Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817

Coleridge’s Responses to German Philosophy

Monika Class
Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817
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Monika Class
To Raúl, Heidi und Walter
# Contents

Acknowledgements viii  
List of Abbreviated Titles x  

Introduction 1  
1 The Early Mediators of Kant in Bristol and London 17  
2 Coleridge's Moral-Political Engagement in the mid-1790s 49  
3 Coleridge and the Categorical Imperative in 1796 67  
4 Coleridge's Poetic Response to *Perpetual Peace*, 1796–1802 93  
5 The Closet Kantian 121  
6 Kant's Giant Hand: Repression and Genial Self-Construction in *Biographia Literaria* 141  
7 Coleridge, Nitsch and the Distinction between Reason and Understanding 169  
Conclusion: Beyond Coleridge 191  

Notes 195  
Bibliography 213  
Index 237
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This book is dedicated to my husband, Raúl Acosta, and my parents, Heidi and Walter Class, their sustaining energy, affection and inspiration.

London
15 March 2012

Monika Class
List of Abbreviated Titles

Coleridge’s collected works

*The Collected Works* and the *Notebooks* are published by Routledge in London and elsewhere (with the exception of the first two volumes of the *Notebooks*, published by Pantheon Books), and by Princeton University Press. *The Collected Letters* are published by Clarendon Press in Oxford. In the text, volume numbers are indicated in capital Roman numbers.


**Biographia** Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols, 1983.

**Church and State** On the Constitution of Church and State, ed. by John Colmer, 1976.


**Opus Maximum** Opus Maximum, ed. by Thomas McFarland with the assistance of Nicholas Halmi, 2002.

**PW** Poetical Works, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, 3 vols (in 2 parts each), 2001.


**Lay Sermons** Lay Sermons, ed. by R. J. White, 1972.

**Lectures 1795** Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion, ed. by Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, 1971.


List of Abbreviated Titles

Logic, ed. by J. R. de J. Jackson, 1981.

Marginalia
(a) Marginalia, vols I–II, ed. by George Whalley, 1980–84;

Notebooks
(a) Notebooks, Vols I–III (each in 2 parts), ed. by Kathleen Coburn, 1957–73
(b) Notebooks, vol. IV (in 2 parts), ed. by Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christensen, 1990

Table Talk, ed. by Carl Woodring, 2 vols, 1990.

Watchman, ed. by Lewis Patton, 1970.

Kant’s works

Short titles refer to Kant’s works in the German Academy edition (1900 to date) followed by the short title for the respective English translation in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant published by Cambridge University Press in Cambridge.

Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*) is cited by the page numbers of the first (1781) and the second (1787) edition as recorded on the margins of the German Academy edition, for example, *KrV* A 226 or *KrV* B 278, respectively. (Accordingly, *CpR* A 226 or *CpR* B 278 refers to the same title in translation. The numbers do not indicate page numbers in the Academy edition.) In all other works by Kant the numbers in quotations (preceded by ‘p.’ and ‘pp.’, respectively) refer to the page numbers in the German Academy edition *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften* by the Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences. Thanks to the recent Cambridge Edition of Kant’s Work, page numbers in the German Academy edition and the marginal numbers in the respective English translation are now congruent, for example, volume VI and page 190 in the Academy edition corresponds to the marginal number 6: 190 in the translation in the Cambridge edition.

Akk XI

Correspondence

Akk XIII

Anthropologie


Common Saying  On the Common Saying: That may be Correct in Theory, but it is of no Use in Practice in Practical Philosophy, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, 1996, pp. 273–309.


List of Abbreviated Titles

KpV  

CpracR  

KrV  


CpR  

Logik Vorlesung  

Logic Lecture  

Orientieren  

Orient  

Reflexionen  

Religion  

Religion 2  

Schiller’s works

Schiller  
## Wordsworth’s works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
Introduction

Coleridge and Kantian ideas in England, 1796–1817

This book reconsiders Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s relationship with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). It contends that when critical philosophy first arrived in England, it had a greater impact on the native culture than is commonly recognized; Coleridge’s relation to Kant did not exist in a vacuum, nor was Coleridge a singular connoisseur followed only in the next generation by Thomas de Quincey and Thomas Carlyle, but he was a member of the radical and dissenting networks in which Kantian ideas had been circulating roughly since 1793. Immanuel Kant’s philosophy is known to have initiated, among other philosophical and cultural phenomena, an entire movement that became known as early German Romanticism. Nineteenth-century writers and twentieth-century scholars have credited Coleridge with the role as the single most important mediator between German and British Romanticism. The biblical scholar and theologian Fenton John Anthony Hort (1818–92) observed that ‘the popular impression about Coleridge’s philosophy represents him almost solely in his relation to Kant . . . Here again a blind instinct has undoubtedly taken a right direction’ (1856, p. 319). Thomas Carlyle noted poignantly that Coleridge ‘was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms’ (1851, p. 69). Coleridge contributed a great deal to the common image of Kant in British culture as a preserver of existing social order. The present study recovers the genealogy of early Kantianism in England and thus lays open Coleridge’s ultimate reversal of Kant’s political stance.

