10

Ideas, Method, Laws

At one point in Coleridge's remarkable Address to the Royal Society of Literature on the *Prometheus of Aeschylus,* from which we quoted at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, he sums up his interpretation of the myth as follows: "the groundwork of the Aeschylean *mythus* is laid in the definition of idea and law, as correlatives that mutually interpret each the other." This principle is one that is nearly central to Coleridge's cosmology, and an expansion of it may prove the best approach to the meaning of the word *idea,* as he habitually employs it.[1]

It was further observed in Chapter 9 that the only plural of reason is ideas of reason. To this it may now be added that *all* ideas are "ideas of reason" in Coleridge's terminology. For the other senses in which the word is most commonly used he himself employs the terms *notion, conception* and occasionally *maxim.* It needs also saying that the ideas of reason are not the plural of reason in the ordinary sense, whereby the particular components of a collective noun might be thought of as its plural reference; in the sense, that is, that the plurality of "crowd" is the persons who compose the crowd. An idea is not a component part of reason, because reason, the whole, is present and effective in each idea. Alternatively, we may speak of ideas as "parts" of reason, only if we are prepared to let the term connote *that* relation between a whole and its parts, whereby the particular and the universal are one—*totus in omni parte.* Coleridge himself sometimes uses the term *constituent.*

> . . . as constituents of reason we necessarily contemplate unity and distinctity. Now the latter as the polar opposite to the former implies plurality: therefore I used the plural, distinctities, and say, that the distinctities

considered apart from the unity are the ideas, and reason is the ground and source of ideas.[2]

We need, once again, to be able to distinguish without dividing; and that very ability is itself reason.

It follows that much, if not most, of what has already been said of reason will also apply to the ideas of reason, or any one of them. In neither case is it possible to "account for," or even fruitfully to discuss, the paradox of singular plurality or of identity in difference. It must be accepted because, on examination, we find that it is itself the experiential ground on which all intellectual acceptance and rejection are based. Reason "affirms itself."[3] It is understanding that thinks "of" or "about" things. Reason is the thinking.[4] Itself the creative polarity that engenders many from one, it "comes forth out of the moulds of the understanding" only as the invincible contradiction, the insoluble 'problem,' of the one and the many.

By the same token the understanding as such can have nothing to say about the relation between reason and the ideas of reason. All it can do is to take note of the fact that to be at once universal and particular is the very nature of the act of thinking, the act of consciousness itself; and this has already been dealt with at some length in the previous chapter.*

The like consideration applies to the relation between the ideas of reason and the phenomenal world. Seeking an explanation of the "multeity" of nature, we are driven, first, to eliminate our inveterate fancy of a fixed and anterior "outness" of phenomena; secondly, to the discovery that understanding points us back behind itself to reason, to reason as at once the source of living opposites and the lightning-flash that arrests them at the entrance to the understanding and reveals them as a stony landscape of logical contradictions bounded by its horizon; thirdly, and consequently, to the presence of reason as the *ground* of the understanding. It would be absurd, or more strictly speaking preposterous, to look 'behind' reason for some fancied source, either ("as monkeys put their hands behind a looking-glass")† in the phenomenal world, which is itself the product of reason, or in the understanding, of which reason is the ground. A thing cannot be the

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* Chapter 9, pp. 107–108, above.

† Shedd I, 465.

product of that which it has itself produced; "that the *very* ground, saith Aristotle, is groundless or self-grounded, is an identical proposition." [5]

And so with imagination: having been told that it is characteristic of imagination to apprehend unity in multeity, or the all in each, we can ask why this should be so; and we can be answered: Because that is the nature of reason, and imagination is the mind's approach towards self-knowledge, and thus towards a fuller awareness of the presence of reason within us. But there we must stop. It is meaningless for the understanding to go on and ask: why should, or how can, that be the nature of reason? All the understanding can hope to do is to remove the obstacles which its own confused conceptions have interposed; and that is just the task that Coleridge set himself. When they *are* removed, we may participate in reason; but not by understanding it, only by awakening it within us as we contemplate its effects; or, if it is preferred, by meditating it. *Meditation* is a word Coleridge introduced more than once when he was emphasising the "all in each," the universal human nevertheless particularised, which we find in Shakespeare's presentation of his dramatic characters.[6]

