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Coleridge's Republicanism and the Aphorism in *Aids to Reflection*

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, *AIDS TO REFLECTION* MAY HAVE BEEN Coleridge's most influential work of prose. On both sides of the Atlantic, *Aids's* psychology of "Reason" (the "source and substance of truths above sense") and "the Understanding" (the faculty which judges "according to sense") persuaded many readers of the value of spiritual as well as intellectual reflection at a time otherwise dominated by Wesleyan enthusiasm, Calvinist reaction, and Unitarian rationalism. Perhaps the best proof of this 1825 book's inspiration is the variety of Victorian intellectual movements it spawned, including the Cambridge Apostles, the Broad Churchmen, the Oxford Movement, the American Transcendentalists, and even American Pragmatism.¹ The tremendous reach of *Aids* into the nineteenth century confirms John Stuart Mill's assurance in his 1840 essay on "Coleridge" that "no one has contributed more to shape the opinions of those among its younger men."²

One overlooked but potential source of the book's great influence is its genre. A collection of aphorisms, *Aids* was among the first in a small renaiss-

1. The influence of *Aids* upon the mid-century English and American movements is well established; see John Beer's "Introduction" to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 14 vols. (London & Princeton: Routledge & Kegan Paul and Princeton UP, for the Bollingen Foundation, 1969-) 9.cx-cxxviii, cxxxiii-cxlix. Hereafter cited in the text as *Works*. The influence upon the pragmatists is less certain, but John Dewey did fondly recall that "this *Aids to Reflection* book, especially [James] Marsh's [American 1829] edition, was my first Bible" (*Works* 9.cxxv); see also J. R. Barth, *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969) 83; John Dewey, "James Marsh and American Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (1941): 131-50; Oliver Elton, *A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1927) 2: 129; and J. H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970) 254-55.

2. John Stuart Mill, "Coleridge" (hereafter Mill [1840]), *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, eds. J. M. Robson and J. Stillinger, 33 vols. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981-91) 10: 119.

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sance of the form in the 1820s and '30s, prompting Mill to examine the trend in an 1837 article for the *Westminster Review*. And, yet, no modern critic has examined Coleridge's use of the aphorism in *Aids*. This neglect may seem surprising at first. Why, for example, have no critics investigated the apparent paradox of Coleridge's bemoaning in 1817 the "corruption" of metaphysics "by certain immethodical aphorisming Eclectics" and his turning in 1825 to this practice himself?³

Two modern critical convictions, I think, make such an investigation seem unnecessary. The first conviction is that Coleridge could finish no project, so that, as Thomas McFarland puts it, the choice for him was often between "neurotically constructed vehicles and no publication at all." One therefore reads Coleridge's prose with a certain generosity about matters of form.⁴ The second conviction—based upon a large critical literature—is that the English romantics wrote fragments, not aphorisms (as Coleridge insists on calling them in *Aids*). Along with maxims, aphorisms are assumed to be part of a "wisdom literature" that was little more than a fashion in the early Victorian period.⁵

The first critical conviction—that Coleridge's generic choices were always "desultory or localized plans" (McFarland 3)—is generally well-founded. However, in letters about the production of *Aids* as well as in *Aids* itself, Coleridge does state specific reasons for using the aphorism that have yet to be explored. These reasons, I will argue, recall the distinctly republican reasons Coleridge gives for using others genres in his experimental newspaper of 1809–10, *The Friend*. The second critical conviction—that the romantics wrote fragments, the Victorians aphorisms—will be held to one side for most of this article, which examines instead the continuity of Coleridge's republican thought in the 1795 lectures, the 1809–10 *Friend*, and—taking into account the purpose of its aphorisms—the 1825 *Aids*. However, my conclusion—that Coleridge's political legacy to the Victori-

3. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. in *Works* 7.1.292.

4. Thomas McFarland, "Shoring up the self: the ragged brilliance of Coleridge's philosophy of religion," *Times Literary Supplement* (June 17, 1994) 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text. See Basil Willey's conclusion that it was *Aids's* lack of form that allowed Coleridge "to do an important thing" (*Coleridge* [New York: Norton, 1972] 221) and James Boulger's that though there was no "schematic" principle to the book there probably was "an idealational principle" (*Coleridge as Religion Thinker* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1961] 8) (hereafter Boulger). In his superb introduction to the edition of the *Works*, John Beer untangles the tremendously complicated content of *Aids* but judges Coleridge's formal considerations to have been uncomplicated: aphorisms would have prohibited skimming and presented disparate thoughts clearly (*Works* 9.lxii–lxvii).

5. Robert Preyer, "Victorian Wisdom Literature: Fragments and Maxims," *Victorian Studies* 6.3 (March 1963): 248.

ans (based on a brief analysis of Mill's 1840 essay) must be judged as something closer to "republican" than "conservative"—suggests that the generic periodization supported by the second conviction obscures what Coleridge was formally and consistently trying to accomplish in his prose writings over the course of his career.

Modern Republicanism and Coleridge's Early Prose

Republicans view humans as political beings who realize their full potential through the acts of civic virtue that sustain republics.⁶ Republicans therefore prize humans as citizens, those who rule and are ruled, as Aristotle put it. In the modern era, historians have identified two versions of republicanism, classical and liberal. Classical republicanism originated with Machiavelli. Noting how professional armies tended to corrupt republics (i.e., turn them into tyrannies), Niccolò Machiavelli defined civic virtue (which he called *virtù*) primarily as participation in a citizen militia. Interpreting history cyclically (as the ancients had), Machiavelli concluded that republics were threatened not only by internal corruption but contingencies in general, a cosmos Machiavelli designated *fortuna*. Machiavelli often expanded his definition of *virtù* to connote the citizen's ability to repel (and occasionally draw upon) *fortuna* in order to sustain the republic.

