

Rhetorics of Value

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I. INTRINSIC VALUE: MARGINAL OBSERVATIONS ON A CENTRAL QUESTION

It has never been easy to define the nature of value; nonetheless forms of discourse have been designed and devoted—over many centuries—to such an attempt. Monetary theorists have created cogent descriptions, but individual cogency has not prevented general confusion even over the real nature of *intrinsic value* in relation to coins of the realm: although this term, on first acquaintance, carries a convincing air of authority.

I have deliberately restricted myself, at this point of the discussion, to the noun in the singular. To undertake any assessment of the meaning of value is to risk appearing a fool. To pronounce upon human values may expose one as an ethical charlatan. “Human values” can, at any time and on any occasion, become vulnerable to the harsh dismissal that Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave to “cheap grace.”¹

Two inferences may be drawn from what I have said thus far. It may be wiser to speak in terms of value rather than of values. It may be useful to restrict a discussion of the singular, “value,” to statements regarding the nature of *intrinsic value*. The matter of intrinsic value carries a distinct referential weight in two particular areas or spheres of activity and discourse: coinage, where it can be assayed, and moral philosophy, where it cannot. In most cases the crux of the problem is the intersection of the material and the symbolic, if intersection can be said actually to take place. If there is no intersection there is likely to be hiatus, a “gap,” somewhat in Gillian Rose’s sense of *aporia*.² The suspect nature of much general discourse on the nature and quality of that mystical entity or aura called “human values” can be traced, I suggest, to a variety of attempts to claim continuity where none exists. This is particularly the case with the type of value-discourse that is a simple trope of monetary values. I shall say more on this aspect in my seminar-presentation, in relation to currency reforms advocated and in part supervised by Isaac

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, translated by R. H. Fuller from *Nachfolge*, 1937 (London: SCM Press, 1948), pp. 37–49.

² Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 8, 10.

Newton and John Locke,³ and in further relation to the symbolic application of monetary value to ethical and aesthetic values by various writers. If asked to name the major proponent of that form of rhetoric in which intrinsic currency value is somehow understood as underpinning and validating intrinsic ethical or aesthetic value, I would reply: John Ruskin, especially in *Unto This Last, Essays on Political Economy, Munera Pulveris*, and sections of *Fors Clavigera*. As is readily apparent from Letters 12 and 58 of *Fors*, Ruskin's own rhetorical currency can prove less than stable: in the first instance, debased with vituperation; in the second, sounding Puginesque in its insistence on purity of design. In the instance of Letter 12, it seems to me a mark of futility to project an exhausted rage against a largely unspecified and unrealizable enemy whom one chooses to name "Judas." There are examples enough of this self-stultifying rhetoric among the major Victorian moralists and their immediate successors: in Thomas Carlyle especially, but also in Matthew Arnold and Ruskin; as, later, in T. S. Eliot, who took his cue from Arnold, and in Ezra Pound, who, to some extent, derived his ethical aesthetics from Ruskin.⁴

The history of ideas is a respectable genre to which I am as indebted as any educated or self-educated man or woman of our time. It has to be said, however, that one cannot profitably debate the substance and issue of intrinsic value from the standpoint of the historian of ideas; the difficulty is revealed to be with the minting and assaying of ideas as themselves; with the transformation of ideas of quality into inherently qualitative statements. In arguments of this kind, direct quotation rather than paraphrase, therefore, must figure prominently within the texture of one's own presentation.

I begin with a sentence from David Hume's essay "Of Refinement in the Arts":

Knowledge in the arts of government naturally begets mildness and moderation, by instructing men in the advantages of humane maxims above rigour and severity, which drive subjects into rebellion,

³*The Correspondence of Isaac Newton*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Society, 1959–77), vols. 4–7; P. H. Kelly, ed., *Locke on Money*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁴Hugh Witemeyer, "Ruskin and the Signed Capital in Canto 45," *Paideuma* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 85–88, acknowledging Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (1971), pp. 323–26; Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), pp. 44–48.

and make the return to submission impracticable by cutting off all hopes of pardon.⁵

To set Hume on the arts of government against a characteristic turn of phrase from one of the several sets of Tudor injunctions to the reformed clergy—"that this damnable device of despair may be clearly taken away and firm belief and steadfast hope surely conceived of all their parishioners"⁶—is to detect, even in this small compass, significant differences and similarities. Each quotation tunes its effect by the correspondence between two given but indeterminate values: political value and English word value. In the Edwardian Injunctions of 1547, drawn up and set down with the authority and approval of Archbishop Cranmer and Lord Protector Somerset,⁷ "despair" has a double valency, at once spiritual and temporal: it is doubly "damnable." Those who despair are desperate. As Thomas More wrote: "The devil is desperate and hath not nor cannot have faith and trust in gods promises" (*OED: desperate*, sense 1). A man in despair re-enacts the political as well as the spiritual desperation of the arch-fiend: he is ready for all manner of treasons, plots, and stratagems. Correlatively, a quiet conscience in respect to God, within the terms set by the archbishop, signifies a compliant citizen, obedient to the government of the lord protector, mindful of the interests of the commonweal above his own.

That which stays implicated in the words authorised by Cranmer and Somerset is explicated in Hume. I remark, here, his word "advantages"—understood, in 1752 as in 1547, as advantages to the ruler rather than to the ruled. Each example is addressing the matter of convenience. In the Tudor injunctions, convenience is spelled out as a magisterial rigour of supervision. The concern manifested in the distribution of such instructions to the parish clergy is less with the diffusion of intrinsic value supposedly emanating from the boy-king—and which his fine profile portrayed on gold coins of fluctuating bullion value seems designed to suggest—than with the threat of contagion by real or imagined evil. Hume's "Of Refinement in the Arts" is also focused on convenience, which surfaces (supposing there to be depth) in such

⁵*Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), pp. 273–74.

⁶Gerald Bray, *Documents of the English Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 253.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 247.

words as “diffuse” (vb), “advantageous,” “naturally begets,” “render,” “beneficial”:

But industry, knowledge, and humanity, are not advantageous in private life alone: They diffuse their beneficial influence on the *public*, and render the government as great and flourishing as they make individuals happy and prosperous.⁸

The significance of the verb “diffuse” should not be overlooked in this genial sequence of politic *congés* to private and public equity. Hume structures his sentences with such economy of syntax as to inhibit our sense of the pervading indeterminacy of his critical terms. We have to recall that diffusion means “wide and general distribution” (*OED*): this is the substance of the piece, though “substance” on reflection is not the right word. The grammar floats an insubstantiality—“and render the government as great and flourishing as they make individuals happy and prosperous.” Consider the question of clauses introduced by “as.” English literary syntax, at the time when Hume was composing his *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, was the beneficiary of various strong and weak forms of the “as . . .” clause. The first I will term the clause of simple indemnity: “as good as gold”; it is a weak form dependent upon a strong sense, at the proverbial level, of intrinsic value. The *OED* calls it the *comparative of equality*. The second, which I name the comparative of commonweal, is well demonstrated in the “King James” rendering of Isaiah 24:2: “And it shall be as with the people, so with the priest, as with the servant, so with his master, as with the maid, so with her mistress, as with the buyer, so with the seller, as with the lender, so with the borrower, as with the taker of vsurie, so with the giuer of vsurie to him.” This is the strong form of the *OED*’s comparative of equality: Isaiah is in fact threatening that the people will be made equal in desolation and destruction, but such threats of “levelling” would be without effect if there were not the ever-present sense of the hierarchic and stratified commonweal as a divine propriety.

