TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES: BETWEEN RELIGION AND ETHICS

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The paper deals with the questions centered around the interrelation of ethics, religion and aesthetics including the reflection upon such constitutive elements of human experience as faith, reason, poetry, experience and politics. The analysis explores S. Kierkegaard's understanding of the relationship between the ethical and the religious and the relationship of both to the aesthetic, explores many relevant themes resided in the works of S. T. Coleridge, W. Blake and others. Structured in this way the paper opens up new paths for better understanding of the fundamental presuppositions of ethics and religion as well as political realities in the age of fundamentalism.

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Take off your shoes and pray
The ground you walk it's holy ground
Every spot on earth I traipse around
Every spot I walk it's holy ground

Every spot it's holy ground
Every little inch it's holy ground
Every grain of dirt it's holy ground
Every spot I walk it's holy ground
(Woody Guthrie, "Holy Ground")

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?
ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.
They do not move.
(Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot)

Introduction

Writing where religion and ethics intersect, I am mindful that intersections are places where deals with the devil have traditionally been made – deals in which both parties typically offer more than they can honestly deliver. But in what follows, my intention is to deal with aesthetics as it relates to ethics and religion – starting with Kierkegaard, then turning to Coleridge and William Blake. If it is a temptation to hope for signs, then we may find

ourselves here in the right place. A sign is all I can offer – and the possibility that a revision of vision may point us toward more reliable ground for responsible action.

I. Between Aesthetics and Religion

I.1. The first problem entering a conversation at the intersection of "religion" and "ethics" is that, in any particular instance of the conversation, some participants will have no *idea* of one or the other – or of either, though all *practice, will practice, and will have practiced* one or both at one time or another.

I.2. The second problem is that, in any particular instance, some participants will *have* an idea of one or the other or both so entrenched that all will go without saying and none will be open to question in practice.

I.3. The third problem is that, as the idea of poetry is prose, the idea of religion is ethics. An idea of poetry is no poem; attending to the idea turns poetry to prose. And an idea of religion (even a religious one) is no religion. When religious practice turns to its *idea*, it turns to ethics.

I.4. This statement of these problems gestures toward Kierkegaard's understanding of the relationship between the ethical and the religious – and the relationship of both to the aesthetic. In time, the aesthetic, which is *immediate*, is first. It may be followed by the ethical, which is *mediate*. That, in turn, may be followed by the religious, which is *immediate* again. Passing through the ethical is the difference between *immediate* and immediate *again*, and, because that difference makes a difference to both religion and ethics, it affects the intersection.

I.5. Before attending to the difference, note that immediacy is a mark of the aesthetic that marks the religious in time: immediacy is aesthetic, not ethical, because there is no time in it (and hence no place) for ethical deliberation. Given time, ethics may take place. Because the religious returns to immediacy (meaning that the religious is always a *return*), it leaves no place in practice for ethics; and that makes it aesthetic. The aesthetic envelopes the ethical; it is "religious" on its leading edge.

I.6. That *again* is a possibility (both in the sense of repetition – as in Kierkegaard – and return – as in Nietzsche) makes all the difference. The ethical follows the aesthetic; it does not supersede it. And the religious follows both but supersedes neither. That *again* is possible, however, means that, once one has entered the religious, one can enter either the ethical or the aesthetic or both *after* the religious. But passing through the ethical – coming or going – is always the difference between the religious and the aesthetic – or, as suggested in passing earlier, between two aesthetics (What Paul Ricoeur, perhaps, had in mind, in his distinction between a first and a second naiveté).

I.7. While the ethical is, as Kierkegaard put it, universal, it is also (and perhaps more properly) communicative, because it is *mediate*. It is where reflection and communication take place, and it depends on categories that can be shared as well as rules that can be obeyed or broken. The aesthetic *resists* categories (there is no accounting for taste), and this accounts for the tension on both boundaries between the aesthetic and the ethical. The tension, as Kierkegaard noted, is *interesting* – and interest is a key concept for border crossing. The interesting moves us when we encounter a border and may move us across it; being *moved* may be the best indicator that we have reached a border worth crossing. Remember Kierkegaard's insistence that faith is a passion, not an action: before we move, we are *moved*. *Being* moved demands our attention.

