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Reading Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in England, 1796-1840

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Abstract: Most studies deny that *Kritik der Urteilskraft* played a significant role in the early reception of Kant's philosophy in England. In this paper I examine the notebooks, letters and lectures of several members of British medical and scientific institutions to tell a different story. Drawing from the writings of Thomas Beddoes, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Joseph Henry Green and William Whewell, I identify a line of reception in which Kant's critique of judgement's power of reflection was used to establish the consilience of the mind's anticipation of systematic order and the organization of natural bodies. Each discovered in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* a shared principle for judgements of taste and scientific inquiry, made available through the mind's affective response to the appearance of contingent order in nature. Their writings, I contend, evince a more sophisticated reception of Kant's philosophy in England than has hitherto been recognized.

1. Introduction

In his landmark study, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793-1838* (1931), René Wellek unearthed the steady incursion of Kant's critical philosophy in British periodicals and universities in the decades following the French Revolution. While this incursion paved way for the first English translation of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in 1838, it involved, on Wellek's account, a series of superficial readings and misunderstandings. Anthony Florian Madinger Willich, the first to summarize Kant's work in English, offers "rarely more than a clumsy translation of the chapter-headings and the tables of contents in Kant" (Wellek, *Kant in England*, 13). Samuel Taylor Coleridge employed Kant's distinction between reason and the understanding "in a very hodge-podge manner which shows that he could not have understood the actual reasons behind Kant's division" (66). Thomas De Quincey's attempt to graft Kant's thought into English Romanticism "was based on a gross misunderstanding of the purpose of the Kantian philosophy and ... remained only skin-deep" (180). The protagonists of Wellek's study fall one after the other before a high evaluative bar: "Kant is, as it were, the measuring-rod which measures all the phenomena streaming into our laboratory" (vi). Kant's philosophy was

applied to ends for which it was not intended by minds that were ill-equipped to grasp the intellectual revolution staged in Königsberg.

Recent studies have enriched Wellek's account by locating Kant's reception within the specific debates unfolding in England at the turn of the nineteenth century (Micheli, *Early Reception of Kant*; Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas*; Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors*). As Monika Class (*Coleridge and Kantian Ideas*, 4) contends, originality on its own is a poor criterion for judging intellectual merit, for it leads the historian of philosophy to neglect the sociocultural conditions in which reception occurs, and thus to overlook the 'act of transmission as a form of intellectual interaction.' In this paper I seek to contribute to an alternative interpretation of the early reception of Kant's critical philosophy in England by focusing on the uptake of the third *Critique*, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). While recent literature has advanced beyond Wellek's study, it is yet to challenge his neglect of the third *Critique*. Wellek refers to this text only twice in his study, once in relation to Coleridge's theory of criticism (Wellek, *Kant in England*, 110-113) and once with respect to Henry Crabb Robinson's aesthetics (157). Implied is that Coleridge and Robinson were lone and eclectic readers of the third *Critique*, lacking both the linguistic skill and intellectual acumen to grasp the nuance of Kant's project.

My aim in what follows is to show that Wellek's ahistorical method of interpretation occludes genuine aspects of Kant's philosophy that were recognized by some of the writers he disparages, and that this oversight has not been sufficiently addressed in subsequent literature. In particular, it neglects the reception of Kant's scientific account of aesthetic experience, which identifies a shared principle for judgements of taste and scientific inquiry made available through the faculty of feeling. Adopting a contextual method, I argue that Coleridge can be seen as an active participant in a line of reading *Kritik der Urteilskraft* that begins with Christoph Girtanner and Thomas Beddoes in Edinburgh's medical faculty and moved to the medical institutions of London via Beddoes' Bristol Circle. This line of reception finds in Kant's third *Critique* a scientific treatment of aesthetic judgement in which the beholder's affective response to contingent order is not understood as the mechanical association of abstract ideas in the mind but as a *sui generis* harmony between the mind's anticipation of systematic order and the organization of natural bodies.

The paper is divided into six sections. In Section 2 I begin with Beddoes' efforts to promote Kant's critical philosophy in the 1790s. In Section 3 I turn to Coleridge, Beddoes' protégé, who deployed Kant's bridging project as a means to explain how judgements of taste open a passage between experience and reason. In Section 4 I examine a series of lectures given by Joseph Henry Green, Coleridge's friend and collaborator, which integrate Kant's critique of aesthetic judging into a holistic anatomy of the mind. In Section 5 I consider

William Whewell's philosophical examination of the inductive sciences, which builds on Coleridge and Green's conception of Ideas and affirms Kant's notion of a natural end as the fundamental Idea of biology. Each discovered in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* an *a priori* principle for judgements of taste and scientific inquiry, made available through the mind's affective response to the appearance of contingent order in nature. Their writings, I contend, evince a more sophisticated reception of Kant's philosophy in England than has hitherto been recognized.

2. Beddoes and Kant's early reception in England

The early reception of Kant's philosophy in England was framed by the political instability of the 1790s. The threat posed to social order in England by the French Revolution saw a preoccupation with events unfolding on the continent. The personal union of Great Britain and Hannover, which continued under King George III, ensured a steady cultural exchange between England and the Prussian states. References to Kant's philosophy in English periodicals began to appear in the early 1790s, yet in most cases before 1796 it was decried as unintelligible and dangerously radical.¹ In 1794, Friedrich August Nitsch, who studied under Kant in Königsberg, held the first lectures on the critical philosophy in London.² Nitsch founded The Kantian Society, which was attended by progressive young scholars including John Thelwall and Coleridge (Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas*, 38). His lectures, however, were not as successful as he had hoped, and economic difficulties forced him to leave London in 1796. Nitsch wrote to Kant to report on the unreceptive conditions he met in England. "As far as philosophy in England is concerned", he laments, "it is, except for the mathematical and empirical part of it, thoroughly bad and really could not be worse" (in Kant, *Correspondence*, 11:518). Nitsch's lectures were published in 1796 as *A General and Introductory View of Professor Kant concerning Man, the World and the Deity*, offering a collage of the categories of judgement and the categorial imperative.