The apocalyptic pseudo-logic of such admonitions, in the English of 1611, I would count—together with the archaisms of *Euphuës* that were novelties in Thomas Hobbes’s childhood—among the stylistic influences discernible in *Leviathan*, even while that monster is swallowing whole the old power of the English prophetic voice:

⁸Hume, *Essays*, p. 272.

For as that stone which by the asperity, and irregularity of Figure, takes more room from others, than it selfe fills; . . . is by the builders cast away as unprofitable, and troublesome: so also, a man that by asperity of Nature, will strive to retain those things which to himselfe are superfluous, and to others necessary; and for the stubbornness of his Passions, cannot be corrected, is to be left, or cast out of Society, as combersome thereunto.⁹

No more of that nonsense, observe, concerning the stone that the builders rejected having become the “head of the corner”:¹⁰ though the resonance of that great *sententia* is not without its value to Hobbes. The formulation “as the stone which/so also a man that” is decorative rather than substantial; but Hobbes is skilled at making the inconsequential appear to be of consequence. In this respect he anticipates David Hume, or at least the Hume of *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. It has been well said that “Hume’s final authority is opinion: see his essay ‘Of the Original Contract’ for the equivocating use of ‘really’ in the statement that there is *really* no other standard of morality but opinion.”¹¹ If that is so, Hobbes is his master in points of detail, in particular the knack of using fashions of syntax so as to make opinion appear to be genuine ratiocination.

There is, however, more to be said of *Leviathan* even if not—at least for the time being—of Hume’s thoughts on matters literary and social. *Leviathan*, whatever else it is or is not, is a tragic elegy on the extinction of intrinsic value. None of Hobbes’s opponents understood this, with the possible exception of Clarendon, himself a tragic elegist of no mean power, and except, possibly, Joseph Butler, in the *Fifteen Sermons* of 1726/29 and the two Dissertations, “Of Personal Identity” and “Of the Nature of Virtue” (both 1736). Hobbes’s despair, in *Leviathan*, arises from the extinction of personal identity, which he in turn identifies with intrinsic value in the person of the young Royalist Sidney Godolphin, killed in the Civil War. The three sentences from Hobbes’s “A Review and Conclusion” beginning “Nor is there any repugnancy between fearing the Laws, and not fearing a publique enemy . . .” are among the greatest English examples of “high sentence”—the equal of Browne’s *sententiae* in *Urne Buriall* or Raleigh’s in the preface to his *The History of*

⁹ *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 209.

¹⁰ Acts 4:11, 1 Pet. 2:7, King James Bible, 1611.

¹¹ Dr. Kenneth Haynes, private communication, January 25, 2000.

the World. The question that follows upon my acknowledgment is this: if Hobbes is seriously of the opinion that intrinsic value in the English commonweal perished when Godolphin was killed, how does he read his own elegiac tribute to his dead friend? The three sentences I am here considering end with a splendid *traductio* “. . . who hating no man, nor hated of any, was unfortunately slain in the beginning of the late Civill warre, in the Publique quarrell, by an undiscerned and an undiscerning hand.”¹² If it can be granted that such sentences resonate as I here claim, may I conclude that Hobbes, with his impeccable sense of timing and upstaging, is here upstaging his own pretended cynicism of despair? How far is he implying that the intelligence that created *Leviathan* is the true heir in an untrue world, and witness for an unwitnessing future, to the magnanimity of Godolphin, Falkland, and the Great Tew “symposium,” whatever arguments to the contrary might be drawn from the theses of the work itself?

Nothing that I have so far said with regard to Godolphin’s significance, for Hobbes the man as also for his *Leviathan*, adds one iota to the assessment made by Irene Coltman in *Private Men and Public Causes: Philosophy and Politics in the English Civil War* (London: Faber, 1962). And I move into the next, and perhaps more contentious, stage of my argument by glancing at the final sentence of her study of Godolphin’s posthumous endowment to late seventeenth century political thought, a sentence that she takes from Clarendon’s *Brief View and Survey*—a bitter attack on Hobbes’s abandonment of the spirit and principles of Great Tew: “I cannot forbear to put him [Hobbes] in mind, that I gave him for an expiation of my own defects, and any trespasses which I may have since committed against him, the Friendship of that great Person.”¹³ “That great Person” is Sidney Godolphin; and “Friendship” between Hobbes and Godolphin was initiated, so Clarendon avers, by his introducing them to each other at a time when all three were fellow-members of the Great Tew symposium. The phrase to which I return is “gave him for an expiation.” This is a *mea culpa* that does not mitigate—indeed it may exacerbate—the severity of Clarendon’s indictment of Hobbes’s book. Though “expiation” is a singularly powerful word, Clarendon cannot be said to surrender any of the indignation to which he clearly feels entitled: the word stands in the guise of a word now for-

¹² *Leviathan*, p. 718.

¹³ Coltman, *Private Men*, pp. 191–92; Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *A Brief View and Survey*. . . (London, 1676; photo facsimile reprint, London: Routledge Thoemmes Press, 1996), p. 320.

eign to Hobbes, the meaning of which needs to be given him clearly and slowly, even while its implication (tempting old friends to the sin of wrath) is laid at his door. For Clarendon, then, it is as if “intrinsic value” is something tightly knit that treachery and ingratitude cause to unravel. It is easier to say what “intrinsic” value is in defeat than in victory. Intrinsic value, for the loser, is sealed into enduring qualities of the life that was; the price paid by the victor is the inevitable lifelong penalty of compromise and corruption. This, I believe, is how writers as different as Andrew Marvell (in the “Horatian Ode”) and Clarendon (in the *Brief View and Survey*) reflected upon these issues.

“Reflection” is a word entirely characteristic of Joseph Butler’s *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*. Unlike Clarendon, Hobbes, or Marvell, Butler’s experience of the Civil War and the first thirty or so years of its aftermath was gained at second hand. It is clear, however, that for him, as much as for Clarendon and John Bramhall, one of the more dreadful legacies of the mid-century anarchy was the publication and success of *Leviathan*. Nonetheless, where Bramhall and Clarendon struggle to uproot the new, Butler reassesses the tried and tested: for him the essay is an assay; and reflection is at the heart of it. In this he so anticipates the significance that Coleridge attaches to the word *reflection* that the relative sparsity of references to him throughout the *Marginalia*, and elsewhere in Coleridge’s writings, is surprising.¹⁴

There is a significant early letter written by George Eliot in 1842, when she was in her twenty-third year, at a time when even the earliest of her published fiction had still to be written; it is significant as anticipating the kind of self-correcting speculative rumination that characterizes the authorial commentary in *Middlemarch*. The letter in question is her response to an acquaintance, an Independent clergyman and professor of theology, who was attempting to lead her back to the intense Evangelical faith from which she had recently turned away. She is here commenting on a course of corrective reading which the Reverend Francis Watts had prescribed for her:

You have well stated one of my sources of doubt: still I am aware that *with adequate evidence* Bishop Butler’s little phrase ‘for aught we

¹⁴Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Works*, Bollingen Series, 75, part 12, *Marginalia*, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), vol. 1 [12:1], p. 867: George Whalley, “considering . . . that in Feb. 1801 [Coleridge] regarded Butler as one of the ‘the three greatest, nay, only three *great* Metaphysicians which this Country *has* produced’ . . . it is surprising how few references [he] makes to Joseph Butler.”

know' must silence objections, for, the existence of evil being allowed, and the solution adopted that all partial evil is universal good, then as a certain amount of temporal evil is to the whole amount of temporal good, so in an infinitely surpassing proportion would be the eternal woe of a limited number to the eternal bliss of a larger multitude and to *possible* moral results co-extensive with the Divine Government.¹⁵