It follows then from the nature of reason, and of its relation to the ideas of reason, that nearly everything we can say about an idea is also being said about reason; and vice versa. To ask: how do we apprehend an idea? is to ask: how do we participate in reason? And there is the same difficulty about answering the one question as about answering the other; a difficulty not really met by using carefully chosen words like *participate* (which already transcends the conceptions of the understanding). Nor is it met (though all this may contribute something to the "pointing back") by going farther and attempting to define participation as, let us say, "a felt union with the inner origin of outward forms." Moreover, assuming that it has been apprehended, any attempt to *express* it will involve those "blank misgivings of a creature | Moving about in worlds not realised" of which Wordsworth wrote. It follows in fact from the whole nature of the relation between reason and understanding that "an idea, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*";[7] that is to say, so far as language is concerned, in figurative language.

Here again a modern reader of Coleridge may find that he derives some assistance from the now familiar, though dim, mental image of an unconscious, or subconscious, mind—an image, which itself, of

course, flouts the conceptions of the mere understanding, since it amounts to saying "unconscious consciousness." It is significant that Freud, who was avowedly determined to limit himself to a body-bound notion of the unconscious, was nevertheless obliged to rely, via the dream, almost wholly on symbolism.[8] It may also be useful at this point to look at one of Coleridge's own attempts to convey, in figurative language, something of what is involved in the apprehension of an idea. He compares it with the experience of listening to music:

> Music seems to have an *immediate* communion with my Life; . . . It converses with the *life* of my mind, as if it were itself the Mind of my Life. Yet I sometimes think that a great Composer, a Mozart, a Beethoven must have been in a state of Spirit much more akin, more analogous to, mine own when I am at once waiting for, watching, and organically constructing and inwardly constructed by, the *Ideas,* the living Truths, that may be re-excited but cannot be expressed by Words, the Transcendents that give the Objectivity to all Objects, the Form to all Images, yet are themselves untranslatable into any Image, unrepresentable by any particular Object, than I can imagine myself to be a Titian or a Sir C. Wren.[9]

To apprehend an idea is to be aware of at once constructing and being constructed by it; it is to be aware, in the same act and moment, of myself and the source of my selfhood; for it is to participate in reason, to become one again with the living opposites that created me and, as growth-forces, sustain my own creative being.

It is perhaps, then, by equating reason with "the unconscious," though in a non-Freudian sense,[10] that we can approach most sympathetically Coleridge's numerous references to the "dimness" of ideas, at least on their first appearance in the mind.[11] Clearness is founded on shallowness.[12] It is for the conceptions or notions of the understanding to be clear, and it is when they lack that saving virtue that they become dangerous; for then they filch some of the strength of growth, and of feeling, which belongs by right to ideas, since it is ideas that actually "constitute" our humanity.[13] And that is why deep thinking necessarily entails strong feeling.[14] It will be best to return to this later in the chapter. But we may note here its bearing on the station occupied by imagination between reason and understanding. Whether we think of the mind as in the first place understanding,[15] but ascending towards reason; or of ideas as in the first place "the permanence

and self-circling energies of the reason," * but descending[16] towards the understanding, we shall not be surprised to find them often enough "in that shadowy half-being, that state of nascent Existence in the Twilight of Imagination, and just on the vestibule of Consciousness . . ." where feeling also has its roots.[17]

In apparent contrast with these references to the dimness of ideas lies the fact that it is precisely on the apprehension of ideas, as distinct from mere conceptions or maxims, that Coleridge bases his important concept of "method." In this volume we are attempting to outline what Coleridge thought, in accordance with a particular selected plan. It would have been possible to choose a different plan altogether and to work outwards, so to speak, from the little group of Essays in the *Friend* in which he himself outlines what he understands by method.[18] Because ideas are the permanence and self-circling energies of reason, they are also in an almost literal sense "the prophetic soul | of the wide world dreaming on things to come" and it is therefore only *their* presence in the mind that can give rise to a knowledge effective for the future as well as analytical of the past; and (which is much the same thing) only that which can produce any radically *new* knowledge. The conceptions of the understanding, "like lights in the stern of a vessel, illumine only the path that has already been past over." [19] Coleridge himself once adduced the literary example of Polonius;[20] but perhaps the best analogy to mere understanding is the idea of the perfect computer. Raise the computer to absolute perfection: reduce the understanding to absolute "mereness": and there need be no significant difference between the two instruments.