Another of Kant's former students, Anthony Florian Madinger Willich, moved to London in 1798, and published the second book-length study of Kant's philosophy in English, entitled *Elements of the Critical Philosophy*. Willich appeals to the nation that has "produced a Bacon, a Newton, a Locke, a Hume, and so many other *profound* thinkers" to consider one "whose genius leaves the beaten track, and searches for higher

¹ For example, an anonymous reviewer for *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1796, I 137) ridiculed J. A. O'Keeffe's endorsement of Kant in *An Essay on the Progress of the Human Understanding*, for "the Kantian system is almost as unintelligible as that of Jacob Behmen. All we learn from it is, that, like the French, all first principles are to be done away with, and we are to begin with a new set."

² Writing to Kant, Nitsch states that "I have the honor of being the first person in London to lecture on the Kantian philosophy", noting that, "Until now, people were not even acquainted with the title of your immortal book, let alone its contents" (in Kant, *Correspondence*, 11:518).

principles as such” (*Elements*, iv). While he emphasizes Kant’s epistemology and practical philosophy in the first two *Critiques*, Willich provides a brief overview of the third *Critique*, translated as *Critique of the Judging Faculty*. The overview consists almost entirely of quotations, selected to capture Kant’s bridging project. He records Kant’s inquiry into the “perplexity on account of a principle”, manifest chiefly in aesthetic judgements (Willich, *Elements*, 104; *KU* 5:169). While aesthetic judgements “contribute nothing to the knowledge we obtain of things”, Willich translates, “they nevertheless belong exclusively to the cognoscible faculty, and evince the immediate relation of this faculty to the sensations of pleasure and displeasure, in consequence of some one principle a priori.”

Despite offering a broader view of Kant’s philosophy than Nitsch, Willich’s book did little to extend the Kantian project in London. The text that sparked a wider discussion of critical philosophy was Kant’s pamphlet *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795), which proposes a league of nations. In August 1796, chemist and physician Thomas Beddoes released a summary of Kant’s argument. He acknowledges that “the reader will be startled by the first [of Kant’s articles]”, which states that “the civil contribution of every state must be republican” (Beddoes, “To Perpetual Peace”, 487). Yet he assures his skeptical readers that Kant’s meaning of the term “republican” does not equate to “democracy”, which is “necessarily a despotism.” It refers merely to the “separation of the executive from the legislative power.” Kant’s progressive ideas are thus applicable to the British parliamentary system without need for revolution. *Zum ewigen Frieden* was translated into English in October that year as *Perpetual Peace*, placing his philosophy at the centre of discussion in London periodicals.

Following Beddoes’ appraisal of Kant’s theory of perpetual peace, translations of his moral and political work began to appear.³ Yet Kant’s growing popularity was dealt a heavy blow as Great Britain entered the second Napoleonic war in 1799. The fear of a revolutionary contagion resulted in a sudden and violent reaction against ideas originating on the Continent, and *Perpetual Peace* was dubbed as Jacobin propaganda in the major English periodicals. A newly established journal, *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, launched a sustained attack on the German “literati” and their universities, where “the paths of the true science are forsaken for the labyrinths of the new philosophy” (“Preface”, viii). A series of letters by “an honest Briton” called for the

³ The three *Critiques*, however, were not available in English until well into the nineteenth century. An incomplete translation of *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* was made by J. W. Semple and published in 1836. A full translation of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* was published anonymously in 1838 (the second edition in 1848 revealed the translator to be Francis Haywood). *Kritik der Urteilskraft* was not available in English until J. H. Bernard published a full translation in 1892.

purging of German thought from English institutions.⁴ The following passage is typical: “of all men in the world German philosophers and German scribblers are the last persons who ought to be allowed to speak on [matters of legal reform]” (“The literati”, V 579). German universities were presented as breeding grounds for radical politics, where the students “have the appearance of a set of rude and insolent Jacobins” (“The literati”, VI 569-70). Their chief object of study “is the new system of philosophy, or what may be called the German metaphysics, by which the mind is totally bewildered, and at length deprived of every solid principle of religion, morality, or sound-politics.” The consistent attacks on Kant in *The Anti-Jacobin* coincide with a sudden decline of interest in Kantian philosophy in English journals. Wellek notes that by 1800, the books by Nitsch and Willich were forgotten (*Kant in England*, 20).⁵ This put a halt to the dissemination of Kantian ideas and made way for the development of Paley and Bentham’s utilitarianism.

While Kant’s name receded from the public eye, interest in his philosophy was by no means extinguished. In scientific institutions, including the medical faculty at the University of Edinburgh and the Royal College of Surgeons in London, Kant’s critical philosophy remained a subaltern matter of discussion. Wellek’s study overlooks the fact that most of Kant’s early advocates were medically trained, and had some connection with Edinburgh’s medical faculty (see Vickers, “Brunonian Medicine”, 59). Willich originally came to Britain to study medicine in Edinburgh under J. B. Jachmann, who later became Kant’s biographer. Christoph Girtanner, a chemist based in Göttingen’s medicine faculty, made several visits to Edinburgh during the 1790s, where he attempted to fuse Kant’s philosophy with the latest developments in chemistry and medicine. Beddoes trained in medicine and surgery at Edinburgh, and collaborated with Girtanner throughout the 1790s (Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors*, 58-9).

To understand what the third *Critique* meant to the medical communities in Edinburgh and London, it will be helpful to consider the dynamical theories of medicine produced in London in the late-eighteenth century. In a series of lectures delivered at the Royal College in 1786-7, Scottish surgeon John Hunter sketched an experimental science of practical anatomy based on a “simple principle of life” (*Principles of Surgery*, 20). This principle is independent of organic structure and is resident in all things capable of instigating their own beginning. In living things, matter is subject to laws that cannot be reduced to their mechanical properties. While the principle of life seemed to promised a new science of living phenomena, Hunter identified the

⁴ Micheli speculates that the author was the Scottish Episcopalian James Walker, then based in Weimar and the main source of information regarding the German academy for the journal’s editor, John Gifford (*Early Reception*, 92).