The two phrases to which I draw particular attention are the quotation of Butler's own locution "for aught we know" and Eliot's own words (underlined in the autograph) "*with adequate evidence.*" In Butler's *Analogy* (1736), as Eliot's editor Gordon Haight observes, "the phrase ['for aught we know'] appears repeatedly." Haight conjectures that the particular instance George Eliot has in mind occurs in chapter seven of Butler's treatise: "The natural government of the world is carried on by general laws. For this there may be wise and good reasons: the wisest and best, for aught we know to the contrary."¹⁶

Of all George Eliot's writings, I would suggest, it is in *Middlemarch*, in the final redirecting toward redemption of the book's burden of particular and manifold error and waste, that she stays closest to the substance of Butler's Christian ethics. *Middlemarch* is a novel whose general ethos is in the *Analogy's* "for aught we know," while its structuring of plot and character seems determined by Eliot's own caveat that "*with adequate evidence*" Butler's "little phrase" "must silence objections":

But the effect of [Dorothea's] being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.¹⁷

In some mysterious way, then, some "infinitely surpassing proportion," nothing of real worth is irretrievably lost. In a novel so powerfully attentive to humanity's perverse gift for supplanting things of value with things that are worthless, the "incalculably diffusive" nature of the benefaction is made to seem equal with foresight and moral deliberation.

¹⁵ *Letters of George Eliot*, ed. G. Haight, 6 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), vol. 1, p. 135.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135 n. 9.

¹⁷ *Middlemarch*, World's Classics ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 682.

Eliot saw herself as a meliorist¹⁸ and initially, in such a passage as that with which she concludes *Middlemarch*, may be thought of as carrying some way further Locke's connection of intrinsic value and "improvement." As he argues that intrinsic value is only latent, dormant even, in a piece of land until or unless human labour develops it by work of hand¹⁹—manures it, that is to say—so she seems able, in the closing paragraphs of her novel, to suggest that human worth itself may lie deep and dormant and unrealized if it is not thoroughly worked by the "manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance."²⁰

I say "able to suggest" to characterize degrees of relative success and failure. Also, I wish to anticipate that familiar style of incredulity (familiar, I mean, to ancient readers—like myself—of E. P. Thompson's *The New Reasoner*) that one can be so indulgent toward the rhetoric of political quietism. The success I would describe as Eliot's capacity to represent that actuality of reflection and endurance by an achieved style that, in its own reflective power and in its demands upon both author's and reader's sustained powers of attention, shows itself the moral equivalent of those very qualities it describes. It seems to me that, for the author of *Middlemarch*, intrinsic value is not so much in things, or even in qualities, as in a faculty: the faculty of sustained attention; attention conceived of, moreover, as a redemptive power. Coleridge, who comprehended this faculty better than any of his contemporaries, and whose comprehension is exemplified in the title of a major work, *Aids to Reflection*, left nothing that so embodied this comprehension as do George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Coleridge's most radically creative ideas and perceptions are sustained, in *The Prelude*, with Wordsworth's ideas and perceptions engrafted upon them, as they are not sustained even in *Aids to Reflection*.

I referred a few moments ago to degrees of relative success and failure. The faculty of attention in George Eliot's work is indisputable: to praise this is not to deny that on major issues, both particular and general, she finds herself attending to a self-projected impasse; nor to deny that, at such points, she is capable of dissolving the frame as calculatingly as an equivocating politician in his memoirs. My term "dissolving" refers

¹⁸B. J. Paris, *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 48.

¹⁹John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 298 (from *The Second Treatise*).

²⁰*Middlemarch*, p. 644.

back, in the first instance, to the final paragraph of *Middlemarch*, in the second, to the paragraph in Hume's essay "Of Refinement in the Arts," which I also quoted earlier. The word the two passages have in common is "diffuse"/"diffusive." Hume: "They [industry, knowledge, and humanity] diffuse their beneficial influence on the *public*, . . ."; Eliot: "But the effect of [Dorothea's] being on those around her was incalculably diffusive . . ." Taken phrase against phrase I would be hard put to say that Eliot is ethically more reliable than Hume. They are both lobbyists: Hume for his own pleasures and satisfactions; Eliot for her self-stabilizing compensations of "partly dependent" and "half-owing"—little drawn breaths and exhalations of scruple that compare badly with Keats's "I have been half in love with easeful Death,"²¹ a phrase that has the capacity to cut short and cauterize the unlovely aspects of Keats's self-absorption: a failing that he was well able to combat (though it was never easy) in the poems of 1819.

Set Eliot's *Middlemarch* in its entirety against Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* in its entirety, and I have more confidence in putting the case. Eliot writes with sufficient command of detail (of both plot and style) over some hundreds of pages that the body of her detailed accuracies is able to ride the shock of her special pleading and evasiveness. In this, George Eliot is very like Wordsworth; in both of them quantity, taken overall, enhances quality. There is enough evidence, in context, of stubborn attentiveness over a broad and varied range of a given world that reflective language itself becomes a redemptive agent of the author's self-deceptions, willed and unconscious evasions, ethical sentimentality and political shape-shifting. It is the ability to recognize, and to realize in the arduous process of writing itself, the nature of the redemptive faculty or agency that characterizes the major writer. Judged by these standards, *Middlemarch* is a great work, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* a set of accomplished personal and social amusements.

I might hesitate to call Butler's *Fifteen Sermons* a great work in the sense that *Middlemarch* is great; I would not hesitate to attest that Butler's work is more than an amusement. I mean by amusement what Joseph Addison meant by it in the *Spectator* of March 30, 1711, recalling how often "amus[ed himself] with the tombstones and inscriptions" in Westminster Abbey. At this date "to amuse" could mean both "to divert

²¹ *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. J. Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 371.

with pleasant trifles” and “to engage in sober reflection.” It is worth pointing out that Butler cannot be contained by either definition, whereas a polished amenability to both is a characteristic of many successful sermons and periodical essays of the period. In such a context, Hume’s *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* can be understood as a collection of urbane and amusing lay-sermons.

In Butler’s tenth sermon, “Upon Self-Deceit,” we find the following:

Truth, and real good sense, and thorough integrity, carry along with them a peculiar consciousness of their own genuineness: there is a feeling belonging to them, which does not accompany their counterfeits, error, folly, half-honesty, partial and slight regards to virtue and right, so far only as they are consistent with that course of gratification which men happen to be set upon.²²

It is certainly possible to challenge both the premises and delivery of this argument. If we object to Hume’s equivocation in his statement that there is “really” no standard of morality other than that imposed by opinion, should we not also object to Butler’s “Truth, and real good sense, and thorough integrity”? Or to his “peculiar consciousness,” or to that “feeling . . . which does not accompany . . . counterfeits”?

One has to recall here that Butler is the older man and that Hume was able to record the bishop’s approval and general recommendation of the two volumes of *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* when they appeared in 1741 and 1742 (*DNB*, “Hume”). The diction employed by both Butler and Hume is the common diction of eighteenth-century rational theology and moral philosophy. One has to fine-tune the language of criticism in order to reveal the distinction between them; but, as the language of criticism ought in any case to be fine-tuned, this requirement should not be unexpected or unwelcome. Distinctions within broadly similar forms of idiom may indicate differences in basic premise. Butler, I believe, retained a sense of the Fall and its consequences, if not in the deep-set Augustinian sense, then in some form sufficiently marked to differentiate his view from that of Hume and the Deists:

Lastly, the various miseries of life which lie before us wherever we turn our eyes, the frailty of this mortal state we are passing through,

²² *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, ed. W. R. Matthews (1914; London: G. Bell, 1949), p. 159.

may put us in mind that the present world is not our home; that we are merely strangers in it, as our fathers were. (*Fifteen Sermons*, p. 106).

