all observable processes and phenomena and connate with God. Young was somewhat circumspect about this agenda, but his Quaker upbringing (*DNB* 68:393–94) predisposed him to a belief in the efficacy of indwelling divine presence.19 Saumarez was less circumspect than Young. Writing in *A New System of Physiology* (1798), in a chapter entitled "Of the Energy of the Living Principle of the Human Species in the Process of Evolution," Saumarez
specifies "the living principle" as being essentially creative, in a figure richly anticipatory of Coleridge. This "principle which the ovum contains, bears the same relation to matter into which it is received, as the painter does to the canvas on which he draws..." The adumbration by this principle of a Maker who works in a living medium as the painter does in his inert one is entirely intentional: "the living principle" takes its rise from God, and its indwelling presence in all living beings brings the life process into harmony with creation's theodical design. In an argument that anticipates Coleridge's regarding the degrees of "internal energy" in different species, Saumarez has the following to say about "the living principle": "That Providence seems to have this principle especially in view, of accommodating the nature of the recipient to the degree of power in the agent, is not only evident from what we have seen in the various systems in general we have examined, but it is illustrated by the human species in particular."20

Young and Saumarez were both scientists known to Coleridge through their work.21 But even before the publication of that work, Coleridge exhibited the same anti-Newtonian predispositions as the two, and for the same purpose—the defense of an agenda that held the essential unity of process and theodicy. In The Destiny of Nations, a poem already noted in this discussion for its celebration of the principle of energy, Coleridge condemns Newtonian mechanists for their attempts to separate the phenomena of physical process from a divinely induced structure of causation.

Proud in their meanness: and themselves they cheat
With noisy emptiness of learned phrase,
Their subtle fluids, impacts, essences,
Self-working tools, uncaused effects, and all
Those blind Omniscients, those Almighty Slaves,
Untenanting creation of its God.

(PW 1:132,11.30-35)

Five years after this attack, Coleridge explicitly condemns Newtonianism and the epistemology that privileges it, calling Newton "a mere materialist" and elaborating on the charge that "Mind in his system is always passive—a lazy Looker-on on an external World. If the mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God's Image, & that too in the sublimest sense—the Image of the Creator—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system."22
Coleridge’s comments make it clear that the issue is not with Newtonian physics *qua* physics. As Trevor H. Levere notes, Coleridge did not have sufficient mathematics to understand that aspect of Newtonian physics fully, let alone to criticize it. Rather, the issue is with the assumptions on which Newtonian physics rests—assumptions that grant priority to Body over Soul or Mind, to metaphoric vehicle over metaphoric tenor, to the “it is” of the object-world over the “I am” of the subject-world.

Energy as a concept did not come to assume the meaning it had for the likes of Young, Saumarez, and Coleridge by accident. Although even the *OED* does not give full and accurate attribution of the English word’s Greek sources, *energy*, from the time that it came into the language in the early sixteenth century, was a word that signified the attempt to merge process and theodicy. The obvious source of the English word is *energeia*, as that word is used in Aristotle, where it refers to the sort of metaphor that describes process, calling “up a mental picture of something ‘acting’ or moving” (*OED* 3.2:167). For example, in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (3.11, sec. 2), Aristotle notes that Isocrates’ figure “‘thee, like a sacred animal ranging at will’ expresses actuality [*energeia*].” But there is also another Greek source for the English word—the New Testament, and there most especially the Pauline epistles. In Ephesians 1:19, for example, Paul writes, “And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working [*energeia*] of his mighty power.” Paul’s claim here is that the “mighty power” of Jesus manifests, in its working, the *energeia* of God’s indwelling presence. By means of that presence, the Judeo-Christian theodicy proceeds from old to new, from fallenness to everlastingness.

Given the range of etymological sources at his disposal, it is no wonder that John Skelton, coining what may have been the first English form based on *energeia*, uses that coinage to describe the act of prophecy in its office of reconciling process and theodicy. *A Replycation* (1528), Skelton’s defense of the craft of poetry—and of his laureateships of Oxford and Cambridge—cites as worthy predecessors David, “With his harpe of prophecy,” and Saint Jerome, “Warblyng with his strynges / Of such theo-logical thynges.” Skelton then goes on to explain

How there is a spirituall
And a mysteriall
And a mysticall
Effecte Energiall
As the Grekes do it call
Of suche a pregnacy
Of hevenly inspyracion
In laureate creacyon...26