⁵ Micheli notes that between 1806 and the publication of *Biographia* in 1818 “there was almost nothing [written] about Kant in England” (*Early Reception*, 106).

principle with the presence of blood, thus demanding a complete break between plant movement and animal life. Rejecting Hunter's insistence on discontinuity, Edinburgh physician John Brown proposed a new system of medical science grounded in the theory of "excitability" (*Elements of Medicine*, 4). In the Brunonian system, every living thing is endowed with a fixed share of excitability, stored in the nerves and muscles. These "exciting powers" correspond with the capacity to respond to stimuli, thus warranting a far broader field of inquiry than Hunter's principle. They can be classified into external and internal groups, and the state of health is determined by maintaining a balance of powers. Brown thus provided an ingenious way to ground the practice of medicine on a single principle: "Life is a forced state" (*Elements of Medicine*, 34). Ailments can be treated by increasing or withdrawing external exciting powers to restore life to balance, meaning that medical practice can be quantified and studied by experimental methods.

The dynamical theories of medicine proposed by Hunter and Brown went against the grain of Britain's medical institutions, which advanced a mechanistic conception of bodily movement. Their work had a far greater resonance with natural philosophers on the continent, as it promised a *science* of medicine, wherein the phenomena of bodily movement could be unified under the principle of life as a forced state (see Risse, "Medicine in Germany", 146). As Kant explained in the first *Critique*, a science is a system of cognitions unified under a principle (*KrV* A832/B860). Yet to elevate the aggregate of cognitions to the status of a science opens a problem, for we must presuppose that the objects of experience adhere to a system of laws (*KrV* A652/B680). Here Kant agreed with the British experimental philosophers: systematicity, as an idea of reason, is not given in experience. Without presupposing that nature coheres as a system, we have no warrant to unite natural phenomena, such as medical symptoms or bodily movement, under a rational principle.

It is against this background that we can understand the first English review of the third *Critique*, published by Beddoes in *The Monthly Magazine* in 1796. Beddoes renders *Kritik der Urteilkraft* as *The Examination of the Judgment*, which he presents as a solution to the problem of grounding the critical system identified by Reinhold in *Letters on Kantian Philosophy*. He claims that bodily feeling opens a passage between reason and the understanding, grounded in our affective response to natural beauty and works of art. He includes a lengthy translation of §54, where Kant examines laughter is an embodied response to an intellectual process of suspense and release. Laughter is evoked by the power of 'wit and originality of humour', Beddoes translates, the common mark of our '*esprits forts*' ("On Kant's Philosophy", 267). Class notes that Beddoes' translation highlights Kant's reservations about the cult of genius (*Coleridge and Kantian Ideas*, 161). His rendering of Kant's "*Genies*" as "*esprits forts*" separates Kant's account of natural creativity from Hume and Burke's

sentimentalist account of genius, and also from the speculative accounts of genius offered by Herder and Schelling. An *esprit fort* is not a passive vessel through which nature speaks, but one who defies group prejudice and religious convention to think freely and generate new practices.

Beddoes' connection between laughter and the intellect offers a cryptic and provisional account of how bodily feeling is produced by the balancing of the rational powers. We find a clue to his developing view in the methodological preface he wrote for the English translation of Brown's *Elements of Medicine*, where he praises Brown as a genius who advanced the first "science of life" (*Elements of Medicine*, xi). Yet it was Coleridge, Beddoes protégé, who was able to build on Kant's third *Critique* to explain how aesthetic experience alerts us to the consilience of mind and nature. For both Beddoes and Coleridge, Brown's excitability theory is an exemplary product of genius, for it presents an Idea – the principle of life – that cannot be reduced to a pre-existing structure.

3. Coleridge on the principles of genial criticism

During his student years in Cambridge, Coleridge became an ardent follower of Hartley's empiricism, in which our experience of objects in connection is the result of a mechanical association between abstract ideas in the mind (*Collected Letters*, I 137). The task of scientific explanation is to reduce our experience of compounds and processes to the material interactions between their component parts. Coleridge's departure from Cambridge in 1794, however, was marked by several encounters that led him to search for a new framework for scientific inquiry. When he moved to Bristol in 1795, he joined the circle of radical chemists and physicians who collaborated in Beddoes' Pneumatic Institution, established to advance research in Brunonian medicine. There Coleridge befriended Beddoes' assistant, Humphry Davy, who was applying the latest discoveries in electrochemistry to surgical practice (Knight, "Chemical Philosophy", 99).

In Beddoes' Bristol Circle, Coleridge encountered a radically different approach to experimental science to that he had acquired in Cambridge. He began intensive study of the German language, and his earliest reference to Kant was in connection with medical theory (*Collected Letters* I 120). Beddoes' rendering of Kant's genius as *esprit fort* suited the interests of Coleridge and Wordsworth as they composed *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), for it presents the artist as self-consciously modelling a new kind of relation to nature.⁶ Beddoes took an active interest in Coleridge's intellectual development, helping to secure the patronage of Thomas Wedgwood

⁶ Class argues that Beddoes had a close working relationship with Wordsworth and Coleridge as they composed *Lyrical Ballads*, given that the first edition included a poem written by Beddoes (*Coleridge and Kantian Ideas*, 163).

and orchestrating Coleridge and Wordsworth's visit to Germany in 1798 (Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors*, 37-8). Beddoes' interest is also apparent in Coleridge's choice to study in Göttingen, where Beddoes had forged an intellectual exchange with Girtanner. There Coleridge attended Johann Blumenbach's lectures on physiology and Christian Gottlieb Heyne's lectures on philosophy and German letters (*Collected Letters*, I 518).