Coleridge develops his own idea of method by contrasting it with *classification*—which is arrangement for the convenience of memory or communication. In the sphere of natural science he takes as an outstanding example of classification the system of Linnaeus in botany. After praising the illustrious Swede warmly for his services to the study, he points out that the system amounts nevertheless to "little more than an enormous nomenclature; a huge catalogue, *bien arrangé*, yearly and monthly augmented in various editions, each with its own scheme of technical memory and its own conveniences of reference!" [21] Linnaeus "invented an universal character for the Language of Botany chargeable with no greater imperfections than are to be found in the

* See Chapter 9, p. 112, above.

alphabets of every particular Language";[22] and alphabetical arrangement is the *terminus ad quem* of non-methodical (in Coleridge's sense) arrangement. It was in fact as the introduction to an Encyclopedia, the topics in which were to be ordered otherwise than alphabetically, that he evolved his *Treatise on Method*.[23]

A *methodical* order must be based, he held, not on notions but on ideas. Above all it requires, in any particular field, the "initiative idea," which Linnaeus lacked.[24] For the plurality of ideas is not a merely numerical one; "there is a gradation of Ideas, as of ranks in a well-ordered State, or of commands in a well-regulated army." [25] And in the case of natural science it is on *this* order that any ultimately fruitful method will need to be based, since this is the actual order of *natura naturans,* and thus the natural order in the mind.[26] Yet the received scientific method—with a few important exceptions—was ignoring it altogether. Coleridge held that the latter was in fact no method at all, but a typically Linnaean, or encyclopedic, classification of disjointed fragments of *natura naturata.* The result was, not the reality of nature, but an arrangement projected upon the phaenomena by memory and fancy. Whereas a genuine method must stem from the participating apprehension of related ideas, and thus of that timeless articulation of ultimate reality, out of which *natura naturans* emerges to become ("quenched" now "in the product" *) the static multeity of *natura naturata.* It is at this stage that method reveals itself as resulting from "the due mean or balance between our passive impressions and the mind's own reaction on the same." [27] And we may think of that mean indifferently as "organisation" in nature or as "imagination" in man.

For there is no getting away from the fact that in Coleridge's system we cannot, in the long view, divide the one from the other, though we can distinguish them sharply enough. Nature is all that is objective, but the relation between mind and nature remains an inseverable polarity. Thus the emergence of ideas from the dimness of instinct, which we have already considered; the fact that the idea then "commences the process of its own transmutation . . . and . . . finishes the process as the understanding";[28] the fact that "organisation ceasing, mechanism commences"; the fact that "an idea conceived as subsisting in an object becomes a law" [29]—none of these are to be taken as exclusively psychological events or processes.

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* Chapter 2, p. 24, above.

The most carefully considered formulation of the relations between *idea* and *law* is probably the one that will be found near the beginning of *Church and State*:

> That which, contemplated objectively (that is, as existing externally to the mind), we call a law; the same contemplated subjectively (that is, as existing in a subject or mind), is an idea. Hence Plato often names ideas laws; and Lord Bacon, the British Plato, describes the laws of the material universe as the ideas in nature. *Quod in natura naturata lex, in natura naturante idea dicitur.*[30]

True, there are other ideas besides those that coincide with the laws of nature. In the *Treatise on Method* Coleridge distinguishes Metaphysical Ideas, which "relate to the essence of things as possible," and which "continue always to exist in and for the Mind alone," from Physical Ideas, or "those which we mean to express, when we speak of the *nature* of a thing actually existing and cognizable by our faculties, whether the thing be material or immaterial, bodily or mental."[31] The Essays are closely reasoned and require to be studied at first hand. Here it may suffice to say that, for the relation between ideas and laws, it is physical ideas that are significant. From that point of view metaphysical ideas are mainly of importance because reflection on them—for example on the idea of a perfect circle in geometry—or upon a law of thought, such as the principle of contradiction—may develop our capacity for that "inward beholding" which is our only access to the ideas of reason, whether metaphysical or physical. They can help us to overcome