II. Being Moved

II.1. Kierkegaard's interest in border categories derives at least in part from his recognition that reason alone does not move human beings

to do the right thing and cannot adequately account for the wrong things we do: rational beings acting rationally are perfectly capable of making cities that are neither good nor beautiful – and, therefore, though rational, are not true. Herbert Marcuse and other critical theorists developed this idea at length in analyses of destructive systems each piece of which could pass rational scrutiny but, that taken all together, behave as if out of their minds. The strategists of United States nuclear policy during the Cold War had humor enough to call their system of deterrence MAD. Naming a system, like naming a demon, is an important step in exorcising it – and it is worth noting that, in an exorcism, the step depends on knowing the name by which the demon names itself. But, beyond naming, the question is how to *turn* it – and Kierkegaard, like his contemporary Marx, saw this as a task that might lead philosophy beyond itself.

II.2. Driving *philosophy* out of its mind might prove critical to critical reflection inside a system that is mad. That, of course, is a dangerous game: a philosopher driven out of his or her mind may be sidelined as a lunatic (Nietzsche and Elfriede Jelinek both have something to say about that). But out of mind may also mean into body – into what moves us, what moves when we move, and that is a critical step if interpretation is to be connected with change. Calling a mad system mad does not in and of itself change behavior that makes it so. As Joseph Heller reminded us, naming the madness of a mad system may simply feed the rational mechanisms by which the system is maintained: to recognize it as mad is the most rational thing one can do, an assurance that policy is in the hands of policy makers and critics who can be counted upon to be reasonable. But *interest* is something else, powering the very turns a system must contain if it is to avoid flying off in all directions.

II.3. There are familiar contexts in which *be reasonable* is equivalent to *contain yourself* – and a perfectly rational system of containment is most perfectly self-sustaining when that is precisely what happens (an important point of convergence between "Western" and Confucian philosophy that is of interest to those seeking to understand mechanisms of social control by which political systems are sustained across time). Interest, though, always threatens to spill out of the containers designed to keep it in line. So Kierkegaard turns to instances in which characters cannot contain themselves and, as a result, cannot explain themselves. Abraham, moved to murder his son, was condemned to silence. He did not choose it; if he was prepared to murder his son, there were no words for it. And, as Kierkegaard saw it, this moved him outside the realm of the ethical – outside ordinary action motivated by interests within the constraints of a system that contained him. He could not contain himself. The system could not contain him. And that is *interesting*. It is interesting particularly because it unleashes a power that threatens to shatter the system itself. If Abraham cannot be contained, there is a real danger that no one can. And in that danger hope also lies.

II.4. All of this is preliminary – pointing to the power of interest on edges of containment, possibilities of not being contained. Pointing to power recalls Foucault's observation that power comes from everywhere (not that power is everything) and highlights the extent to which processes of containment depend on distinctions among centers, while challenges to containment depend on acting from centers that are not *authorized*. It is a question of legitimacy that turns on balances of power often mediated by language and other symbol systems: power is contained by being balanced and channeled. When power overflows its channels, balance is threatened. And unbalanced individuals are dealt with in predictable ways, by being institutionalized – as citizens, as criminals, as saints, as lunatics – or by being eliminated – executed or rendered invisible.

II.5. The first category, *citizens*, is of particular interest because it is the "ordinary" condition of balance in which people who play by the rules find themselves. It is often understood as a balancing

act, finding one's feet in an interplay of powers that include (but are not limited to) one's own – and it is in this context that both ethical and legal behavior are often understood in terms of competing interests, as evidenced by the place of "self-interest" in everyday conversation and "conflict of interest" in ethical judgments and explanations of particular behaviors. Had Abraham consulted his attorney, he would likely have been advised to recuse himself from this assignment because of a conflict of interest concerning his son (and his relationship to the boy's mother as well as the earlier promise of a gift from the person responsible for assigning the task). If God wanted the boy sacrificed, he would have been well advised to assign the task to someone undeterred by such conflicts. And, though God is presumably someone else's client, assigning the task to someone who has been promised a gift not only creates a conflict of interest for Abraham but also creates the appearance of impropriety on God's part. There are problems all around, and this means of executing the task is not likely to contribute to the stability of the organization.

II.6. Ordinary discourse about ordinary behavior, often involving extraordinary tasks, is ordinarily cast in terms of interest. "Standard" accounts assume that *self*-interest is a given, while the interests of *others* are suspect. More often than not (especially in economic and sometimes legal theory) rational behavior is understood to be behavior that is consistent with the self-interest of the agent. "Rational choice" theory in economics contends that such a behavior, consistently pursued, will result in a "rational" social structure. Controversy often takes the form of different understandings of the extent to which the social structure ought to intervene consciously (and *can* intervene consciously) to constrain behavior. Centralized planning is generally thought to have been discredited by the failure of command economies; but there are varying degrees of faith in the ability of emergent structures to self-correct in rational ways – and differences of opinion about whether what is believed true of economic systems applies directly to other social systems.