Soon after Coleridge returned to England, he and Wordsworth were personally attacked in *The Anti-Jacobin* for their progressive politics and sympathy for German ideas.⁷ Decrying the infection of German metaphysics on the minds of England's youth, the "honest Briton" reports an anecdote in which "two gentlemen, formerly well known at Cambridge, who, feeling the restraints of law and religion somewhat irksome, left the University and became philosophers" (Anon., "The literati", VI 574). These gentlemen travelled "to Germany, to enable themselves, by acquiring the language and philosophy of this favoured country, to enlighten more completely the ignorant people of England." The author presents Coleridge's passage to Germany as a matter of national betrayal. The letter evidently had an effect, for, despite his extensive writings on German philosophy in letters and notebooks, Coleridge made no public reference to Kant until *Biographia Literaria* nearly twenty years later. Nevertheless, a series of letters to Thomas Poole indicate that he began to read Kant in earnest in 1801, when he discovered in Kant's philosophy a framework to express his own search for a rational principle within experience (see *Collected Letters*, II 706-9). Because the ideas of reason transcend the conditions of possible sensible intuition, they also transcend the conditions of human knowledge. How is it, then, that they can be present to the mind and employed in scientific investigation?

In what follows I suggest that Coleridge found a solution in the third *Critique*, where Kant argues that aesthetic judgement alerts us to a subjective principle that bridges between reason and the understanding (*KU* 5:176). In a letter to Robinson, he described the third *Critique* as "the most astonishing of his [Kant's] works" (*Correspondence*, I 305), and declared in 1811 that he had, like Schelling, "mastered the spirit of Kant's Critique of Judgment" (*Collected Letters*, III 360). Coleridge's most extended engagement with *Kritik der Urteilskraft* occurs in a series of essays outlining "The Principles of Genial Criticism", published in five parts in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* in 1814. The essays are framed as a response to Richard Payne Knight's *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805), which advanced an empiricist theory of aesthetics. For Knight, judgements of beauty are "unconnected with, and uninfluenced by, the higher faculties of mind" (19). They arise rather from the pleasure we take in associating the properties of certain abstract ideas that drive us to

⁷ For studies on the threat posed by German metaphysics to British patriotism, see Magnuson (*Reading Public Romanticism*, 69-70) and Simpson (*Romanticism, Nationalism*, 85-9).

preserve life. Rejecting Knight's empiricism, Coleridge builds on Kant's transcendental critique of taste, in which judgements of beauty are an immediate cognitive act of the mind, grounded in a subjective *a priori* principle that enables a transition from reason's demand for systematic order to experience. In Wellek's study, Coleridge's "Principles" offers "merely a paraphrase of Kant", rehearsing Kant's argument without grasping the systematic import of the deduction of taste (*Kant in England*, 111). This assessment, however, fails to consider the cultural pressures that constrained the discussion of Kant's work in public. More significantly, it obfuscates the specific questions Coleridge brought to the text, and is thus unable to define where he deviates from Kant's argument. While Coleridge reproduces the cognitive structure of Kant's aesthetics, he refuses to accept Kant's reticence to acknowledge an objective harmony between beholder and beheld. His attempt to rework Kant's aesthetics thus undermines its transcendental status, and yet reveals a problem in Kant's account that, I suggest in later sections, Green and Whewell aspire to overcome.

In the first essay, Coleridge presents the thesis that "The common essence of all [art] consists in the excitement of emotion for the purpose of immediate pleasure thro' the medium of beauty" (*Shorter Works*, I 358). The peculiarity of this excitement distinguishes poetry from science. While the pleasures of scientific progress serve a mediated end – "truth and possible utility" – the excitement occasioned by the beautiful is immediate. Coleridge terms this immediate and disinterested emotion "complacency", which is his rendering of Kant's *Wohlgefallen*. Echoing §9 of the third *Critique*, Coleridge claims that to discern the principles of genial criticism we must search for the "third something" that connects the passive and active faculties, made available to us in the feeling of complacency. This "third something" is the faculty of taste:

TASTE is the intermediate faculty which connects the active with the passive powers of our nature, the intellect with the senses; and its appointed function is to elevate the *images* of the latter, while it realizes the *ideas* of the former. (*Shorter Works*, I 365)

By identifying taste as the bridge between reason and the senses, Coleridge presents a fundamentally different conception of criticism to Knight's *Analytical Inquiry*, in which taste is a mechanical faculty of association. This bridging work operates in two directions: contemplation elevates sensory experience to images, and production realizes Ideas. A critique of taste thus yields a theory of the fine arts, for contemplation energizes the creative powers to reproduce the excited state of the mind peculiar to judgements of beauty. Aesthetic experience elevates objects into something more than mere surfaces, perceiving living Ideas in what is given in the senses.

To explain how Ideas can be perceived, Coleridge follows Kant's inquiry into the conceptual ordering of aesthetic judgements. In judgements of the agreeable, "the *sensation* of pleasure always precedes the judgment" (*Shorter Works*, I 380). In such cases, the intellect is mediated by a desire. In judgements of beauty, the harmony of images and ideas always precedes the pleasure. The pleasure is not subservient to the intellect or to bodily needs, but is generated spontaneously through a harmonious interaction of sense and reason. Here Coleridge rejects Kant's subjective harmony, in which the interplay of the faculties grounds the judgement that it is *as if* the object were purposely arranged to excite the mind (*KU* 5:221). For Coleridge, judgements of beauty are objective. They arise from "the perceived harmony of an object, whether sight or sound, with the inborn and constitutive rules of the judgment and imagination: and it is always intuitive" (*Shorter Works*, I 382). Coleridge's use of "perceived" and "intuitive" is thoroughly unKantian, for it implies that reason has immediate access to the intrinsic unity of an object. It transgresses Kant's restriction of intuition to the conditions of sensibility and affirms a preestablished harmony, wherein the inborn rules of judgement genuinely cohere with the object. Coleridge can thus compare the rational appreciation of beauty with the eye's perception of light: "As light to the eye, even such is beauty to the mind, which cannot but have complacency in whatever is perceived as pre-configured to its living faculties" (*Shorter Works*, I 383). In judgements of beauty, the harmony of the object and the constitutive rules of judgement is intuited by the "mind's eye", which produces complacency. The mind's eye grasps the object as unified by a principle, perfectly suited for a rational being to contemplate it:

The sense of Beauty subsists in simultaneous intuition of the relation of parts, each to each, and of all to a whole: exciting an immediate and absolute complacency, without intervenience therefore of any interest sensual or intellectual. (*Shorter Works*, I 378)

Coleridge agrees with Kant that the dynamic relation between whole and parts is not constituted by the understanding, which moves only from parts to whole. Yet in contrast to Kant, he claims that the movement from whole to parts is *given* to reason, which *intuits* the dynamic structure of the object without the understanding's interest. Beauty thus operates as a bridge between mind and nature, for it excites the faculties though reason's perception of a harmony in the object, which gives rise to the pleasure.