English classical republicanism originated during the Interregnum when James Harrington argued in his utopian *Oceana* (1656) that English citizens exercised civic virtue less through martial prowess than through reflection, a meaning he understood to fall within Machiavelli's elastic definition of

6. The review of republicanism in the next four paragraphs draws largely upon J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975), a magisterial recovery of a tradition spanning four centuries of the modern "Atlantic world." Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as Pocock (1975). The book has been criticized for its studied exclusion of the liberal tradition, which we now know—thanks in part to Pocock's later work—to have grown up alongside of (and often intertwined with) the republican tradition. Nevertheless, *The Machiavellian Moment* remains the indisputable starting point for studies of republican thought up to and including Coleridge (Pocock [1975] 495). Other sources drawn upon here include chapter 6 of Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations Of Modern Political Thought, Volume One: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) for classical republicanism; J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977) for Harrington (hereafter Pocock [1977]); Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968) for eighteenth-century classical or "country" republicanism; and, for liberal republicanism, Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) 56–63; J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) (hereafter Pocock [1986]); and Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978).

virtù. Harrington reasoned that civic reflection is a direct function of freeheld land. His logic follows Aristotle's in the *Politics*: cultivated land (or the *oikos*) provides freeholders with the leisure to discuss affairs of the state (in the *polis*). Freeheld property also gives citizens a self-interested reason to protect the republic. Harrington also modified Machiavelli's cosmology to satisfy English taste—the whims of *fortuna* were meshed with Puritan millennialism—but the result was still recognizably Machiavellian: republics are only sustained (against sin now as well as corruption and contingency) through acts of virtue (which could be intellectual as well as physical).

During the eighteenth century, English and Scottish classical republicans drew on Harrington's agrarianism to advocate republics founded upon private property, individualistic (and elite) citizens, rural values, and martial prowess. In the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, an English "country" argument was shaped by political reactionaries like Lord Bolingbroke and poetical ones like Oliver Goldsmith, who were opposed to the new commercial state. At the same time, another, primarily Scottish, version of republicanism emerged to challenge this dependence on the agrarian model. The same urban markets that English Tories denounced as corrupting were hailed by Scottish political economists as underwriting the independence (economic and intellectual) that Harrington had deemed essential to citizenship in a republic. Rather than simply disseminating luxuries, *doux commerce* (as Montesquieu referred to it) in fact "sweetened" the citizenry, supplying them with the comforts necessary to cultivate the modern independent mind. This second version of republicanism, today designated liberal republicanism, still concerned itself with the civic virtue of citizens, but democracy and a market economy had replaced Harrington's essentially feudal structure.

Although classical and liberal republicans differed over how to guarantee it, a virtuous citizenry remained the ultimate objective of both camps. Both agreed that corruption (in forms ranging from political tyranny to material luxury) and citizens' consequent loss of their intellectual independence posed the greatest threat to a republic. The task for all republicans, then, was to define the setting most conducive to the cultivation of free and civic minds. Classical republicans relied on traditional means to insure political stability, especially an agrarian economy and mandatory participation in the militia. Liberal republicans, on the other hand, believed that appropriate commodities, generated by a modern commercial society, would actually liberate citizens from material concerns—sweeten them, just as freeheld property once had—so that they could pursue their civic calling.

Coleridge began his intellectual career as a classical "country" republican. In Bristol with Robert Southey in 1795, in search of funding for their

agrarian “pantisocracy,” Coleridge read Moses Lowman’s *A Dissertation of the Civil Government of the Hebrews* (1740), which argued that the Old Testament Hebrews realized Harrington’s *Oceana*.⁷ Coleridge drew upon the *Dissertation* when composing six lectures for the Assembly Coffeehouse in Bristol (delivered in May and June of 1795), in which he contrasts the virtuous Hebrew republic with the current and corrupt British empire. Compare, Coleridge says, the Hebrew’s free militia to our own standing (i.e., professional) army, especially how the former “preserved the people in a state of discipline while it prevented the possibility of military Despotism” (*Works* 1.129). Note, too, how with the Hebrews questions of war and elections were decided by “authority of the whole people” while in Britain such questions are left to a rotten Parliament of “Place-men” (*Works* 1.130–31). The Jews, unlike the British, avoided monarchical pomp, for it led to luxury, high taxes, and inequality, the last being tantamount to a reversion to idolatry (*Works* 1.134).⁸

Most of all, though, Coleridge admired the Hebrew’s elimination of private property. Coleridge’s rhetoric here is typical of country republicanism:

Commerce then is useless except to continue Imposture and oppression. Its Evils are vast and various— . . . Cities[,] Drunkenness, Prostitution, Rapine, Beggary and Diseases—Can we walk the Streets of a City without observing them in all their most loathsome forms? Add to these Irreligion. The smokes that rise from our crowded Towns hide from us the face of Heaven. In the country, the Love and Power of the great Invisible are everywhere perspicuous, and by degrees we become partakers of that which we are accustomed to contemplate. (*Works* 1.223–24)

While this includes the same kind of language that can be found in poems from Alexander Pope’s “Windsor Forest” (1713) to Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village” (1770), Coleridge has also grasped—perhaps more than most country republicans—the essential purpose of Harrington’s agrarian: to prompt civic reflection, or as Coleridge puts it, to make us

7. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*, eds. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann in *Works* 1.126n.

8. Although Peter Mann recognized the connection in 1969 (*Works* 1:liv), it is really due to two books—Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge’s Critical Thought* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988) (hereafter Leask) and John Morrow, *Coleridge’s Political Thought: Property, Morality, and the Limits of Traditional Discourse* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990) (hereafter Morrow [1990])—that we now discern in Coleridge’s early writings the influence of Harrington and his country interpreters, particularly in Coleridge’s ideas about property redistribution, the agrarian ideal, and participatory democracy. See, in particular, Leask’s discussion of Coleridge’s “one-life” republicanism (Leask 13–29) and Morrow’s discussion of the pantisocracy (Morrow [1990] 12–41).