Such a passage is profoundly Pauline (or profoundly “pseudo-Pauline,” since the reference is to Hebrews) as Hume never is. And so, for Butler, I would say, “our ignorance, the imperfection of our nature, our virtue and our condition in this world” are intrinsic to our creatureliness:²³ notice, in the words I have just quoted (from the beginning of Sermon XIV), how “virtue” is not lacking but is found together *with* “our ignorance” and “the imperfection of our nature.” At the heart of his thinking, that is to say, the author of *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* does not rely on analogy—our own philosophy’s resistance to Butler and preferral of Hume rests on the assumption that it does and is thereby outdated as Hume is not—but on the intervention of incarnated Grace in our carnal perplexity: our “imbecility or weaknes” as Hooker called the natural condition.²⁴ It is to be remarked that the phrase “for aught we know,” upon which George Eliot placed emphasis and which Haight confirms as characteristically recurrent throughout Butler’s *Analogy*, is found earlier, in the preface to *The Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, where Hooker remarks that “the staines and blemishes found in our State” as “springing from the root of humaine frailtie and corruption, not only are, but have been alwaies more or lesse, yea and (for any thing we know to the contrary) will be to the worlds end complained of, what forme of government soever take place.”²⁵ In such writing—and here I place Hooker and Butler together—the “root” is at once our frailty and our conscience. A single root, it yet performs a double function: as aboriginal frailty, it transforms gifts into penalties and is itself further disfigured; as aboriginal grace, it remains within the density of fallen nature, transforming frailty and corruption into redemptive self-knowledge, and is itself finally transfigured. Hooker’s name does not feature in the index to the excellent volume of *Tercentenary Essays, Joseph Butler’s Moral and Religious Thought*;²⁶ neither does that of Donald MacKinnon, who gave con-

²³ *Fifteen Sermons*, p. 217.

²⁴ Richard Hooker, *Tractates, and Sermons*, vol. 5 of the Folger Library Edition of *The Works of Richard Hooker*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 73.

²⁵ *Works* (Folger), vol. 1, pp. 15–16.

²⁶ Ed. Christopher Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

centrated attention to Butler's ethics and whose own affirmation that "the language of repentance is not a kind of bubble on the surface of things" reestablishes the proper *gravitas* of Butler for the mid-twentieth century.²⁷ John Henry Newman's name is noted, and rightly; for he several times acknowledged his indebtedness to Butler, referring to him as "the greatest name in the Anglican Church" (*Tercentenary Essays*, 8). I myself used (*supra*) the word "aboriginal" to recall that link by alluding to Newman's phrase for the inheritance of Original Sin—"the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity."²⁸ Butler, in what Newman elsewhere calls "his grave and abstract way,"²⁹ might demur at "terrible" and "calamity" but that he grasps the full nature of *implication* I do not doubt. His strength—and in this he stands in the direct line: Hooker-through-Newman—is to comprehend and accept the intrinsic value of our self-realization in and through conscience as stemming directly from the implicated nature of our strength and frailty.

I am aware that allusions—or even precise references—to the nature of the intrinsic do not of themselves guarantee intrinsicity. I am undertaking in these Tanner Lectures, I remind myself, a double task: to offer as succinctly as I am able, within the formally prescribed limits, a natural history of the term "intrinsic value"; and to try to determine if there is any way in which intrinsic value can be proven in a context or contexts other than that of the assay office at the Mint. One can put a gold or silver coin to the "assay"; it is conceivable, though this may be merely a conceit, that one could assay with equivalent precision the intrinsic value of Shakespeare's sixty-sixth sonnet or Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale."

Ben Jonson entered in his commonplace book—published posthumously as *Timber, or, Discoveries: Made upon Men and Matter*—ideas given to him by his wide and deep reading, particularly in Classical Latin authors and in such Humanist authorities as Erasmus: "Wheresoever, manners, and fashions are corrupted, Language is, It imitates the publicke riot. The excesse of Feasts, and apparell, are the notes of a sick State; and the wantonnesse of language, of a sick mind."³⁰ The intelli-

²⁷ D. M. MacKinnon, *A Study in Ethical Theory* (London: A. & C. Black, 1957), p. 138.

²⁸ *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. M. J. Svaglic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 218.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 463: "Answer in Detail to Mr Kingsley's Accusations."

³⁰ *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, P. Simpson, and E. Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52), vol. 8, p. 593.

gence that believes in these words, from wheresoever derived, and seals that belief by giving them this cogent stability, affirms also its acceptance of a doctrine of intrinsic value, albeit tacitly. The tacit understanding here is that language does not universally descend into corruption in company with a sick mind, or the mind of a sick state. Jonson had no doubt that his own times were sick; but he never doubted the capacity of language, his own language in particular, to retain its sanity and to guard the sanity of those who gave it their assent. Giving assent to one of Jonson's moral axioms is not necessarily an exercise for the prudent: he requires of his readers the full *yea, yea!* Failing that, I think he would prefer the full *nay, nay!* to "maybe" or "just possibly" or "perhaps." If you do answer with *yea, yea!*—as I admit that I do—you are henceforward committed to a course of thought and statement that accepts opposition as a part of the common lot, which can hardly avoid controversy, and which will be, or from some points of vantage will appear to be, narrowly constrained and constraining.

Toward, and into, this matter of constraint, however, more than one way of approach is open. Peter Geach has observed that "if you opt for virtue, you opt for being the sort of man who *needs* to act virtuously And if you opt for chastity, then you opt to become the sort of person who *needs* to be chaste."³¹ Geach credits the philosopher Philippa Foot with this neo-Aristotelianism; but she would not have claimed that the retrieval began with her. It is more than likely that she found it in Butler's *Fifteen Sermons*, in the Third Sermon, "Upon Human Nature":

But allowing that mankind hath the rule of right within himself, yet it may be asked, "What obligations are we under to attend to and follow it?" . . . The question . . . carries its own answer along with it. Your obligation to obey this law, is its being the law of your nature. That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action, is itself alone an obligation. (p. 64)

Obligation. Attestation. If I conclude that the condition of language—the language of imaginative attestation—in relation to the conditions laid down by the world is very much as Ben Jonson depicts it; and if I further conclude that a paradigm of ethical self-evaluation and affective

³¹ Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 123.

acceptance is in being as Bishop Butler describes it; and that this paradigm in its bearing upon the world (as also in the world's bearing upon it) is essentially the same today as it was in 1726: I have put myself in the position of being obligated to speak somewhat as I have spoken throughout this paper. I resume my chain of hypothesis, as follows: If I am constrained to choose not to be a part of the "public riot," and if I abide by Ben Jonson's analogy, State health/sickness: Language health/sickness, or if I propose to push the issue deeper than analogy into inter-relationship or even interpenetration (State-into-language/language-into-State), then Butler's argument offers more serrations and striations, more toe-hold and hand-hold for the resistant conscience of our imagination, than can be found in the arguments of any other eighteenth-century author—not excluding such a triumph of the moral imagination as Samuel Johnson's *Life of Richard Savage*. My language is in me and is me; even as I, inescapably, am a minuscule part of the general semantics of the nation; and as the nature of the State has involved itself in the nature that is most intimately mine. The nature that is most intimately mine may by some be taken to represent my intrinsic value. If it is so understood, it follows that intrinsic value, thus defined, bears the extrinsic at its heart.