Ben Brice (*Coleridge and Scepticism*, 83) describes Coleridge's literary criticism as a "Trojan horse", cleverly deployed to infiltrate British empiricism with Kant's *a priori* notion of criticism. While this metaphor

identifies the cultural constraints that Coleridge had to navigate in his reading of the third *Critique*, it remains beholden to Wellek's ahistorical method, for it maintains a static conception of Kant's philosophy that can somehow be imported to a new context without alteration. Thus, Brice not only overlooks Coleridge's distinct project, but also misses the glaring problem opened by Coleridge's genial criticism. Because the consilience of mind and nature is perceived, the harmony that arises between beholder and beheld is not really spontaneous but preestablished. Coleridge returns to a realist aesthetics wherein the harmony between the subject and object grounds the judgement. He thus fails to provide a science of taste in which criticism justifies an *a priori* principle, for the principle is dependent on the fit between subject and object – a “happy accident”, to use Kant's term (*KU* 5:184).

4. Green's anatomy of beauty

While “Principles” did not succeed in articulating a scientific understanding of poetic and natural processes, Coleridge spent the following decades collaborating with Green in search of a solution. Green was Professor of Anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons, and used this office to establish the work of Hunter and Brown on a respectable philosophical foundation. Despite his contributions to surgical practice, Green is mostly depicted as executor of Coleridge's estate, and the subservient force in the pair's collaborative activities. Yet this depiction does not stand up under close inspection. In a notebook entry in 1830, Coleridge exclaimed that “My dear and honored Mr. Gr. has fully *solved* the problem – He first has discovered and ascertained *what Beauty is*” (*Collected Letters*, VI 811).⁸ Given Coleridge's general reticence to acknowledge his sources, such praise merits our consideration. What is it that Green discovered, and that Coleridge thought had solved the question of beauty? I suggest that Green resolved the problem of harmony by replacing the objective harmony of Coleridge's “Principles”, which pertains between beholder and beheld, with an anatomy of the mental powers. He thus fulfils Coleridge's project of developing a scientific account of our capacity to intuit a creative power common to mind and world.

Early correspondence between Coleridge and Green suggests that their friendship was forged over a common appreciation of Kant's philosophy. Shortly after their first meeting in 1817, Coleridge expressed to Green that

⁸ For a discussion of Green's relation to Coleridge, see Fulford, “Coleridge and J. H. Green”.

I reverence Immanuel Kant, with my whole heart and soul and believe him to be the only philosopher, for all men who have the power of thinking. I cannot conceive the liberal pursuit or profession, in which the service derived from a particular study of his works would not be incalculably great, both as cathartic, tonic and directly nutritious. (*Collected Letters*, II 326)

Like Coleridge, Green was a proficient reader of German philosophy. In 1817 he spent a year in Berlin studying philosophy under Wilhelm Solger, author of *Erwin* (1815), a two-volume treatise on aesthetics. Green's most extensive work on aesthetics features in a series of lectures given at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1829/30 in which he expounds "the science of interpreting human expression and appreciating human beauty" (Simon, "Memoir of the Author's Life", vii). He uses his office as Professor of Anatomy to demonstrate how Coleridge's objective take on Kant's account of harmonious play can be satisfied without the dogmatic assumption of a preestablished harmony.

At the heart of Green's lectures is the claim that judgements of beauty open us to "a common ground of science and fine art" ("Beauty and Expression", 1111). His aim is not merely to develop a theory of the fine arts, but to show how beauty enlivens the mind to a productive idea of nature that persists in an active state of rest, just as the mental powers persist in a dynamic state of activity. Following Coleridge, Green begins by opposing the empiricist account of criticism, in which there is no meaningful difference between "the pleasurable affection of the senses and the intellectual complacency now in question." In contrast, he affirms the Kantian distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful; the agreeable satisfies a pre-given interest, the beautiful pleases without an interest. Yet breaking from Coleridge, Green does not present complacency as a pleasure that arises from the harmony of mind and object. Rather, he claims that complacency is generated by "a unity resulting from the equilibrium of all the powers that constitute the human mind" (1109). Complacency is a *sui generis* feeling produced by the "living balance of the mental powers", which is essentially "motion in the form of rest" (1110). The *sui generis* nature of complacency ensures that Green's aesthetics remain scientific in the critical sense: complacency is not determined by an external object but is the enabling condition of a mental power. Yet Green does not abandon Coleridge's search for an objective presentation of Ideas, for he includes reason among the mental powers. For Kant, judgements of beauty are grounded in the felt harmony of imagination and the understanding, such that reason, which introduces a cognitive interest, is not directly involved (*KU* §9). Green joins Schelling and Solger in developing an account of aesthetic experience much

closer to Kant's sublime, wherein the mind is "affected as a whole" – reason included – "consisting in a living balance of all its constituent faculties, reflected to us in the beautiful object" (1110).

Having defined the beautiful in terms of a pleasure that arises from a living balance of the mental powers, Green sets out to determine what gives to objects "the power to excite this complacency in our minds" ("Conditions of Beauty", 1134). His answer is that the excited state of the mind is occasioned by an object that bears an "antecedent unity, which the components necessarily presuppose, flowing out of the genial conception of the artist, and remaining present as the in-dwelling soul, which still continues to animate the whole" (1134). Aesthetic experience opens us to a kind of object that is not the product of design but rather an internally organized whole – a "forced state", to use the Brunonian phrase – that cannot be presented by the understanding but can only be grasped through contemplation. As the beholder feels the balance of her mental powers, her reason intuits the balance of part and whole in the object, "the sense of its being ... a spontaneous product." The living balance is thus "an act; and the source of the peculiar pleasurable emotion or complacency is the act and moment of balancing."