II.7. What I find intriguing is that self-interest, understood as a given, is acceptable within limits that legal theorists and courts struggle to define on a case by case basis. Generally speaking, while it is assumed that rational agents act in ways that are consistent with their own self-interest, when self-interest is judged to have crossed a line into self-enrichment – especially in fiduciary relationships – it is considered (at least) ethically questionable and (possibly) illegal. In fiduciary relationships, the legal approach seems to be predicated on the need to protect the interests of others (which the fiduciary is obligated to pursue) from self-interest (which the fiduciary, being human, will *naturally* pursue). In conflict of interest cases, the legal practice, it seems, is to place limits on those interests assumed to be "natural" in order to protect *legal* interests that are not. Ethically, that action is the best that is least motivated by "natural" inclinations. The law, it seems, is supposed to function in such a way as to insure that action is undertaken on the basis of legal/contractual obligations among strangers. That is interesting for what it says about strangers as well as what it says about the sources of our obligations. The emphasis is on the legal/contractual obligation, not the stranger. And ties of family, friendship, passion are all viewed as forces to be held in check.

II.8. What most troubled Kierkegaard about the binding of Isaac was the ease with which such a text of terror could be bound within a legal tradition. Whether the emphasis is on Abraham's willingness to do whatever he believed God commanded or on Ishmael's willingness to submit to whatever his father believed God commanded, this terror is too much to contain. Even if the emphasis is on God's repenting of the command just in time to save Isaac (or Ishmael) from the knife, the terror is beyond words. How can Isaac (or Ishmael) and Abraham ever face each other again without the glint of the knife flashing in the corner of the eye?

II.9. The ethical is suspended in the terror of the present moment (Kierkegaard called the suspension "teleological," but I think we are best served by suspending the *telos* as well). That turns us back to the stranger and, more

generally, to the other we know with varying degrees of familiarity. The "ethical" is essentially contractual – a legal arrangement rationally executed at least in part so we know what we can expect and what we can do if the contract is, unexpectedly, violated. The unexpected becomes essential as we move to the borders of the ethical, and the question is how we are to act when we cannot know what to expect. The other, especially the stranger, defies expectation and, merely by being present, constitutes an obligation. Obligation arises, perhaps, from the *fact* of a limit (which informs Derrida's understanding of death as a gift). Such limits, in fact, are critical to the formation of "selves" without which "self-interest" is not possible. Obligation precedes self-interest – and is, in turn, preceded by the being present of the stranger – oneself as another, to an other, to one's self as an other.

II.10. The most wholly other most wholly demands response. Response, not rule, is the basis of obligation, which grows out of an absolute demand to welcome the stranger. The ethical, as contractual relationship, is not temporarily suspended by the demand of the wholly other. It is temporarily *imposed* when the other is not acknowledged as being there. Rules by which interest is held in check contain strangeness by imposing predictability. The appearance of the stranger defies predictability and takes us back to where *we* begin – in the encounter of one self with an other. The "we" Agnes Heller wrote, "is that through which I am." Yes. And we is I to I, a circle out of which systems of obligation may be formed.

II.11. The point is not to build legal systems that, by holding interests in check, enable contractual agreements among strangers. It is to mobilize interest as a means by which to turn to strangers, to turn strangers to guests, to make us inclined to give our lives for friends rather than to take the lives of others we love in the name of arbitrary gods. If the demand to sacrifice our children is a test, we pass it when we say no. And so, for ethics and religion, what gives us pause is as critical as what moves us.

III. Being Here

III.1. Coleridge locates the certainty of our knowledge in affirmation of the immediate that dwells in every person (though consciousness of it does not). Language, the medium of "ordinary" communication, plays off the surfaces that constitute matter—like smoke and mirrors or shadows on the inside surface of a cave. (Matter, he says, has no *inward*.) The medium of the depth, however, is freedom. We have, he says, "imprisoned our own conceptions by the lines, which we have drawn, in order to exclude the conceptions of others." As a result, we live not so much in a cave as in a labyrinth of closets of our own making. Coleridge's advice is a more practical version of Hegel's negation of the negation. I find, he says, that most sects are reasonable in a good part of what they advance—but not in what they deny. This is a basis on which to elaborate grammars, logics, and rhetorics of freedom—necessary if freedom is to be a medium of communication in the "spiritual" world analogous to language as a medium of communication in the "material" one. Because we live in a "material" world oriented toward a "spiritual" one, we live in necessity toward freedom. In Coleridge's critical theory, active imagination forms poetry out of the material – language – in which it works, toward the medium – freedom – in which it lives.