Some facts

Coleridge conceived of his plan to learn German in order to read and translate a number of German authors including ‘Kant, the great german [sic] Metaphysician’ in May 1796 (Letters I, p. 209). Although translations of Kant’s writings had appeared in English since 1796, knowledge of German was necessary to read and study Immanuel Kant’s three critiques, for the translations appeared only after Coleridge’s death in 1834. The second of the three critiques, the Critique of Practical Reason (Kritik der praktischen Vernunft, 1788), appeared in an incomplete translation (KpV pp. 19–42, 71–107) by J. W. Semple as part of Metaphysics of Ethics in Edinburg and Hamburg in 1836 (Kant 1836a; Boswell 1991, pp. 235, 239). After that, the Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft, 1781), or first critique, appeared anonymously in 1838 (Kant 1838) and later with the translator’s name, Francis Haywood, in the second edition of 1848.
Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England, 1796–1817

(Kant 1848); J. M. D. Meiklejohn's translation of it appeared in 1845 (Boswell 1991, p. 236). The Critique of the Power of Judgment (Kritik der Urteilskraft, 1790), or third critique, was not published until the Irish scholar J. H. Bernard gave a full translation of the Kritik of Judgment more than a hundred years after the first publication (Kant 1892; Boswell 1991, p. 237). Yet, despite the absence of translations of the three critiques in 1790s Britain, one of Kant's shorter writings as well as expositions of his works were readily available in English for non-German speakers like Coleridge before 1798 (see Chapter 1).