This discussion is not the proper context for summarizing the fortunes of energy as a concept and word from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth.27 Suffice it to say that events as seemingly disconnected as the death of Charles I (and with him divine-right kingship in England), the replacement of Aristotelian physics by the Galilean-Newtonian variety, and the influence of philosophical skepticism on religious orthodoxy caused the word energy to assume the negative connotations that it carried down to the turn of the nineteenth century—connotations most offensive to those who fancied themselves spokespersons for religious and political orthodoxy.28 Notwithstanding such connotations and social pressure, however, the word began to reemerge, with approbation, in contexts where it was used specifically to refer to an indwelling principle responsible for the harmony of process with theodicy. In a 1775 sermon entitled “Working out Our Own Salvation,” John Wesley comes startlingly close, in his title and in the sermon itself, to using the word energy, albeit in the original Greek form, in the manner in which Thomas Young later uses it. “To thelein...we render to will, plainly indicating every good desire, whether relating to our tempers, words, or actions; to inward or outward holiness. And to energein, which we render to do, manifestly implies all that power from on high, all that energy which works in us every right disposition, and then furnishes us for every good word and work.”29 And in a 1778 response to Dr. Price’s attack on his Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit, published in that same year, Joseph Priestley, unedified by Price’s Dissertation on Providence (1768), which he had enjoined Priestley to read, states that Price’s text “only shews, though in a very clear and masterly manner, that the present laws of nature require an intelligence, and an energy, of which what we usually call matter is not capable. Now I certainly admit to an intelligent and active cause in nature, and have no objection to supposing that this intelligent cause has even more to do with the execution of the laws of nature than Dr. Price is willing to allow.”30

Priestley’s Disquisitions “entered significantly into” Coleridge’s Religious Musings, according to Levere.31 And while Priestley’s Unitarianism may have made him a kindred spirit to the young Coleridge, his use of Disquisitions and the concept of energy that that work sets forth has another
purpose that remained with Coleridge long after he had renounced Unitarianism and embraced Trinitarian orthodoxy. If one is able to unify process and theodicy under the aegis of energy, that person is in a position to ascribe to process an indwelling presence responsible for a design in the enactment of process that overwheels any consideration or imputation of evil. In such a scheme, falls become fortunate, not to say temporary; suffering becomes redemptive, not to say purifying; apparent evil becomes ultimate good. Moreover, the apprehensions necessary for the individual to understand the mere appearance of evil and the triumph over it are accessible to the individual while that person is still alive. Such apprehensions, although they may not be Wordsworth's "simple produce of the common day,"32 wait only on the apprehension of the energy within and the energy without, followed by the insight that it is the same energy in both cases, and that what M. H. Abrams calls "the theodicy of the private life" and "the theodicy of the landscape"33 depend on one and the same indwelling principle of energy, linking the created world irrevocably to the design of providence itself. Simply stated, Coleridge's adoption of the concept of energy, which he may have had from Priestley, Wesley, or numerous others, is his attempt to come to grips with the problem of evil and to lay it to rest.

Thus Coleridge, convinced at least momentarily that he is possessed both of energy and of the apprehension of its presence within himself and abroad,34 assumes the prophetic office and addresses the

numberless,

Whom foul Oppression's ruffian gluttony
Drives from Life's plenteous feast!

a mob that includes the murderous highwayman "made wild by want," the seduced and abandoned woman turned prostitute, the old woman turned parish almsperson, and others, telling them,

Yet is the day of Retribution nigh:
The Lamb of God hath opened the fifth seal:
And upward rush on swiftest wings of fire
The innumerable multitude of wrongs
By man on man inflicted! Rest awhile,
Children of Wretchedness! The hour is nigh . . .

(PW 1:120–21, ll. 276–308)
On that day, not only will every valley be exalted and every mountain and hill made low, but all of the energized natural world will be etherealized and all of the ethereal world will be naturalized as a way of demonstrating the common indwellingness of the energy within each. At the time of this demonstration, apparent evil will disappear before energy like day before night.

Thus from the Elect, regenerate through faith,
Pass the dark Passions and what thirsty cares
Drink up the spirit, and the dim regards
Self-centre. Lo they vanish! or acquire
New names, new features—by supernal grace
Enrobed with Light, and naturalised in Heaven.