III.2. Coleridge collapses epistemological and ontological questions in his articulation of transcendental philosophy, folding ethical questions into the mix as well. The postulate of philosophy, the ground from which it begins, he says, is "the heaven-descended know thyself," an injunction that is simultaneously practical and speculative: philosophy is not only a science of reason or understanding (an epistemology), not only a science of morals (an ethic), but also a science of *being* (an ontology). Its primary ground cannot be either merely speculative or merely practical; it must be both at the same time. Knowledge rests on "the coincidence of an object with a subject." Coleridge calls the objective

Nature, the subjective *intelligence*. Intelligence is representative, Nature – represented. Knowledge is an act that consists in "a reciprocal concurrence of both," in which the two are so instantly united that one cannot determine which takes priority. Either the objective is taken as the first, and we have to account for the coincidence of the subjective, or the subjective is taken as the first, and we have to account for the coincidence of the objective. Coleridge takes these as two equally important poles of fundamental science. In both cases, we are confronted with a union of opposites in which Nature is infused with intelligence and intelligence – with Nature. Coleridge maintains that this is neither idealism nor materialism, but *realism*.

III.3. He maintains that to know is in its essence an active verb; that truth is either derivative or immediate; that the only immediate truth is an absolute identity of subject and object, of the finite and infinite. That immediate truth or absolute identity – which Coleridge refers to as spirit, self, or self-consciousness – is not a kind of *being* but a kind of *knowing*. On the basis of this immediate truth that is a kind of knowing, Coleridge distinguishes *imagination* from *fancy* and primary imagination from secondary one. Primary imagination is "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception," a repetition of the eternal act of creation. Secondary imagination is an echo, differing from primary imagination only in degree: it dissolves in order to recreate. Both varieties of imagination differ from objects in that they are active, while objects are fixed. Objects live to the extent that they are infused with vital imagination. Fancy is a mode of memory that "must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association." Fancy lives in the spontaneous consciousness of the sensory world. It reflects passively, like a mirror – and it does not create. Imagination lives in the philosophical consciousness of the spiritual world. It reflects actively, recapitulating the creative act by breathing life into dead matter. Primary imagination is the soul of the world.

III.4. Early in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge defines *essential* poetry as that which we not only read with pleasure but *return to* with pleasure, and that which cannot be translated into other words of the same language without loss of significance. The image of return highlights the extent to which poetic genius consists in a continuously present undercurrent rather than a separate and transitory excitement. Keeping in mind the image of active imagination as the soul of the world, this is another way of pointing to the sustaining power of poetry as well as establishing the sustained attention of criticism: critical judgment rests not in reaction to accidental failures or shortcomings, but in careful exploration of qualities essential to the whole body of a poet's work. That Coleridge grounds both poetry and criticism in sustained attention to the essential qualities of a whole body of work is indicative of the close connection he saw between poetry and philosophy, between both and imagination. Poetic genius carries the feelings of childhood into the powers of adulthood, combining the child's sense of wonder with a lifetime of experience. Poetry and philosophy rescue universally accepted truths from impotence by continually making them new, digging beneath the surface to depths that are inexhaustible. This understanding grows out of conversation with William Wordsworth regarding two cardinal points of poetry: "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination." These cardinal points are related to the distinction between fancy and imagination. A simple mirroring of the sensuous world (fancy) would quickly degenerate into banality, reproducing the world without transforming it. But, because imagination is active, it makes the world new.

III.5. Philosophical discussion proceeds by distinction, not division. The philosophical and poetic process of distinction combines active and passive dimensions in a serpentine movement. Truth is distinguished into its component

parts, and the unity of these parts is conceptually restored. Just as a leap requires that one both defy gravity and submit to it, the process of philosophy requires both distinction and unity if it is not only to get off the ground but also return to it. A poem is composed of the same elements as a prose composition, but there is a difference in form as well as object – not what a particular piece of writing is *about* but the end toward which it is directed. Prose is characterized by having truth as its immediate end with pleasure as a possible secondary result. It is primarily concerned with knowing – understood particularly in terms of communication as transmission of information, only secondarily with feeling. But poetry is marked by its primary concern with pleasure. A poem is "that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having *this* object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such a delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*."