Green's aesthetics solves Coleridge's problem of preestablished harmony, for it demonstrates how complacency is both *sui generis* and occasioned by a "temporary disturbance". The functional interaction of the mental powers is interrupted by an object that manifests a spontaneous part-whole relation, which cannot be explained by the forces that act upon it. Thus, Green solves Coleridge's problem by affirming the positive reading of reflecting judgement developed by Kant's German readers, in which the inner harmony of a work of art *is* an inner purposiveness. When we "stand in contemplation of the Beautiful in nature", Green explains, we "abstract from all other purposes of design, of utility, or truth." Instead, we intuit *nature itself* as a designer. Beauty is thus defined by "the fitness of the object to excite in the mind of the beholder, or contemplator, the state [of complacency]" (1134). Genius, then, is the capacity to repeat the relations at work in nature's self-production, either in works of art or natural science.

The beautiful opens us to the ground of scientific inquiry to the extent that it enlivens the beholder to the idea of nature as a forced state of rest, which serves as the fundamental Idea of the dynamical sciences. The idea of nature as the product of design is helpful and yet provisional: it allows us to observe the relation between parts and whole as structured by an external idea, but does not explain the contingent order discerned *in* nature. Design anticipates a deeper grasp of natural order as the product of an inner dynamic. Beautiful objects are those that manifest a sense of wholeness that is "supplied by *intrinsic* relations", thereby alerting the beholder to

“the unity of the forms of *organic life*.” The idea of life is intuited through an experience of our mental powers which persist in an internal, spontaneous unity.

In his Hunterian Oration of 1840, Green explains how the idea of life provides a rational principle for the life sciences by offering a quasi-transcendental argument that mirrors Kant’s presentation of judgement’s principle in the Introduction to the third *Critique*. There Kant argues that our search for empirical laws governing particular natural products is grounded in the presupposition that objects of experience feature within a system, conceived of as the product of design (*KU* 5:181). Green’s version of the argument is not strictly transcendental, however, for it presents Kant’s principle of reflective judgement as a principle of reason. Without “a rational and unshaken faith in an invariable order of nature”, he claims, “we could only claim for a patch-work of experience that faintest mode of combination arising from a habit of association in our own mind” (*Vital Dynamics*, 17). To identify the source of this rational and unshaken faith, Green points to organized beings, which cannot be explained by their component parts but “necessarily presuppose the unity as the cause and condition of their existence” (*Vital Dynamics*, 18). The part-whole relation in organized beings is intelligible only if we presuppose “a power and unity, antecedent in the order of efficiency, and remaining present, as the sustaining and conservative energy”:

Growth, motion and feeling, – such are the universal characters, under which animated being is alone conceivable. And it is in contemplating these functions as forces of one subject or power that we learn the aim and purpose of the actuating idea, in the development of an organism, ... as the indispensable medium and condition of the manifestation and working of that which in and of itself as essentially supersensuous – a living subject or power. (Green, *Vital Dynamics*, 32)

In Green’s aesthetics, the poet and the scientist begin from the same delight in nature, and then proceed via different modes of expression: the poet realizes an Idea, while the scientist – like the genial critic – discerns an Idea manifest in natural products. While Kant denied the connection between scientific reasoning and genius, for the ideas produced by the scientist can, once demonstrated, be learned (*KU* 5:308), Green establishes a much closer relation between productive reason and natural science. In his second Hunterian Oration of 1847, he presents Hunter’s discovery of the principle of life as a paradigmatic act of scientific genius (*Mental Dynamics*, 7). Where other anatomists had perceived mere affinities between similar phylogenetic traits, Hunter produced “a connected scheme of gradual development, the connection supplied, and the aim anticipated, in the

antecedent unity of the causative law of life” (*Mental Dynamics*, 6). This was made possible by the Idea of life, by which Hunter was able to organize the diversity of living form as the consequence of a dynamic principle.

Green’s lectures display how he and Coleridge were learning to apply what they had learned in Germany to problems specific to their British context. While Green could not match Coleridge’s creative powers, his anatomical approach to the cognitive faculties opened a scientific account of poetic and natural processes where Coleridge had failed. Both discovered in Kant’s third *Critique* an alternative to the empiricist tradition of criticism, and developed an account of investigation in which the Idea of nature, understood as “a self-sufficing whole”, directs inquiry and determines its success (Green, “The Conditions of Beauty”, 1134).

5. Whewell and Fundamental Ideas

William Whewell was professor of minerology at Trinity College, Cambridge, noted for his twin investigations of the nature of scientific knowledge, *The History of the Inductive Sciences* (1837) and *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (1840). Scholars have drawn attention to Whewell’s selective use of Kant’s first *Critique* in these texts, including Kant’s doctrine of space and time, his anticipatory account of causation, and the use of regulative ideas in scientific knowledge. Yet they are divided on the extent to which Whewell’s project is properly Kantian. At one end of the spectrum, Robert Butts argues that “Whewell, in fact, owes his theory of science to Kant” (“Induction as Unification”, 278). At the other end, Gerd Buchdahl insists that Whewell’s philosophy of science is “a mistaken reading of Kant”, for it collapses Kant’s transcendental account of synthetic *a priori* concepts into a metaphysical account of nature (“Deductivist Verses Inductivist”, 322). In what follows, I suggest that our assessment of Kant’s influence on Whewell must be balanced with Whewell’s own attempt to develop an account of induction that does not fall prey to the problems he encountered with the empiricism he accepted as a young mineralogist (see Ducheyne, “Whewell’s Philosophy of Science”, 77). I argue that Whewell’s notebooks, written between 1830 and 1833, reveal that he became convinced that natural philosophy required the use of ideas in the process of discovery, and that he found the key to this method in Coleridge and Green’s reading of Kant’s third *Critique*.