(PW 1:112-13, ll. 88-93)

But in the tell-tale phrase “self-centre” and the epic simile that follows, it is possible to glimpse the problems raised by Coleridge’s decision to embrace the concept of energy as a solution to the problem of evil. “Passions and . . . thirsty cares” may absorb the spirit and give rise to the solipsistic self-regard that absorbs the fallen and the elect alike. But if the apprehension of indwelling energy is the evidence of one’s election, then the means of attaining “supernal grace” is a species of self-contemplation that is difficult to distinguish from the effect of those “dark Passions” that “Drink up the spirit, and the dim regards / Self-centre.” When one is truly numbered among the elect and such self-contemplation goes well, then the apprehension of energy indwelling within and the access of grace that follows is “As when a shepherd on a vernal morn / Through some thick fog creeps timorous with slow foot,” keeping his eye trained on the partially obscured road ahead, until

lo! the bursting Sun!
Touched by the enchantment of that sudden beam
Straight the black vapour melteth, and in globes
Of dewy glitter gems each plant and tree . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
And wide around the landscape streams with glory!

(PW 1:113, ll. 94-104)

But the process may as well lead to solipsistic estrangement and despair. More than thirty years after he wrote Religious Musings, at approximately the same time he renounced the energetic faculty of mind, Coleridge
brought back the same simile with a difference. Apparently, that vexing problem of evil, which the concept of energy had been intended to solve through the unification of process and theodicy, was still a problem; and therefore the self-contemplation that had earlier been advanced as the means of apprehending the indwelling presence of energy as evidence of election was more likely to maroon the percipient in solipsism than it was to acquaint that person with grace or glory. “Constancy to an Ideal Object” (1825–26) identifies nature as the locus of lapse and loss, the place of all who “veer or vanish,” rather than as the locus of any indwelling presence such as energy which, if it exists, has been relegated to the realm of the ideal. And the contemplation of that realm is at best difficult and at worst the sort of false consciousness that leads to solipsism,

as when

The woodman winding westward up the glen
At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,
Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
An image with a glory round its head;
The enamoured rustic worships its fair hues,
Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!

(PW1:455–56, ll. 2, 25–32)

The effect of Coleridge's peculiar need to proceed in his philosophical and theological investigations by beginning with the problem of consciousness—and there with the positing of his own consciousness as object—is precisely the lethargy and intimations of solipsism glimpsed in “Constancy.” Not trusting his apprehension of energy within his own mind or abroad, Coleridge sought to verify the means of apprehension, an operation that entailed the willed apprehension of consciousness, which was thought responsible for the unwilled apprehension of energy on the basis of like apprehending like. In contrast to Keats, who understood that such “Things cannot to the will / Be settled, but they tease us out of thought,” Coleridge wished to settle the problem of consciousness to the will, and thereby, he thought, to settle the problem of evil by verifying that the apprehension of energy as the means to overcoming the latter problem was, in fact, a valid apprehension. Although he wrongly attributes Coleridge’s dilemma to opium addiction, Laurence S. Lockridge provides an aptly telling analysis of the effect of will in solving the problems he posed for himself.
volition no longer coordinates impulse and motive, will and consciousness. The paradoxical result is that though Coleridge is driven by ever-increasing impulses of a powerful will, he exists in a paralyzed and energyless state. The will sends out a “galvanic fluid” that results in a simulacrum of real motion: the compulsiveness that is identical with loss of freedom. The “Spirit of Life that makes Soul and Body one” is wanting.

At issue in Coleridge’s attempt to solve the problem of consciousness as a necessary prolegomena to the problem of evil are the origins and identity of what he would like to consider energy and attribute to origins and ends in God. The question is whether the mind, functioning as the vessel of energy, is God’s place and thereby a participant in the theological triumph of good over evil, or whether the mind harbors a willfulness that is the simulacrum of energy—self-originated and self-contemplated—making the mind not God’s place, but rather its own, satanic place. Two corollary questions concern mixed influence and total renunciation: If the mind is the battleground on which divine energy and its satanic simulacrum meet, is it possible for the struggle to be resolved on the part of a tertium aliquid that inclines to and thereby demonstrates the triumph of the divine over the satanic? And if the mind is in fact wholly under the influence of satanic energy, is there any chance for it to throw off that influence and grant access to the divine?

Like his use of the word energy, Coleridge’s adherence to this agenda of concerns spanned his mature lifetime. This adherence precedes his reading in German philosophy, to be sure. It is the commitment that draws Coleridge back again and again to what Jean-Pierre Mileur calls “the Protean problem of immanence: immanence of the author in his work, of identity in consciousness, of God in his creation.” It is the commitment that leads Coleridge to solve the problem of immanence in one instance by positing the sort of etherealized interpenetration envisioned in Religious Musings, then to draw back with the realization that the problem of immanence is in fact a problem of origins. It is a commitment that leads Coleridge to attempt to deal with the problem of origins by proposing a magnum opus geared not only to the “systematic reconciliation of the ‘I am’ with the ‘it is,’” but also to the demonstration that the apparent opposition of these categories may be resolved through the discovery of a divinely originated indwelling principle found to exist in both. In so doing, Coleridge could not only solve “the methexic problem that lies at
the root of all reticulative philosophy”—the reconciliation of apparent opposites through the discovery of a common universal ground—he could also pursue an explanation of the "unaccountable fact" of Original Sin.\(^{41}\)