It was in May 1796 that Coleridge informed Tom Poole about his plans for Jena. This date tellingly coincides with the time when Friedrich August Nitsch published his lectures about critical philosophy under the title A General and Introductory View of Professor Kant concerning Man, the World and the Deity (Nitsch 1796; Micheli 1990, p. 259). At the time, Coleridge was also corresponding regularly with a member of Nitsch's Kantian Society in London: John Thelwall (Roe 1990, p. 68).¹ This leading spokesman of the London Corresponding Society wrote on the margins of his copy of Biographia Literaria that he had several philosophical discussions with Nitsch (Pollin 1970, p. 92). Nitsch's pamphlet was advertised and reviewed favourably by the liberal press (Micheli 1990, pp. 266–73). The Unitarian minister William Enfield recommended Nitsch's work (Monthly Review 22 [1796], pp. 15–18). Another supporter of Nitsch's work was Coleridge's Bristol mentor, Dr Thomas Beddoes (1760–1808). He reviewed Nitsch's exposition in the Monthly Magazine and advocated the translation of Kant's works in a letter to the editor written on 28 March and published in May 1796 (Monthly Magazine 1 [1796], pp. 265–7). Beddoes had discussed Kant's epistemology three years earlier in his Observations on the Nature of Demonstrative Evidence (1793), and in August 1796, he reviewed Kant's Zum Ewigen Frieden (1795). The pamphlet was translated and published under the title Perpetual Peace by Vernor and Hood in London in October (Kant 1796; Micheli 1990, p. 232). Kant's pamphlet, which proposed a league of nations, was the first of Kant's texts to be translated into English. Its composition coincided with, and was possibly inspired by, the Treaty of Basel in 1795 – the Prussian peace treaty with Revolutionary France – and argued for opposition to the war. Zum Ewigen Frieden was an immediate success in Prussia as well as abroad; a second edition followed the first in brief succession, illegal print-offs circulated, and the work was translated into French, English and Danish a year after its first publication (Klemme 1992, p. lii; Malter 1984, p. 82). As England was still at war with Revolutionary France, however, the professed cosmopolitanism in Kant's Perpetual Peace smacked of treason in the eyes of many British counter-revolutionaries. For this and other reasons, which I will explain, Kant's works were generally subsumed under the label 'Jacobin.' Radicals and religious dissenters like Joseph Johnson did much for the Anglo-German exchange and especially for the transmission of the new German philosophy. Johnson's paper, the Analytical Review, regularly printed translated excerpts from the Jena Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung.² Another committed advocate of Kant's philosophy was the Irish doctor J. A. O'Keeffe. He caused a minor scandal in late 1795 by publishing his pamphlet An Essay on the Progress of Human Understanding (O'Keeffe 1795). The Irish radical had appropriated Kantian philosophy as part of his attack on the monarchy.
This book concurs with scholars who have dated Coleridge's study of the first critique in German to 1800 and 1801, even as it disagrees with the standard view which conflates this date with the beginning of Coleridge's perusal of Kantian texts (Wellek 1931, p. 71; Orsini 1969, p. 47; Ashton 1980, pp. 36–48; Coleridge 2002, p. 163; Hamilton 2007, p. 13; Perry in Coleridge 2002, p. 163). Coleridge read Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in German sometime after his return from Germany in June 1799. The textual evidence consists mainly of three pieces: two letters to Poole, one dated to 13 February 1801, when Coleridge mentioned in passing that ‘— I turn at times half reluctantly from Leibnitz or Kant even to read a smoking new newspaper/s such a purus putus Metaphysicus am I become’ (*Letters* II, p. 676), and another letter dated to ‘Monday Night [16 March 1801]’ (*Letters* II, p. 706), and a notebook entry (*Notebooks* I, §887). Coburn has suggested that this notebook entry refers to Kant's Latin work *De Mundi Sensibilis* (*Notebooks* [Notes] I, §887), a publication that Coleridge recommended to Mr. Pryce in 1818 for containing ‘the Germs of all the great works published by him [Kant] forty years afterwards – De formis Mundi intelligibilis et sensibilis’ (*Letters* IV , p. 851). I agree, however, with Kathleen Wheeler and Raimonda Modiano that the source of Coleridge's Kantian studies in the winter of 1800 and 1801 was probably the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Marginalia III, p. 241). For Coleridge recorded a thought that refers to the ‘“Transcendental Aesthetic” [in the first critique, which] concerns the a priori elements of sensible perceptions’ (Guyer 2006, p. 53): ‘Space – is it merely another word for the perception of a capability of additional magnitude – or does this very perception presuppose the idea of Space? – The latter is Kant's opinion’ (*Notebooks* I, §887). In the ‘Transcendental Aesthetic’, Kant argued that the notion of space (besides that of time) constitutes a necessary condition of our sensibility. Coleridge's statement appears to refer to the passage that ‘Der Raum ist eine nothwendige Vorstellung, a priori, die allen äußeren Anschauungen zum Grunde liegt’ (*KrV* A 24; ‘Space is a necessary representation, a priori, that is the ground of all outer intuitions’ [CpR A 24]). Later on, in 1803, Coleridge read Kant's ethics, taking detailed notes from the *Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten* (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 1785) and *Metaphysik der Sitten* (Metaphysics of Morals, 1797) (*Notebooks* I, §1705, 1710–11, 1721 and 1723; Orsini 1969, pp. 149–52). Coleridge continued studying Kant. Copies of Kant's works with Coleridge's autograph commentary are preserved at the British Library and in University College, London, and published in the Bollingen Series of Coleridge's Collected Works. There we find Coleridge's annotations of *Anthropolog[ie] in pragmatischer Hinsicht, Critik der reinen Vernunft, Critik der Urtheilskraft, Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten, Logik, Die Metaphysik der Sitten, Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft, Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossom Vernunft* and various shorter pieces published in *Sammlung einiger bisher unbekannt gebliebener Schriften* and in *Vermischte Schriften* (Marginalia III, pp. viii, 236–366). Coleridge's reading of works by and on Kant was extensive and exceeded the titles on this list. For instance, Coleridge studied Kant's moral philosophy in 1803 (Chapter 3) and started to assimilate the distinction between Reason and Understanding in 1806 (Chapter 7); in 1808, he used Kant's aesthetics for expounding the naïve in his lectures of the same year (Chapter 5), and subsequently in his *Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism* (1814) and *Biographia Literaria* (1817) (Chapter 6).
Reappraisal of Coleridge’s reception

By revising the assumption of Coleridge’s singularity, this book further contends that the investigation of Coleridge’s relation to Kant should no longer involve ‘originality’ as a criterion of intellectual merit. It proposes instead that the early reception of Kant in England is best understood when we appreciate the act of transmission as a form of intellectual interaction and as part of sociability despite the great importance of ‘originality’ during this particular period. Thus this book makes the controversial move to treat critical philosophy as a subject of serious study as well as of German and English fashionable conversation.