“partakers of that which we are accustomed to contemplate.” This is the essence of what one critic of republican literature has called the “georgic ideal,” where what is best in man is realized through both contemplation of and interaction with a natural environment fully invested with the “great Invisible.”⁹

More than a decade would pass before Coleridge would develop this Harringtonian cosmos in more detail. In the meantime, however, Coleridge’s radicalism evaporated. Between 1798 and 1802 Coleridge abandoned his opposition to the war with France. Additionally, by 1806, the once radical Unitarian had fully reconciled with Trinitarianism, including the belief in original sin. When in 1809 Coleridge began *The Friend*—his second experiment in journalism after the failed *Watchman* of 1796—the link in his mind between republicanism and radicalism was severed.¹⁰

His radicalism ended, Coleridge’s republicanism took new form. Coleridge in the 1795 lectures had identified the heart of the Harringtonian agrarian as civic reflection. At that time, however, Coleridge had not read Harrington, only Lowman’s interpretation of Harrington (*Works* 1.126n). Lowman suggested that civic reflection would only flourish in agrarian settings. By the early 1800s, Coleridge had read Harrington for himself, and this significantly changed his conception of civic reflection as well as the conditions that fostered such reflection.¹¹ Gone by 1809 are the radical calls for the redistribution of property; according to Morrow, *The Friend* in fact develops a very aristocratic conception of *government*, dedicated to the protection of private property. At the same time, Morrow continues, Coleridge in *The Friend* identifies a distinct civic project in *the state* (Morrow [1991] 13). Essential to that civic project of the state—as opposed to the government—is what Coleridge had always perceived to be the end of republican life: reflection, or what he will call “Reason.” It is his focus on reflection—rather than upon the hotly debated means to achieving that reflection (i.e., real property for classical republicans, commerce for liberal republicans)—that makes Coleridge’s early nineteenth-century republicanism so unique and therefore worthy of its own designation, “cosmic republicanism.”

This claim requires some development. Since Machiavelli, modern republican philosophy had always been concerned with the metaphysical

9. William C. Dowling, *Poetry and Ideology in Revolutionary Connecticut* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990) 36–37.

10. For Coleridge’s disengagement from radicalism in this period, see John Morrow, “Introduction,” *Coleridge’s Writings, Volume One: On Politics and Society* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 7–10 (hereafter Morrow [1991]).

11. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (hereafter *CN*), ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 639–41.

status of civic virtue. Struggling to refashion ancient political models for an epoch even more dominated by contingency (or so it seemed), modern republican philosophers often overlaid their historical analysis of civic life with an extra-historical frame of reference so that citizenship might be defined more essentially. So, for example, Machiavelli used *virtù* to describe not only participation in the city-state militia but participation in the struggle against *fortuna* to achieve stability. Harrington, too, was always careful to explain his idea of citizenship in agrarian terminology that evoked God's presence in nature.¹²

Coleridge was especially drawn to Harrington's use of a particular set of terms. What Harrington called "Religion" and "Reason" seemed very close to what Coleridge had learned from Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and other German philosophers to call "Reason" and "Understanding." Coleridge's use of the German version of these terms in the *Biographia* is well known, of course. However, it is interesting to note that in *The Friend*, Coleridge begins his essay on "Reason and Understanding" with Harrington's, not Kant's or Jacobi's, version. First, he uses as an epigram the thirty-fifth aphorism of Harrington's *Aphorisms Political*.

"Man may rather be defined a religious than a rational character, in regard that in other creatures there may be something of Reason, but there is nothing of Religion."¹³

"If the Reader will substitute the word 'Understanding' for 'Reason' and the word 'Reason' for 'Religion,'" Coleridge writes, "Harrington has here completely expressed the truth for which the *Friend* is contending" (*Works* 4.1.154). Reason, then, is what makes us human, different from "other creatures."¹⁴

12. For republican interpretations of the Machiavellian cosmos, see Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) and Pocock (1975) (156–218). For Harrington's republic of Reason, Coleridge is the crucial interpreter, but see also Wm. Craig Diamond, "Natural Philosophy in Harrington's Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 16 (October 1978): 387–98; Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981) 80; Leask 2–5, 19–33; Morrow (1990) 82; Pocock (1975) 390–391; Pocock (1977) 87; and Pocock (1986) 41, 62, 106.

13. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols. in *Works* 4.1.154.

14. Coleridge goes on to say that he has "no objection to defin[ing] Reason with Jacobi," but then defines it (as "an organ identical with its appropriate objects") incorrectly—at least according to Jacobi (see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Reason, the Understanding, and Time* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1961] 14–21, and Boulger 69–72). Instead, Coleridge switches back to Harrington and Milton's idea of Reason: "Thus, God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c., are the objects of Reason; but they are themselves *reason*. We name God the Supreme Reason; and Milton says, 'Whence the Soul *Reason* receives, and Reason is her Being'" (*Works* 4.1.155–56).

A human essence of Reason is important to Coleridge, as Essay vi, “On the Grounds of Government as Laid Exclusively in the Pure Reason” shows, for Reason is at the core of his cosmic republicanism:

REASON! best and holiest gift of Heaven and bond of union with the Giver. The high Title by which the Majesty of Man claims precedence above all other living Creatures! . . . [T]hou alone, more than even the Sunshine, more than the common Air, art given to all Men, and to every Man alike! To thee, who being one art the same in all, we owe the privilege, that of all we can become one, a living *whole!* that we have a COUNTRY! (*Works* 4.2.125–26)

In Reason, Coleridge believed he had recovered the metaphysical essence of seventeenth-century English republican philosophy. This would remain true for the rest of his career. For example, in 1805, Coleridge wrote in his notebook that Harrington and John Milton were a part of what he called “Old” England, “the spiritual platonic old England,” and in opposition to eighteenth-century “Commercial” England (“with Locke at the head”) (CN 2598). Twenty-four years later, in *On the Constitution of Church and State*, Coleridge still viewed the major seventeenth-century republicans—i.e., Algernon Sydney, Harrington, Milton, and Henry Neville—as the source of his understanding of the real foundation of citizenship. These men, Coleridge notes, “were wont to discourse . . . on the IDEA of the STATE: and in what sense it may be more truly affirmed that the people . . . are in order to the state, than that the state exists for the sake of the people.”¹⁵

It is true that Coleridge shifted back and forth over the course of his career as to whether commerce corrupts or benefits a state. For example, the 1817 *Lay Sermon* argues that an “over-balance of trade” threatens to corrupt “the mind of the nation.”¹⁶ In contrast, the 1795 “Lecture on the Slave-Trade” argues (as did Thomas Jefferson, a country republican who eventually became a liberal republican) that “if we confined our [commercial] wishes to the actual necessities and real comforts of Life” we could still develop the “power of the Creator” (“our proper employment”) (*Works* 1.235).¹⁷ It is also true that Coleridge shifted back and forth as to whether Reason was cultivated in citizens best through relatively democratic means (as with the newspapers *The Watchman* and *The Friend*, and—to a certain extent—*Aids*) or through relatively aristocratic means (as with the clerisy of

15. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State*, ed. John Colmer, in *Works*, 10.65.

16. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, in *Works* 6.191–92.

17. Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York UP, 1984) 90–91.

On the Constitution of Church and State, and—again, to a certain extent—with *Aids*). What did not change in Coleridge's political philosophy, however, is his belief that Reason was the essence of citizenship and thus to be cultivated in all citizens. It is in this sense that we can say Coleridge developed a unique cosmic republicanism, prudent in its means of civic cultivation yet ultimately dedicated to the integrity of the independent mind of the citizen.

In *The Friend*, Coleridge makes the link between his cosmic republicanism—i.e., the cultivation of Reason in all citizens—and genre. Coleridge wanted *The Friend* to model how newspapers can prompt citizens to reflect independently—and thereby come to Reason.¹⁸ By 1809, the agrarian concerns of country republicanism seemed to Coleridge antique when he observed how expanding newspaper circulations rendered the *oikos* irrelevant. “Newspapers, their Advertisements, Speeches in Parliament, Law-courts, and Public Meetings, Reviews, Magazines, Obituaries”: all of these things, Coleridge noted, “have combined to diminish, and often to render evanescent, the distinctions between the enlightened Inhabitants of the great city, and the scattered Hamlet” (*Works* 4.2.28). Reflection is now sponsored by the word as much as real property.

However, this development was a mixed blessing. For if the press had yet to realize its new power to provoke reflection, it also did not yet realize its new power to corrupt. In the eighteenth century, Coleridge noted, newspapers such as *The Spectator* could afford to make a mockery of the principles provided by Reason, only because Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's entirely urban readership could always retire to their country estates to reflect more seriously upon those same principles. But a century later, Coleridge observed that a nationwide “public” had spread over the old town/country line. Print was fast becoming the sole viable source of principles for much of the citizenry, rendering any Addisonian levity more and more dangerous (*Works* 4.2.87).

In the midst of the Napoleonic Wars, newspapers were enjoying huge readerships, and any journalist, thought Coleridge, had before him a great opportunity, or what Machiavelli would call *l'occasione*. For Machiavelli, the occasion is what *fortuna* presents to her potential masters. In his poem about this subject, Machiavelli depicted occasion as a woman with a graspable forelock in the front but tonsured in the back (Pocock [1975] 168–69). Coleridge considered his journalistic occasion equally risky. “Reflection, and stirrings of mind, with all their Restlessness and all their Imperfections and Errors, are come into the World,” Coleridge observed. “The powers

18. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (hereafter *CL*), ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1956–71) 3.143.

that awaken and foster the Spirit of Curiosity and Investigation, are to be found in every village; Books are in every Cottage.” And it is this spirit, the very “[c]ause of our disquietude,” that “must be [made in turn] the means of our Tranquillity; only by the Fire, which has burnt us, can we be enlightened to avoid a repetition of the Calamity” (*Works* 4.2.86). Against those “who think that the Peace of Nations has been disturbed by the diffusion of Knowledge,” then, Coleridge argues that no “Peace may be re-established by excluding the People from all Knowledge, all Thought, and all prospect of Amelioration” (*Works* 4.2.86). *The Friend*, for one, will “refer men to PRINCIPLES in all things” (*Works* 4.2.13).

What form should these references to principles take? In keeping with the republican understanding of the occasion, Coleridge emphasizes that the genre of these regenerating writings must be determined by historical circumstance, and he frankly recognizes that the public is now being “taught in sport.” He does not admire such sport, but he does argue that, if history has dictated that the press must communicate by such means, it should do so “from the actual impulse of a believing Fancy” and not “from [the] Cowardice or Malice” that leads to “a pitiable destitution of all intellectual power” (*Works* 4.2.86). Coleridge’s ideal genre would act to unite reader and writer in the pursuit of Reason while in the midst of historical emergency. Coleridge urges the press not to patronize its readers, but to consider them as friends, for “[t]ruth is not Detraction: and assuredly we do not hate him, to whom we tell the Truth. But with whomsoever we play the Deceiver and Flatterer, him at the bottom we despise” (*Works* 4.2.87). A republican genre should promote fraternity between reader and writer. Constrained by historical contingencies, no republican writer should dictate principles from on high; rather, he must join the reader within the historical moment in an exigent but consensual search for principles. Coleridge’s choice of the title “The Friend” takes on new significance from this republican perspective.¹⁹

The final question remains unanswered, however: what particular genre shall accomplish this republican fraternity of reader and writer? Clearly it must be a genre of some sport, and *The Friend*’s miscellany tries out several: essays, poems, letters, travel writing, gothic stories, even jokes. The maxim flickers into view at one point when Coleridge suggests “that in the whole

19. Coleridge’s grasp of the relationship between genre and *l’occasione* had republican precedent. In the writings of Harrington, Milton, and Algernon Sidney, “the republic was presented as a standing confrontation with contingency,” and these authors sought “to dramatize the threat to government presented by emergency” (Pocock [1977] 15). For example, the death of Cromwell in 1658 prompted Harrington to republish immediately the main ideas of his bulky utopia *Oceana* (1656) as more incisive and compelling aphorisms, dialogues, and models (Pocock [1977] 101), writings meant to bring thinking citizens together to seize the occasion. On Machiavelli’s similar use of the aphorism, see Brian Vickers, *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 68–70.

Chapter of Contents of European Ruin, every Article might be unanswerably deduced from the neglect of some maxim . . . [in] the Works of Machiavelli, Bacon, or Harrington” (*Works* 4.2.85). Yet Coleridge himself does not publish such maxims in *The Friend*. He continues instead to experiment with the miscellany, seeking generic guidance at one desperate point from *The Spectator* itself.²⁰

What was wrong with the aphorism? In 1809–10, Coleridge seems to have recognized that such a superficial style remained popular, and that it thus demanded his consideration as a writer. However, in a letter written as he began *The Friend*, he admitted that he could not (despite his own recommendations) surrender his own choice of genre over to the historical moment if it meant using the aphorism. He recognized that his own studies, especially of authors in the English sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “have combined to render my sentences more *piled up* and *architectural* than is endurable in so illogical an age as the present, in which all the cements of style are dismissed.” However, “the popular book is only a sequence of epigrams and aphorisms on one subject.” So while Coleridge frankly admitted that “[t]oo often my Reader may justly complain of involution and *entortillage* in my style” (Brinkley 426), the aphorism seemed too much the superficial opposite.