The result of the direct pursuit of this agenda by Coleridge was the sort of solipsism and despair glimpsed in the closing lines of "Constancy." Coleridge learned through painful personal experience one of the salient lessons that follows from the Cartesian sundering of mind and body. The "ability to know itself incorrigibly ('privileged access')" does not, according to Richard Rorty, necessarily give the mind or the consciousness that it houses the "ability to grasp universals . . . ability to sustain relations to the inexistent ('intentionality') . . . [or] ability to act freely. . . ."\(^{42}\) With specific respect to the question of energy, construed as the ability to perform work, no poem of Coleridge's more poignantly illustrates an awareness of the limits arising from the inability to solve the problem of consciousness than "Work without Hope" (1825). In that poem, the consciousness of the speaker—both of his otherness and of the lack of hope that characterizes and enforces that otherness—isolates the speaker from nature awakening at the passage of winter into spring. And that isolation, not merely from nature but from nature's theodical potential, is precisely the difference between work without hope and work with—between to thelein, the willing of "every good desire, whether relating to our tempers, words or actions; to inward or outward holiness," and to energein, the working of "all that power from on high, all that energy which works in us every right disposition, and then furnishes us for every good word and work." The absence of the energy that, according to Wesley, so furnishes the individual is evident from the speaker's description of himself lacking "every good word and work": "With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll: / And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?" (PW 1:447, ll. 11-12). That absence means any work attempted by the speaker is willed work—mechanical and incapable of transforming. "Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve" (l. 13) at least in part because it is the sort of willed work that cannot transform nectar to honey, as the bees' work can (see ll. 2,6). Willed work does not work "in us every right disposition," but rather precludes such disposition, isolates the individual from it, or both. Such work, moreover, ratifies Coleridge's conviction "that man was and is a fallen creature, not by accidents of bodily constitution or any other cause . . . but as diseased in his will, in that will which is the true and only strict synonyme of the word I, or the intelligent Self."\(^{43}\)

Moments as painfully revealing as the last discussed are found with
some regularity in the poetry after “Dejection: An Ode” (1802). Throughout most of the prose, and in the poetry up to 1802, Coleridge elected to treat the apprehension of energy and the several problems such apprehension entailed in what, for him, was a scientific rather than a philosophic or imaginative manner. Although Coleridge did not have the mathematics to do so, his treatment has affinities with the strategy devised by the likes of Descartes and Galileo for the treatment of res extensa, the world of matter, except that instead of mathematizing nature, Coleridge scientized (or perhaps dialecticalized) it. The end of this strategy was to determine, as Dorothy Emmet observes, whether the powers that Coleridge “found operative in his own mind,” as a representative human mind, were “connatural . . . with powers of life and growth in nature, and finally . . . alike depending on a spiritual ground.” The oft-discussed chapter 13 of the Biographia begins with the goal of making such a determination—not merely the stipulation that the powers operative in the human mind are “connatural” with those in nature, but the proof that the “ tertium aliquid, or finite generation” of such powers, manifested as opposed Cartesian forces, is on the order of a positive outcome. The problem with such an undertaking, as Mileur suggests, is that the third term in question depends for its existence on the reconciliation of dualisms—mind and matter, perception and will—that are fundamentally irreconcilable. In a poem such as The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1797), discussed below, the way beyond such dualisms is the Christ-like love that allows the Mariner to bless and become one with the water snakes, anticipated to an extent by a “donation” of another sort in Chapter 13—the anonymous letter from a “friend” that specifies the imaginative conditions under which loving, blessing, and a “connatural” state of affairs is possible.

Coleridge's shifting of the problem of consciousness to the realm of dialecticalized science is nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of light and color, an aspect of physical theory with definite theological overtones, most especially since the time of Newton's Optics (1704) and its highly suggestive thirtieth and thirty-first queries. Nearer to Coleridge's own time, the theology latent in Thomas Young's theory of light and color, which sought to supplant Newton's theory and its pantocratic point-source of corpuscular light with a wave theory granting light immanent properties, drew down the wrath of the Scottish common-sense philosophers and their spokesperson, Henry Brougham. Calling Young's theory the product of “a warm and misguided [enthusiastic?] imagination,” Brougham illustrated the self-contradictory secularism of this "common sense" New-
atonian legacy. On the one hand, as Richard Olson notes, the Scottish philosophers “consciously emphasized the heuristic value of models”; but on the other, they conspired to duck the issue of where such models and the inspiration for them might come from, dissociating “the models and the theories arising from them from any ontological content.”