III.6. That pleasure is poetry's primary object does not diminish truth's importance. Nothing can *permanently* please if it does not "contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise." Attention must be sustained, not sporadic. If the form of a composition is detachable from its object, it is nothing more than a vehicle by which to get at the object – and one vehicle may serve this purpose as well as another, though none will serve it perfectly. If, however, composition and object are inextricably connected, neither object nor composition is expendable or exchangeable. Prose gestures toward truth, and it may carry us some way toward it; if so, it will impart pleasure. Poetry embodies truth in its form as well as its end. To the extent that it succeeds, pleasure is its end and its embodiment is truth. The distinction between poetry and prose, then, is not a distinction between poetry and philosophy. Because poetry is uniquely concerned with wholeness, it is the proper language of philosophy. Philosophical prose will necessarily be fragmentary and depend on poetry for both its composition and comprehension.

III.7. A legitimate poem is the one "the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement." Harmony is a critical standard by which to judge the legitimacy of a composition: if it does not sing, it is not a poem. Which leads to the question of the poet. The poet "brings the whole soul…into activity," harmonizing discordant qualities by the power of imagination. The poet, in short, is an embodied poem.

III.8. In the discussion of "common" language that Coleridge and Wordsworth initiated with *Lyrical Ballads,* poetics and politics interpenetrate. An ideal polity, like an ideal poet, embodies poetry. Every part supports and explains every other; every part and every relation harmonizes with and supports the whole. Wordsworth maintained in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that language taken from real life is the proper diction for poetry and that this language actually constitutes natural human conversation. Coleridge offers three objections. First, the observation is applicable only in a limited class of poetry: it is true of some poems, but not all. Second, its application in this limited class is simply commonplace, not a subject for argument. And, third, it is at best useless and at worst harmful when applied as a rule. He does not object to the claim that the language of poetry is the language of real life, insisting, in fact, quite consistently that poetic language is the *most* real language, closest to the freedom he identifies as the medium of the spiritual world *toward* which our lives in the sensual world are turned. But the claim is sometimes interpreted to mean that poetry should be written in "rustic" or "vulgar" language. Where Wordsworth represents conversational speech, he recasts it in poetic form and so refines it. This, Coleridge argues, is precisely what poetry should do: seek not the commonest language but the greatest refinement of the common speech. The poet's

task is the turning of soul in *refinement* of language. This is why the observation is a commonplace in the class of poetry where it applies: Wordsworth's experiments with common subjects and common speech are undeniably real language, but they are not simply transcriptions of common speech. Such transcription is one disastrous result of a mechanical application of Wordsworth's observation as a rule. Creativity is sacrificed, the poetry does not sing, and souls turn toward the sensuous rather than the spiritual world.

III.9. Coleridge outlines his method in a long note in the middle of an even longer comment on an aphorism in *Aids to Reflection*. The subject of the aphorism, from the Cambridge Platonist Robert Leighton, is redemption – more particularly the distance beyond nature's reach of a crucified Saviour. Here is a reality that extends far beyond the reach of understanding; but it is not, Coleridge insists, irrational. The distinction is critical. Where it is not properly drawn, we cannot hope to penetrate beyond surface phenomena. Drawing it is a matter of method. The method – which bears a family resemblance to Kant (and therefore Hegel and Marx), though it is not simply derivative – is built on a triadic structure derived from a Pythagorean understanding of the geometry of the line. A line may be drawn from a point midway between two extremes, "indifferent" with regard to the extremes, identifiable with either, identical to neither. Applied to logic, the extremes may be called *thesis* and *antithesis*. The midpoint, equally identifiable with either pole, Coleridge calls *mesothesis*. This mesothesis may be conceived as both thesis and antithesis, but not both at the same time: relative to the thesis, the mesothesis is equal to the antithesis; relative to the antithesis, it is equal to the thesis. The mesothesis does not bring thesis and antithesis together, but occupies (and defines) middle ground while it is pulled from moment to moment one way or the other. The third term in popular expositions of dialectic is *synthesis*, which, by bringing together thesis and antithesis, comprehends both. Coleridge maintains, however, that this convergence depends on a comprehensive *prothesis* present before thesis, antithesis, and mesothesis. He imagines the Pythagoreans rendering the constructions of pure mathematics applicable to philosophy by generating the line from a point which it does not contain – independent of the line, transcendent to its production. The assumption of this transcendent generative point is the prothesis. With its assumption in relation to the line, four relations of thought are expressed: prothesis, or *identity* of thesis and antithesis; thesis, or *position*; antithesis, or *opposition*; and mesothesis, or *indifference*. Synthesis adds *composition*. Prothesis, thesis, antithesis, mesothesis, and synthesis together make up a "noetic pentad" which describes the rhythm of distinction and comprehension characteristic of reason as reconceived by Coleridge: below (or behind) distinction lies the unity of prothesis, above (or beyond) it lies the unity of synthesis. More explicitly than Kant, Coleridge connects analytic and synthetic, practical and "pure," reason in what he calls "the five most general forms or preconceptions of constructive logic."