If in *The Friend* Coleridge grasped the importance of genre to reconstituting the relation between writer and reader within a certain historical moment, he was himself not yet sure of the genre best suited for his occasion. That Coleridge still sought that genre in the 1818 revised edition of *The Friend* is apparent in his defense of the generic experiments that the book involves, which he describes as an aesthetic of fraternity:

The musician may tune his instrument in private, ere his audience have yet assembled; the architect conceals the foundation of his building beneath the superstructure. But an author’s harp must be tuned in the hearing of those, who are to understand its after harmonies; the foundation stones of his edifice must lie open to common view, or his friends will hesitate to trust themselves beneath the roof. (*Works* 4.1.14)

Republicanism and the Aphorism in *Aids to Reflection*

Another historical occasion, though, forced Coleridge to reconsider the merits of the aphorism.²¹ A few years after the above passage was written, Coleridge’s friends urged him to lay aside his ongoing work, “The Asser-

20. Roberta Florence Brinkley, ed., *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century* (Durham: Duke UP, 1955) xxiv–xxv. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

21. The chronology of events examined here is based on John Beer’s “Introduction” (*Works* 9.xlii–lxvi, xcvi–cvi).

tion of Religion,” and put something to press immediately to meet a perceived spiritual crisis in the younger generation (*AR* lii). Coleridge conceived of a selection of the writings of Archbishop Robert Leighton, a seventeenth-century divine whom Coleridge first read in 1814 (*AR* xlvi). In his first proposal to publisher John Murray in January 1822, Coleridge emphasizes how Leighton’s style entertains without sacrifice of principle, recalling the combination of sport and principle described by *The Friend*. “Profound as his conceptions are,” Coleridge writes, “there is always a sense on the very surface which the simplest may understand” (*AR* liii). Coleridge also explains the value of Leighton’s theology for the historical moment, locating it in that ideal place Coleridge had recently described in *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816) between the empty notionalism of Socinianism (which has desiccated faith) and the dangerously enthusiastic literalism of the Methodists (*Works* 6.30, *Works* 9.liii). Leighton, in Coleridge’s view, called one to a deeper self than Wesley’s Methodists and yet challenged the self-satisfaction of the Socinians (*Works* 9.lxxxvi).²²

And yet, wrote Coleridge, the style and substance of Leighton’s prose were not in themselves enough to meet the historic occasion. Coleridge’s final argument is how his proposed edition will respond *generically* to the contemporary crisis of faith better than any edition of Leighton now available:

“Beauties” in general are objectionable works—injurious to the original Author, as disorganizing his productions . . . and injurious to the Reader, by indulging his taste for unconnected and for that reason unretained single Thoughts. . . . [However] the Volume, I propose, would not only bring together [Leighton’s] finest passages, but these being afterwards arranged on a principle wholly independent of the accidental place of each in the original Volumes, and guided by their relative bearings, it would give a connection or at least a propriety of *sequency*. . . . (*Works* 9.liv)

In themselves objectionable, selections or “beauties” arranged according to a “principle” of “sequency” will not corrupt the reader but prompt him into connected and worthwhile reflection. The genre of the volume will itself constitute that principle. As in *The Friend*, genre at once recognizes its occasion (even the “simplest” reader can respond to beauties) and seizes it (in this case, through the “propriety of sequency”).

22. Leighton’s ability to bring together Paul’s idea of Grace and John’s idea of the Word—his ability to speak at once of our inward light and of our depravity and need for redemption (*Works* 9.xlii, li)—had helped Coleridge earlier in the century to comprehend how a mind might be divided by the Understanding and Reason (*Works* 9.xlii, li). See McFarland 3.

When Murray rejected the proposed volume on the grounds that there were already too many editions of Leighton in print, Coleridge clearly had to make even greater claims for his unique generic presentation. In his next proposal to the publishers John Taylor and J. A. Hessey in August 1823, he begins with the generic argument: "I have the honor of agreeing with all the thinking Men, with whom I have conversed, in their objection to 'beauties' of this or that writer, taken as a *general Rule*" (*Works* 9.lvi). Coleridge lists the same concerns for the reader as above, though now more dramatically—beauties not merely "indulging" but "depraving" the reader's taste—heightening the sense of the occasion's urgency. But Leighton is the exception to the "general rule." Coleridge asks his potential publishers to consider "how much more favorable Impression the passages would make, arranged and in sequence, with the necessary additions, or completions" (*Works* 9.lvii). A pocket edition, annotated and abridged and arranged according to the principle of sequency, would make available to nine out of ten readers "a much truer, livelier, and more retainable Idea than they would form from their own reading of the Works themselves, even on the assumption that their patience held out so far" (*Works* 9.lvii).

Taylor and Hessey were persuaded that the time was indeed ripe for such an edition and agreed to publish a volume to be titled "Aids to Reflection: or Beauties and Characteristics of Archbishop Leighton extracted from his various Writings, and arranged on a principle of connection . . ." (*Works* 9.lvi). By early October 1823, Coleridge submitted the first arrangement of selections with his own annotations, enough material for the first four signatures' (or sixty-four pages). This material was then returned as proof sheets to Coleridge, now at Ramsgate for a vacation (*Works* 9.lx–lxi). There, while revising this first proof, Coleridge apparently decided that aphorisms would be the best means to accomplish this "principle of connection," for the publishers first heard of this generic change in a November 6 letter.²³ Because these first sections were already in proof pages, Coleridge's emendations had to be minimal. His decision to rewrite the material as aphorisms, then, was no casual one. But why did Coleridge choose the aphorism specifically, and not the selection or the beauty? Explicitly, we have only his November 6 explanation to his publishers:

As soon as I saw the Proof, I was struck with the apprehension of the disorderly and heterogeneous appearance which the Selections inter-

23. There are several other important clues to Coleridge's seemingly sudden choice of the aphorism at this time. See a September 1823 reference to other proposed publications of fragments in a letter to Hessey (*CL* 4.302) and Coleridge's suggestive experiments with "Thoughts" in the Ramsgate notebooks, which the editor describes as a generic innovation for Coleridge at the time (*CN* 5012–26; *CN* 5017n.).

mixed with my own comments etc. would have . . . and the more I reflected, the more desirable it appeared to me to carry on the promise of the Title Page (*Aids* to reflection) systematically through the work—But little did I anticipate the time and trouble, that this *rifacimento* would cost me. . . . I leave it to your better judgment. . . . (CL 5.306)

Coleridge then describes the aphoristic solution, which was—as John Beer argues—clearly an expedient way to deal with a lot of unrelated thoughts (*Works* 9.lxvi). However, note how Coleridge also lays emphasis here on the contingency not only of the text but of his own authority. For example, he specifically notes that he himself had to “reflect” (like his future readers), and that his reflections were partly the result of a pressing emergency. He had also to consider his publishers’ thoughts, and finally he recognized that he was beholden to his future audience “to carry on the promise of the Title page.” Invested in this eleventh-hour choice of genre, in short, are all the concerns of the fraternizing ideal expressed by Coleridge in *The Friend* and his earlier proposals to the publishers. The difference now is that this fraternity will be cultivated not by the miscellany but by the once disdained aphorism.