As Levere notes, although without fully appreciating his theological implications, Young and his theory of light figure into Coleridge's thought on the subject, as do other writers more obviously aware of theological issues, such as Schelling and Steffens. Not only did Coleridge undertake to show that “light and colors illustrated dynamic logic, and [that] their total influence comprehended many energies, including calorific and chemical ones,” he also undertook to show, as was the case with his development of the analogy between light and sound, that any explanation of the phenomena of light and colors must be “founded in dynamic philosophy and Biblical exegesis . . . .” As a mode of inquiry, biblical exegesis must be understood not only to include the “higher criticism” and its theological and philosophical predecessors, but also the mystics Coleridge read, including Behmen, and such literary exegetes as Milton.

How, then, does Coleridge propound his theory of the relationship of light and color? An 1820 notebook entry proclaims that “Gravity in & subordinate to Light is color. . . . I fear not to call . . . color the body of Light.” The metaphor of subordination is neither incidental nor idle, appearing three years earlier in a letter to Tieck, where Coleridge proclaims “Color = Gravitation under the praepotence of light.” As schematized in what Levere terms “a standard Coleridgean pentad,” the “praepotence of light” evolves out of a prior state labelled “Indistinction/(the Mosaic Chaos):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indistinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(the Mosaic Chaos)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis</th>
<th>Mesothesis</th>
<th>Antithesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gravity</td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Light</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Synthesis
Color
Whatever the heuristic value of Coleridge's theory, it is certainly rich in ontological—and—theological content. Even atheists are familiar with the biblical account in Genesis of how God began to fill and give form to a formless and void earth ("[the Mosaic Chaos]") with the efficacious command, "Let there be light" (1:3). But the position of light in Coleridge's pentad is that of the second term (antithesis) rather than that of the first term (thesis) of this dialectical structure, indicating that gravity, (the thesis) preceded light. There is nothing in Genesis itself to justify the sequence, where a gravity-defying “darkness” seems suspended “upon the face of the deep” (1:2) and no cause precedes the command for light. And yet Coleridge is clear that light is an older power than gravity, which is subordinate to light: “Color = Gravity under the praepotence of light.”

If there is a contradiction involved, it is a contradiction of two conflicting points of view. The pentad attempts to show things from an absolute point of view, uninformed by the fallen perspective of humanity, while the prose statements attempt to explain the phenomena in question from that fallen perspective. In theological terms, the answer to the question “what is light?” is clear enough. Even Newton's “Rules of Reasoning in Philosophy” argues for a common cause of the light observed in a cooking fire and the light of the sun. But what is gravity? Here Coleridge apparently would disagree with Newton (and agree with Blake): gravity for Coleridge is not the action at a distance by a pantocrator-God bent on harmonizing the motions of the solar system by the application of that force. Gravity is, rather, the tendency to fall; and although the Fall of Adam and Eve comes after the creation of light in the Bible, the fall of Satan precedes that creation in Paradise Lost. Milton's epic opens with Satan and his rebellious host "Hurl'd headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Sky," those "happy Realms of Light" in which Satan was "Cloth'd with transcendent brightness." From that place Satan and his host fell "With hideous ruin and combustion down / To bottomless perdition, there to dwell" in a realm containing "No light, but rather darkness visible. . . ." Given this scenario, Coleridge's "Mesothesis" of heat may refer either to the infernal circumstances of Satan after the fall from Heaven, the battle between the angelic legions led by Christ and the satanic legions, or both, since both Hell and the battleground in question are certainly hot places.

Heat is also a characteristic of the "Libyan air adust" (12.635) that awaits Adam and Eve beyond the East gate of Eden. How is one to overcome the struggle of the two opposing dialectical terms and reach the synthesis of
color? Color is conspicuously absent from the descriptions of Hell in the opening books of *Paradise Lost*, as well as from the description of Christ's triumph over Satan in Book 6. As Michael's comments in Book 11 suggest—and as Genesis 6:5–9:17 would tend to corroborate—the synthesis that is color is a phenomenon observed by human beings and pertaining to them alone as *embodied* creatures (“I fear not to call . . . color the body of Light”). Color marks the contingent triumph, in the world, of good over evil—that moment at which light asserts its “praepotence” over gravity and humanity is bound to light through a covenant from God, in token of which he gives his rainbow—color, in other words. In describing the significance of the rainbow that God sets as his covenant following the Flood, Michael explains, in response to Adam's anthropomorphized question about “those color'd streaks in Heav'n / Distended as the Brow of God appeas'd” (11.879–80), that the rainbow is a synthesis, in the sense that a contract, as agreement between two (opposed) parties is a synthesis. The rainbow God shows to Noah, and all subsequent rainbows, are to be viewed as types of