A crucial issue remains. In so framing the matter, do I confuse intrinsic with mediated value? Here again I believe that Butler has shown that, in some if not all circumstances, intrinsic and mediated value cannot, may not, be separated. It is my "obligation to obey this law [in] its being the law of [my] nature"; that is, in and of itself, the intrinsic being that I mediate.

The rest is paradox. For the poem to engage justly with our imperfection, so much the more must the poem approach the nature of its own perfection. It is simply not true to say that the intrinsic value of a line or phrase cannot be assayed and proven in close and particular detail. For the intrinsic value of the entire poem so to be established would require the significant detail to illumine and regulate the whole. I am left with no other course but to say that the great poem moves us to assent as much by the integrity of its final imperfection as by the amazing grace of its detailed perfection. But of one thing I am sure: at those points where the intrinsic value of the formal structure, by whatever means, is revealed to us, that value is on the instant mediated.

II. POETRY AND VALUE

Joseph Butler and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz had a friend in common, although they never met. Each was the mentor and friend of Caroline, queen-consort of George II. Leibniz's friendship with her was closer and of a longer duration; even so, her devotion to Butler's *Analogy of Religion* was such that he owed his public rise and acclaim to her interest perhaps as much as to his own distinction of intellect and spiritual *savoir-faire*.

Butler and Leibniz were more closely related, however, than such biographical marginalia might indicate. It has been observed of the author of the *Analogy* that his "metaphysic of personal being as radically active *and* sentient is profoundly pluralistic as well as profoundly relational, and has more affinities with Leibniz (that most Anglican of continental philosophers) than with either Spinoza or Descartes: he is troubled by neither of their characteristic problems—maintaining individual distinctness or genuine interaction, respectively."¹ I have now to decide what "profoundly pluralistic" means in this—or any—context; and what, if anything, terms and phrases such as "radically active *and* sentient," "profoundly relational," "maintaining individual distinctness [and] genuine interaction" have to do with the topic of this lecture: "Poetry and Value."

I remarked in my previous paper that students of Coleridge's philosophical, theological, and political writings have found surprisingly little reference to Butler in those pages, and astonishingly little in the *Marginalia* and *Table Talk*. I came to Coleridge long before I came to Butler and until quite recently if asked with which English thinker I associate the terms "radically active *and* sentient," "maintaining individual distinctness [and] genuine interaction," I would have named the author of *Aids to Reflection*, *Biographia Literaria*, "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison" and "Dejection: an Ode." One of the "lost" great books of the past two hundred years is *Aids to Reflection* as it might have been if Coleridge had chosen to reflect upon the axioms of Joseph Butler rather than the aphorisms of Archbishop Leighton.² But one must avoid sophistication. The fact is that the name of Leibniz features more promi-

¹ C. Cunliffe, ed., *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 146.

² Hazlitt, in the essay "My First Acquaintance with Poets," records Coleridge's praise of Butler's *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*: noted by John Beer in his edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. lxxxix. See also Lecture I, note 14.

nently than that of Butler in the indices to Coleridge's major works. Butler and Coleridge show strong affinity in areas of thought relating to individual distinctness and genuine interaction because each—Butler by affinity, Coleridge by derivation—shares Leibniz's awareness of particular forms of potentiality and realization, and perhaps also of loss. In my own autodidactic inquiry into the nature of intrinsic value and the questionable relationship of value-theory to the spoken and written word, especially as this is formalized in the art of poetry, they exist as a triumvirate of moral assessors. I should add that, attached as I am to a form of belief in Original Sin, one that is probably not too far removed from the orthodox, I expect my assessors to be in some respects compromised, though this in no way lowers them in my estimation. I should say further that however evasive I may be on the question, the fact that I do have such a strong attachment to Newman's "terrible aboriginal calamity" makes particularly difficult my attempts to give some kind of priority to the status of intrinsic value as an ethical referent. As I observed in my previous lecture, Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, presents us with an enduring vision of "inherent," or intrinsic, value, but in the person of a dead man and in the body of a vanished society. In this respect, *Leviathan* is a powerfully elegiac work; and when I praise the "inherent"—meaning the "intrinsic"—in an elegiac context, the term must carry a different kind of inference from the specific weight of the word "intrinsic" as applied to precious metals employed in the manufacture of coins. I am conscious, also, that what initially draws me to the idea of intrinsic value is a set of expectations and presuppositions that are themselves attached to interest and thereby compromised. I find that I am here presenting two inter-involved—but not indivisible—categories as if each confronted us with issues identical to those of the other: I mean questions relating to the nature of language and questions relating to poetics. The status of language in relation to the speakable and the unspeakable is less problematic than that of poetics so situated: it is with particular reference to the latter ganglion of energy, *techné*, belief, and opinion that I am self-committed to address you on this occasion. Let me here present—briefly, since I shall be considering them more fully in the closing stages of my discussion—the degrees of significance attached to language by two major European figures of the last sixty years, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Helmuth James von Moltke. As their last recorded words indicate, language did not in the end forsake them, nor did they finally surrender language to some existential brute force such as that evoked by Czeslaw

Milosz in his parable of “a man threatened with instant death.” My strong impression is that neither Bonhoeffer nor von Moltke would have concluded in his final hours or moments that what “judge(s) all poets and philosophers” is the “very amusing sight” of machine-gun bullets up-ending cobblestones “on a street in an embattled city.” Milosz’s observation,³ like much of the late twentieth century poetry on which he has made his mark, is suspended between vitalism and nihilism essentially as Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* foresaw the condition of an overridingly post-Christian world: “Vitalismus endet zwangsläufig im Nihilismus, im Zerschneiden alles Natürlichen.”⁴ The spirit that motivated Bonhoeffer and von Moltke was grounded in its own recognition of intrinsic value, which was neither the semantic irreducibility of Mallarmé nor the zero-apprehension of Milosz’s man under machine-gun fire. There is a significant similarity between Ezra Pound’s belief in the absolute authority of poetics—“all values ultimately come from our [i.e., the poets’] judicial sentences”⁵ and Milosz’s belief in the absolute supremacy of the corrida and its “moment of truth.” This likeness of opposites stems from the fact that the provenance of both is *symboliste*, or, one might say, Romantic-confrontational. This is not the situation in which Bonhoeffer and von Moltke find themselves and find language adequate to their particular witness. Poetry is ruled out of their form of witness only if one forgets the Psalms and the kenotic hymn of Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians. As this lecture is inescapably confessional, I am bound to offer myself as a child of our time who, forced to respond to the disputatious “relevance of poetry after Auschwitz” question, would think immediately of Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge” but only belatedly of the Psalms and the Prophets.

I say “inescapably confessional,” but is there not also something artificial or engineered in the premise and mannerism of modern confession, something at once arbitrary and highly convenient in so presenting the issues as being exclusively, to use my term, Romantic-confrontational? To read Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* or the last letters of Helmuth James von Moltke is to discover that they have more in common with Butler’s *Fifteen Sermons* than with the poetics of existential crisis. In his “Preface” to the second edition (1729) of the sermons Butler writes:

³*The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 41.

⁴*Ethik*, in *Werke*, vol. 6 (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1992), p. 171.

⁵*The Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), p. 181: letter to F. E. Schelling, July 8, 1922.