Coleridge in 1823 was right to be nervous about his choice of genre. While Mill was confident in 1837 that “books of aphorisms are seldom written but by persons of genius,” he conceded that there were still “to be found books like Mr. [Charles Caleb] Colton’s *Lacon* [1820]—centos of trite truisms and trite falsisms pinched into epigrams.”²⁴ William Houghton’s review of anti-intellectualism in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* suggests that this triteness was widespread. Throughout the middle and upper classes, the popular assumption was that action ought to replace thought, not stem from it. For example, Samuel Smiles’s best-seller of 1859, *Self-Help*, flattered its readers with the promise that “the experience gathered from books, though often valuable, is but of the nature of learning; whereas the experience gained from actual life is of the nature of wisdom.”²⁵ Because their deliberate brevity seemed to suggest that they were the next best thing to pure experience itself, aphorisms risked being read as celebrating action alone. Books like Colton’s—subtitled “Many Things in Few Words”—verified this understanding of the aphorism.

Aids, which sought to aid reflection *before* action, therefore had to be very careful not to valorize the latter to the diminishment of the former. In

24. John Stuart Mill, “Aphorisms” (hereafter Mill [1937]), in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* 1: 422–23.

25. Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 110, 117.

the Preface, Coleridge explicitly defends the spirit of his collection of aphorisms against the growing number of “beauties” published just for big sales. *Aids* was written “for the Benefit of the Readers,” Coleridge promises, not “the Number of Purchasers” (*Works* 9.5). He admits that this book “belongs to the class of *didactic* Works,” but he will not allow that this new didactic literature must serve only the self-interest of private readers. The civic-minded author and compiler of these aphorisms expects the same level of reflection from his readers. Pass on to other readers the lesson of what you learn here, Coleridge requests; and as for “those who neither wish instruction for themselves, nor assistance in instructing others,” they will “have no interest in its contents” (*Works* 9.5).²⁶

In this way, *Aids to Reflection* avoids the Victorian anti-intellectualism identified by Mill and Houghton. However, the book does represent a different kind of compromise of Coleridge’s cosmic republicanism. For a different message is presented in the next paragraph, where Coleridge describes more specifically “for whom” the book is written:

Generally, for as many in all classes as wish for aid in disciplining their minds to habits of reflection—for all who, desirous of building up a manly character in the light of distinct consciousness, are content to study the principles of moral Architecture. . . . And lastly, for all who feel an interest in the Position, I have undertaken to defend—this, namely, that the CHRISTIAN FAITH . . . IS THE PERFECTION OF HUMAN INTELLIGENCE. (*Works* 9.6)

The first sentence recalls Coleridge’s primary objective in *The Friend*: to cultivate a more reflective citizenry, though a citizenry still exemplifying manliness (recalling a more Machiavellian understanding of virtue).²⁷ The second sentence, however, seriously restricts this reflection to a foreor-

26. His Latin epigram—*Sis Sus, sis Divus: Sum CALTHA, et non tibi spiro!* [Be you a pig, be you a God: I am a marigold and do not breathe for you!] (*Works* 9.5n)—has not been definitively traced, but the similarities to Aristotle’s classic definition of man the political animal (*zoon politikon*) in the *Politics* are worth noting: “he who is unable to live in society must be either a beast or a god; he is no part of a state. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature” (1253a).

27. Since Milton, the modern English republic of “wisdom” had been haunted by the ancient republic of “vertue.” See the Second Book of *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty*, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953–82) 1.818–820. Modern classical republicans especially made use of the old manly vocabulary of *virtù* to describe the new republic of intelligence. See the Preface to *Aids to Reflection*, in the formation of a manly character . . .” (*Works* 9.1): “READER!—You have been bred in a land abounding with men, able in arts, learning, and knowledges manifold. . . . But there is one art, of which every man should be master, the art of REFLECTION. If you are not a thinking man, to what purpose are you a man at all?” (*Works* 9.9)

dained conclusion. The “Advertisement” for the 1831 edition of *Aids* also demonstrates this same tension:

Fellow-Christian! the wish to be admired, as a fine Writer, held a very subordinate place in the *Author's* thoughts and feelings in the composition of this Volume. Let then its comparative merits and demerits . . . possess a proportional weight . . . in determining *your* judgment. . . . Read it *through*: then compare the state of your mind, with the state in which your mind was, when you first opened the Book. Has it led you to reflect? . . . [H]as it increased your power of thinking connectedly? Especially on the Scheme and purpose of the Redemption by Christ? If it has done none of these things, condemn it aloud as worthless: and strive to compensate for your loss of time, by preventing others from wasting theirs. But if your conscience dictates an affirmative answer to all or any of the preceding questions, declare this aloud, and endeavour to extend my utility. (*Works* 9.3)

Throughout this passage, there are instances of high-minded republican authorship: the selflessness of the author (who wishes not to be “admired”); the insistence upon the worth of the reader’s reflection (“*your* judgment”); the equal insistence that every reflective reader “endeavour to extend” the utility of this book within the fraternity of readers. At the same time, the point of all this fraternization and reflection is merely to validate a few points of Christian dogma.