... a Cov'nant never to destroy
The Earth again by flood, nor let the Sea
Surpass his bounds, nor Rain to drown the World

... till fire purge all things new,
Both Heav'n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell.

(11.893–901)

The reference to the Last Judgment places the rainbow, the covenant it signifies, and the colors (three of them, suggestively) that are the means of signification within the larger context of the Judeo-Christian theodicy. Interestingly enough, at the end of time, when the Last Judgment occurs, color as the token of a temporary synthesis of dialectically opposed forces will no longer be needed or even present. The final images of the City of God in Revelation are of transparency and pure (unrefracted) light: “and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. . . . And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (21:21,23). From the perspective of this world—the Adamic perspective of *Paradise Lost*, Books 11–12, then, color is a contingent synthesis, a third term (*tertium aliquid*?), the “body of light” that one puts on as a consequence of
the Fall into this world and the bodily limits set by the circumstance of Original Sin and that one takes off at that moment when the Resurrection of the Dead sets gravity at nought and signals the annihilation of Satan and the return of pure light "connatural" with God. Seen in a slightly differing perspective, color is what is produced in a body as a result of the conflict between divine and Satanic energies. In Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, Satan comes to Eve in her sleep to begin tempting her with dreams of the Forbidden Fruit. He "enters," as it were, "at the ear of Eve," in hope of coloring the perceptions arising from

The Organs of her Fancy, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams,
Or if, inspiring venom, he might taint [*cf. tint*]
Th'animal Spirits that from pure blood arise
Like gentle breaths from Rivers pure [*i.e., translucent*],
   thence raise
At least distemper'd, discontented thoughts,
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires
Blown up with high conceits ingend'ring pride.

(4.800-09)

At the distance it assumes as a dialecticalized scientific theory, Coleridge's theory of light and color exists on a level of generality and impersonality that makes it seem almost as though it makes no affective or fideistic claims on lived experience. That "Color = Gravitation under the praepotence of light" may be proven, and it may not. In at least one context, that of the General Theory of Relativity, Coleridge's ideas constitute an uncanny anticipation of the explanation of "red-shift," the phenomenon that occurs when the light waves of a celestial body in motion relative to the observer is viewed through a strong gravitational field that affects the frequency and distribution of the light waves emitted. But in the context of pure theory subjected to impersonal, disinterested observational testing, Coleridge's ideas lose the aura of lived experience joined to theodical significance that those ideas take on in the context of the Bible or *Paradise Lost*. Calling "color the body of Light" in a scientific setting is a way of ignoring the provenance or significance of the concatenated metaphor of color as light's body, as well as of ignoring the passion of Adam, Eve, Noah, and all others who experience color as light's body until the Last Judgment.

It is not the Platonic will to power or the Newtonian will to dissemble.
that leads Coleridge to move the problem of consciousness and the problem of evil to the realm of dialecticalized scientific theory. Afraid of a serious rupture, perhaps even an irreconcilable conflict between process and theodicy, and possessed of a need to see the energies within one and the energies within the world as being ultimately the same theodically informed energy, Coleridge attempts to preserve the theory from any potentially discrediting circumstances by distancing it as far as possible from the ground of lived experience on which the claims of process and theodicy were originally to have been reconciled. There are earlier attempts at such reconciliation in the poetry, but they are incomplete, in large part because the lived experience to verify such a reconciliation is lacking. Without either the egotistical self-confidence or sense of poetic design possessed by Wordsworth, Coleridge did not feel himself sufficiently the prophet of nature to propound “A lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth” that tells of everlasting things, such as

how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things

In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.57

The failed attempts at reconciliation have a good deal to do with that characteristically Coleridgean structure, the interrupted work.58 But such failures are also found in completed works, such as The Rime, which was to have provided the occasion for the “essay on the uses of the supernatural in poetry” announced at the end of chapter 13 of the Biographia. Limitations of format prevent a full discussion of how Coleridge’s theory of light and color operates through the lived experience of the Mariner; however, it is possible in this context to sketch out some of the manifestations of that theory, as well as the implications to be drawn from them.