If the observation [i.e., that benevolence is no more disinterested than any of the common particular passions] be true, it follows, that self-love and benevolence, virtue and interest are not to be opposed, but only to be distinguished from each other; in the same way as virtue and any other particular affection, love of arts, suppose, are to be distinguished.⁶

Given the climate of confrontation and exclusiveness within which the particular manners and mannerisms of modern poetics have evolved, Butler's suggestion that, in order to distinguish, you do not absolutely have to draw up things *in extremis* or antagonistically comes as a moment of surprising grace; and, indebted as I am to Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, I would nonetheless offer the structure of Butler's comment as a form of critical observation upon the explicit strategies of that powerfully isolationist yet powerfully influential work: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence."⁷

There is, I concede, a view contrary to mine: this is, that in the passage that I took from Butler's 1729 "Preface" we have the grammar of a sceptic and hedonist; and that the impacted antithetical syntax of Blake's sentences reveals the extremes to which a radical moralist must go to disrupt the easy flow of self-serving parlance. It is quite true that there is a marked absence of tension in Butler's argument. It is equally the case that Blake's language of radical opposition does our simple thinking for us less straightforwardly than at first appears. If attraction and repulsion are demonstrably contraries, does it necessarily follow that reason and energy are similarly opposed, on any grounds other than Blake's say so? I would claim that there is an energy of reason, a reason in energy, which Blake's own work embodies in itself and for itself, and which is not of its own volition demeaned to the level of marketable slogan, though such a process can be forced through by others, as Allen Ginsberg and his British counterparts made evident when they took up Blake forty or so years ago. In part, what I am attempting to define as "intrinsic value" is a form of technical integrity that is itself a form of common honesty. Believing, as I have admitted I do, in the radically flawed nature of humanity and of its endeavours entails an acceptance of

⁶Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, ed. W. R. Matthews (1914; London: Bell, 1969), p. 23.

⁷*The Poems and Prophecies of William Blake*, ed. M. Plowman (London: Dent, 1927), p. 43.

the fact that, in one way or another, our integrity can be bought; or our honesty can be maimed by some flaw of *techne*; at the same time, however, our cynicism can be defeated, our defeatism thwarted, by processes within the imagination that, as processes, are scarcely to be distinguished from those that discover and betray some flaw in our conceptual structure or hypothesized ideal. There are, indeed, various terms—"discover" and "betray" are two of them, "reduce" and "invent" are others—that in themselves reveal this to be so. That is to say, they are descriptive of *techne* and also imply moral deductions having to do with technicalities. The supporting evidence is preserved in and by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Another way of stating the claim is to say that the ethical and the technical are reciprocating forces and that the dimension in which this reciprocation may be demonstrated is the contextual. If context is the arena of attention, it is also the arena of inattention. Crucial nodes of discourse *are* crucial precisely because they bring attention and inattention together in a specific crux, as here in a passage from an early letter of Leibniz: "Pilate is condemned. Why? Because he lacks faith. Why does he lack it? Because he lacks the will to attention. Why this? Because he has not understood the necessity of the matter . . . Why has he not understood it? Because the causes of understanding were lacking."⁸

It has been suggested that Leibniz "was aware that 'an inevitable necessity . . . would destroy the freedom of the will, so necessary to the morality of action.'"⁹ That being so, Pilate is condemned, according to Leibniz, by a mechanics of inner necessity that has the appearance of intimate mimesis, of being an accurate slow-motion exposure of Pilate's psychological incapacity and moral illogicality in the process of *becoming* "inevitable necessity," that is to say, "the necessity of the matter."

I associated the names of Leibniz and Butler at the start of this discussion because I think that Butler's method in *Fifteen Sermons* is similar to that aspect of Leibniz's method as revealed in the letter to Magnus Wedderkopf. He appears as a sceptic and a hedonist because he apprehends the mental rhythms of scepticism and hedonism rather as Leibniz apprehends the inertia of Pilate's logical illogic. There is certainly vanity, in more than one sense of the term, in Leibniz's presentation of Pilate's hypothetical thought-process in the shape of a psychological,

⁸*Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. L. E. Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), p. 146.

⁹Leibniz, *Political Writings*, ed. P. Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 11.

metaphysical, and semantic *fait accompli*; it is perhaps vain of Butler to display before us, in so steady a fashion, the inner workings of self-deceit, cant, and hypocrisy and to show an equal certitude in charting their acceptable opposites. I believe, on the grounds of a close reading of *Fifteen Sermons*, that he recognizes such tendencies as comprising several facets of that human nature within which his own nature is implicated. From evidence both internal and historical, we have a basis from which to project his likely answer to the question: *Where do you stand?*—"between Ecclesiasticus and Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*." That, if you like, describes the general terrain within which his moral sensibility moves most freely; but "freely" does not accurately define Butler's capacity for making distinctions, which, although they derive from the standard figures of eloquence, nonetheless attest to a reflectively working mind.

It is manifest [a] great Part of common Language, and of common Behaviour over the World, is formed upon Supposition of . . . a Moral Faculty; whether called Conscience, moral Reason, moral Sense, or divine Reason; whether considered as a Sentiment of the Understanding, or as a Perception of the Heart, or, which seems the Truth, as including both.¹⁰

It was my recollection of this passage especially—it is from the "Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue," 1736—that caused me to cavil at Blake's opposing Reason to Energy. Each clause in Butler's sentence is a modifier or qualifier; there is an immediate connection here between his *referral* to a "Faculty, or practical discerning Power within us" and the demonstration of that power of discernment in the structure of the sentence.¹¹ It is in the light of this example also that I take further a suggestion made by one of Butler's editors, W. R. Matthews, in 1914:

Perhaps the most original part of Butler's teaching is his treatment of the "particular passions." He observes that all desires for particular objects are, in the strict sense, disinterested, since they seek their external object as their end and rest in that.¹²

I would need to be persuaded that, considered as "teaching," there is much actual originality here: it seems to me thoroughly in line with

¹⁰ *The Analogy of Religion . . . to Which Are Added Two Brief Dissertations*, 5th ed. (London: Robert Horsfield, 1765), p. 452.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

¹² *Fifteen Sermons*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

that form of modified Thomism that Hooker diffused into the body of Anglican thought and that one finds cropping up in various unlikely places. The originality is in the active shaping of the reflective voice; and the quality of that voice itself is effective in conveying to the reader a sense of what it means to take the measure of one's own thought through the common medium of language.

I would take this speculation a step further by suggesting a modification to the sense in which we understand "disinterested" in relation both to Butler's intentions and to the nature of language itself. Language, whatever else it is and is not, can be understood historically as a form of seismograph: registering and retaining the myriad shocks of humanity's interested and disinterested passions. One may not be always alert to this characteristic in daily conversation, and it is probably better for us that this is so; but no one, I believe, could consult the great *Oxford English Dictionary* and fail to appreciate that my term "seismograph," crude as it is, at least registers something of that seemingly illimitable capacity. If I am even approximately right, one must conclude that a reflective grasp of language will necessarily involve more than an easy familiarity with the surface conventions for conveying "intelligence" (i.e., information), conventions that, by and large, do not interfere with one's self-possession or the possessiveness of one's own interested passions. Reflection—certainly as Butler and Coleridge would understand the term—is the faculty or activity that draws the naturally interested sensibility in the direction of disinterestedness. It is not necessary to my argument to suppose or suggest that some hypostatic condition of perfect disinterest is attainable within the usages, whether ordinary or extraordinary, of the English language. The particular quality of our humanity that I am attempting to describe, on this occasion in terms of poetry and value, is best revealed in and through the innumerable registrations of syntax and rhythm, registrations that are common to both prose and poetry and to which as writers and as readers we attend or fail to attend.