In the Harringtonian ideal, a republic was founded upon the free exercise of citizens’ Reason. Whatever history brought forth, Reason could encompass it, for the fraternizing ideal of Reason—what Coleridge calls the “living whole” in *The Friend*—ensured that all citizens abided together in that moment, and that none could claim a loftier vantage point from which to legislate a set of beliefs for the other citizens. But, to conceive of a need for a set of specific values to be held by all citizens and promulgated by an elite few of those citizens—as Coleridge begins to do here—is to admit that there are now historical forces at work which Reason cannot encompass, historical forces which can only be checked and balanced by a preserve of extra-historical faiths, a kind of civil (and in this case, explicitly Christian) religion.

One can be a republican and advocate a civil religion: republican philosophers like Machiavelli and Rousseau have demonstrated this. One can also be a republican and restrict citizenship to a certain (in Coleridge’s case, Christian and manly) few: this has been so since Aristotle. One cannot, however, be a republican and argue that not all citizens can participate in the republic—that not all citizens are capable of comprehending the civil religion. That is the point at which Coleridge compromises his cosmic re-

publicanism. In *Aids*, this compromise occurs when Coleridge addresses his readers—some of whom may not have been citizens, of course, but many of whom were—as subjective individuals and not as members of the “living whole” of Reason. In addressing his reader privately, appealing to that reader’s spiritual self-interest, Coleridge has abandoned his cosmic republican commitment to Reason in history, and taken up an anti-republican solution similar to one he would promote as the “clerisy” in *On the Constitution of Church and State*: i.e., providing “throughout the MANY . . . the basis of divinity, possessed by the FEW” (*Works* 10.48–49).

Throughout *Aids* itself, we can judge the rigor of Coleridge’s commitment to his republic of Reason by his use of the aphorism. As we have seen, Coleridge’s aphorism was designed to inspire immediate and deep reflection upon the contingencies of the moment. But to urge reflection about only specific doctrines is to compromise the essence of the republican aesthetic. The republican aphorism must be open-ended, prompting reflection about matters central to a republic adrift in a cosmos ruled by fortune. Like Machiavelli or Harrington, Coleridge in his best fraternizing aphorisms seeks to bring the citizen-reader into the realm of contingency, “to a lively conviction of your responsibility as a moral agent.” These true aphorisms are all in the opening one-hundred pages of the book, which were written, as noted above, in the fall of 1823 to meet a perceived historical crisis. They epitomize the republican aesthetic.

There is one sure way of giving freshness and importance to the most *common-place* maxims—that of *reflecting* on them in direct reference to our own state and conduct, to our own past and future being. (*Works* 9.11)

Note how Coleridge in this early aphorism keeps the focus on “our conduct,” not on timeless truths. Reflection should be “in direct reference to our own state,” to our specific historical condition, and only from within that specific situation—the phrasing suggests—should we then consider our past and future being. Similarly, in the aphorism that follows, the common-place truths are not to be instinctively cherished and preserved, but directly reflected upon and then acted upon:

To restore a common-place truth to its first *uncommon* lustre, you need only *translate* it into action. But to do this, you must have *reflected* on its truth. (*Works* 9.12)

These early aphorisms—both quoted in their entirety—seek to prompt reflection in a specific historical context. In Coleridge’s case, that context is a small nation reorganizing itself around the routines of a commercial empire. Here is how he first defines the aphorism:

It was customary with religious men in former times, to make a rule of taking every morning some text, or aphorism, for their occasional meditation during the day, and thus to fill up the intervals of their attention to business. (*Works* 9.32–33)

The aphorism is the genre which brings reflection to bear upon the historical world, in this case “former times” (which sound a lot like Coleridge’s current times) determined by business. The essentially civic-minded man, finding himself at leisure, will by nature reflect upon the *polis*; such reflection is “to *aphorize*, and the result an *aphorism*” (*Works* 9.33n).

But, as both the Preface and Advertisement anticipate, Coleridge eventually wants to do more than exchange reflections and aphorisms with his fellow readers. His fundamental objective changes somewhere around the middle of *Aids* from a collection of open-ended aphorisms into that “assertion of religion” he was writing prior to starting *Aids*. These later aphorisms, written in 1824 and clearly after the initial inspiration for the collection had worn off, are between two and ten *pages* each.²⁸ Coleridge begins to address directly the private person on the use of these beliefs:

In my intercourse with men of various ranks and ages, I have found the far larger number of serious and inquiring Persons little if at all disquieted by doubts respecting Articles of Faith, that are simply above their comprehension. It is only where the Belief required of them jars with their *moral* feeling; where a Doctrine in the sense, in which they have been taught to receive it, appears to contradict their clear notions of Right and Wrong. . . . Now it is more especially for such Persons, unwilling Sceptics, who believing earnestly ask help for their unbelief, that this Volume was compiled. . . . (*Works* 9.156)

Normally, it seems, the private man need not concern himself with the “articles of Faith” that lie beyond his comprehension; he requires only those beliefs that do not “jar with his moral feeling.” Coleridge here anticipates his argument in *On the Constitution of Church and State* that the public culture—or nationality—is really the trust of an elite. The private man—even if he is a citizen—must only be persuaded that it is in his own private interest to respect that public culture. That kind of crass appeal to self-interest, not unlike that made in books like *Self-Help*, is clear in passages like this from *Aids*:

[If the Reader has] his religious principles yet to form, I should expect to overhear a troubled Murmur: How can I comprehend this? How is

28. See McFarland (3–4) and Beer (*Works* 9.xli, xcvi–cvi). See also the opening of the last section, entitled “Aphorisms on that which is indeed spiritual religion” (*Works* 9.155).

this is to be proved? To the first question I should answer: Christianity is not a Theory, or a Speculation; but a *Life*. Not a *Philosophy* of Life, but a Life and a living Process. To the second: TRY IT. It has been eighteen hundred Years in existence. (*Works* 9.202)

According to the reading offered here, then, Coleridge's inability to compose *Aids* entirely in legitimate aphorisms goes hand in hand with his growing conviction that the nationality is better left in the hands of an elite, who will guide the common citizen in his strictly self-interested reflection upon that nationality. Once Coleridge imagines his common readers to be reading entirely for self-interest, the aphorism as the republican aesthetic, which would compel readers to reflect openly upon pressing civic events, can no longer be written. The aphorism becomes instead a kernel of extra-historical truth for private consumption.