> the difficulty of combining the notion of an organ of sense, or a new sense, with the notion of the appropriate and peculiar objects of that sense . . . the organs of spiritual apprehension having objects consubstantial with Themselves (ὁμοουσία), or being themselves their own objects, that is, self contemplative[32]

and thus to preserve the all-important distinction between a genuine law of nature and a mere hypothesis evolved by fancy for the purpose of saving the appearances.[33]

We may now conveniently complete the quotation from the address on the *Prometheus of Aeschylus,* with which this chapter opened:

> the groundwork of the Aeschylean *mythus* is laid in the definition of idea and law, as correlatives that mutually interpret each the other,—an idea, with the adequate power of realizing itself being a law, and a law considered abstractedly from, or in the absence of, the power of manifesting itself in its appropriate product being an idea.[34]

Fortunately however we are not limited to pondering definitions; for in Essays VIII and IX of the *Friend,* Section 2, Coleridge has taken up and expanded these definitions in a careful study of the relation between Plato and Bacon. And these two Essays are important for two more reasons: because they survey the relation between law and idea in the light, as Coleridge observes, of the General History of the Human Mind,[35] and because, in doing so, they solve, or should solve, the difficulty which many have found in perceiving the actual relation—the difference as well as the resemblance—between Plato's doctrine of ideas and Coleridge's.

There is yet a fourth reason why these two Essays should be studied. They suggest that a substantial revision, or at all events readjustment, is called for of the popular image of Bacon's place in the history of science. His view of what constitutes induction is indeed adversely criticised (on the basis, incidentally, of a misunderstanding of which Coleridge makes short work); but he is still, for most, an admired leader of a merciful escape from the leading-strings of Plato, Aristotle and the Middle Ages. To describe him as "the British Plato" is in fact pretty startling in view of his own loudly proclaimed contempt for all three. Coleridge was well aware of this, and the Essays are a carefully documented response to the obvious challenge his judgment invokes. In the first of them (VIII) he briefly reviews the current misunderstanding of what Bacon in fact endeavoured to assert concerning the relation between nature and mind and considers the extent to which Bacon himself was responsible for it, stressing heavily in this regard the latter's brutal rejection of his predecessors. It is this unthinking, and unjustified, rejection, he says, which has been hailed with joy as a great step forward in the growth of science, not the actual teaching, which is in fact very closely allied to Plato's. There *was,* at this point, a step forward in "the education of the mind of the *race,*"[36] as he will show in Essay IX, but it was a different and far subtler one than is commonly assumed. But there is also another, a semantic,

reason why Bacon is misunderstood; and Coleridge concedes, towards the end of Essay VIII, that

> it will be no easy task to reconcile many passages in the *De Augmentis* and the *Redargutio Philosophiarum* with the author's own fundamental principles, as established in his *Novum Organum;* if we attach to the words the meaning which they *may* bear, or even, in some instances, the meaning which might appear to us, in the present age, more obvious . . .[37]

We shall not reproduce the arguments and supporting quotations from the *Novum Organum,* of which Essay IX consists. Its two principal contentions are, firstly, that the "lux intellectus" or "lumen siccum," on which Bacon lays repeated emphasis, is not, as had been generally supposed, the shallow clarity of understanding, but is identical with Plato's *nous* or Coleridge's reason; while the famous "idols," on whose correction he was so insistent, are precisely "the limits, the passions, the prejudices, the peculiar habits of the human understanding, natural or acquired . . . the arrogance, which leads man to take the forms and mechanism of his own mere reflective faculty, as the measure and nature of Deity."[38] Bacon's real point is that

> our understanding not only reflects the objects *subjectively,* that is, substitutes for the inherent laws and properties of the objects the relations which the objects bear to its own particular constitution; but that in all its conscious presentations and reflexes, *it is itself only a phaenomenon of the inner sense* [reason], and requires the same corrections as the appearances transmitted by the outward senses [italics not in original].