III.10. With this, Coleridge returns to the *Idea*, which is neither an impression on the senses or a mere abstraction from sensory data. Beginning with the absolutely real as prothesis, the subjectively real as thesis, and the objectively real as antithesis, he identifies *Idea* as mesothesis: conceived as in the subject, it is an object; conceived as in the object, it is a subject. This is the two-step serpentine movement of active imagination described in *Biographia Literaria*. And it is related to the distinction between understanding and reason, arguably the most important contribution of *Aids to Reflection*. Coleridge describes the difference between reason and understanding as a difference *in kind*, and he outlines it most explicitly in the section of *Aids to Reflection* devoted to "spiritual religion indeed." The outline follows a comment on another aphorism from Leighton: "Faith elevates the soul not only above sense

and sensible things, but above reason itself. As reason corrects the errors which sense might occasion, so supernatural faith corrects the errors of natural reason judging according to sense." Coleridge laments a pervasive tendency in British thought to include two faculties under the one heading of "reason," which, under the influence of Locke, is always derivative from sensation and opposite to faith. In order to properly distinguish these faculties, he proposes a consistent application of two terms—reason and understanding. Understanding is discursive, derivative, and reflective. Reason is fixed, substantial, and contemplative. Understanding is "the faculty by which we reflect and generalize." Coleridge describes understanding as a three-step process relative to (but only partly dependent on) sensation: attention, abstraction, and generalization. The first step is passive: our attention is appropriated; the second one is active: we attend selectively; the third one is comparative and synthetic. As a whole, the function (or end) of the understanding is generalization of sensory data in the construction of names. It is "a faculty judging according to sense," but it is also an active faculty that constructs categories. Reason, on the other hand, is "the source of necessary and universal principles, according to which the notices of the senses are either affirmed or denied" and "the power by which we are enabled to draw from particular and contingent appearances universal and necessary conclusions." Understanding is dependent on and posterior to sensation, while reason is independent and anterior.

III.11. Coleridge objects to the essential passivity and determinism of Lockean "reason," not so much a term as a confusion that, because it conflates two faculties that differ in kind, is not even half right. The conflation of faculties results in a language of necessity that undermines both freedom and communication. Neither understanding nor reason is simply passive. Both proceed by the serpentine rhythm of action and passion described in *Biographia Literaria* with reference to imagination. Understanding abstracts on the basis of both reason and sensation; resting on wholes, it weaves parts together. Reason is the whole by which understanding operates on sensation. The digger combines both but does not conflate or confuse them. This is partly a matter of the direction, partly a matter of the operation of thought: in Leighton's aphorism, reason corrects sensation, faith corrects reason, and our soul is lifted above both. From sensation through reason to transcendence, the soul is a butterfly the world sends fluttering on its way. But Coleridge looks for *ground*: from transcendent reason through sensation and understanding toward comprehension and communication, the soul, grounded in the world, grounds the world in God.

IV. Now, Vision

IV.1. Soul grounded in the world that grounds the world in God calls to mind how Kierkegaard described "the condition of the self when despair is completely eradicated" in *The Sickness Unto Death*: "by relating itself to its own self and by willing to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the Power which posited it." Being grounded transparently marks a return to immediacy that echoes Coleridge's description of poetic "genius" (cited in III.4) as carrying the "feelings of childhood into the powers of adulthood, combining the child's sense of wonder with a lifetime of experience" – grounded, yes; but carried away. And that image carries us to another English poet often identified with the beginning of the "Romantic" movement, even more often associated with *being touched* and *seeing things*, William Blake.

IV.2. Encountering Blake's work means encountering vision whole – not "a vision" reported by an observer, but the act itself, an embodied refutation of Locke's depiction of the mind of the child as a blank slate. His work, which demonstrates a mind engaged in a world of its making, is an invitation to engage all the

senses in the perpetual birthing of a world always new. One can't simply *read* Blake with transparent eyes through which an author is expected to engrave fixed truths on a blank mind. One must *engage* him, eyes first, then ears – not because sight takes precedence over sound but because vision contains sound as well as sight, both tactile. Vision is an experience of the whole body, an interplay of sight, sound, taste, smell that *touches* us. In the touch, meaning is made. Blake, as many of his friends and acquaintances suspected, was touched; and we cannot encounter him without being touched as well.