Conclusion

Focusing on the evolution of Coleridge's cosmic republicanism in *The Friend* and its lingering presence in *Aids*, we can better comprehend not only the continuities of Coleridge's political thought but the complex legacy that he bequeathed to liberal Victorian intellectuals like J. S. Mill. In his 1840 essay on Coleridge, Mill himself outlines an appreciation of the philosopher that is at times essentially republican, suggesting that Coleridge played a more important role than we currently think in the translation of early modern republicanism into modern liberalism.²⁹

In the portion of "Coleridge" that reviews eighteenth-century Continental philosophy, Mill explains how the *philosophes* had been wrong to assume an enduring civic spirit in the human soul (Mill [1840] 131). Focusing exclusively on what needed to be torn away ("superstition, priestcraft, error and prejudice of every kind" [132]), the *philosophes* "never for a moment suspected that all the virtues and graces of humanity could fail to flourish, or that when the noxious weeds were once rooted out, the soil would stand in need of tillage" (132). However, Coleridge, Mill writes, did recognize the fragility of civil society and, along with the late eighteenth-century Germans he read, particularly recommended "three prerequisites as essential principles of all permanent forms of social existence" (139).

29. When first constructed by historians in the 1970s, the republican tradition was assumed to be inimical to the liberal tradition; through the 1980s and early 1990s the assumption remained that republicanism, even if at points complementary to liberalism (e.g., as liberal republicanism), still historically had to give way to liberalism. In recent years, historians and political theorists have concluded that not only was republicanism often compatible with liberalism but that it did not necessarily disappear with the rise of liberalism. I can only sketch here the ways in which Mill's liberalism represents a continuation of Coleridge's republicanism.

First, Coleridge understood that there is the need for a “system of education . . . to train the human being in the habits . . . of subordinating his personal impulses and aims, to what were considered the ends of society.” Whereas the ancients (Sparta is the classic example) accomplished this through “civil and military policy,” Mill notes, the moderns have tended to rely upon “religious training” (133), a remark which suggests we do indeed need to reconsider the civic purpose of books like *On the Constitution of Church and State* and *Aids to Reflection*.

Second, writes Mill, Coleridge understood that there must exist among members of “political society” “the feeling of allegiance” to something in the State which is “settled” (133). This is the notion that Coleridge called “nationality” in *On the Constitution of Church and State* and that I designate in my discussion of *Aids* as “public culture” or “civil religion.” As I argue above, the important point for republicans is that this public culture is sustained by the reflection of *all* citizens, and Mill seems to confirm this point when he writes that the “something settled” should be “a fixed point; something which men agree in holding sacred” (134), “something which, by general agreement, has a right to be where it is, and to be secure against disturbance, whatever else may change” (133–34). Coleridge remains republican in his understanding of this public culture, I believe, when he writes of the nationality in *On the Constitution of Church and State* as being “consecrated . . . to the potential divinity in every man, which is the ground and condition of his civil existence, that without which a man can be neither free nor obliged, and by which alone, therefore, he is capable of being a free subject—a citizen” (*Works* 10.52). Coleridge compromises his cosmic republicanism, I believe, when he writes, in response to the citizen-reader’s “how can I comprehend this,” “TRY IT” (*Works* 9.202).³⁰

Third, Mill writes, Coleridge understood that there must exist “a strong and active principle of cohesion among the members of the same community or state” (135): that fraternity of reflection that Coleridge sought to cultivate in *The Friend* and at times in *Aids*. Indeed, it was in support of this kind of vibrant civil society that Mill wrote his 1837 appreciation of the aphorism. Although Mill does not explicitly say so in that review, aphorisms clearly represent for him the kind of knowledge that thrives in democratic republics, an unsystematic knowledge to which any single total phi-

30. Mill’s tone is especially republican when he explains that this civil religion is needed as a bulwark against the threat of *fortuna*: “A State never is, nor, until mankind are vastly improved, can hope to be, for any long time exempt from internal dissension. . . . What, then, enables society to weather these storms, and pass through turbulent times without any permanent weakening of the securities for peaceable existence? Precisely this—that however important the interest about which men fell out, the conflict did not affect the fundamental principles of the system of social union which happened to exist” (Mill [1840] 134).

losophy cannot do justice.³¹ The kind of wisdom that aphorisms do justice to is that “acquired by experience of life, and a good use of the opportunities possessed by all who have mingled much with the world” (Mill [1837] 421). Such people know that “to be unsystematic is of the essence of all truths which rest on specific experiment” and that aphorisms capture that vibrant sense of experimentation. Yes, Mill remarks, because of this vibrancy aphorisms “are very seldom exactly true; but then this, unfortunately, is an objection to all human knowledge” (422). No knowledge is immune to “all these contingencies,” and “no one need flatter himself that he can lay down propositions . . . which he may afterwards apply mechanically without any exercise of thought” (422). In aphorisms, then, we do not memorialize truths, but only “record them” *unfinished* so we can then “act upon them.” Mill especially admired aphorisms because their form suggested to readers that truth was a work in progress; confronted with these suggestive but inconclusive remarks, every reader, Mill wrote, “must see that he is left to make the limitations for himself” (422).

In all this Mill sounds very much like Coleridge does when he writes early in *Aids* that the “one sure way” of giving importance to commonplace maxims is “reflecting on them in direct reference to our own state and conduct” (*Works* 9.11) and then “translat[ing them] into action” (*Works* 9.12). This is, as Coleridge says, “to aphorize” (*Works* 9.33n). In his 1837 review, Mill argues the same point about aphorisms: that they make citizens reflect about matters that need the reflection of as many citizens as possible. What Mill therefore thought of the more dogmatic aphorisms of *Aids* we do not know; he does not mention the book in his 1837 review. However, he does review Coleridge’s *Table Talk* there, and the results are what we might expect. *Table Talk* “excited our expectations highly,” Mill writes, “and disappointed them utterly.” Why? Because Coleridge “dogmatizes with the most unbounded confidence on subjects which it is evident that he never took the trouble to study” (Mill [1837] 424n). Coleridge’s aphorisms in *Table Talk* are failures for the same reasons that Coleridge himself—in both *The Friend* and in *Aids*—once explained: they do not invite genuine reflection. So, while we cannot know for sure how Mill would have appraised the aphorisms in *Aids*, the important point is that, thanks in part to Coleridge himself, Mill would have been able to judge those aphorisms against that genre’s great republican promise.

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31. More than twenty years later, in 1859, Mill would of course develop this appreciation “of the liberty of thought and discussion” in the chapter by that title in *On Liberty*.