The vessel on which the Mariner and his shipmates sail, losing sight of the village church, the landscape, and the lighthouse, in that order, is a microcosm of a world subject to original sin—that human version of Satanic pride that is as “unaccountable” but ubiquitous as the gravity that is its physical manifestation as a reminder of prior falls and of one’s predisposition to fall further still. Without any particular concern about falling away from their Edenic homeland, with its landscape-dominating
church, (green) hills, and (pure) rays of light from the lighthouse, the Mariner and his mates “Merrily did . . . drop” (PW 1:187, ll. 22–24). That falling off occurs as inevitably yet unaccountably as gravity of Original Sin. The events that follow, including the killing of the Albatross, are all in their turn both inevitable and unaccountable, not any more susceptible to explanation than why gravity or Original Sin exists. All attempts at explanation, whether they be the cause-and-effect arguments of the Mariner’s shipmates or the epigraph from Burnet or the poem’s “Argument” or the glosses added to the 1817 edition, are ironic at best and casuistical at worst—the same species of justification that the serpent uses on Eve, that she in her turn uses on Adam, and that he in his turn uses on himself, in order to justify the eating of the Forbidden Fruit that occasions the Fall.

At the outset, there is absolutely no interaction between gravity and light—certainly no subordination of the former to the latter—and no “tertium alicuius,” as Coleridge calls it in the Biographia. The lack of interaction is signalled by the fact that both the ship’s motion and the sun’s diurnal motion continue without alteration and by the fact that the sunlight does not interact with gravity to produce any color. All that is known about the sun is that it comes up on the left, sets on the right, and shines brightly (without any color, indicating that its “praepotence” is not observed or acknowledged by the shipmates), and is personified as a “he” (“He?” [PW 1:187, ll. 25–28]). At the Equator, where the sun shines directly overhead and should have the greatest influence over the ship and its crew, the sun has none and withdraws, not to reappear until the beginning of the second part of the poem, forty-two lines later. Another “he,” a “storm-blast” described as “tyrannous and strong” (PW 1:188, ll. 41–42), takes the place of the sun. Actually, the storm is only a different aspect of the God figured forth by the sun—a wrathful God rather than the creator-God who says “let there be light.” The storm he visits upon the ship is a Noachic storm; and the Albatross, like the raven and the dove in the story of the Flood, is the instrument for regaining access to God’s grace, and face, which assumes the colors of the rainbow in Noah’s story to indicate that evil has been subordinated to good, not completely vanquished by it. But while Noah is patient and faithful enough to send out a raven that symbolizes the darkly rapacious side of human nature before realizing that the dove, as white as the raven is black, and accounted as selfless as the raven is rapacious, is the better means of achieving landfall and a glimpse of God’s grace, the Mariner lacks all such patience. Moreover, the
Albatross, a long-distance flyer even as the dove is a long-distance flyer in comparison to the raven, is suggestive of how great a distance there is between the ship and any rapprochement with God. At the Equator, a sort of point of no return, the ship is far enough away, but when it reaches the South Pole, which is where the Mariner kills the Albatross, the ship is as far away from its Edenic home port and the direct rays of the sun (God) as it is possible to get.

Even when the ship completes its “fall” (southward motion) and begins its “redemption” (northward motion), there is still no interaction between light and gravity. The sun has no color—especially no red, one of the colors of the rainbow (even Milton’s tricolored rainbow) and the color of the blood that Christ must ultimately shed to ransom a sinful humanity and supplant the Old Man with the New. “Nor dim nor red, like God’s own head, / The glorious Sun uprist...” (PW 1:190, ll. 97–98). But the Mariner and his shipmates soon reach a place of suffering and redemption—and a place of highly significant color, at that, with its “hot and copper sky” and “bloody Sun” (ibid., ll. 111–12).

Blood sacrifice is an important tenet of Coleridge’s credo, but it is the office of the “bloody Son,” Jesus, not of the individual. The note to The Destiny of Nations, declaring “Christ the only begotten Son of the Living God before all Time,” preceded The Rime. The point is that something else is wanted for the Mariner’s redemption to proceed. Biting his arm and sucking the blood from it to announce the approach of what turns out to be a ghost ship (PW 1:192, ll. 160–61) is a token of the Mariner’s fellow feeling for his shipmates, but not of his redemption.