IV.3. Blake reclaimed a tradition of English lyric that is more Spenser than Milton, though it is something of both; and it is Biblical to the core. But he did it in an urban context where he listened for the music of the city with ears trained by a pastoral tradition to hear shepherd's songs. When Blake heard the chimney sweep, he recognized the music of Albion, a music he could not disconnect from his vision of a new Jerusalem. And he could not convey a vision of a city of music that reached back, through the bleak landscape of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century London, to an essentially pastoral epic tradition in words alone. He needed images. He needed to sing them as the folk did on the streets of London. And he needed to share a vision – a poetry of the eyes as well as the ears. This is what led him to the "illuminated books" that began with *Songs of Innocence* and evolved into *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. Calling the books "illuminated" recalls the monastic tradition of adding images to the words of manuscripts prepared by hand, but it also directs our attention to the light that is so important to Blake's engravings, which often seem to glow. Blake did not add images to words. He composed poetry of both and used it to illuminate a soul formed in the tension of two "states," not a progression from one state to another.

IV.4. The method by which he composed poetry of words and images was suggested in a vision by his dead brother Robert and is illustrated in the making of the *Songs*. Images and words were etched onto a copper plate used to print the pages of the book which were later colored by hand. This had the practical effect of reducing costs: and, because what would have been accomplished in two steps could in this way be accomplished in one, words and images were integrated into the same act. In order to accomplish the etching process in one step, Blake had to master the art of mirror writing; so he became expert in writing in reverse, an interesting exercise for an artist convinced that our humanity is composed of contraries. But he also worked by burning away surfaces that were not essential to the words and images of the book – a reversal of Locke's blank slate. Rather than writing on an empty tablet, he developed a process by which to expose new words and images on the one that was full.

IV.5. While the book took shape from 1788 to 1793, the printing process evolved. *Songs of Innocence* was printed then colored by hand with transparent watercolors – a watercolor wash over a monochrome print. *Songs of Experience*, first printed five years later, was color-printed with opaque pigments. In both cases, the etching process itself involved painting with acid-resistant varnish on a copper plate – marking what was to be saved from the corrosive influence of the acid into which the plate was plunged. For *Songs of Innocence*, monochrome prints were made from the plates, then colored with transparent wash. For *Songs of Experience*, opaque pigment was applied directly to the plates, resulting in more richly colored, denser prints. As Blake saw it, the watercolor wash was more like painting with light than with pigment. For the viewer, the experience of *Innocence* is that of seeing light reflected off a ground through transparent color. *Experience* is the reflection of light off the opaque pigment itself. And there is metaphysical significance to this. For Blake, vision

is entangled with penetration to depths that are not fully exposed under layers of experience. One effect of experience is a layering that renders depths less accessible to ordinary vision: experience is never transparent. The interplay of the paired poems in this collection (most famously, perhaps, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger") is intended to recover depths more immediately accessible to childhood's "innocent" eyes than to the "experienced" eyes of adulthood. There is a progression in the poems – not from innocence to experience, but from unorganized to organized innocence, with the contrary states of innocence and experience maintaining tension throughout. (Recall the description of the movement from immediate through mediate to immediate *again* in I.4. Kierkegaard's "ethical" parallels Blake's "experience," and the difference between the two *immediates* is akin to that between unorganized and organized innocence.) In human existence, innocence is never pure, and experience does not outgrow it. Vision always takes place in between – and that it takes place in between is highlighted by the making of the book: in the interplay of word and image in *Songs of Innocence*, painted with light in watercolor wash; in the pairing of poems and the tension between the translucent images of *Innocence* and the opaque color-printed images of *Experience*; in the creation of the images of *Experience* on the pages of a sketchbook begun by Blake's brother Robert; and in the open-ended form of the book itself, which was produced not as a bound and fixed object but as a collection of prints ready to be bound at the point of sale.

IV.6. Two of the most overtly political poems in the collection are "The Little Black Boy" and "The Chimney Sweeper" in Songs of Innocence. "The Little Black Boy" is almost certainly inspired partly by the inhumanity of the slave trade, which Blake unequivocally condemned. It begins with familiar and problematic racial imagery in which "black" is the negative of "white": "My mother bore me in the southern wild, / And I am black, but O! my soul is white, / White as an angel is the English child: But I am black as if bereav'd of light." But then something interesting—remarkable for a poem published in 1789 – happens. At the beginning of the fourth stanza, Blake puts our earthly existence in theological context: "And we are put on earth a little space, / That we may learn to bear the beams of love." For Blake, our earthly existence is an act of mercy that prepares us to encounter the light of God's presence. In and of itself, that is not significantly different from imagery used by many mystics and some dissenting preachers. But Blake turns the table when he describes how this truth is learned. First the little black boy's mother teaches him: "For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear / The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice, / Saying: come out from the grove my love & care, And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice. // Thus did my mother say and kissed me." Then it is the little black boy who becomes the teacher: "And thus I say to little English boy. / When I from black and he from white cloud free, / And round the tent of God like lambs we joy: // I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear, / To lean in joy upon our father's knee. / And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair, / And be like him and he will then love me." Consistent with his image of contraries, Blake sees the human form as simultaneously that in which the divine is revealed and a "cloud" from which we must finally be released to love God and each other. "The Chimney Sweeper" takes up the exploitation of children in its first stanza: "When my mother died I was very young, / And my father sold me while yet my tongue, / Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep. / So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep." This, remember, is a song of Innocence. It ends with the bitterly ironic image of Tom, the chimney sweeper cheerfully going off to "do his duty" while he dreams of a sweet by and by in which an angel releases children from coffins so they can fly off to their father in heaven. The companion poem in Experience reiterates the irony: "And because I am happy, & dance, & sing, / They think they have done