At the start of this lecture I coupled the names of Butler and Coleridge, and associated both with that of Leibniz. I did so, having in mind a passage from *Nouveaux essais sur l'Entendement Humain* (1703), in which Leibniz challenges Locke's interpretation of the understanding or intellectual soul (Leibniz's term for it is "l'âme"), a passage to which Coleridge returned more than once in his own philosophical writings:¹³

¹³Notably in *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 9, first paragraph; *Logic*, ch. 12, second paragraph; *Aids to Reflection*, 2nd ed., Aphorism 6 (Comment).

You [Philalèthe = Locke, the Lockeans] oppose to me this axiom received by the philosophers, that there is nothing in the soul which does not come from the senses [que rien n'est dans l'âme qui ne vienne des sens]. But the soul itself must be excepted and its affections [Mais il faut excepter l'âme même et ses affections]. *Nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit in sensu, excipe: nisi ipse intellectus.*¹⁴

Coleridge seized on this Leibnizian redirecting of Aristotle's maxim as if he saw in it the possibility of encrypting the very nature of intrinsic value: such value would be held permanently to attention within the clause itself, *nisi ipse*. Coleridge thus expatiated on his understanding of Leibniz's modifier: "the act of comparing supposes in the comparing Faculty, certain inherent forms, that is, Modes of reflecting, not referable to the Objects reflected on, but pre-determined by the Constitution and (as it were) mechanism of the Understanding itself."¹⁵ I do not find this any advance on Butler's discourse on the "Moral Faculty" to which I have already referred. In fact in requiring the locution "and (as it were) mechanism" Coleridge's definition is retrograde. I would not wish, even so, to underrate the significance of this endeavour, a significance that is enhanced by his capacity of attuning conceptual hypotheses to his semantic perceptiveness, his immediate sense of language as mediator in the struggle toward a grasp of intrinsic natures (one of several ways in which he anticipates Hopkins's search for instress and inscape).

Gerard M. Hopkins's poetry, as also in certain instances his prose, is both material evidence of and expert witness to the precise nature of the activity of reflection that we see adumbrated in Butler and developed by Coleridge. Hopkins simultaneously clarifies and complicates these issues: first, because his mastery of the essential techniques is such that he reduces to a bare minimum the distance between the mediate and the immediate characteristics of language; second, because, in his profoundest theological allegiance, he is totally committed to mediation. At the same time, therefore, he is both innovative, finding radically new ways of compounding the intellective with the sensuous elements of language, and also reactionary: devoted to those beliefs and practices that, in severe opposition to the liberalising inclinations of the century, concentrated a worshipper's attention upon Mary as Mediatrix and upon the saints as intercessors. Hopkins at Oxford was a pupil of both Walter Pater, for whom intrinsic value was signified—irrespective of context I

¹⁴ *Nouveaux essais*, ed. J. Brunschwig (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1990), p. 88.

¹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Works*, Bollingen Series 75, part 9, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. J. Beer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 225.

would say—by the “hard gemlike flame,” and T. H. Green, who felt able to criticize Butler for being “content to leave the moral nature a cross of unreconciled principles,”¹⁶ and whose own sense of intrinsic value was, like that of Locke and George Eliot, inseparable from ideas of improvement, of the moral imperative to bring to fulfillment within society, as much as within the individual life, latent qualities and virtues that would otherwise remain dormant or, worse, in a condition of torpor.

If I say that these are artificial distinctions I am evading the issue. The most refined forms of artifice, brought to bear upon the conditions of our natural life, lose something of their artificiality even as they infiltrate and complicate spontaneous activity. Green’s objection to Butler’s “cross of unreconciled principles” is brusque and inappropriately theatrical, though less so than Ruskin’s choice of the name “Judas” for the national betrayal of the values of a true commonweal by estimating wealth as commodity values, that is to say, assessing national wealth in terms of what is more truly “illth.”¹⁷

Ruskin in fact acknowledged that the “use of substances of intrinsic value as the materials of a currency, is a barbarism”¹⁸ but maintained nonetheless its utility as a “mechanical check” and as an instrument of exchange with “foreign nations.”¹⁹ In short, intrinsic value, understood in terms of bullion value, was demanded by the conditions of life: to which Ruskin reacted in the mid to late nineteenth century very much as Hobbes had understood anarchy and arbitrary force in the mid seventeenth century. I began the research for these lectures essentially an adherent of “intrinsic value” as delineated by Ruskin. I am now much less sure of my position, partly because I am no longer confident that I can discern the point at which Ruskin himself crosses an indeterminate line between, on the one hand, regarding money as “an expression of right,”²⁰ or entitlement, or as a “sign” of “relations,” and, on the other hand, using a monetary trope in which “intrinsic value” is by sleight of will substituted as the vital referent. In the first instance, Ruskin concedes that, if received as a “sign,” money is “Always and necessarily . . . imperfect . . . ; but capable of approximate accuracy if rightly ordered”;²¹

¹⁶T. H. Green, *Works*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1888), vol. 3, p. 104.

¹⁷*Unto this Last and Other Essays* (London: Dent, 1970), p. 216.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 208.

²¹*Ibid.*, note 1.

in the second instance, the “expression of right” itself takes on a mysterious intransitive quality that is thereafter to be received—and not questioned—by us as “intrinsic value.” Any acknowledgment of “approximate accuracy” is dissolved and Ruskin’s real authority of eloquence is devoted, as here in *Essays on Political Economy*, to the creation and promulgation of an idea of the intrinsic that is scarcely to be distinguished from the intransitive:

It does not in the least affect the intrinsic value of the wheat, the air, or the flowers, that men refuse or despise them. Used or not, their own power is in them, and that particular power is in nothing else.²²

This has an undeniable eloquent beauty; but to what is it applied? Ruskin is devoting the same degree of intensity to his subject that Wordsworth in “Michael” or “Resolution and Independence” or “The Female Vagrant” or Book XII of *The Prelude* devotes to the unrecognized and publicly unfulfilled powers of men and women forced to live in various kinds of straitened circumstance.

What Wordsworth and Ruskin have in common, in these passages at least, is the eloquence of mourning. They are essentially elegists when they write of the intrinsicity of the despised and rejected among the common people and the common things of the earth, as Hobbes was an elegist when he wrote of the “inherent” virtues of the dead Royalist soldier-poet Sidney Godolphin. As such points, I would add, Wordsworth and Ruskin seem to me to spring from common seventeenth–eighteenth century roots: from Locke’s association of intrinsic value with potentiality for improvement and from the philosophy of individuation made axiomatic in Butler’s “Preface” to *Fifteen Sermons*: “Everything is what it is, and not another thing.”²³ The crucial difference is that whereas in 1690 (Locke) and 1729 (Butler) the tone is optimistic or at least melioristic, by the first decade of the nineteenth century (*The Prelude*, Book XII) it is, at best, stoical.

The great exception, and the major challenge, to these conclusions I take to be John Henry Newman. It is in Newman’s pastoral theology that Butler’s teaching finds its nineteenth-century fulfillment. And Newman is no more an elegist—in the central body of his writing—than is Butler. Fr. Sillem, the editor of Newman’s *Philosophical Notebook*,

²² *Ibid.*, p. 204.

