S GILES-IN-READING

SOUTHAMPTON STREET

URBANABBEY PUBSTUDY

A SACRED DIVE INTO: OWEN BARFIELD'S WHAT COLERIDGE THOUGHT,

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CH. 5: OUTNESS

CENTRAL ARGUMENT: The chapter focuses on understanding Coleridge's unique conception of nature and its relationship to human intelligence, diverging from traditional interpretations of organicism and Cartesian dualism.

KEY THEMES:

Rejection of metaphorical organicism: Coleridge's view of organicism is not merely metaphorical. He doesn't see nature as simply analogous to mind, but as fundamentally unified with it. He argues against interpretations like Professor M.H. Abrams', who defines organicism as "the philosophy whose major categories are derived metaphorically from the attributes of living and growing things." Coleridge emphasizes that his concept of nature is not a separate process reflected in the mind, but an integral part of the mind itself.

"Outness" as a law of nature and self-consciousness: Coleridge identifies two fundamental certainties, or "prejudices," in human consciousness: the awareness of things existing outside of us ("outness") and the awareness of ourselves perceiving those things. He argues that the "outness" of phenomena is not merely a product of our senses but is "identical and one and the same thing with our own immediate self consciousness."

Reconciling subject and object: Coleridge challenges the Cartesian separation of mind and matter. He argues that the very act of perceiving the "outness" of the material world demonstrates its connection to our self-consciousness. This leads him to propose a "true and most binding realism" where the outness of the world is not explained away but is built into our understanding of reality.

Nature as "becoming" and the human mind "above nature": Coleridge posits that nature is a constant process of "becoming," driven by a "life force" (natura naturans) that is "essentially one" with human intelligence. However, he also distinguishes the human mind as being "above nature" due to its capacity for self-consciousness and the ability to become its own object of reflection.

Important Ideas & Facts:

Coleridge's theory of life: Life is characterized by a "tendency to individuate and to connect" culminating in the "most perfect detachment with the greatest possible union" between the self-conscious "us" and the "things without us."

Evolutionary perspective: While not the central focus, Coleridge acknowledges an evolutionary process leading to the current relationship between nature and the human mind.

Emphasis on experience: Coleridge grounds his arguments in direct experience, urging us to consider our firsthand knowledge of self-consciousness and perception when interpreting nature.

KEY QUOTES:

"The productive power, or vis naturans, which in the sensible world, or natura naturata, is what we mean by the word, nature, when we speak of the same as an agent, is essentially one (that is, of one kind) with the intelligence, which is in the human mind above nature."

"It is the table itself, which the man of common sense believes himself to see, not the phantom of a table, from which he may argumentatively deduce the reality of a table, which he does not see."

"Life is a subject with an inherent tendency to produce an object, wherein and whereby to find itself..." This succinctly summarizes Coleridge's understanding of the fundamental drive of life."

SUMMARY: Understanding Coleridge's philosophical framework requires moving beyond simplistic interpretations of organicism and confronting his nuanced articulation of the interconnectedness of nature, intelligence, and self-consciousness. The excerpts provide a compelling entry point into these ideas, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between subject and object in his evolving conception of reality.