me no injury: / And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King / Who make up a heaven of our misery."

IV.7. These are songs children sing, and they are written by a poet more conscious than most of how much cruelty, pain, and violence can be wrapped up in the joyful noise of child's play. That the songs are also saturated with the music of Scripture (particularly the parallelism and repetition of the psalms as translated in the King James Version) and the music of English hymnody, is an important key to understanding the critical eye Blake cast on his society. He had no doubt that one must become a child to see God, and he seems to have been convinced that children were more often attuned to his vision than adults. But he was careful to distinguish becoming children from the childishness of superficial promises that all would be happy if we simply did our "duty" as defined by the powers that be. The sequence of poems that begins with "The Little Boy Lost" and continues through "The Divine Image" recalls the story of Hagar and Ishmael being driven, forgotten, into the desert, after the birth of Isaac. In that story as in these poems, it is the weeping of a child that gets God's attention. And God's attention leads Blake to a beautiful hymn that reminds us what keeps us singing: "And all must love the human form, / In heathen, turk or jew. / Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell, / There God is dwelling too."

IV.8. Blake turned to a poetics of word and image to engage the world with imagination. "Thou art a Man. God is no more; / Thine own Humanity learn to adore," Blake wrote. And, in the voice of the daughters of Albion, "Arise, and drink your bliss, for every thing that lives is holy!" Strange words, perhaps, in a secular age marked by religious conflict that seems more inclined to drink destruction than bliss. But they may still move us to open our eyes to a world aflame and take off our shoes on holy ground.

Walking out of the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago after a performance by the Klezmatics of songs by Woody Guthrie, I overheard a young voice in the crowd scoffing at the idea of "Holy Ground." "That," he said, "is the problem. There's too much of it". But I think he missed the point. When every war is pronounced holy, it is a sign that the ground is not. Harry S. Truman invoked God when he explained what had taken place in Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. Osama bin Laden invoked God to explain what took place in New York on 11 September 2001. If each grain of dust stirred up by those events, those that passed between, and those since is holy ground, it should most certainly give us pause. That it has not is a failure, and the first step in addressing it is to stop long enough to take off our shoes: "Don't just do something," said the Buddha. "Stand there".

As passing through ethics is the difference between immediate and immediate *again*, passing through Blake's *vision*, Coleridge's *active imagination*, is the difference between Woody Guthrie's 1954 pause for the holy and another pause introduced to the English speaking world in 1954, that of Vladimir and Estragon. The difference makes all the difference – and, for now, we have nothing more with which to begin.

Well? Shall we go?

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* Material in Section III was included in an earlier form in *The Metaphysics of Cooperation*: *A Study of F. D. Maurice*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1999, 29–47.

** Material in Section IV was included in an earlier form in my introduction to William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, forthcoming from Barnes & Noble as part of the Barnes & Noble Library of Essential Reading.

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NUSIAUK BATUS: TARP RELIGIJOS IR ETIKOS

Steven Schroeder

Straipsnyje analizuojami įvairūs etikos bei religijos sąveikos aspektai, apibendrinami pagrindiniai žmogaus patirtį aktualizuojantys elementai – tikėjimas, protas, poezija, politika. Probleminė straipsnio ašis yra Kierkegaardo etinės ir religinės patirties demarkacijos samprata bei ja grindžiama reflektuojama estetinė patirtis. Pateikiamos relevantiškos S. Coleridge ir W. Blake idėjos. Tokia struktūra leidžia naujai pažvelgti į pamatines etikos ir religijos prielaidas, taip pat kritiškai reaguoti į politines fundamentalizmo amžiaus realijas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: etika, religija, poezija, protas, politika.

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