What is necessary for such redemption to occur is that the Mariner recognize intuitively the deployment of the dialectically arrayed forces of good and evil in the world, and that he somehow demonstrate his allegiance to the good (light) to bring about the subordination of evil (gravity) to it. The occasion for redemption arises with the arrival of the ghost ship, which “drove suddenly / Betwixt us and the Sun,” giving the Mariner and his mates a radically altered view of the sun, which harks back to the “barred” appearance of the rainbow at the same time it foretokens an access of grace.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,
(Heaven’s Mother send us grace!)
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

(PW 1:193, ll. 175–80)
The figure of the dungeon-grate of course begs the question of who is in jail, and the answer is that we are in, just as surely as the Mariner becomes the thrall of life-in-death.

But being a fallen and death-bounded individual did not prevent Noah from seeing the colors of the rainbow and blessing it for the blessings that its Creator-God conferred on him and his race. And the Mariner also sees such colors and blesses them. Before understanding intuitively that good triumphs over evil just as surely as light triumphs over gravity to create color, the Mariner had seen the water snakes merely as evil unmodified by good. They were "slimy things [that] did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea." Their colors were like "death-fires," and "The water, like a witch's oils / Burnt green, and blue and white" (PW 1:191, ll. 125–30). A moment of reflection is wanting, and that occurs with the rising of the moon, which stimulates such reflection in its role as a reflector of the sun. With a consciousness that is a reflection of God's, as the result of the divine gift of grace, "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite AM," as Coleridge calls it in the Biographia, the Mariner views the water snakes and sees that they are good, just as God sees the Creation as good after each separate creative act. The Mariner loves and blesses the snakes, just as God loves and blesses his Creation. The Mariner sees the colors for what they are—"rich attire"—sees the snakes in their proper place upon the sea and, as he explains, "A spring of love gushed from my heart, / And I blessed them unaware." It is a moment of colors—"Blue, glossy green, and velvet black," along with "a flash of golden fire"—and it is a moment of the subordination of evil to good, a moment of prayerful love in which "The Albatross fell off, and sank / Like lead into the sea" (PW 1:198, ll. 278–90). It is also a moment of "praepotence," in the sense of "old power." In loving the snakes and their colors, the Mariner harks back to a Creator-God who, in the originary power of Creation, loved the serpent, before it betrayed him in the Temptation and the Fall.

The problem with "praepotence" is that it is doomed in the reenactment of the fall, just as the paradisal realms that Wordsworth would reattain through the marriage of the mind to nature are doomed to be lost all over when they are reattained. The Mariner's triumph is a triumph of life, but it is a life that is under the sway of life-in-death. The reconciliation of the life-process with theodicy is possible, but only momentarily so, and doomed to reenactment in life without any hope of durability or permanence. The Mariner's fate of passing from land to land and repeating his tale to audiences in whatever language they may speak arises not from a
neurotic (or psychotic) repetition-compulsion, but from the fact that repetition is the only possible strategy for achieving even momentary reconciliation between the life-process and theodicy and thereby valorizing the former. The Mariner's gift of tongues also evokes the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9), which occurs just after that of the Flood. Not only is Babel the locale of a second fall—this one into separate and mutually incomprehensible languages—it is also the place at which humanity learns that it is impossible to build any sort of durable link between the world of process and the realm of theodicy. God simply will not remain accessible with anything like permanence, instead choosing to reveal Himself momentarily, and sometimes even obscurely in the moment. Thus it may be, as McFarland claims, "that Coleridge was the 'living link between religion and philosophy' for his own age." But that linkage, which is but another version of the linkage between theodicy and process, is a severely qualified one, subject to the sort of ephemerality and parallactic distortion that arises from trying to view a fixed and unchanging object from a moving and otherwise shifting perspective, the very organs of perception changing from moment to moment.

Ultimately, Coleridge's was an impossible task. Energy as a common term of linkage could cleave to the part of process or the part of theodicy, but it could not remain between the two as a linkage. Coleridge backed away from the concept of energy in his poetry early on, and he constrained and qualified it increasingly throughout his prose. The energy that Thomas Young observed and named, purged of its theodical trappings by thermodynamics, leads not to a new heaven and new earth but, ultimately, to entropy, a circumstance in which the sum of all energy within a system is zero. And the energy of which Saumarez spoke, leads to an ontogeny that, in the fetal state, recapitulates phylogeny, not to a reconciliation with All-in-All. On the level of phylogeny itself, such energy is responsible for evolution, not Providence, a circumstance dictated by fitness relative to a given environment, not by election. If God disappeared from the world of process in the nineteenth century, it is not for lack of an effort on the part of Coleridge and others to keep him in it. And even the truths about energy that we have realized in his aftermath may say more about human beings as the projectors of the metaphors that order the phenomenal world than about the final cause of that world.