To date, there exists little scholarly awareness of how problematic value judgements on grounds of ‘originality’ have been for the study of Coleridge’s reception of Kant, and of ‘reception’ studies more widely speaking. Wellek, for instance, regarded ‘individuality’ as the ultimate measure of a writer’s achievement. For Wellek, Coleridge’s philosophical thought was overrated because of a fundamental lack of real philosophical individuality in Coleridge (Wellek 1931, p. 66). Since then, if not earlier, scholarship seems divided into two groups depending on the respective affirmation or rejection of Coleridge’s ‘originality’. John H. Muirhead (1930) and I. A. Richards (1934) disagreed fundamentally with Wellek’s negative assessment of Coleridge. Entrenched in the Romantics’ cult of genius, originality and individuality, Wellek saw the transmission of ideas as a minor achievement: ‘Historically, of course, Coleridge is immensely important and can scarcely be overrated as a transmitter of ideas’ (1931, p. 68). Indeed, an author’s ultimate merit lies, according to Wellek’s opinion, exclusively in individuality. Coleridge deserved, according to Wellek’s first monograph, scholarly attention because of his seemingly exceptionally problematic personality: ‘Individually as a person, he is so fascinating a problem that he well deserves closer study’ (1931, p. 68). Wellek’s stipulation of individuality provided also the ground for his dismissal of one of the major figures in this study: the long underestimated disciple of Kant and first Kantian lecturer in England, Friedrich August Nitsch. Assessing Nitsch’s treatise superficially, Wellek came to the conclusion that ‘the author [Nitsch] seems to have had the understanding of Kant which one can expect from a contemporary who was not himself an original mind and could not see the further implications and problems’ (1931, p. 7). The stipulation of ‘individuality’ and ‘originality’ as a critical criterion is still palpable in the recent scholarship on Coleridge and Kant by internationally leading experts. While ‘individuality’ and ‘originality’ are natural concerns for scholars of European Romanticism mainly because these concepts constitute two major legacies of the period, the concepts are, nonetheless, counterproductive for this type of investigation. From the perspective of ‘individuality’, Coleridge’s reception of German philosophy appears always as a latent accusation of the lack of ingenuity. Elinor Shaffer has shown that Coleridge’s engagement with Higher Biblical Criticism and the reinterpretation of major religious text of the West was a ‘communal event’ (1975, p. 6). The field of British Romanticism is moving beyond its traditional stipulation of individuality as Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite proclaim: ‘[i]t is our contention that the solitary self has stood for Romanticism for too long’ (2002, p. 4). It is time for the studies of Coleridge’s reception of German philosophy to relinquish ‘individuality’ and
'originality' not as a subject of investigation but as a criterion for our assessment of the writers' respective significance and merit. This book recovers the significance of interaction between the people who were involved in the process of mediating critical philosophy. It lays open that Nitsch wrote his pamphlet based on the conversations he had with the men and women in his audience. It traces Coleridge's conversations with Dr Beddoes. Beyond Coleridge's fear of his audiences and their reaction to German thought (Ashton 1980), this book recaptures an instance when a particular group of listeners in combination with a congenial setting elicited Coleridge's open endorsement of Kant and discussion of scepticism.

Elinor Shaffer, editor-in-chief of the open-ended and multi-volume series on the reception of British authors abroad published by Bloomsbury Books, observes that ‘[i]t is, of course, always possible, and indeed to be hoped and expected that further aspects of reception will later be uncovered’ (2007b, p. x). Traditional reception studies run the danger of being limited to isolated comparisons of texts by canonical authors. Previous Coleridge studies, notably by René Wellek (1931) and Gian N. Orsini (1969), have examined Coleridge's reception of Kant as if it had been sealed off from his native culture. Paul Hamilton in Coleridge's Poetics (1983, p. 28) and Nigel Leask in The Politics of the Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought (1988, p. 83) have rightly criticized this tendency in comparative studies. Wellek's work was partly informed by the view that literature should overcome national boundaries. The influential Czech comparatist and literary historian (born in Vienna) became a proponent of departments of literature (rather than of English, German, etc.) after his emigration to the United States in 1939, having enrolled in a graduate programme in Princeton in 1927 (Procházka 2007, p. 267; Brown 2011, p. 7). He opposed together with Austin Warren in Theory of Literature (1949) the idea of national literatures (Brown 2011, p. 7): ‘There is just literature’ (Wellek and Warren cited in Brown 2011, p. 7). In his first book based on his habilitation dissertation of 1930 (at the Charles University, Prague), Wellek followed ‘critical reflections of contemporary histories as master narratives of national identities’ (Procházka 2007, p. 267); however, the chapter on Coleridge's reception of Kant is devoid of sociocultural analysis. Contrary to this tendency, this book approaches Coleridge's reception of Kant from a position within English culture.

This reconsideration of ‘reception’ as a concept also entails a movement away from the long-dated linear history of ideas that presupposes a sequence of hitherto unprecedented ideas. The departure from linearity is one of the major reasons why this monograph draws on Michel Foucault. While this study employs a variety of critical approaches including close-reading and formal analyses of narrative and poetic structures, the book has an overall historicist framework. As an interdisciplinary study based on archival research, it applies the causal, diachronic mode of analysis which Foucault termed ‘genealogy’ in order to ‘identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us [like Coleridge's distinction of 'Reason' and 'Understanding']’ (Foucault cited in Gutting 2005, p. 49).

Accordingly, I mean by Coleridge's 'reception' of critical philosophy his encounter with, reaction to, and assimilation of Kantian themes (and not of stable, given concepts)