The second, and more particular, contention he summarises in the following passages:

> Thus the difference, or rather distinction between Plato and Lord Bacon is simply this; that philosophy being necessarily bi-polar, Plato treats principally of the truth, as it manifests itself at the *ideal* pole, as the science of intellect (i.e. *de mundo intelligibili*), while Bacon confines himself, for the most part, to the same truth, as it is manifested at the other, or material pole, as the science of nature (i.e. *de mundo sensibili*).

Plato's *main* concern therefore was with metaphysical ideas—"those objective truths that exist in and for the intellect alone," whereas Bacon's was with those which

> have their signatures in nature, and which (as he himself plainly and often asserts) may indeed be revealed to us *through* and *with,* but never *by* the senses or the faculty of sense.

And hence, Coleridge concludes,

> it will not surprise us, that Plato often calls ideas LIVING LAWS, in which the mind has its own true being and permanence; or that Bacon, vice versa, names the laws of nature *ideas;* and represents . . . *facts of science* and *central phaenomena,* as signatures, impressions and symbols of ideas.[39]

Plato's gaze was turned in one direction, Bacon's in the other; but both were agreed, and it is "often expressed, and everywhere supposed" by Bacon, not only

> that there is potentially, if not actually, in every rational being, a somewhat, call it what you will, the pure reason, the spirit, lumen siccum, intellectual intuition etc. etc.

but also

> that in this are to be found the indispensable conditions of all science, and scientific research, whether meditative, contemplative, or experimental.[40]

It was the shift of emphasis, the change of direction of the gaze, that constituted an actual "step" in the general history of the mind, not (as has been very widely assumed) the adoption of a new scientific *method;* most certainly not so, if that method is taken to be a wilful limitation of science to the mere understanding and the senses.[41]

It is, then, in connection with these two Essays on Method, and his remarks on method elsewhere, that the difference between Coleridge's doctrine of ideas and Plato's can be best discerned. Here too it is a difference of emphasis or direction rather than of substance. Plato's *nous,* we may say, is Coleridge's reason; for both of them, the hierarchy of ideas which constitutes that *nous* or reason is the articulation of ultimate reality and for both of them these ideas are also the powers

that produce and sustain the natural world.[42] But Plato never spoke of an "initiative idea"; he never equated an idea with the *act* of reason individualised, and thus with an individual human thinker.[43] All that Coleridge has to say of the relation between reason and *will*[44] is foreign to him. There is really no word in Greek that corresponds to what we mean by will, and none to what we mean by "subject." That polarity between subject and object, which is at the base of Coleridge's system, is nowhere to be found in Plato. It is only in Coleridge therefore that we find such a concept as that of an "initiative idea,"[45] on which method depends. Plato's method was his dialectic. It is only for Coleridge that the articulation of ideas can be itself at the same time method; that it is indeed the only reliable method, since we cannot in the last resort divide the objective ordering of nature from its ordering in and by human reason; since "the mind of man in its own primary and constituent forms represents the laws of nature."[46]

That which functions in nature as the principle of "productive unity," is necessarily at the same time functioning in nature's ideal pole, spirit, as that principle of "unity with progression," which is the principle of method.[47] It is always so functioning potentially and is felt, when it first begins to be felt, as instinct.[48] What we call "discovery" is the raising of it from potential to actual by becoming fully conscious of it; and that is the proper, the *methodical,* function of the understanding. ". . . every idea is living, productive, partaketh of infinity, and (as Bacon has sublimely observed) containeth an endless power of semination."[49] "From the first, or initiative Idea, as from a seed, successive Ideas germinate."[50] We are entitled to designate Coleridge's system "organicism" only if, in doing so, we are aware that "semination" and "germinate" here are not mere *metaphors*—unless, of course, by the word *metaphor* we merely allude loosely to the fact that all words referring to the ideal pole of reality have, or at one time had, reference also to the phenomenal pole.[51] Coleridge's organicism is definitely not "a metaphor of mind" in the ordinary sense of the word; it is not "an implicit assertion that all the universe is like some one element in that universe." *

"Hypotheses non fingo." Newton refused to seek "behind" the law of gravitation for causes or explanations acceptable to a human understanding boggling at the impossible contradiction of "action at a dis-

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* See Chapter 5, p. 59, and note 3, above.