²³ *Fifteen Sermons*, p. 23.

implies that Newman read Butler in the same spirit as that in which he read St. Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom, whose writings “expressed the inner unity of their own minds rather than that of an abstract system.”²⁴ My reason for choosing this particular observation will be apparent in the general context of our discussion of intrinsic value. Sillem’s particular choice of words makes emphatic the difference between the intransitive and the transitive. If, as is true of Newman (according to Sillem), the intrinsic value, the “inner unity,” is in the mind’s conduct and disposition of its own best qualities, there is no arbitrary limit to, or restriction upon, the burgeoning of such estimation. Our notion of intrinsic value does not inevitably make us *laudatores temporis acti*. Our grasp of intrinsic value is transitive in its implications. What I have termed the elegiac celebration of “intrinsic value” understands the value as being in some sense isolated from current degradation, and therefore as being inviolate, held securely within the sphere of the intransitive. With Ruskin, more than with Wordsworth, the result is loss of proportion: it is surely disproportionate when Ruskin claims: “It does not in the least affect the intrinsic value of the wheat, the air, or the flowers, that men refuse or despise them.” Locke would have said, and here he would be cogent as Ruskin is not, that the intrinsic value of a bushel of wheat cannot be isolated from the value of the human labour that contributed to its growth and harvesting. The idea, then, that some other human act, i.e., of “refusing” the bushel of wheat, preserves a mysterious integrity of its “own power” within the rejected grain is a sentiment little short of the absurd. One is put in mind of the fate of certain elderly authors who, rescued from oblivion by coteries and the editors of small-circulation journals, are invariably described as having been hitherto “strangely” or “unaccountably” neglected. The “neglect” by some kind of imaginative fiat is simultaneously held to be both their “documentary claim” to present notice and an intrinsic part of the “neglected” author’s newly proclaimed value.

The title of this lecture, I remind myself, is “Poetry and Value.” It seems fitting, therefore, that I should now make explicit a number of conclusions that have been implicit, or in suspension, during the earlier part of my paper. To do so, I need to return to the question “What is the constitution of the activity we call ‘reflection’?” In the chapter of “Pru-

²⁴John H. Newman, *The Philosophical Notebook*, ed. E. J. Sillem, 2 vols. (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1969–70), vol. 1, p. 94.

dential Aphorisms,” in the second edition of *Aids to Reflection* Coleridge advised his reader: “Whether you are reflecting for yourself, or reasoning with another, make it a rule to ask yourself the precise meaning of the word, on which the point in question appears to turn;”²⁵ and, in the same section of his book, he noted: “At the utmost [the moral philosopher as opposed to “the botanist, the chemist, the anatomist, &c.”] has only to rescue words, already existing and familiar, from the false or vague meanings imposed on them by carelessness, or by the clipping and debasing misusage of the market.”²⁶ He is referring to the misusage of such words as “happiness,” “duty,” “faith,” “truth,” and, by implication, of the word “reflection” itself. “Reflection” is not here identifiable as a “passive attending upon the event”²⁷ or even as a “wise passiveness”²⁸ but in metaphors of, and associations with, energy conceived as a “co-instantaneous yet reciprocal action”²⁹ of the individual “will” and an “empowering” law; of “THE WORD, as informing; and THE SPIRIT, as actuating.”³⁰ Language, that is to say, does not issue from reflection but is an inherent element within the activity of reflection itself; it is an integral part of the body of reflection.

The issue here, for Coleridge as for Butler and Leibniz and, albeit less happily, for Ruskin also, is whether the intrinsicity of value can be, ought to be, made viable in and for the contingent world, the domain of worldly power and circumstance. In each case the answer—in principle—is yes; in practice the resolution is, in varying degrees and for various reasons, less than perfect. The toll is most severe in the case of Ruskin and is the effect of a cause that Coleridge precisely anticipated, in *Aids to Reflection*, when defining sophistry: “For the juggle of sophistry consists, for the greater part, in using a word in one sense in the premiss, and in another sense in the conclusion.”³¹ I read this as a prescient description of that flaw in Ruskin’s argument, to which I earlier drew attention, and which I now attribute to the term “intrinsic” occurring in

²⁵ Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p. 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” part 2, final paragraph, in T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1934), p. 21.

²⁸ Wordsworth, “Expostulation and Reply,” line 24, in *Wordsworth: Poetry and Prose*, ed. W. M. Merchant (London: Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 123.

²⁹ *Aids to Reflection*, p. 75.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

one sense in the premise and in another sense in the conclusion. One may balk at the word “sophistry,” if sophistry can be understood only as intentional juggling to deceive. I do not believe that Ruskin intentionally misleads; nor do I say that we have here the broken or jumbled threads of an inattentive weaver of platitudes. Ruskin’s was a great and scrupulous mind. He is overcome, in this particular area of discourse, as we are all overcome, at some time or another in our particular areas of discourse, by a kind of neutral, or indifferent, or disinterested force in the nature of language itself: a force that Coleridge describes incomparably well in the sudden blaze of a sentence at the beginning of *Aids to Reflection*: “For if words are not THINGS, they are LIVING POWERS, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined, and humanized.”³² As much weighs here upon that plural present indicative of the verb *to be*—the verb substantive—as weighs upon the verbs “discover,” “betray,” “reduce,” “invent” in other contexts, or upon the locutions “excipe” and “nisi ipse” in Leibniz’s modifying of Aristotle’s axiom, “nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit in sensu.” And certainly no less weighs upon the grammar of a sentence in Helmuth James von Moltke’s farewell letter before his execution in January 1945, rejoicing that, in the end, the Third Reich could find no justification for killing him other than the fact of his Christianity: “nicht als Grossgrundbesitzer, nicht als Adliger, nicht als Preusse, nicht als Deutscher . . . sondern als Christ und als gar nichts anderes.”³³

Syntax such as we find here, in this context, establishes the *Grundbass* (as we would speak of the ground-bass in a Bach *continuo*) in the midst of the *Abgrund*: the abyss, the deep, in the psalms of penitence and lamentation. I do not say, however, that with von Moltke’s words we move into a dimension unique to him and unperceived or unanticipated by such a thinker as Joseph Butler. Coleridge and Newman seem especially able to comprehend and to take further the implications and resonances of certain of Butler’s phrases of adumbration. Newman’s *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* builds upon the sense of Butler’s “full intuitive conviction”³⁴ as much as upon the distinction between “*mere power and authority*,”³⁵ a distinction that Butler says “everybody is ac-

³²Ibid., p. 10.

³³*Briefe an Freya, 1939–1945*, ed. B. R. von Oppen (Munich: Beck, 1988), p. 60.

³⁴*Fifteen Sermons*, p. 12.

³⁵Ibid., p. 57.

quainted with,”³⁶ though he refrains from adding “but which not everybody understands.” Newman also works to ensure that “full intuitive conviction” is not confused with or supplanted by “blind propension.”³⁷ Coleridge’s achievement is to show how “full intuitive conviction,” “blind propension,” the tendency to mistake power for authority; above all, perhaps, how a sense of “the moral rule of action interwoven in [our] nature,”³⁸ as Butler calls it, can without arbitrariness of analogy, be extended into the nature of human language itself, in such a way that language becomes, not a simple adjunct or extension of “the moral rule of action” but rather a faculty of reflective integration.

Invited (or self-appointed) to put, as succinctly as I can, my views regarding the nature and responsibility of “poetry” in the field, or court, of “value,” I offer the following response.

A poem issues from reflection, particularly but not exclusively from the common bonding of reflection and language; it is not in itself the passing of reflective sentiment through the medium of language. The fact that my description applies only to a minority of poems written in English or any other language, and to the poetry written in this country during the past fifty years scarcely if at all, does not shake my conviction that the description I have given of how the uncommon work moves within the common dimension of language is substantially accurate.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.