Whewell was a founding member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1831), and met regularly with Coleridge and Green at the association’s meetings during the 1830s. Having studied in Germany, he had a firm grasp of the philosophical developments on the continent in his own right.⁹ In the

⁹ For example, in Notebook 5 Whewell sketches an account of the pantheism controversy, demonstrating a thorough grasp of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. See *WP* R.18.17⁵, 125. The *Whewell Papers* (*WP*) are

summer of 1825, Whewell made a study tour to learn from the German school of mineralogical science (Todhunter, *William Whewell*, I 33). Working with Professor Mohs in Freiberg, he encountered a mathematical treatment of minerology that was nevertheless grounded in extensive empirical research. He wrote back to H. J. Rose to report that in the course of his tour, his “mineralogical *supernaturalismus*” had been deeply challenged (Todhunter, *William Whewell*, II 60-61). This term refers to the empiricist epistemology he had defended at the Cambridge Union Society, which assumed a static conception of nature as a divine artifice. Writing to Richard Jones, a fellow student from Cambridge, Whewell requested that no one be informed that he was “bewildered with German philosophy” and its “*a priori* metaphysics” (Todhunter, *William Whewell*, II 61). He reassures Jones that he hopes for “a union of the two creeds”, and insists that everything he holds to be true is at once “philosophical and inductive.”

Whewell’s encounter with German minerology foreshadowed a development that can be traced in his notebooks.¹⁰ In an entry from the early 1830s, he records that the “detection of a law of a class of phenomena ... does indeed give an aspect of order and unity and connexion to the facts which makes them a ... distinct subject of contemplation, and adds to the appearance of purpose and design” (*WP R.18.17*⁵, 49). The discovery of a cause for such a class of phenomena, however, gives to them “more than that merely subjective unity of connexion; it shows, in general, that the law of the phenomena flows by a kind of necessity from the manner in which the phenomena are produced.” For Whewell, scientific understanding is a process that begins with a manifold of phenomena, reflects on that manifold as a contingently ordered product, and then produces a system of causal relations. This process is not a mere association of abstract ideas in the mind, for it presupposes the operation of ideas in nature, such that the mind

transfers the imperfection of order and beauty from the facts to the principles which connect the facts with their discovered origin: it transfers also the imperfection of selection and design from the ends to the means: and exhibits to us that as an actual sequence of a wider rule which had often occupied our [thought] as an independent law and transfers [the] imperfect as the manifestation of a sperate purpose. (*WP R.18.17*⁵, 49)

located in the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge. R.18.17 refers to the box of Whewell's notebooks, the number in superscript refers to the specific notebook, the final number is the page reference.

¹⁰ Here I agree with Fisch, who argues that Whewell’s research in minerology is the impetus for his turn to the science of science (*William Whewell*, 68).

Whewell presents a system in which our contemplation of facts gives rise to laws. To detect a law for a class of phenomena, we first appreciate the beauty of the facts and imbue them with the appearance of design. This prepares the manifold for our discovery of a cause, which transforms the appearance of design into a properly deductive sequence, whereby the lower facts are determined by a higher Idea. The mind is thus not a mechanical instrument but an active force, “perpetually exercising a formative and productive power” (*WP R.18.17*⁷, 24). The movement is from the anticipation of order, which we experience in beauty and design, to a principle that determines the fact according to an Idea.

Whewell’s notebooks record a shift in the object of his study from mineralogy to science itself; “from the object to the method”, from “doing to ~~knowing~~ seeing” (*WP R.18.17*⁶, 33). The fruit of these labours is evident in his 1833 *Bridgewater Treatise*. Unlike most authors of the Bridgewater Treatises, Whewell does not infer from ordered complexity to the existence of a designer. Rather, he presents design as a “regulative principle” derived through an analogy with our own creativity as designers (*Astronomy and General Physics*, 345-46). Like Kant, Whewell was interested in the activity of the mind that makes certain sciences possible. Turning to the nebular hypothesis Kant had advanced in 1755, which would have been viewed by Whewell’s readers as an atheistic form of materialism, he contends that reflection of cosmological origins in fact presupposes that Newtonian laws stand together in a system that can be grasped only as an object of design (*Astronomy and General Physics*, 349-50). Whewell thereby echoes Kant’s transcendental deduction of judgement’s principle in the Introduction to the third *Critique*, claiming that cosmological reasoning could not get started unless we anticipate that the particular laws governing celestial mechanics cohere as a system of causes and their effects (*KU 5:182*).

In a notebook dated to 1833, Whewell sketched a draft titled “The Philosophy of the Progressive Sciences”. In these notes he begins to fashion his own transcendental argument to identify the “mental tendencies” that actively present the manifold of sense within an anticipated order. His aim is to show that in every act of cognition there are two parts of a single process, “external impressions, and an act of the mind” (*WP R.18.17*⁸, 20). To have knowledge we must “both perceive and conceive; we must both observe and connect; we must put into action the senses and thoughts.” The following two passages are typical formulations of a Whewellian transcendental argument, which takes the grammatical form, “it is obvious/clear that ...”:

It is thus obvious that in the function of general and abstract laws something is conditioned by the mind from within as well as by the senses from without. (*WP R.18.17*⁸, 33)

It is clear that this process is the effect of certain ↓mental↓ tendencies ... and not a result of our sensations alone. (*WP* R.18.17⁸, 34)

While Whewell takes Kant's account of causation as the basic example of the mind's tendency to anticipate the connections between the facts given in intuition, his notion of a transcendental argument is not restricted to Kant's *a priori* categories of the understanding. It includes the presupposition of purposiveness, which Kant presented as the principle of reflecting judgement in the third *Critique* (*KU* 5:184). Consider the following Whewellian transcendental argument:

It is clear therefore that the faculty by which for such purposes we apprehend the meaning of general laws does not unite with such precision as to put in marks and definitions to which shall fix the selection of limits of each law. To state marks of something which is common to the particulars which it includes, that it is not itself certain what this something is, and therefore does not enable us to draw ↓it↓ forth and exhibit it. And if it is possible for us to assigning [*sic*] marks and definitions to our general laws, this must be some form of effort of the mind, and not by taking for granted that the mind has always taken this step. (*WP* R.18.17⁸, 29)

Whewell's claim is that unless we had reflected on objects as instances of substances that are located within a system according to their defining qualities, we would be unable to classify facts under names, and designate the degree of particularity bestowed by the name. The unity "given by the mind to a certain datum of the impressions of the senses may be called a conceptual unity; their unity being once given, one may supply the names of sensible things" (*WP* R.18.17⁸, 23). It is only by receiving this unity that we can seek further designations, such as whether the "tree may be an oak or a willow, the flower may be an iris or a tulip; or it may be necessary to name an item, like plant, which includes both trees and flowers." The presupposition that the data of experience cohere within a system of laws, Whewell claims, is fundamental to the process of discovery.

