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SOUTHAMPTON STREET

URBANABBEY PUBSTUDY

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

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CH. 9: REASON

CENTRAL ARGUMENT: This text explores Coleridge's philosophical distinction between reason and understanding. It argues that reason, a superindividual and super-sensuous faculty, is present in human consciousness at all levels, shaping even the most basic perceptions. Coleridge contrasts two modes of reason: a negative, unconscious mode and a positive, self-conscious mode, highlighting the crucial role of reason in achieving individuality. The text further connects reason to imagination, emphasizing their interconnectedness in shaping human experience and knowledge. Finally, the text uses analogies and examples to illustrate the complex and paradoxical nature of reason, its relationship to God, and its importance in understanding human existence.

KEY THEMES:

Reason is distinct from understanding: The sources emphasize a fundamental difference between reason and understanding, which is key to human psychology. Reason is described as "superindividual" and "supersensuous". Understanding, on the other hand, is more aligned with the senses and the mechanical aspects of nature. The text also makes it clear that reason is not merely a higher form of understanding; it is different in kind.

Reason has two modes: negative and positive: Reason can be present to the understanding in two ways. In one mode, reason is present but not realized as reason; this is described as "dreaming." In the other mode, reason is consciously realized; this is "waking" or "conscious self-knowledge". These modes are also referred to as conceptual and ideal reason, or negative reason (lumen a luce) and positive reason (lux intellectus). Negative reason is associated with detachment and individuality. Positive reason is the being of the detached individual.

Reason is both individual and universal: Reason enables both individuality and universality, a seemingly contradictory aspect. It allows for detachment from nature through abstraction and generalization, which are made possible by comparing and analyzing impressions to form concepts. However, reason is also "superindividual," existing beyond individual minds. It is the basis of self-consciousness and the ability to know truth. Reason is described as "entire in each and one in all". The source states that this paradox is a crucial point, with Coleridge frequently emphasizing its importance.

KEY QUOTES:

"The ideas of reason 'are of higher origin than the notions of the understanding, and by the irradiation of which the understanding itself becomes a human understanding.'"

"Reason, in both its negative and its positive aspect, is the individualiser."

"It is either false and mischievous: or it is a most radical and necessary truth...the Primacy of the Will, as deeper than and (in order of thought) antecedent to Reason."

"Reason is being; but that is another way of saying that reason is God"

SUMMARY: Coleridge's concept of Reason is complex and nuanced, but its essence lies in its transcendence of the limitations of mere Understanding. Reason, for Coleridge, is not simply a higher-order cognitive function, but a fundamental aspect of human existence that connects us to the divine, enables individuality, and guides us towards truth. Understanding the relationship between Reason and Understanding, and the role of Imagination, is essential to grasping Coleridge's philosophy and his vision of a fully realized humanity.