tance." He left that to inferior scientists;[52] and the law of gravitation is one of Coleridge's favourite illustrations of a "law of nature," as distinct from theory or hypothesis. Law differs from hypothesis, as idea differs from abstraction; just as an idea is not a notion "of" or "about" something other than itself, so a true law of nature is not a rule generalized from particular observations of natural behaviour; it is nature behaving. An idea is neither an abstraction nor a thing, but a physical idea *is* at the same time a law of nature. We must still therefore distinguish the idea or law itself from any uncontemplative notion of it. It is the *notion* of a law of gravity which degenerates into fancied invisible string.[53] The very law itself is also the power.[54] Science went astray in its dealings with both matter and space when, instead of accepting gravitation as at once a law of nature and an idea of reason, it began to devise hypotheses which would render it acceptable to the understanding. Where Newton was content to think of, and to quantify, the link that holds the earth to the sun as a vector, the lesser fry in an age of the understanding and the senses must fancy their piece of invisible string or something like it. They could never accept, because they could never understand, that the ultimate explanation of phenomena cannot itself be phenomenal.[55] In the *Treatise on Method* Coleridge put it as follows:

> Every Physical Theory is in some measure imperfect, because it is of necessity progressive; and because we can never be sure that we have exhausted the terms or that some new discovery may not affect the whole scheme of its relations . . . the doctrines of vortices, of an universal ether, of a two-fold magnetic fluid, etc., are *Theories* of Gravitation: but the Science of Astronomy is founded on the *Law* of Gravitation, and remains unaffected by the rise and fall of the Theories.[56]

The true object of science is "that knowledge in which truth and reality are one and the same, that which in the ideas that are present to the mind recognises the laws that govern in Nature if we may not say the laws that are Nature." [57]

Of course the mental activity of forming theories and hypotheses may lead the mind to the apprehension of laws. In fact a sound theory will prove to have been an anticipation of one; it "becomes an IDEA in the moment of its coincidence with an objective law." [58] And here lies the clue to the true function, and the value, of *experiment*. There

is naturally much on this subject in the Essays on Method and the *Treatise,* but it is not there alone that Coleridge has dealt with it, and in particular one of the Notebooks contains a fairly extensive treatment of the whole relation between idea, law and theory.[59] There are a good many minor difficulties, and it might be worth someone's while to investigate as fully as the records permit such topics as Coleridge's later substitution of *theorems* for metaphysical ideas,[60] his occasional, but only occasional, distinction between *theory* and *hypothesis,*[61] and his more frequent, but not invariable, distinction between *laws* and *rules.*[62] Instead of attempting anything of the sort we shall simply try to outline in our own way, and on our own responsibility, the general scheme of the relation between ideas, theories and laws which appears to result from a general survey of the many and scattered observations of Coleridge relevant thereto. It was on that relation that his methodology was founded.

For this purpose it will be necessary to begin by reverting once more to that "order of the Mental Powers," to which we have already alluded in previous chapters:

Reason
Imagination
Understanding
Understanding
Fancy
Sense

It will be recalled that the scale is meaningful only if it is conceived in the mode of polarity. So conceived, it may be used, before we proceed farther, to illuminate a little the difficult issue of the peculiar relation between ideas and mind. We have used such terms as *apprehend, contemplate, participate, meditate.* Coleridge himself on one occasion, and in one particular context, went so far as to say that idea *is* mind.[63] But more often he makes the relation equivalent to a perceptual one.[64] This is in accord with the scale, since the mode of polarity involves a relation between the two extremities that is closer to identity, though it is greater in distance, than that between any two other points in the scale or process. Thus, the closer one is to reason, the closer also has one come to its octave, sense, "Reason indeed is much nearer to Sense than to Understanding; for Reason (says our great Hooker) is

a direct aspect, an inward beholding, having a similar relation to the intelligible or spiritual, as Sense has to the material or phenomenal." [65] The distinction is that, in the case of reason, we are in a realm where an act may be "one with the product of the act"; we are dealing with "a subject which becomes its own object." And it is for that reason that, as previously mentioned,* reflection on metaphysical ideas is a valuable aid. For there we are *obliged* to combine "the notion of an organ of sense . . . with the notion of the appropriate and peculiar objects of that sense." Contemplating *any* idea, the mind contemplates its own energies; contemplating a metaphysical idea, "the mind *exclusively* contemplates its own energies." [66] Reason is "an organ of sense, or a new sense," † but it is an organ of *inward* sense and moreover "an organ identical with its appropriate objects." [67] Human reason, as organ, perceives or contemplates the ideas of reason which constitute it, but are nevertheless its own act. Perception of an idea is therefore self-apprehension or self-contemplation; but then so would physical sense-perception be, given full self-consciousness.[68]