Whewell presents his mature system of inductive science in *History and Philosophy*, in which the science of the knowing process emerges through its historical development. His methodological claim in both texts is that the invention of a concept makes possible the discovery of a law. Contra Herschel and Mill, Whewell claims that induction is not an inference from a proposition about experience to a predictive

conclusion, but a creative act of the mind in which the necessity and universality of truths is derived “from the *Fundamental Ideas* which those truths involve” (*Philosophy*, 66). Following Coleridge and Green, Whewell’s notion of Ideas collapses the Kantian distinction between the rules of the understanding and reason’s ideas into a single framework of experience. This enables a philosophy of science that moves from the dynamic constitution of matter to higher forms of organization, such as the excitability of organic bodies, following the trajectory of Schelling and Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*. An Idea is “that element, supplied by the mind itself, which must be combined with Sensation in order to produce knowledge” (*Philosophy*, 29). Ideas are the “Laws of Thought”, which come to consciousness in the development of the sciences through history. Whewell thus draws Coleridge and Green’s attempt to reconcile poetic and natural processes to its completion. As a branch of science progresses, a Fundamental Idea becomes more explicit. The principles of mechanics, for instance, are arranged under the Fundamental Ideas of force, matter and cause. The chemical sciences are arranged under the Ideas of polarity, chemical affinity and substance. The biological sciences are arranged under the Idea of life.

Whewell’s section on biology integrates Brown’s doctrine of excitability with Kant’s account of organic structure in the third *Critique*. While natural philosophers had previously invoked God’s creativity as the cause of organic form, thereby restricting anatomy and physiology to the association of ideas, Whewell notes that Kant “asserted the reality of such a principle of physiology as we are now maintaining in the most emphatic manner. Indeed, this assumption of an end marks his very definition of an organized being” (*History*, II 490). Whewell works closely with the second part of the third *Critique*, citing Kant’s definition in §66, which states that “An organized product is that in which all the parts are mutually ends and means.” He translates an extended passage from this section, in which Kant explains that this principle can be discerned in the work of natural scientists. To investigate the structure of plants and animals, Whewell translates, the “anatomizers” must not only presume the causal “principle that *nothing happens by chance*”, but must also assume a “*teleological principle*”, for without it, “no clue could exist for the observation of a kind of natural objects which can be considered teleologically under the conception of natural ends” (*History*, II 490-91). Whewell clearly read Kant as a precursor to his own historical method of discerning a fundamental idea in scientific practice. He states that if we, like Kant, contemplate “the arguments, the results, the practice of physiologists, their speculative opinions”, then “we are led to the same conviction [as Kant], that in the organized world we may and must adopt the belief, that organization exists for its purpose, and that the apprehension of the purpose may guide us in seeing the meaning of the organization” (*History*, II 491). When the anatomist contemplates organic structure, she considers each part as “subservient to some use”, without which it would be impossible to study a natural

structure as an organic structure. Whewell recognized that Kant entirely reversed the conceptual ordering of the physicotheological argument. Kant's idea of a final cause "is not *deduced* from the phenomena by reasoning, but is *assumed* as the only condition under which we can reason on such subjects at all" (*History*, II 620).

Whewell's reading of Kant's third *Critique* can be seen within Coleridge and Green's revisionist line of reception. The idea of an "organised product of nature ... in which all the parts are mutually ends and means", he claims, "is capable of being made the basis of sound knowledge" (*History*, II 573). Whewell too refuses to accept Kant's reservations regarding the possibility of biological knowledge, and asserts instead that the idea of life has become the Fundamental Idea of an experimental science. He thus demonstrates how a properly contextualized reading of Kant can be deployed in the best science of his time. With almost a half-century of progress in the biological sciences since Kant's third *Critique*, Whewell compiles evidence to show that once the study of living beings is grounded in "natural relations", our knowledge of organic functions "have tended more and more to the character of exact and rigorous science" (*History*, II 579). Yet he nevertheless held that Kant unearthed the Fundamental Idea that unifies this knowledge as a science, which "is not a portion of the facts we study" but rather "a principle which connects, includes, and renders them intelligible; as our other Fundamental Ideas do the classes of facts to which they respectively apply" (*History*, II 620-21).

6. Conclusion

If one examines the reception of Kant's thought in England through Wellek's ahistorical method, it is easy to view Green as repeating Coleridge's misreading of Kant, and Whewell's *a priori* program of natural science as a failure to grasp Kant's distinction between the categories of the understanding and the regulative ideas of reason. When we give attention to the specific questions that Coleridge, Green and Whewell brought to the third *Critique*, however, we find a line of reception in which Kant's account of reflecting judgement opens a bridge between reason and nature. When Coleridge encountered Brunonian medicine in Beddoes' Bristol Circle, he did not simply find a new, dynamic movement in the natural sciences but also undeniable evidence of the mind's active, creative role in scientific progress (see *Aids to Reflection*, 395). With the help of Beddoes' mentorship and ongoing collaboration with Green, Coleridge found a grammar in Kant's third *Critique* to express the productive power of imagination to raise experience to the level of Ideas, which is itself an expression of nature's self-production.

It is ultimately Whewell who imbued the Kantian position with some respect in England. Yet if my argument is correct, significant work had been done by Beddoes, Coleridge and Green to develop a reading of

Kant's third *Critique* in which the dynamical sciences could be placed on philosophical grounds. In the forty years between Beddoes' review of *The Examination of the Judgment* and Whewell's endorsement of Kant's account of organic structure in *History*, there were considerable political pressures constraining the public endorsement of Kant's philosophy (Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas*, 122-27). In the letters, notebooks and lectures written those involved in the medical communities in London, however, we find a distinct line of reception in which *Kritik der Urteilskraft* was read as a text that opens an alternative to empiricism in which nature could be grasped as a self-organizing process.

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