Just as the understanding *without* the light of reason, or without the use of reason as an organ turned inward, is a very different matter from the understanding when properly related to reason (a difference Coleridge expressed by the line drawn between understanding and understanding), so is what is ordinarily meant by a law of nature very different from the true law, which is at the same time an idea. We may venture accordingly to parallel Coleridge's gamut with another of our own construction:

Reason (as "the source and birthplace of ideas")
Idea
Law

Law
Theory
Sense

We believe that, seen within such a framework, many of Coleridge's observations become more meaningful or at all events less mystifying; such observations, for example, as that "in the infancy of the human mind all our ideas are instincts";[69] or that the scientist, in forming a

* P. 121, above.
† P. 121, above.

theory, is instinctively labouring to extract a law, and further, that "This instinct [note: *not* the theory] is itself but the form, in which the idea, the mental correlative of the law, first announces its incipient germination in his own mind." [70] It would be well to consider also, in this framework, his many allusions to the necessary relation between deep thinking and strong feeling, into which we shall not closely enter. Attention has often been drawn to them. "Ignorance seldom *vaults* into Knowledge, but passes into it through an intermediate state of obscurity . . ." [71] "deep feeling has a tendency to combine with obscure ideas . . ." [72] We shall not well understand them, unless we are keeping in view the fact that Coleridge always has at the back of his mind the idea; that the idea is at the opposite pole to, but not detached from, sense; and that knowledge and acknowledgment of an idea "requires the whole man, the free will no less than the intellect." [73]

At the moment however we are concerned with that all-important line between law and law, which parallels the line between understanding and understanding; the difference—and of course the relation—between the law of nature, which is at the same time an idea, and the so-called law (more properly a "rule") which may be arrived at by generalising the notices of the senses.[74] Must it not have been on that very line that the real function of experiment, and with it the whole conception of scientific method, balanced and faltered in the mind of Francis Bacon? If Coleridge was convinced that the future of mankind depends on its success in grasping the former distinction, he was no less convinced that the future of science depends on its success in grasping the latter.

In the former case we endeavoured to elucidate the consequences of *failure* so to distinguish, by presenting an alternative scale, decapitated by eliminating reason.* If we tried the same experiment in the latter, we should get something like the following:

Fancies (= hypostatized notions)
Laws (= rules)
Hypotheses
Sense

and this is in fact ("fancy paramount in physics")* what we have largely got.

* Chapter 8, p. 102, above.

For that reason Coleridge has not a great many examples to offer of his genuine laws of nature. On one or two occasions he placed beside the law of gravity the principle of Archimedes and Kepler's laws of the planetary motions.[75] He believed that John Hunter was on the verge of arriving at a law of life, as universal as the law of gravity,[76] and it distressed him to see this true *principle* of life (the tendency to individuation) being gratuitously supplemented by the hypostatized notion of a "fluid," just as the true principle of gravitation was being supplemented by the fancied "ether." [77] Above all, however, there was his own discovery, or re-discovery, of polarity as another law of nature no less universal than that of gravitation.* The law or idea of polarity was one he had evidently been feeling towards for a long time; the more so, because in this case the artificial split between law aspect and idea aspect cannot so successfully be maintained. In this case understanding and fancy cannot so easily have it their own way. It might indeed be said that a certain "tragic" element in the relation, in the very identity, between idea and law, which he laboured to expose in his paper on the *Prometheus of Aeschylus,* is *most* evident in the law of gravity, *least* so in the law of polarity. Much in his letters, and many unpublished notes, show that in his latest years he devoted a good deal of attention to the contrast and relation between the two. But it will be best to consider this in its bearing on the relation between what Coleridge thought and the world of modern science.

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* See Chapter 3, above, and especially the long passage from the *Friend* quoted on pp. 38–39.